



“ Artists want to make sure their music is not used inappropriately... they believe their music is an extension of themselves. ”

The words “license” and “copyright” seem to pop up a lot in conversations about music that appears in movies, TV shows, or on the Web. You know that people who stream music online have to get permission to do so. And you also know that the owners of the music—whether it’s the songwriter, performer, music publisher, or record label—decide whether they want to grant that permission. Although it might seem simple, there’s much more that happens in during that “clearance” process. That’s where Jennifer Gordon comes into the picture. Jennifer landed her job at Diamond Time, a copyright clearance company, 13 years ago after interning there during her last year in college. She was nice enough to give us the low-down on copyright clearances and how she obtains them.

Jennifer Gordon

Director of Licensing, Diamond Time, Ltd.

What are your main responsibilities?

I secure permission for things like still images, moving images, lyrics, song recordings, and trademarks, whenever anyone wants to use one of those in a new work.

What’s the clearance process like?

When one of our clients wants to use a copyrighted work in a project, I first determine whether it’s available or will be difficult to get. Then I research to see who owns it, contact the owner, and work with the owner to secure permission. Within this effort, I negotiate a rate on behalf of the client and figure out a fee that is favorable to both the owner and the user.

Why are licenses important?

They allow people to control what happens with their music or images. People want to make sure that their music or image is not being used inappropriately. If a songwriter is against smoking, he or she may not want their song to be included in a movie where the actor is smoking. Many artists believe that their music is an extension of themselves, so they don’t want to misrepresent themselves.

Why is it hard to license music?

One reason is that the people who can grant the permission tend to want higher fees than the users can afford. Sometimes music is hard to license simply because it’s very hard to reach the person who can give the necessary

consent—that person might be on vacation or on a 12-hour plane trip, and your deadline is in 10 hours. These things happen.

What do you find most challenging about your job?

Dealing with personalities—some people think they’re very important. And you also have to deal with unreasonable demands. Recently, I was trying to license a virtually unknown recording. It took a lot of research to find who owned the rights, and then that person went on and on about how it’s the most important recording ever made and so it would require a really high fee. You have to be careful how you react to someone like that because you still want to include the music in your project.

Aside from tact, what other skills are necessary?

Patience. A clearance can take anywhere from 6 minutes to 6 months. You also need good research skills. Sometimes you have to find a music publisher that no longer exists—then you have to get creative and determine how to find the remaining copyright owner. I’ve searched press releases on the Internet and contacted [songwriters] through MySpace. Networking is important—part of why we’re so successful is the network of relationships we’ve built.

What do you like most about your job?

I like making people happy. I know it’s corny, but it’s nice to make everyone’s job easier by helping move things along smoothly.

—VERONICA DOMINGUEZ-GARCIA



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