

Managing Your A Cappella Recording Project

By Freddie Feldman

V a **O** c **C** a **O** p **M** p **O** e **T** i **I** i **O** a **N**

So you want to make an a cappella album. A cappella groups have been recording and releasing albums for decades, but not until recently has it been so relatively easy and inexpensive to accomplish. Just because it's easier and cheaper doesn't mean groups are doing it any more successfully than before.

Like any problem, there are always many ways to get to the solution. Mine is just one way. I've produced over 32 a cappella CDs in the past seven years and I see groups making the same mistakes over and over again. These mistakes can be costly, annoying, and even tragic.

I'm not going to talk much about production techniques, all of the stuff that happens in the studio. In my opinion, you don't need to know very much about that. You're going to be paying recording engineers, producers, and mastering engineers to handle those details. You need to know how to put it all together, on time and budget. I'll show you how to, predictably, get your finished album in your hands by that big Spring Concert date.

I'm not just pulling these methods out of the air, based on solely what I see. I actually used them myself. In December 2005, I released the *Dark Side of the Moon A Cappella*. I acted as not only the Producer on this album, but also the Vocal Percussionist, one of the soloists, and the Record Label. It was my responsibility to make sure this project was managed properly. And why not? It was tens of thousands of my own dollars at stake and I couldn't afford to lose it all. After years of teaching groups how to manage their own recording projects, it was my turn to make good on my promises of success!

Even though it was quite a massive album to coordinate, the *Dark Side* CD went off pretty much without a hitch. The one or two bumps in the road I encountered, were aptly dodged because I had planned ahead and I was prepared for the worst.

Always keep two things in mind while you're reading this book and going through the process of making your own album: plan ahead and have fun. Follow those two rules and everything else will fall into place.

→ freddie

The number one rule of making an album is:

Plan ahead.

That's it, we're done. Good luck with your CD! Just kidding, but only a little. There's a lot to know but if you always plan ahead, you'll be prepared. If you don't plan ahead, what are you going to do when Mr. Murphy (see Murphy's Law) pays you visit with a phone call telling you that your artwork "is going to delay production because of a problem with your Ink Density"? You're going to be screwed. Plain and simple.

Usually there's one or two people in your group that are responsible for the recording project. Before you do anything, sit down and plan out the project. It doesn't have to take hours and hours, but "wingin' it" isn't a good plan when you've got thousands of dollars, and your reputation, at stake.

If you know all the steps of the process, you'll know how to plan accordingly. Let's look at a typical list of milestones in the average recording project. We'll go into how to schedule these milestones in the next Chapter, first let's see what tasks we're scheduling:

1. Planning
2. Tracking
3. Editing/Mixing
4. Mastering
5. Artwork Preparation
6. Licensing Preparation
7. Pressing/Printing
8. Distribution/Promotion

Why record an album in the first place?

Yearbook - Collegiate groups tend to record one album a year and it represents a year in the life of the group.

Product - Turn an unpaid gig into a paying one. Sure, it sucks to play a show for free (or close to it). But if you've got a decent looking product to sell at the show, you can actually turn that frown upside-down.

Album-Title & Song-Order

The sooner you can start talking about what you are going to call your album, and even what order your songs will be in, the better. You will have many differing opinions in your group. Choosing an album-title will take longer than you think. **START EARLY!**

Choosing a song-order does not have to be an arduous process. One helpful tip: Put the name of each song on a Post-It note, with other info about the song (gender of soloist, tempo, key). Then put them on the wall and move them around to try out different song-orders.

Freddie's Plea: PLEASE don't put hidden tracks on your album. They are only funny to you and after a couple listens, you won't even find it funny anymore. I also wouldn't call anything a "Bonus Track" unless it's truly a bonus. Hidden tracks are very 90's and should be avoided at all costs!

The best way to make sure you get everything done on time is to work out a schedule for the whole project. There's no better way to find out where you're going than to start out looking at your destination. Work backwards. Start from your release date and work in reverse, in one-week blocks. Here's a very loose example:

Timeframe	Task
Week 17	CD Release Show
Week 16	Safety Padding
Week 12-15	Manufacturing
Week 11	Proofing & Licensing
Week 10	Artwork Preparation
Week 9	Mastering
Week 5-8	Mixing
Week 1-4	Tracking

That is not the fastest, most efficient use of your time, however. Several of the tasks can be done simultaneously. Let's consider the tasks as being in two separate "tracks." One set of tasks will be called "Audio" and one will be "Manufacturing." Let's take a look at the newer, more efficient timeline:

Timeframe	Audio Task	Manufacturing Task
Week 14	CD Release Show	
Week 13	Safety Padding	
Week 9-12	Manufacturing	
Week 8 (1 day)	Mastering	
Week 5-8	Mixing	Proofing & Licensing
Week 1-4	Tracking	Artwork Preparation

These time estimates are just rough estimates. How long it takes your group to get everything together to track all the parts, could take 8 weeks, rather than 4. But use this as a general guideline for laying out your schedule.

The Track/Song Matrix

Never rely on your memory or your studio engineer to remember which people/sections have recorded their parts in the studio. Use a chart and check off parts as you go. Then you can see your current status at a glance:

	Song #1	Song #2	Song #3	Song #4	Song #5
Solo	X	X		X	X
Harmony					
VP	X	X	X		NA
Soprano I	X	X			X
Soprano II		X		X	NA
Alto I	X	X		X	X
Alto II	X	X			X
Tenor I		X	X		
Tenor II			X		
Bass I	X	X			X
Bass II	X	X	X	NA	X

Here's what the Track Matrix looked like for the Dark Side of the Moon A Cappella CD project:

		Track #1	Track #2	Track #3	Track #4	Track #5	Track #6	Track #7	Track #8
		Breathe	OnTheRun	Time	Great Gig	Money	Us Them	Airy Colour	Brain Damage
Tracking	MIDI	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Solo	Mike	N/A	Time	Steph 10/8	Freddie	X	N/A	Alan
	Soprano 1	X / X	X	X / X	X	X	X	10/8	X
	Soprano 2	/ X	X	X / X	X	X	X	10/9	10/9
	Alto 1	X / X	X	X / X	X	X	X	X	X
	Tenor 1	X / X	X	X / X	X	X	X	X	X
	Tenor 2	X / X	X	X / X	X	X	N/A	X	X
	Beltone	X / X	X	X / X	X	X	X	X	N/A
	Bass	X / X	X	X / X	X	X	X	X	X
	VP	/ X					X		
	Extra								
	Mixing	Draft 1	Thursday / X	Thursday	/ X	X	Saturday	X	Friday
Draft 2		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Draft 3		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Draft 4		X	X	X	N/A	X	N/A	N/A	X
Final		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

You must setup a realistic budget for your recording project, and do it before you actually get into the studio. Find out all costs up front, so that there are no surprises later. Always add some breathing room to your budget, for unexpected hours/costs that will invariably come up.

I've put this chapter before the chapters on Recording, Mixing, Mastering, etc, because you should do your budget first. You may want to skip reading this chapter until after you've read the following chapters, it might make a little more sense.

Tracking

Discuss this one with your recording studio and producer/mixer. Ask them how many hours, average, will it take to record each song. Then multiply it all out:

$$\# \text{ of songs} \times \text{hours per song} \times \text{hourly rate} = \text{recording budget}$$

Mixing

This one is pretty much the same as tracking. Find out how many hours, on average, does it take to mix a song. Then multiply.

Mastering

If you choose to have your producer/mixer master your album, let them know and find out how much it will cost. It should run you about \$300-\$500 for a basic album. A full-time mastering studio will cost you anywhere from \$300 all the way up to \$2000 to master your album, depending on the mastering studio you go to. It's usually 30-45 minutes per song at a rate of \$75-\$475 per hour. So figure maybe 5-6 hours for a 12 song album. Find out **all** mastering costs up front. Some studios will charge you a fee to burn the finished master, separate from their hourly rate. Most studios will charge you a media fee for the blank CD-Rs, and some will charge an archiving fee as well.

Artwork/Photography

Figure this into your budget as well. Who will be preparing the artwork for your CD? Will you need any photos taken of the group, or anything else? Many times you can get someone you know to do this for you for free (and some pizza & beer).

Legal/Licensing

I discuss the details of this later, but if you have cover-tunes on your album, you will be required to pay Mechanical Licenses in order to put them on your CD. You must pay this fee up front when you manufacture your CDs, and you pay for the number of CDs printed, not the number of CDs you sell. The rate is 9.1-cents per song, per copy printed. You will also pay a \$10 service fee for each song you license. So figure about \$1200, if you have 12 cover-tunes on your album, of which you will be printing 1000 copies.

Replication

I would set aside a full \$2000 for replicating 1000 CDs. You can find cheapy places that will do it for \$1000, but you'd better be really on the ball and know what you're doing. I usually recommend Discmakers, since I am a Platinum Studio Partner with them (mention VOCOMOTION when you place your order).

Keep in mind that you will pay taxes and shipping on your CD order. Shipping 1000 CDs can be more expensive that would think. 1000 CDs can fill up like 9 boxes depending on the packaging used. So ask your manufacturer up front what the average shipping costs (and sales tax rate) are for the number of CDs you will be ordering.

I'm not going to talk too much about the recording and mixing process itself. You will be paying someone to handle those details. I will talk a little about selecting a producer/mixer, a studio, and some administrative issues that often arise during the recording/mixing process.

The two things that will occur during the part of the process are: tracking and mixing. Tracking is the process of actually recording your tracks. Mixing is adjusting levels of various sounds on a song. This also include editing and adding effects.

What is a Producer/Mixer?

I keep writing "Producer/Mixer" because you may use either a Producer or a Mixer to mix your CD. A Mixer is a person who will simply mix your album, based on their expertise at mixing a cappella. A Producer can also mix your album but they may also, at times, help you with other aspects of your album production. They may help you with song choices, songwriting, arranging, and other tasks.

Finding a Producer/Mixer

I urge you to find a qualified, experience, producer/mixer who has worked on a cappella recordings before. This person does not necessarily need to live anywhere near you (or even in the same hemisphere!). Firstly, I'll recommend you use me as your Producer (hey, it's my book!). I do have several friends in the industry who also produce a cappella albums exclusively that I could recommend, should you want to explore other options.

Remote Production

There are only so many people out there with the right skills and experience to properly produce your album. If you do not live near one of these rare people, don't despair! It has become very popular to record your tracks where you are and send them out to have someone produce/mix them remotely. You may either use a local studio, or you could even do the recording on your own.

If you have the resources, I would still recommend going to a local studio for tracking your parts. They will also always have better gear and they will have experience recording vocals. If you do not intend to mix your tracks in the same studio that you record the tracks in, you must let the studio know up front of your intentions.

Things To Discuss With Your Producer/Mixer

Your goals for this album?

Why are you recording this album? Are you planning on selling it? How detailed/picky do you want to be with tuning, rhythm, and mixing.

How many songs will you be recording?

This seems unimportant, but it can be often overlooked. Be sure your producer/mixer has time in their schedule to mix all the tracks you wish to have on the album.

What kind of sound are you going for?

Bring some recorded tracks of other a cappella groups you like. Heck, bring some non-a cappella tracks too. The more specific you can be about what you like, the better. Do you like a heavily-produced sound? Lots of effects? No effects? A more live sound? No pitch correction (autotune/melodyne)? No vocal percussion? Organic vocal percussion? Synthetic vocal percussion? These can be important things to discuss before you start recording a single take.

Will there be anyone else mixing any of the tracks?

Some groups out there like to sample different producers on the same album. They may have one producer work on three songs, another on three songs, etc. Personally, I think the album doesn't flow very well when it is produced by various people, a different one for each song. I feel an album should be thought of as a complete product and should have a consistent sound/feel as a whole. I have, however, been a part of albums where I only mixed three or four tracks. Depends on the group and the album.

Do you plan to use any other pre-recorded material?

Some groups can't afford to record a full 12-song album, and want to include some pre-recorded live recordings (maybe from last year's Spring Show) to beef-up the CD. Let your producer/mixer know that ahead of time. Some producers may not be so into having these tracks on the album, so may really dig it.

Do any of your members have any special requirements?

In my old studio, I had a "studio cat" who used to hang around with the singers. I once had a singer come in who was so allergic to cats that he had to be whisked in and out of the studio with a towel over his face. I had another singer who didn't tell me he was allergic, but he played with the cat anyways, then had a severe reaction and had to go straight to the emergency room. If you've got singers who like to record in the mornings, evenings, unshowered, naked, whatever...let your producer/mixer know up front.

What is Mastering?

Mastering is the final step in the process of making your recording, before it goes to manufacturing. Contrary to a common misconception, **no mixing is done during mastering**. The audio for your album is processed as final mix to “finish” or “sweeten” the audio. Do not ever count on mastering to fix any mixing, tuning, or other such issues in the recording. “They’ll fix it in mastering” is not a valid excuse for bad mixes.

Your recording studio will provide “pre-masters” which are finished mixes, ready to be mastered. The mastering studio will now look at your album as a whole. It’s good to have another set of ears listens to the mixes and maybe identify some overarching issues with the mixes. They may be a little muddy in the bottom-end, and they can try to fix this. Maybe they’re not bright enough overall. This can be adjusted as well. Things they can’t usually fix: the solo is too loud or soft, the rhythm of the VP is off, sopranos are flat, and other such mixing issues.

The mastering studio will also boost the volume of your tracks, to get them as hot (loud) as possible. In order to crank the volume as much as possible, they will have to limit the dynamics of your recording. For pop/rock songs, this will most likely be fine. If you’ve got more choral or acoustic sounding a cappella tracks, you may wish to keep as much of your dynamic contrast as possible. Just let your mastering engineer know what you expect, and they should be able to accommodate you.

Why can’t they just make it sound perfect in the mixing?

Well, nobody’s perfect. Your producer will get your mix to sound great, but the mastering studio will make your album sound like an album. They have special gear, that is very different from the gear that you use in mixing. If the mixes are good, the mastering studio won’t have to do very much.

Making the Master CD

The final step in the mastering process is the creation of the final master. You will need to provide your mastering engineer with a final track order for your album. The studio will then sequence your tracks in this order, and produce a final CD-R with your master. This is not exactly like a CD you might burn in iTunes. It will be a PMCD. The mastering studio will put in special codes into this disc that the manufacturer will use to ensure the CD is replicated properly. Nowadays, manufacturers will take regular CD-R's as masters. I even heard of people sending in CD-R mastered burned in iTunes. This will generally turn out fine, but be warned that if you have special requirements, like tracks that flow from one to the other (no break between songs), you really want a PMCD master.

The mastering studio will also check your PMCD to make sure there are no errors on the disc. Even though CDs are digital, burning audio to them does not mean that errors will not occur. Checking your PMCD for errors will ensure your replicated discs are as close to perfect as possible.

Who Should Do the Mastering?

I highly recommend finding a separate mastering studio from the recording studio that mixed your album. Even if your recording engineer says they can master the CD for you, kindly decline this service. Tell the recording engineer that you completely trust their mastering abilities, but you'd like to have a fresh set of ears do the mastering. Your recording will thank you for it in the end (okay, it won't literally thank you, but you know what I mean).

How Do I Find a Mastering Studio?

First thing to do is ask your producer or mix engineer if they could recommend a mastering studio. Many producers work regularly with the same mastering engineer, because they work well together. I personally have a very good relationship with a mastering studio that I use for almost every project I produce. We save a lot of time because we both know the other one's expectations and work methods.

What Should it Cost?

Mastering studios charge a wide range of rates for their services. They may charge as little as \$60/hour and as much as \$475/hour for mastering an album. Keep in mind that these rates seem very high, but you are only paying for a few hours of work. A typical 12-song a cappella album, if mixed well and consistently, should only take 3-5 hours to master.

Moving Audio/Data Around

Nowadays, audio is stored as digital files that can be moved around in a variety of ways. Some ways are more reliable than others, some are faster, some are cheaper. First, we'll look at the variety of file formats you can use, and then some good methods of getting those files from one place to another.

Audio File Formats You Might Use and/or See:

WAV	This type of file is the most standard audio file format used today. Sometimes know as Broadcast Wave Format, this type of file can be used for almost anything you'll need. They are uncompressed, though, and will be large (average 30-50mb for a song), but you do get the full quality audio (lossless). I recommend this format for any full-quality audio you need to store/transfer.	Max bits: 24 Max sample rate: 96k Max channels: 2 Encoding: PCM lossless
MP3	I recommend this format for any compressed audio you need to store/transfer, like test mixes and demos.	Max bits: 16 Max sample rate: 44.1khz Max channels: 2 Encoding: lossy compression
MP4	This is a relatively new format on the scene. It is similar to MP3, in that it does use a lossy compression to reduce the file size, so technically it's not full quality of the original. MP4 tends to compress even smaller than MP3 and will now do some neat things like multi-channel audio (like 5.1 surround. This format does allow for the Digital Rights Management (DRM), like the one used by Apple in store-bought songs from iTunes Music Store.	Encoding: lossy compression
AIFF	Also known as the Audio Interchange File Format. This format is similar to WAV in usage and widespread acceptance. It is being phased-out slightly from the recording studio world.	Max bits: 24 Max sample rate: 96k Max channels: 2 Encoding: PCM lossless
Sound Designer II (SD2)	This is an older file format primarily used by ProTools. Most audio workstation software packages are phasing-out the use of SD2 files. Avoid them.	Max bits: 24 Max sample rate: 48khz Max channels: 2 Encoding: PCM lossless

Some Methods of Transferring Audio:

- Audio CD-R** The most basic way to get audio from one place to another is to burn the audio to standard "Red Book Standard" CD. An Audio CD will play in any CD player, but must be ripped to MP3 or WAV before you can manipulate it digitally or transfer it in one of the other methods listed here.
- Data CD-R** If you've bounced/saved/ripped your audio as MP3 or WAV, you can burn it to a data CD-R. These files can then be copied from the CD-R easily, as you would with any harddrive on your computer. CD-R's can store up to 700mb standard (some will go higher, but are not always reliable or readable on other machines).
- DVD-ROM** Sometimes the files you need to send are bigger than 700mb. Especially if you're sending 24-bit WAV files to your mastering studio. DVD-ROM will hold up to 4.7gb on a single-sided single-layer disc. Some DVD-R drives will even store 9.8gb of data using dual-layer discs.
- Firewire Drive** Large amounts of data, like all the raw track for a complete album, are often transferred from place to place on a portable firewire harddrive. If you are going to ship a firewire harddrive, make sure you've made a backup copy of all of your audio before you ship. Also be sure to pack the drive very well so that it doesn't get banged around in transit.
- Email** You can simply email MP3s from one person to another. Keep an eye on the size of the files you are sending. Some people cannot receive email with attachments bigger than 10mb. WAV files will probably be too big for this method.
- FTP** FTP stands for File Transfer Protocol. Many studios now utilize FTP servers to store audio files. Using some basic software, and given the correct username/password/server-address, you can upload/download files using a stuiod's FTP server. This is a good way to transfers very large files, like ProTools session folders. Even if you're only uploading one file, it's still a good idea to ZIP or StuffIt your file before sending. It's possible that your file will have errors due to the way the files are transmitted, and ZIPping your file will help prevent errors (and may reduce your file size too).
- AIM/Skype** This is a pretty popular method lately. Using an instant-messenger type of system (AIM, Skype, MSN), you can transfer files to another person through the chat software itself. I've actually found Skype to be pretty fast and reliable (plus you can use it to make free voice calls).
- YouSendIt.com** This is an interesting site. You don't need an account, you don't have to login or pay anything. You simply go to the website with your browser, enter the email address you wish to send to, select the file you want to send (with a standard Browse Dialog box) and click send. Then the file begins uploading. Unfortunately, the website doesn't show any progress, so you never know how long it will take or how much longer you have to wait (maybe they'll fix this soon). Once the file is uploaded, an email is sent to the person you're sending to that alerts them to the transfer. They click on a link in the email and the file begins downloading. Not the best method yet,

but might help if other options aren't working for you. Thanks for Wes Carroll from The House Jacks, for turning me on to this site.

iDrive/Box.net Using Apple's .Mac service, or box.net, you can actually see a "network drive" right on your computer's desktop. You simply drag files to this drive and the software uploads the files to your virtual drive. Then the person on the other end can connect to the drive, in the same manner, and download the files. There's usually a charge for sites like this, and the number of this type of sites is growing rapidly.

ISDN or Dedicated Line This isn't used really for transferring audio but for listening to audio remotely in real-time. It's used heavily in the Voiceover (VO) world, where you have the talent (voiceover artist) in one location and the producer in another location. Each side of the connection needs an ISDN (Integrated Switched Data Network) line and a phone hybrid (sometimes called a Codec or ISDN Modem). ISDN lines are like digital phone lines. They're pretty expensive to install and maintain and they're pretty old technology. Some companies are developing systems that do the same thing as ISDN but without using an actual ISDN line.

Once your album is mixed and mastered, you need to have it manufactured (unless, of course, you're doing an online-only release). The manufacturing process can be tricky and takes just as much planning that went into the making of music on your album. You should start planning for manufacturing early. You can even start on the same day you start recording and work in parallel.

Replication vs. Duplication

Duplication (CD-R)

Recordable CDs (also known as CDR, or CD-R) are manufactured blank. Your artwork is either printed on the surface of the disc with an inkjet or silkscreened as with pressed CDs. The data is written ("burned" is also an acceptable term) onto them at your leisure, usually with desktop burners or stand alone duplicators. One exception, CD-Rs usually cannot be offset printed due to the pressure applied (unlike pressed cds which can be), these need to be silkscreened.

Recordable CDs are ideally suited for projects where you need a small quantity of one title. For example, you may want to publish one-of-a-kind recordings for fans -- on CDs that have the look of a mass-produced title. It is also for when your data changes frequently. Recordable media is more expensive than pressing CDs, so use it only when the project needs call for it.

Caveat for CD-R Duplication: Many older car-stereos and home CD-players are not able to play burned CD-Rs. By going with replication, instead of CD-R duplication, you will ensure that the most number of people will be able to play your album successfully.

Replication (Pressed CD)

Pressed CD manufacturing differs from recordable CD burning in one very important respect. In CD pressing, all the data is put into the disc in one "stamping or pressing" step (plating, actually) from the glass master created from your CD-R master. The disc shape is then created by injection molding. Once they are molded, pressed CDs are either silkscreened or offset printed, then inserted into their packaging.

Finding a Manufacturer

Discmakers (www.discmakers.com) and Oasis CD (www.oasiscd.com) are two of the largest CD manufacturers for independent releases. I know there might be cheaper alternatives (not that much cheaper), but if you can possibly afford it, go with one of the larger manufacturers. They are much more organized and will be less likely to completely screw up your project (although it could happen with any of them). Let your account representative know your deadlines at the beginning! You may even want to lie a little about the deadline (by a week). Padding your schedule is a good thing.

How many CD's should we order?

Order what you think you could possibly sell within a couple years, now how many you'll sell before your next CD comes out. You won't sell them all in a year, but you will still get people buying them a several years later.

The smallest quantity most manufacturers will do is sometimes 300 or 500. Don't order these quantities, if you can afford to possibly get 1000. The price difference, per CD, between quantities under 1000 and over 1000 are significant. Many companies will actually print a 1000 copies even if you order 500. It costs about the same for them. Then, later, when you need 500 more CD's they sell them to you at a "discounted reorder price." They set the pricebreak at 1000 for reason, use it.

When should we place a re-order for more CDs?

Plan ahead and you'll never be without discs. Don't wait until you have 10 CDs left before ordering more. Set a certain amount, and when you hit it, order more. You really need to base it on how fast you're selling your album right now. Take your average album sales per week, multiply that by 5, and that's how many CDs you should have left when you place your re-order.

Let's say you ordered 1000 CDs to start. You're selling 20 CDs a week. That means that you should re-order more discs when you have 100 CDs remaining. This way, if you continue to sell at 20 discs a week, you'll be covered for the three weeks it might take to get your next re-ordered batch of CDs. I've padded it a little (by a couple week's worth), because you never know when you're going to sell a bunch more in a week.

Freddie's Rule: You never want to be completely out of discs. If you don't have CDs, you're not going to sell CDs. If you plan ahead, get them just before you need them, you'll be all set!

Packaging Options

Nowadays, all of the major manufacturers offer a variety of interesting packaging options. The two main choices are Jewelcases or DigiPaks. The Jewelcase is your standard plastic CD case. DigiPaks are those cardboard cases (not cardboard sleeves though, as in CD singles).

Recommendation for collegiate groups: Go with the 4-panel folder. It's the cheapest and it will have enough room to fit all the info you want to put in there. You're probably not doing many original songs, so you won't be including lyrics (remember, you're not allowed to print the lyrics of cover tunes without negotiating permission ahead of time).

Would it be better to do an EP?

EP stands for Extended Play and, ironically, it's shorter than a regular album (LP). A standard album has 12 tracks. An EP is usually 5-9 tracks. Here's why an EP may not be the greatest idea for you: it costs the same amount to press an EP as it does an LP. Of course, it will cost more to record/mix/master the extra tracks, but once you've press your CD, those costs are not ongoing.

Usually, you want to price your album at about a dollar per song. That would mean that you would probably only charge about \$7-\$9 for your EP, but your cost of manufacturing is the same. I'm not saying to add songs on there so you can charge more for your CD. Actually, I believe that collegiate a cappella albums longer than 13 or 14 tracks are just too long. But, I do believe that if you were thinking of only recording 8 songs because you'd save the money on recording, you might not be correct.

What must you provide to the manufacturer?

Artwork files

Get their templates, in the format of the software you will be using to create the artwork. FOLLOW THE MANUFACTURER'S SPECS! They will tell you the resolution (usually 300dpi) and color-space (usually CMYK). Follow the guidelines on the template exactly, they're not kidding with that stuff. I've

seen some wacky results from groups that didn't provide artwork at the correct resolution.

Ink Density is something that can cause a snag in your plans. The paper that your booklet/DigiPak/etc are printed on will actually absorb some of the ink printed on it, and will darken once it dries. Ink Density is calculated by adding up the individual percentages of your darkest CMYK color. So if your darkest color has a CMYK value of 50% 60% 20% 80%, you'd add those up and get 210. Most manufacturers want you to stay under 300 or 280, so you'd be fine in this case. If you want "black," don't do 100% black, because that would add up to an Ink Density of 400. You'd have to do something like 70% 70% 70% 70%, which would add up to 280. Don't worry, your black will still be black even though it might seem like grey on the computer screen. The ink will absorb into the paper, become darker, and will look black in the end.

Use Photoshop for images. Use Freehand or Illustrator for layout and text. Photoshop is not the best thing for doing text. Also, don't use weird programs that the manufacturer doesn't support.

On the album-cover, make the album-title smaller than the group name. The largest text will be what people think is the group name. If you make the album-title larger, people will be confused. I've seen it happen many times.

If you are a college group, PLEASE put your school's name on the back cover somewhere (it can be small). There's nothing worse than having a listener try and figure out which "Accidentals" or "Chordials" or "Acafellas" you are.

Make sure your artwork has the approval of any governing body that supports your group. If you are a college group and your school is funding your album, their Legal Department may require that they approve your album booklet. It happens, it sucks, but be warned. This sort of thing can also hold up your album or even require significant changes to occur. Legal Departments at universities can be slow. I've seen a group that got held up for 2 months waiting for approval from their school. Then the school told them they had to remove a commercial jingle (Coke) from a medley they had recorded. Find out if you need any approval, AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

Master CD

Your mastering studio must provide the proper media for the master. Exabyte tape (not used much anymore), CD-R, or DAT.

Payment

Sounds so obvious. Sounds like a joke, but it's no joke. The manufacturer won't even open the package you sent them (artwork, etc) without having at least your deposit. They will not go to press without having your full payment in their hands. They will also not go to press without the proofed/approved artwork and the master CD. Everything is done as one job: CDs, booklets, stuffing cases, shrinkwrapping. Remember to figure in shipping into your cost (1000 CD's can weigh a lot).

If you go with a manufacturer out of the country (using Canadian manufacturers is getting more popular here in the States), figure in extra time for getting the CD's through Customs (can delay up to a week). You may also be required to add the text "Printed in Canada" to the outside of the booklet (so Customs can see it).

Unders/Overs

Your CD manufacturer will print 5% more discs than you order, in case some of the cases or discs get mangled by the machines during pressing. In the end, the quantity of finished CDs you will receive will be within 5% of the ordered amount (from 950 to 1050, if you ordered 1000). You are credited back the money for the CD's that weren't printed, and usually will be given the extra CDs for free, if you pay in full before manufacturing begins.

You may also receive many extra booklets or traycards. Be creative with these. Use them on your merchandise table to promote your new album. Be prepared to receive NO extra printed materials as well.

Album Credits / Liner Notes

Liner notes are all the printed text inside of the CD packaging. This also include the printing on the disc and in the traycard. This can be a bit of a thorny issue for some groups. Start working on this stuff early, so that you're not waiting at the end to get all the "Thank You's" from everyone.

Song Information

You should definitely list all of the songs on your CD, in the order they occur on the disc. If a song is a cover-tune, I would strongly recommend putting in at least the original artist, and even the name of the songwriter. Putting the soloist's name for each song is great too. If you have different people doing vocal percussion from song to song, this is a good place to list who's doing VP on each song.

Production Credits

I like to look at albums that I dig, and see how they've done this. Grab your favorite U2, Guster, Moby, whatever, and see how the credits are worded. It's definitely a good starting point. Here's an example of how I did the credits on the Dark Side of the Moon A Cappella CD:

Recorded and Mixed by: Freddie Feldman at VOCOMOTION, Evanston, IL
Mastered by: Doug Sax at The Mastering Lab, Ojai, CA
Produced by: Freddie Feldman
Arrangements by: Jon Krivitzky
Music Director: Jon Krivitzky

Thank You's

Some groups put "Special Thanks" and "xxxx Would Like To Thank" in their liner notes. Some don't. I always like to do it. People really dig seeing their name in print, and if they helped you get your album together in any way, it's a nice thing to do for them. It's up to you whether you do one long list of people or a separate list for each member of the group. The order of the names may mean something to you, it may not. Maybe the first and last names are the most important and the rest are alphabetical...it's up to you.

An album containing non-original songs must pay license fee to the Harry Fox Agency. Mechanical licensing is the licensing of copyrighted musical compositions for use on CDs, records, tapes, and certain digital configurations. Harry Fox Agency was established as an agency to license, collect, and distribute royalties on behalf of musical copyright owners.

Under the United States Copyright Act, the right to use copyrighted, non-dramatic musical works in the making of phonorecords for distribution to the public for private use is the exclusive right of the copyright owner. However, the Act provides that once a copyright owner has recorded and distributed such a work to the U.S. public or permitted another to do so, a compulsory mechanical license is available to anyone else who wants to record and distribute the work in the U.S. upon the payment of license fees at the statutory "compulsory" rate as set forth in Section 115 of the Act.

It should be noted that a mechanical license does not include the right to reproduce an already existing sound recording. That is a separate right, which must be procured from the copyright owner of such sound recording.

Harry Fox Agency issues mechanical licenses that are valid for products manufactured and distributed in the USA (including its territories and possessions) only. Mechanical licenses are available only to U.S. manufacturers or importers with U.S. addresses.

A mechanical license does not include lyric reprinting or sheet music print rights. For these rights, you must contact the publisher(s) directly.

If you would like to obtain a license to make and distribute within the U.S. 2500 or less recordings, you can now get a Harry Fox Agency mechanical license at SongFile.com!

I recently released the "Dark Side of the Moon A Cappella" CD on my own record label, which makes me responsible for all legal issues surrounding the album. The big legal issue with this album: the whole album is a cover (ie. we didn't write the songs).

What's involved, legally, in putting out an album consisting entirely of cover-tunes? In the previous chapter, you will find that I've discussed what you need to do when you manufacture copies of your CD for sale. But, we've all heard that CD sales are declining in favor of online digital sales (and P2P sharing of illegal files as well). So you might think that Online Digital Distribution is the way to go. Well...let's have a look...

What is Online Digital Distribution?

When I say "Online Digital Distribution," what am I talking about? I'm talking about selling your album through one of the many Digital Distribution Outlets such as: iTunes Music Store, Rhapsody, eMusic, MusicMatch, Napster, MSN Music, and dozens more. Users of these services can purchase albums (or individual tracks) and digitally download them to their computers and MP3 players. Some of the outlets use something called Digital Rights Management (DRM) to lock down the music to your specific computer or player (ex. iTunes Music Store). Some do not use any protection for their files at all.

Handling the Licenses (for cover-tunes only)

We all know that in order to sell a CD with cover-tunes on it, we simply need to pay our "Compulsory Mechanical License" and we're all set. Digital Distribution is relatively new, and therefore has relatively new rules. The process for licensing material for digital download seems to change almost daily. I've rewritten this article a couple times since starting, because the situation has changed so quickly.

Just like for Mechanical Licenses, the Harry Fox Agency (SongFile.com) can handle all of your Digital Phonorecord Delivery (DPD) Licensing needs. Isn't it funny how they make this new name for digital downloads (DPD), but the meaning of DPD has the now antiquated word "Phonorecord" in it? Ridiculous. Simply go to Songfile.com, login, and start licensing songs. The fee is the same for Mechanical Licenses, 9.1-cents per song (per download) for songs that are 5-minutes-long or under.

The kicker: you must license a minimum of 150 downloads. What this means is that you must pay for 150 downloads up front (for each song). Plus, these licenses (unlike Mechanical Licenses) are valid for one year only. Yup. So if you don't sell 150 songs through Digital Distribution in a year, you will lose those licenses and have to start again for the new year. Of course, if your album has 12 songs on it, you only need to sell 13 albums (digitally) in a year. This may or may not be easy for you.

My first question is: is that 150 download minimum a per song minimum? Meaning, if my album has 10 tracks on it (all cover-tunes), do I need to purchase 150 download licenses or 1500 download licenses? It appears from reading on SongFile.com that it means 150 download licenses, not per song. The only downside from getting your licenses through SongFile.com is that you must buy these licenses up front. As soon as you've sold the number of downloads that you've licensed, you must immediately go and buy more licenses.

The alternative is to do the licensing on your own directly with the Music Publisher for each of your songs. This means, you must find out what Publishing Company owns the rights to each of the songs you're covering, then contact those companies. You must send a separate letter for each song you wish to license. There is a specific format for this letter, that can be found at CDBaby.com. Then you basically send them licensing payments on the 20th of each month, based on the number of downloads for that month. At the end of the year, you must have a CPA certify that your accounting is correct and send another letter to the Publishing Companies that states that you've done this. It's a little more paperwork, but you don't have to pay for licenses up front, and you won't have that expiring license issue that you would have with SongFile.com.

Handling the Digital Distribution

Now that you've licensed your DPDs, how do you get your music on iTunes Music Store, Napster, et al? You must find a Digital Distributor that will submit your album to all of these outlets. You could do this on your own, but it's not worth the hassle. For example, iTunes Music Store will not work directly with an artist, only labels. They will only work directly with labels that have a significant number of album releases in a year (not just a handful). You know what? It's easier to find a company to distribute your album to many outlets anyways. Otherwise you'd have to deal with each one individually (hardly worth the effort).

So who should you use to distribute your album to digital music outlets? My top recommendation is CDBaby.com. These guys have been doing it as long as anyone out there, they charge very little in fees, and they're crazy cool to work with...imagine getting an emailed response from a distributor signed "We love you" at the bottom. Yeah, that's CDBaby .

If for some reason you don't want to use CDBaby, The Orchard is another decent company. The problem with The Orchard is that they take a much larger chunk of money from your sales, and they seem to have a lot of accounting rules (complicated to use). The upside of The Orchard is that they can sometimes get artists "preferred placement" in online stores. This is like those highlighted albums you see on the frontpage of the iTunes Music Store. I think it's unlikely that they would get this placement for an a cappella group, unless it's really something unusual (and all original).

Signing up for digital distribution with CDBaby is pretty easy. They will only do digital distribution for your album if it's also in their online store database. So sell your CDs through CDBaby (you should anyways) and you'll be fine. Go to CDBaby.com and just follow the online instructions, super-easy. Also remember, you can only do digital distribution for full retail-ready albums (can't just burn a CD-R and sell it on iTunes), and must have its own UPC code (ask your CD Manufacturer).

How Much Do We Get Paid?

Quick answer: not as much as you would think. Let's say your album has 10 tracks on it (nice round number to work with). The different digital distribution outlets will pay out a different amount to artists. iTunes is a little higher than most and will pay 70-cents per song (or \$6.50 per full-album). Most of them seem to pay 65-cents per song (or \$6.50 per full-album). Let's do the math here for our 10-song album (assuming someone buys the whole album on Napster:

Revenue from Napster =	\$6.50
CDBaby's fee =	\$0.585
DPD License =	\$0.91
You Keep =	\$5.00

In The End, Is It Worth It?

I think so. \$5 an album doesn't sound like a lot of money, but you have to keep in mind that you're not paying anything to manufacture CDs for these downloads. That saves you like \$2 a disc right there. Plus, there's a chance you could sell a lot more tunes digitally than you would sell full CDs. Personally, I think there's too little a cappella available on iTunes Music Store, Napster, and the rest.

Do I Really Need To Do This Licensing Stuff?

Yes, you do. I know in the past, many a collegiate cappella groups have been hesitant to pay for licensing, but in the case of digital distribution, be careful. It would be very easy for the RIAA to pull up a list of cover songs that are digitally distributed and then crosscheck that list with the license database at HFA. I'm not saying that it's a trivial task, but it's possible. It's also possible that in the near future, all of these systems will be linked together, to prevent artists from skirting around the licensing issue.

So, don't mess with it. Pay your fees and you'll be a happier person (the universe will thank you). Remember that you're also making money from songs that someone else took the time to write. Pay them for the masterpiece you've decided to honor by covering it on your album. Pay the license fees.

All this stuff costs money, right? I've got a few suggestions that will help you raise money for your recording project. There are tons of ways to raise money, just get creative. Obviously, doing gigs for money is a great way to finance your project. Here are some others...

Pre-Sales

Many groups have successfully raised recording funds by pre-selling copies of their CD before it was even made. Come up with some ways to convince people to buy the CD. If you've got previous albums already made, play them clips to show them the quality of your recordings. Maybe mix a couple tracks from this new CD early so that you can have a "demo" of the new album. Get creative.

Alumni

This one really only applies to high school and college groups. Chances are, if you're reading this, your group is fairly new and you might not have a lot of alums just yet. But if your group has been around for several years, you may have alums that would be willing to kick in some money here and there. Maybe a \$100 donation or something. Make it worth their while. Give them a couple copies of the CD for their donation. It winds up only costing you a few bucks. Maybe get all the alums together who have donated to recording and have a "Special CD Release Party." Make the alums feel special and they'll be more willing to help you with your special CD.

Tap Into Your Niche Market

Think about your group and what makes it different from other groups. Maybe you're all Indian, all Jewish, all female, all male, all gay, all retired, all black, all latino, or whatever. There's a whole market you can tap into. Find community groups, youth groups, camps, or clubs. Talk to them about getting some financial help. You might be surprised.

Sell Ad Space in Your CD Booklet

I haven't had a lot of groups take me up on this suggestion, but it might work for you. Basically, approach local businesses and see if they'd be willing to pay to have their logo or small ad inside. Space inside your CD booklet really doesn't cost you anything, but the businesses might get some great exposure from being in there.

About Freddie Feldman

Freddie Feldman has been involved in the world of a cappella for 17 years. He performed in his first group, The Coppertones, in High School in upstate NY. While at Northwestern University, he founded the collegiate group Five O'Clock Shadow (no relation to the Boston professional group). After graduating from Northwestern with a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance and Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering, Freddie toured full-time with the professional a cappella group, VOCOMOTION.

The group ended it's touring and Freddie kept the name for his a cappella recording studio. In the past six years, he has produced over 30 a cappella albums, with five tracks on the Best Of College A Cappella (BOCA) compilation, 2 tracks on Voices Only, 11 Contemporary A Cappella Recording Award (CARA) nominations, and 1 CARA award. He has reviewed 70 albums for the Recorded A Cappella Review Board (RARB). He is a member of the Board of Directors for the Contemporary A Cappella Society (CASA) and is also their Web Manager. Freddie is the inventor of the only throat-microphone designed for music performance, The Thumper. His recording studio, VOCOMOTION, is a Silver Studio Partner with Discmaker's and a partner with Turtle Studios (Philadelphia, PA).

In December 2005, Freddie's record label, VOCOMOTION Records, released its first album, Dark Side of the Moon A Cappella, an all vocal version of Pink Floyd's best-selling album.

Freddie is the former lead singer of the hard rock band Gaskit. He toured with Gaskit for 4 years, was twice named winner of the Songs Inspired By Literature (SIBL) International Songwriting Competition, and opened for national acts such as: Godsmack, Drowning Pool, Tantric, Dark New Day, SouthFM, and Future Leaders of the World.

Freddie currently lives in Evanston, IL with his wife Jill, baby on the way, and two cats Kefira and Tigger.

If you have any questions for Freddie, he can be reached at **freddie@vocomotion.com** and on the web at: **www.vocomotion.com**, **www.TheThumper.com**, and **www.DarkSideVoices.com**.