



A FIELD GUIDE FROM PRATER PAID MEDIA

Paid Ads for Musicians

How to use Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok ads to grow your streams, build a real fanbase, promote a single, and sell out shows, without a label budget or a marketing degree.

PRATER PAID MEDIA

grow real fans, not just streams



FOR INDEPENDENT & DIY ARTISTS

You don't need a label's budget to run ads

You need to understand what you're actually paying for. This guide breaks down music marketing with paid ads without the confusing parts, so you can grow your streams and fanbase on a small budget without getting talked into a strategy that quietly wastes your money.

Running Facebook and Instagram ads (that's "Meta ads") feels complicated on purpose. But whether you're promoting a single, growing your monthly listeners on Spotify, or selling tickets to a show, the whole thing runs on one simple idea.

The one idea that changes everything

Ads aren't about buying streams. They're about turning strangers into fans **you own**, instead of renting them from the algorithm every time you release.

Stranger → Listener → Follower → Superfan

You use cheap ads to get discovered, you **capture** those people so you can reach them again for free, and you turn casual listeners into fans who show up for every release and every show. That owned audience is the real asset, and it compounds with every drop.

Everything else, targeting, retargeting, pre-save campaigns, lookalike audiences, is just a tool for moving someone one step closer to being a superfan. Keep that in your head and the rest is common sense.

THE SETUP

Your ad account, and the one thing artists miss

Every ad account has three levels: the **campaign** (your goal), the **ad set** (who sees it and your budget), and the **ad** (the actual video or clip). Simple enough.

But here's what trips up almost every independent artist: **there's no "stream" button for the algorithm to track.** Meta and TikTok can't see a Spotify play. So if you just send people to your Spotify link, you're flying blind, and you can't retarget anyone.

Use a smart link (this is the fix)

Tools like **Feature.fm, Linkfire, or Show.co** give you a single landing page that links to every platform (Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube) and, crucially, lets you drop a tracking pixel on it. Now every person who clicks, pre-saves, or streams becomes an audience you can advertise to again for pennies.

This is the difference between an artist who pays to reach the same strangers every release, and one who builds a fanbase that gets cheaper to reach over time. Set up the smart link and pixel **before** you spend a dollar. It's the single highest-leverage thing in this whole guide.

Pre-save campaigns, quickly

A pre-save campaign lets fans save your song before it drops. It's the best pre-release tool you have: it captures a warm audience, and it tells Spotify's algorithm the song has momentum on day one. Your smart link tool handles it. Run ads to it in the weeks before release.

How to build a fanbase you actually own

There are two kinds of people you can advertise to, and one is far cheaper.

Cold — people who've never heard you

You reach them with interest targeting (fans of similar artists) and lookalike audiences. More expensive, but it's how you get discovered.

Warm — people who already engaged

Anyone who watched your videos, follows you, visited your smart link, or is on your email list. Advertising to them again is called **retargeting**, and it's the cheapest way to turn a casual listener into a real fan. This is where most of your budget should quietly go.

Lookalike audiences: your discovery engine

You hand Meta a list of your best people (say, everyone who pre-saved your last single), and it finds thousands of strangers who resemble them. A **1% lookalike** is the tightest match and the right one for a small music budget. It's the closest thing to a "find me more real fans" button that exists.

The whole strategy in one line: get discovered cheaply, capture everyone who engages, retarget them into fans, then build lookalikes of your fans to find more people just like them. You're not buying streams. You're building an audience that grows every time you release.

How to promote a single (the release funnel)

The most common mistake is spending everything on release week. That's the most expensive moment to buy attention, everyone's competing for the same fans. Build the audience early, when it's cheap.

Weeks 6-4 BUILD

Get discovered. Run cheap video-view ads with teasers, snippets, the story of the song. Goal isn't sales yet, it's a big warm audience and pre-saves. Tag everyone who watches.

Weeks 3-1 WARM

Build anticipation. Retarget everyone who engaged. Push pre-saves and countdowns. This warm crowd is who actually shows up on release day.

Release +1 week CONVERT

Convert the warm crowd first. They're your cheapest streams. Then expand to a lookalike of your pre-savers. Never point release-week budget at cold strangers, that's where money dies.

After KEEP

Don't turn it off. The fans you just converted become the seed audience for your next single. That's how a fanbase compounds instead of resetting every drop.

How much to spend? Whatever you've got, even \$5 a day in the build phase adds up over six weeks. The rule isn't "spend more," it's "start early and keep the winners running." A small budget spent on purpose beats a big one spent in a panic on release day.

How to sell more concert tickets with ads

Selling out a show is a different game than streams. Here's how to fill seats without wasting spend.

1. Geo-target hard

Only advertise the show to people in that city, plus a 25 to 50 mile radius. Running a national ad for a local show is the fastest way to waste money, and it's incredibly common.

2. Warm audiences first, in that city

Your followers, past ticket buyers, and listeners who live in the metro. These are your likeliest buyers by far. Then expand to lookalikes and fans of similar artists in that city.

3. Time it to the final push

Most tickets sell in the last 10 days before a show. Build a small retargeting pool early with live-performance clips, then pour budget in as the date approaches. Live video is your best-converting creative, it's proof the show is worth it.

The honest part: ads amplify demand, they don't create it from nothing. If a show isn't selling, put your budget where it can actually move, the markets and dates closest to selling out, not spread evenly to feel fair.

What to do when a song starts going viral

A clip blows up on TikTok, streams tick up. Here's how to pour gas on it in the first 48 hours, the right way.

- 1 Amplify the proven clip, don't make a new one.** Run the viral video itself as an ad (a "Spark Ad" on TikTok). The algorithm already proved it works, don't throw that away on a polished remake.
- 2 Capture the moment.** Point everyone to your smart link so viral viewers become an audience you can retarget after the spike fades. A viral moment you didn't capture is just a good day.
- 3 Test, then scale fast.** Start with a small amount, watch the cost per save. In a viral moment it's usually cheap. Scale while the window's open, virality has a short shelf life.

The only numbers worth watching

Cost per new listener, pre-save, or follower, and your **frequency** (if people have seen your ad more than 3 times, refresh it). Ignore reach and impressions, they feel good and mean nothing. If a number wouldn't change what you do next, it's decoration.

The artist's paid-ads cheat sheet

- 1 Use a smart link with a pixel.** No tracking, no fanbase. This is step zero.
- 2 Build the audience before release week.** Cheap early, expensive late.
- 3 Retarget your warm crowd.** Casual listeners become real fans here, for pennies.
- 4 Run pre-save campaigns.** They capture fans and tell the algorithm you have momentum.
- 5 Geo-target your shows.** City plus a radius, warm fans first, timed to the final 10 days.
- 6 When something goes viral, amplify the proven clip and capture the audience.**
- 7 Watch cost per fan, not reach.** And never turn off a winning campaign, seed the next release with it.

Want someone who actually gets artists to run it for you?

I run paid media, only paid media, and I love working with musicians and creative people who are great at their craft and shouldn't have to become media buyers too. Start with the free 5-minute ad audit, or just reach out.

praterpaidmedia.com

You make the music. I'll get it in front of the right people.