

The Last Word—and Numbers—on Your CD

The artist's guide to coded information

Digital download sales, royalties for new media play, even royalties from the sale of blank CD-Rs, in addition to physical retail and online retail sales of CDs all hinge on coded information. It's important that artists use every means available to establish their connection to their recording, and to incorporate into their project all of the now-essential tools for selling their recordings.

UPC, ISRC, CD Text, CDDB®

A lot of information on a music CD isn't music. Digital delivery and online CD sales are important to almost every artist, and they can't happen without some of these codes. Listeners' use of all kinds of players to hear their music gives artists new opportunities to share information about their music, too.

In this guide, we tell you what each code does, what it looks like, and where to get it.

UPC, a numeric code, and ISRC, an alphanumeric code, support the conduct of the music business by tracking sales of CDs and individual tracks. CD Text and CDDB® are two sources of text information that enrich the listening experience.

UPC (Universal Product Code)

What Is It?

A UPC is the "bar code" attached to nearly every packaged product available in retail stores. Each product has a unique 12-digit number, encoded in the bars, which are scanned upon purchase and allow for the tracking of inventory and sales.



For a CD, the UPC's 12 digits are assigned as follows: the first 6 digits (the prefix) represent the record label or other releasing entity (more on this later), and the last 6 digits (the suffix) represent the artist and the release.

What Is It Used For?

In addition to indicating the purchase price at cash registers, the UPC is used for two main purposes: managing inventory and tracking sales. Each product has a unique string of digits and bars, and thus is an essential tool for tracking inventory. For example, a distribution company uses UPC data to track the number of CDs sent to stores.

In addition, Nielsen SoundScan collects UPC sales data from 14,000 outlets in the U.S. and Canada to compile its weekly list of music sales, which are published online (www.soundscan.com) and in the Billboard charts. Nielsen SoundScan's charts are the only ones based on actual record sales. For a recording to be tracked by SoundScan, its title must be submitted to SoundScan using a [submission form](#). In a nod to the independent music community, Nielsen has authorized other parties to upload the submission; Oasis CD Manufacturing, for example, will do this for their customers, with very little additional effort on the artist's part.

Where Does It Come From?

The Uniform Code Council (UCC) is the organization in charge of maintaining the UPC standard www.uc-council.org. To receive bar codes, a company must become a member of the organization. The membership fee varies according to the number of unique products and gross sales revenue, but it is a minimum of \$750 annually. Member companies receive the first six digits of their code and the right to use the rest of the sequence.

How Does It Work?

UPCs are scanned with an optical reader device, which decodes the bars, displaying the product name on an enabled cash register or inventory system. For recordings registered with SoundScan, when the bar code information is scanned by a retailer, it is also sent to the sales database.

AARC – free money?

In 1992, Congress imposed a compulsory royalty on the sale of blank recording media (CDs and digital cassettes), to be awarded to artists, composers, and labels to compensate them for the home recording of their works by consumers. Artists and labels are represented by Alliance of Artists and Recording Companies (www.aarcroyalties.com) in the annual negotiation and distribution of the funds collected. SoundScan sales data are used to determine who gets paid what.

electronic stores, such as MSN Music and iTunes. Because the ISRC remains attached to a track even after it is extracted from the original medium (such as an audio CD) and encoded for download as mp3, aac, etc, it is a reliable information source.

Where Does It Come From

The ISRC was created by the International Standard Organization (ISO) in order to provide an electronic label to sound recordings. Appointed by the ISO, the International Federation of Phonographic Industry (IFPI) maintains the ISRC standard. Because the ISRC includes a recording's country of origin, every country has its own national agency, designated by the IFPI. For more information on the ISRC standard and appointed national agencies releasing ISRC codes, visit www.ifpi.org. In the U.S., the national administrative agency is the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA): www.riaa.com.

How Does It Work?

The ISRC code is an electronic tag that tells a story about the track to which it is attached. The ISRC standard presents 100% reliability for identification of the sound recording for a specific track.

As with UPC, record labels (and other music business entities) apply for status with the administering agency (the RIAA) to obtain its own 3-digit code (the "Z04" in our example, above). The label then assigns the remaining digits in the code sequence. With one letter and two digits to work with, it's clear that the ISRC was put in place for a finite number of record labels, not for today's music environment. Distributors and online music "aggregators" are permitted by the RIAA to assign ISRC codes to sound recordings, which means independent artists do not have to request codes from the appointed national agency.

Where Is It Put On My CD?

Typically, a record label furnishes its sequence of ISRC codes to the mastering lab, where the information is

compiled on a subchannel of the master. If you plan to release your tunes as digital downloads, the same codes assigned by the aggregator can be applied to the audio CD recording. Plan ahead: get your ISRC codes in advance and have them added to your CD release as well.

CD Text

What Is It?

CD Text is information about the release that can be encoded as a separate file on an audio CD.

What Is It Used For?

CD Text stores such information as the artist's name, the album title and song titles. When playing back an audio CD containing CD Text information on a CD Text-enabled CD player, the listener will be able to read this information on the display panel. *It's displayed only on CD or DVD players, not on the desktop of most computers.* (Computer display of text information comes from an entirely different source; see the section on CDDDB below.) In addition, specifications for CD Text will eventually allow the inclusion of additional data, such as JPEG coded images.

Where Does It Come From?

CD Text has been around since the advent of CD in the '80s. CD Text is part of the original *Red Book Audio* standard, which defines the CD audio medium that we use every day. There is renewed interest in CD Text now because DVD players and more car stereos include text-enabled displays.

Where Is It On My CD?

CD Text is stored on a CD in a way that it does not interfere with playback of the audio portion. CD Text information is encoded in a subchannel. (Other subchannels are available on a CD.) There are two ways to

Internet and satellite radio - Income for the recording artist

When a tune is played on an over-the-air broadcast station, the station pays royalties to the composer of the music only, not to the label or the recording artist. When the same tune is played on an Internet radio service, a satellite radio station, or a music service like Muzak, the rules are different: both the composer and the performer are paid a statutory royalty. The recordkeeping for these transactions includes several fields of information, including the reliable ISRC. Sound Exchange is the nonprofit organization formed to facilitate this business, with estimated royalty payments in 2005 of \$30 million. Artists may join Sound Exchange for free: www.soundexchange.com.

length appearing in exactly the same sequence on a disc: the very first time a CD is inserted into a computer drive and the CDDDB database is accessed, the database reads the (generally) unique sequence of tunes and their lengths, and stores that unique sequence. (When the statistically improbable happens, the listener may see album and content information displayed that is unrelated to the CD in the drive.) For recognition of individual tracks, Gracenote has other software that generates a “fingerprint” of some portion of the content of the music file, and thereafter associates the information about the track with that fingerprint.

For more information on a complete list of software applications complying with the CDDDB service visit <http://www.gracenote.com/partners/software>

Should I use CDDDB?

By all means. As the party with the most to gain or lose by the correct data being in the online database, be sure to upload your album information when you receive your discs from manufacturing. If you work with a record label, check to be sure the label takes responsibility for entering the information, preferably as a “content partner.”

In Conclusion

Artists may feel that their CD project is complete when the CD is mastered and the artwork is approved. But that is no longer the case. With digital download sales, royalties for new media play, even royalties from the sale of blank CD-Rs, in addition to physical retail and online retail sales of CDs, it is imperative that artists use every means available to establish their connection to their recording, and to incorporate into their project all of the now-essential tools for selling their recordings.

ACT!

Independent-oriented mastering labs (us!), manufacturers and retailers can provide access to the entire suite of information tools available to record labels. Get your ISRCs early and have them appended to your disc by your mastering lab. Be sure to use a bar code. When you get your discs back from manufacturing, be sure that accurate information is uploaded to the online databases.

Information for this report was compiled by Emiliano Ferragosto, Jason McDaniel, and Ann Blonston, with help from our friends at OasisCD.com and CDBaby.net.

We’d usually say, “for more information, contact us,” but this is all the information we have on these topics – and now you have it, too!