



Hiring Your Team: Part I – Hiring a Music Attorney

If you are working in the music industry, the first member of your support team should be a qualified music attorney to represent and advise you. But don't wait until you have a contract in front of you to think about finding one. You really should have one in place long before then.

But how do you know when you need an attorney?

Here are some milestones:

- You have just established a band of talented songwriting musicians,
- You have been playing in your area, have built a following and are ready play further from home,
- You are ready to hire a manager,
- You are preparing to book some studio time to cut a demo,
- Someone has offered you a contract (and you have not signed it because you KNOW not to sign anything without seeking the advice of a qualified attorney first).

But where do you find a music attorney?

You could contact the largest law firm in town and ask for help. You might be connected with an excellent attorney but you are more likely to be referred to an attorney who practices general business law (or who once had a client who played guitar).

Why should you find an attorney who specializes in music law? It's like this. . . if you required brain surgery, who would you prefer to perform it:

1. A doctor who performs a variety of surgeries each week on various parts of the body.
2. A doctor who only specializes in brain surgery.

Of course you want 2) the specialist. That person is up to date with new trends in their field, knows what to look for and can easily identify anything that looks out of place. Chances are, you will be in better hands and will get more for your money by going with a specialist.

But it's not enough to just pick a specialist, you also need to ask the right questions and get an idea of the attorney's style. There are attorneys out there who just tell clients to sign or not to sign a contract. For example, with a client who brings in a contract, the attorney would require anywhere between \$3000 to \$5000 up front,

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and then a week or two later would tell them, "I read over your contract. It's legal. You can sign it."

I've met with clients who unfortunately signed horrible deals at the advice of that type of an attorney. The thing was, the contracts were perfectly legal. . . but they didn't include favorable terms for the client.

Finding the right attorney for you requires a little work. Talk to people and see what name comes up with positive comments. Look at the attorney's website. Email or telephone to find out whether they offer a consultation, what it includes, how long it will be and whether there is a charge.

Some attorneys offer consultations for free, some charge their hourly rate, and some charge a special consultation fee. Do not make the mistake of choosing based on cost alone. Find out what is included in the consultation. Some attorneys have you complete forms before the meeting so that they can identify areas where you need assistance and share that information with you in the meeting. Other attorneys just have you come in and talk with them to see if you both want to work together.

In any case, prepare to ask plenty of questions like "what services can I expect if I bring in a contract for your review" and "what would you typically charge for this service?" See if the attorney is responsive to your questions and needs. It's usually a good indicator of how they will treat you later.

Remember that although this might feel like a job interview, ultimately, you are the employer. Take your time and choose well.

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Posted April 10, 2006 – MusicLawInfo.com