

THE HINDU

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Be your own record label

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Until last week, getting a record deal with a music label and putting their music out on shelves around the world seemed like a distant dream for many rock bands and up and coming musicians.

Even those who had record deals never got more than 20 per cent royalty.

And the few who got their cut were never sure of the numbers. They blindly had to trust that the record label would be truthful about sales.

Worse, they were at the mercy of the label and music stores that could any day decide to take the music off the shelves.

But all that may soon be a thing of the past.

Pro Music, Egmore, is the official distributor of a software that will help bands and musicians put their music for sale over 300 digital stores, including iTunes, Nokia, Amazon, AOL, etc. on the Internet.

This single-window software, Rebeat, brought to India by Sudeep Audio, can be bought at Pro Music for a one-time fee of Rs.7,000. And soon, you are all set to upload your music, sign the contract and launch your album.

“Once you buy the software, you just need to pay for creating product bar codes and other incidentals and this roughly works out to about Rs.1,500 per album,” says Aditya Mehta, Partner of Sudeep Audio. “For every sale in any of the 300 stores around the world, the band/artiste gets 85 per cent royalty.”

The world’s largest digital distributors of music, Austria-based Rebeat, has signed up with 1,200 music labels worldwide and has about three-five lakh songs in its catalogue.

“Finally, musicians will have control over their songs, how they want to sell it and what they want to sell. The trend of buying music is moving from physical to digital,” observes Aditya.

Will people be willing to buy music when they can get it through torrents and illegal downloads?

Sudhin Prabhakar of Pro-Music believes they will.

“We were one of the first to start selling legal software in India. It’s been over 15 to 17 years now. Everybody said you will sell nothing; people are used to buying pirated software. We said ‘That’s fine but there must be a percentage of people who want to buy legitimate software.’ We can’t be the only people who are buying legal, there must be a lot more like-minded, we thought and started. Sure enough, we sold, maybe 10 boxes a month. Then, it slowly became 20 and then 40. Last year alone, we sold Rs. 50 lakh worth of just one product that I can’t name. But yes, there’s a market,” explains Sudhin.

“Earlier, people didn’t buy because it was never available. We are now making it available. There’s definitely a change in culture,” he adds.

“Let’s say you want a song. First, you have to hunt for a store. Then they may tell you it’s out of stock and you need to wait for 15 days. But you really WANT the song. By not making a song available, we are making the fan a pirate. For 30 seconds, when they are willing to pay Rs. 10 for a ringtone, why wouldn’t they then pay if we make available the song at say Rs. 15 when it makes sense to buy only the songs you like instead of paying Rs. 150 for the whole album?” asks Aditya.

“Rebeat only retains the distribution rights in the digital form. You can still make physical copies of the album and sell it with a record label. Rebeat helps the musician access the market,” adds Aditya.

The music is directly uploaded from the composer’s computer to the Rebeat server and the musician

gets a detailed report about the numbers sold from various stores.

“I think it levels the playing field,” believes Sudhin. “Whether you are Rahman or a musician making a debut, you both will be available in the same 300 stores. Then, it’s up to the quality of your music.”

Aditya believes that with proper marketing over the Internet and social media, bands will be able to push their product online. “You can’t just put the product on Rebeat and forget about it. You still need to go out and create the buzz, have an impressive Myspace or Facebook page, blog about it, give out samples and you can even sign up for a promotional offer with Rebeat that will let radio companies around the world play your music for free.”

Also, Rebeat itself is pirate-proof. “Because the sales are linked to your Paypal account. Even if someone hacks into your Rebeat account and sells his music, the money would come to your Paypal account. So why would anyone pirate Rebeat!” laughs Aditya.

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