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How Creators Can Keep Videos Monetized in 2026

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A single song in the background of a video can decide whether a creator earns from it. Here is how music licensing has quietly become one of the biggest income risks of the modern creator economy. And how to stay monetized.

The economics of being a content creator are stranger than most people outside the industry realize, largely due to copyright issues. A single video might become eight pieces of content or more, and each one earns money differently and sits under a different set of music rules.

- A single Content ID claim can redirect 100% of a video's ad revenue to the rights holder for the lifetime of that video's views.
- YouTube processed 2.2 billion such claims in 2024, with **rights holders choosing to monetize over 90%** of them rather than block the video.
- Using a song without the right license can cost between \$750 and \$30,000 per song in statutory damages in a US court. If a judge decides the use was wilful, **the fine rises to \$150,000 per song**.
- A song that is cleared on one platform is not automatically cleared on another.
- In 2025, Warner Music **sued shoe brand DSW for over \$30 million** for doing exactly this.

How it should work

Luckily, there is a simpler way to work. **Epidemic Sound**, the world's leading soundtracking platform for content creation, is built around the principle that the music a creator uses should travel with the content without losing its commercial rights along the way. It is a license-at-the-source model, where every right needed for commercial use is settled upstream with the artist.

Creators pay for a subscription and gain access to their artist-created catalog, which clears the headaches of surprise Content ID claims and retroactive demonetization. The globally cleared soundtracks and sound effects, spanning 400 genres, sit alongside AI-powered workflow tools that embed audio directly into the creative process.

Without that structure, here is what might happen

A video goes up on YouTube on a Monday morning. Within an hour, the audio gets scanned, a label-owned track in the third minute matches the database, and a Content ID claim lands on the video. The video stays live. The views keep climbing. The ad revenue starts going to a rightsholder the creator has never heard of.

This holds even when everything else in the video is original. The filming, the editing, the script, the narration, none of it changes the outcome. One unlicensed track is enough to send the entire video's ad revenue to whoever owns the rights to that track.

Monday afternoon, the same video gets cut for Reels, TikTok, and a podcast clip. The Reel is muted on Instagram because the account posting does not have a license from the rights holder. For the TikTok cut, the creator switches to a track from TikTok's in-app commercial music library. That library caps commercial use at 60 seconds, so anything past the first minute plays without sound. By Wednesday, a brand partnership is on hold. The brand needs proof that every track is licensed correctly. The creator cannot give it.

Sponsored work that uses unlicensed music exposes the brand as well as the creator, and brand legal teams know it, which is why proof of licensing is now a standard ask before sign-off.

Legal peace of mind for creators

Every failure point in that week traces back to the same root problem: the music was not properly licensed across every platform the video reached. A single license at the source resolves all of them.

On YouTube, channels connected to an Epidemic Sound subscription are safelisted with Content ID. The system recognizes the music as cleared before any automated scan runs. There is no claim to dispute, no revenue redirected, and no waiting period to recover earnings.

On Instagram, the license covers commercial use on both personal and business accounts.

On TikTok, the license covers the track inside TikTok and on every other platform where the same content reaches. Reposting the cut to Reels or YouTube does not break the licensing. The license also covers the full length of the video, up to 10 minutes, so the soundtrack does not cut off at 60 seconds the way an in-app library track does.

For brand partnerships, the license on the Pro and Business plans extends to commercial use in sponsored content. When the brand's legal team asks for written proof that the music is cleared, the subscription itself is the proof.

The clearance also outlasts the subscription. Any video soundtracked during an active subscription stays cleared for the life of the content, regardless of whether the creator continues to subscribe. A song chosen in 2026 will not surface in a 2031 brand audit as a problem.

The simple side-by-side

Feature	Native platform music libraries	
What music is included?	Limited royalty-free libraries (Meta Sound Collection, TikTok CML, YouTube Audio Library). Popular songs available on some platforms via revenue-share programs	55,000+ artist-created tracks and 250,000+ sound effects
Use in monetized or sponsored content?	Permitted only from each platform's own approved library. Revenue may be shared with rights holders	Yes, with commercial rights included. Sponsored work covered on the Pro and Business plans
License covers cross-posting to other platforms?	No. The license applies only to the platform that issued it. Cross-posting can make the same track unlicensed in the new context	Yes. One license covers every platform the same content reaches
Risk of Content ID redirecting ad revenue?	Variable. Tracks sourced from elsewhere can still be flagged by automated audio scanners	Low when channels are connected and safelisted with Content ID
Risk of the license being revoked?	High. Platforms can end or renegotiate deals with rights holders without notice, and existing videos using affected tracks lose their commercial license overnight.	Low. Tracks soundtracked during an active subscription stay cleared for the life of the content, even after the subscription ends. Licensing terms do not change retroactively
Access to trending or popular songs?	Available on personal accounts. Restricted or unavailable on business accounts	Not part of the model. Music is artist-created, not chart music
Cost	Free	Subscription, from \$9.99 per month on the Creator plan

Photo: Vitaly Gariev via Pexels

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