



# HIRING A MUSIC PRODUCER

Possibly the most important, and sometimes most challenging step in getting your music done *right*, will be securing the help of a good producer.

## INTRODUCTION

The Producers section you are about to explore has been put together to help artists that *do not* produce themselves. This chapter, although helpful to anyone in the music business, is primarily an informative guideline for those who are *in need of a producer*. Later on, we will go over key information in relation to record **production**. For now, we will discuss the importance, the role, and also some of the realistic things to consider in getting a Hip-Hop or R&B/Pop music producer on your team.



### *...By Definition - What is a Producer?*

- A producer is... **1.** One that produces, especially a person or organization that produces goods or services for sale. **2.** One who supervises and controls the creation and public presentation of a project, or similar work. (Courtesy of Dictionary.com)

## DO YOU REALLY NEED A PRODUCER?

Generally, you are going to need the help of a good producer, just like most major label artists need help when making a record. Very seldom will you see any successful records made on any major record labels, or even a strong independent, without the help of a qualified producer. **Qualified?** Yes, because having someone who knows what they are doing - to guide you, and to help you make your music come together, should not be left into the hands of someone without skills in record production. You need a producer; **a good producer**; because you want to make sure that you *maximize* your chances of getting your music to “sound” it’s best. Also, beyond the skills required to produce a record effectively, a producer is also there to be objective, which is incredibly hard to do alone.

It seems that lately there has been a movement of some new artists trying to skip the idea of hiring a music producer for help. But, if you honestly look at what has to happen musically (and sometimes politically too) to assure the success of a music project, an artist might be **asking for self-inflicted failure** by trying to do too much, and being too close to their own music to be impartial. In other words, most people that are great producers can usually look at the talent and concept of what has to happen, from a discerning musical, creative, and marketing approach. This is a skill and an art in itself.

Artists need producers as much as most good actors need good directing. You will most times need that "heads-up" professional to be on the project to assure it having a better chance of success anyway. Plus, producers many times deal with everything from writing and creating the idea for the song, to dealing with the human variables of attitudes, emotion, and the atmosphere of working with all of the many different people attached to the project; Music Managers, Label A&R, Radio and Club DJs, Musicians, and of course, the actual artist themselves. Note: There is an art to producing, just like there is an art to sampling, DJ scratching, singing, rapping, and playing an instrument. While technology does allow many artists (and non-artists) who never thought that they could make beats & music "sound" pretty good, without having a hired producer - in truth, **most of it is far from being "well-produced"**, or good enough to release, or to be given a contract where a company's **revenue is at stake**.

Therefore, if you are an artist, you should highly consider taking the most rational approach to getting your record or demo project completed; meaning that you'll need to find either a reputable and experienced producer, or a hot new, up-and-coming producer that has **"reel" evidence** of developed skills to make a song sound **finished**. Or, at least find a producer who will sell you some beats, or license you some great instrumental music tracks to use for your demo or music project.



... "Reel Evidence?"

COMPACT  
disc  
DIGITAL AUDIO

- A Producer's "Reel" is a compilation of snippets or completed songs that is used as "evidence" of what the producer has done to let potential clients; artists and different entertainment companies hear - for work opportunities. This reel is basically a producer's demo reel, and will usually be accompanied by his discography (record & project credentials). This "reel" will usually contain the best of his present and past music projects, all to show a demonstration of their ability; particular sound, and production skills. Of course, if the producer has got some great credibility, and also has current songs on the market, then they might just tell you to get a copy of their latest release at your favorite MP3 download store.

## FINDING THE RIGHT PRODUCER

Whenever you start putting your songs together, and you plan for these songs to be heard by the *rest of the world*, whatever your music “sounds” like will ultimately need to be the best way of representing yourself...*as far as records go*. So ultimately, the main person responsible for *how* your music turns out, or sounds in the end - will be your producer. Now, some of you may be thinking that a mix engineer has that responsibility, but actually, the right producer will be accountable for getting a great mix engineer to “expand on” what the producer originally created.

Having a great producer on your team *will make the difference* in how your music is going to end up as a finished musical representation of your talent and songs. For that reason, if you are an artist, and you are *serious* about making the best record or demo you can, know that getting the *right* producer working with you can many times *make or break the outcome of your whole project*. So at some point, it will be very important that you get a producer *with some skills ...and a good track record, or project credibility doesn't hurt either*.

## CREDIBILITY



You also need to recognize that your producer's past and present music credentials and successes may increase your *own* opportunity to get your finished production(s) into the right hands. A producer's credibility may also get other industry insiders to take *you* a little more serious about what you're doing as an artist.

**For example:** Imagine if you are able to put on your demo or your independent release, “**Produced by Swizz Beatz**”. If nothing else, just the whole idea of you having that “piggybacked” credibility will open up doors to you that were probably not there before.

So do not take the idea of having the right producer(s) working with you lightly. Commit this to memory; **much of the music business is built around credible business and personal relationships...and also associations**. At the *end of the day*, the music industry circle in Rap, Hip-Hop, Pop and R&B is actually not as big as you might *think*.

## DIFFERENT TYPES FOR DIFFERENT HYPE

Ok, first of all, there *are* different types of producers. So if you're going to hire a producer, you'll first have to figure out what *your* particular needs are. One of the things to consider when deciding on who to work with will greatly depend on your

own style as an artist. Also, your skill level and budget will be things that have to be considered.

It is important for you as an artist to feel confident in your producer's ability and know-how in the style of music you are doing. His or her knowledge of *your* particular style will help in determining production chores, and how well they can create the best musical tone for the performances needed. I mean, you may be asking for a *headache* if you are going for the Usher, or India.Arie market, but you go out and get with a producer who primarily has their only experience in the Underground Rap market...*especially* when it comes down to doing **vocal overdubs** and "**comps**". This is mainly because it is not their *normal* area of expertise in music production. But, on the flip-side of that idea, every now and then, when music productions are made that go away from the normal combination of producer and talent, and the process involved in the creation...**it is** possible to come up with a new *unique* sound or style.



**For example:** Just look at what producer Lil' Jon, known for his "Crunk" & "Dirty South" style productions did with the smooth, soulful vocal style of Usher. The mixture of these normally *different* sounds; Lil' Jon's music, and Usher's



vocal style, created a whole *new* sound; "Crunk & B". Also check out the work of music producer Jazze Pha and his artist Ciara, "The First Lady of Crunk & B".



...Overdubs?

- An **overdub** is a recording technique used in the studio that allows artists and musicians to record parts "over" previously recorded parts or takes (attempts). This technique allows artists and musicians to create different recorded performances...without affecting any earlier recorded parts or performances in the recording.



...Comps?

- The term **comp** is short for **compilation**. When you make multiple **overdubs** or takes of the same part, **but on different tracks** in the studio, a compilation track of the **best of these overdub tracks** is sometimes needed. This new single edited performance track is called a "comp". This will usually require the producer and the engineer to have a great ear and technical ability to assemble these "best of" parts, all so that the finished comp is not only the best overdubs, but it is also a **consistent "sounding" track** of the performance. **For example:** A producer may have an artist go into the studio and record the performance three different times, on 3 different tracks. Later on, the producer and engineer will sit and make a new **best of track**, from the best sections of the first 3 tracks. If this new "comp" track was done correctly, the sound and performance on tape will be consistent in tone, performance, quality, and feel.

## PRODUCER - DIRECTOR OF SONG CONSTRUCTION

You need to know that there are very different types of producers who know *how* to make the artist and song stand out through record **production**, which many of you need to start thinking of as **record construction** or direction. When you look at it as constructing or directing a record - from *the creative, the technical, and the whole building and directing process that goes into making a record*, maybe then you will see (and hear) that you can build a song with different approaches, and with different types of music construction experts; producers. Whoever the right producer is that works best for the type of “building”, or music *image* that you *need* (your style) – make sure that the candidate you choose is skilled at *whatever they do...* all to deliver **a great finished product**. The producer’s main job is to deliver great product, *that’s why they are called producers*. (See Introduction)

### KNOW THE M.O.\*


\* (MO) Modus Operandi means:

- A technique of operating
- A person’s way of working

### What are the different types of music producers?

In the many urban music trends of today, you will find *traditional* musician-type producers like Scott Storch, Babyface, Pharrell, or Manuel Seal, Jr. Then there are those who are *basically* stand-alone beat-maker type producers like Swizz Beatz. There are producers who mainly sample from other productions, and then *creatively* use their *own cleverness* to make “new” productions like Kanye West. Next there is the combination of DJ and musician-type producers like DJ Toomp and Lil Jon; who use a mixture of great synthesizer hook riffs, *combined* with the actual energy *the sound itself makes*. The DJ-Musician-producer will also know how to use samples and *sound placement, along with a touch of musician skills to get the job done right*. So basically, all the types mentioned – *if they have already done a few successful records*, are all *credible* types of producers. Credible meaning, they have a method to make the project **complete** through *whatever* method or approach that they use. These are the producers that know *how* to get the job done, and done right...**with proof**. They’re the person that knows and oversees *whatever* has to happen - to make a *finished record ready for the market*. The complete producer also usually understands at least a little something about *all of the above* methods or approaches to making a recording come together. They are the supervisor and director of song **construction**. And he or she commonly knows how to use their experience and knowledge to deliver finished product...*regardless* of *who* actually does some of the work involved in the studio when making the production.

**For example:** Jermaine Dupri, Dallas Austin, P. Diddy, Lil Jon and other great producers, have all had very successful productions on very *different types* of recording artists; rappers, to soul-singers, to pop artists. A large part of their

success comes from understanding the *how* process of getting the job done. This understanding normally comes from years of know-how, and also years of *surrounding themselves with great people in the studio*. These are the producers that are skilled at **incorporating what they do and what to do**, and with who to do studio production work with. For reference, go and research LA & Babyface productions, then look for names like producers Daryl (De'rock) Simmons and Kayo. See, getting the job done is like this; *from time to time*, when a seasoned producer needs a better arrangement, sample loop, or maybe a hot new beat or keyboard added...or maybe some great DJ scratching, or “ghosted” vocal adds, etc... **they recognize this:**  Whether or not *they actually go in and do the “hands-on”*, or physically do beats, sampling, or arrangements themselves, is *not as important* as finding the *right people* to come in and enhance *their* sound. **Whatever happens during the *music construction* process happens under *their* direction.**



...**Ghosted Vocals?**

- *Ok kids – here’s the deal. Ghosted vocals are usually vocals that are put into, or left in a recording to support the vocal performance of the featured artist. Sometimes a vocalist is hired to come in - as a guide, or as “icing” to lay down vocal parts that are basically the same as the featured vocalists parts. In the decision process of picking which vocals make the record, these “hired vocals” if they are great, are left in the track “underneath” the featured vocalist’s performance to enhance things. The result is called a “ghosted” vocal part. Ghosted vocals are not out front, but are normally below the featured vocalist’s parts.*

## TALENT & RESOURCES\$

Even if you have talent, finding the right producer may be very challenging, and may come down to you either having **money**, resources, great exposure, or in the best situation; **all of the above**. You may also have made some type of relationship with an established or “hot” up-and-coming producer who is willing to help you get your music done right for little cost, or **maybe even *nothing up front***. In some cases, established producers have been known to take on a new artist project entirely on a “spec” or speculative basis... with the idea being that **the talent is so hot, the finished product will surely get some major attention**. So the established producer is willing to risk working without any advance money at all - to be paid when the artist gets some type of deal in place. Recording studios have also been known to do “spec” deals with new artists that they believe in, or have what it takes to attract major interest.

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