

## **The Trials and Tribulations of releasing a video game soundtrack**

Before I start, a disclaimer. I've been trying to persuade companies to release game soundtracks for over 6 years. Whether it be by luck, judgement, incessant nagging or a combination of all 3, it's finally happened. This article is by no means a definitive list of 'how do I get my soundtrack released', but simply a recital of some of the important facts we learnt along the way.

First off, the game itself. Even if you've written what you regard as your magnum opus if the game doesn't sell, it's fairly safe to assume your soundtrack won't either, a harsh reality.

There are 2 ways to go about it:

1. Doing it yourself. The advantages are you have complete control over content and distribution. You can forge your own audience from scratch and on a per unit sale you'll make more money. The disadvantages are you have to pay for everything out of your own pocket, market it yourself, and you're faced with the daunting task of figuring out how an entirely different industry works - all whilst working on other projects.

2. Get a record company to release it. The advantages are that you are putting your work in the hands of a company that understands how to sell music, have access to a network of distributors and retailers that are unlikely to talk to you as an individual and you're far more likely to sell more copies. The disadvantages are that you'll have to find a suitable one to buy into your ideas AND your music.

Either way you're going to have to persuade your publisher/developer to go along with it. In order for this to have a fair chance you need to be extremely well prepared. Don't just mention in a meeting 'wouldn't it be nice if....', then wait for them to finally say 'no', which could take 2 minutes or 2 months, games companies are in the business of selling games, not music. Ideally you want to bring 1. A concise proposal containing as many solid & well-argued reasons for doing this (based on fact, not supposition), 2. a schedule from completion of the music to the CD on the shelves and finally 3. a budget. If you choose to source a record company, bringing them to any initial meeting will no doubt impress (and they can help produce the paperwork needed to convince the powers that be).

I don't have a lot of space to go into detail on the 3 elements but here's a few bullet points that could help guide you in the right direction...

1. Compare the soundtrack to a T-shirt, Pen, Cap etc. everything that comes under the umbrella of 'ancillary products'. This is a way to increase consumer awareness of the game.
2. Sell it to them as a 'marketing tool' which has the potential to not only re-coup its costs but also make money (compare that to an advert on a bus shelter).
3. Quote sales figures wherever you can.
4. Compare it to film soundtracks, but don't quote sales figures.
5. Don't say it'll make loads of money.
6. Mention the cross-marketing potential (get the game mentioned in non-

- game specific media that the game itself could not normally get in).
7. Piggy back the marketing on the back of the game.
  8. Offer to share the spoils equally with the developer. It may be your music, but they paid for it. Without either component, it wouldn't have happened in the first place.
  9. Use the expertise of a record producer to help choose the tracks, re-editing shorter cues into longer musical 'experiences', mastering, sleeve notes, artwork etc.
  10. Offer your services to help promote the album – interviews / pictures / articles and press conferences - will help the audience become far more aware of you and your work. You could speak at a press conference on the audio component of the title at hand and use the opportunity to promote the album. As long as you vigorously plug the game, everyone should be happy!

After all that, it still might not happen. It's a relatively new concept over here in the UK which always makes it a hard sell, even harder considering that there isn't what you would call an existing demographic in the UK to prove that a market even exists. The most important lesson I learnt was determination, trying again on each subsequent project which I felt had a score that was strong enough to stand alone.

Well that's as much as I have room for. My apologies if this article comes across as simply a load of bullet pointers, there is so much we have learnt during this process, it's hard to disseminate the most poignant tips from the less important ones! I sincerely hope that the game soundtrack becomes as commonplace as the film soundtrack in record shops over the next decade, there's a helluva lot of great game music that deserves to sit near to the latest John Williams scored sequel, the more that get released the easier it'll be for all of us. Go on, games composers everywhere, roll your sleeves up and get stuck in :- ) I dare ya.....!!!

## **BOXES ON THE SIDE**

### **The Consumer Connection**

Having a soundtrack out there is all well and good but how does your core audience (those who bought the game) know about its existence? The best form of advertising is on the game itself so how's about a sticker on the box or flyer inside? If you're too late, how's about hanging a poster in the games section?

Take advantage of the marketing of the game as much as possible. Film companies like soundtracks to be in the shops 2-3 weeks BEFORE the film is released but it'll take 2-3 months to actually get into retail once you've got finished CDs so start early!

### **50 words**

- Prepare for this well in advance of the games' release – 6 months or more!
- Do loads of research - local game & record shops to ascertain whether there is an audience.
- Source a suitable record company (thinking big) OR
- Consider doing it yourself (slowly build up an audience)
- Use the words 'Ancillary Product' a lot.
- Don't underestimate the power of marketing & PR.