SELLING CREATIVE SOUND
HOW TO SELL AN UNTOUCHABLE SOUND LIBRARY ON THE WEB

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By
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Introduction
The World Needs Remarkable Sound

Sound has vast power to immerse and inspire us.

Film scores enchant us. A scene of bold gunfire excites or threatens us. A dramatic theme will sway us with feelings of triumph or sorrow. A lush jungle ambience transports listeners across the planet using sound alone.

Sound has a subtle, yet powerful ability to convey experience, and compel emotion.

You already know this. You work with sound. You're creative. Maybe you design sound for film. Perhaps it's for theatre. You may be a session musician. You've seen your creations contribute to incredible projects. You've seen it mesh with video, design, and art. You've felt an electric thrill when you see it affect others emotionally.

But here's what you may not know: we need you to share sound. We need your creations in the world.

There are plenty of sound recordings drifting around us. You, however, know exceptional sound. You've captured it in field recordings. You've created it when jamming in a practice space. You've invoked new sounds using samplers and plug-ins. Remember the excitement you kindled when you created something remarkable?

This is what we need. We need you to share this spark. We need you to inspire others with sound.
This is an amazing time for creative sound pros. It's far easier now to create and share ideas through sound. Knowledge is spreading. Digital technology is cheap. There is a growing need for meaningful work.

We've also become deeply interconnected through a lattice of blogs, forums, user groups, and social media. Thousands of people hunt this network for exceptional sound.

What this means is that you have great potential to fill projects and the world with meaning.

There's also a hidden benefit: sharing your sound library will free you. Freedom cultivates creativity. You'll design more, better sound effects and music. Exceptional sound will continue to surround us.

Perhaps you're an altruist. You may want to give your sound library away. You may wish to sell sound clips instead.

This book isn't necessarily about making a buck (although there's a high chance you will).

Instead, it's about an idea: sharing creative sound with the world.
Who Can Use This Book?

Whom is this book written for?

It's for field recordists. It's for sound designers and musicians. If you've just bought your first portable recorder, it's for you.

You don't need a sound library. You don't need 10,000 sounds or even ten.

It's for people with collections waiting on dusty hard drives. It's for those intrepid recordists with libraries currently branching throughout the Web.

If you're interested in sharing remarkable sound with the planet, I'm writing this book for you.
Who This Guide is For

Are you interested in sharing sound? Do you ask yourself these questions?

About Sharing Sound
• Why share sounds worldwide?
• How can I make cash from the recordings I’ve collected?
• What are the risks and benefits to sharing sound?

About Selling Sound on the Web
• How do Web shops sell sound?
• How do they differ, and which should I choose?
• How do licensing and royalties work?

About Your Sound Library
• How can I build an irresistible sound library?
• Which sounds should I include? Which should I avoid?
• What key ideas are essential to a bulletproof collection?
• How do I share music?
• How do I dodge competition?

About Library Preparation
• How should I organize my library for Web sharing?
• How should I name my sounds? What metadata should I include?
• How should I prepare music tracks?

About Web Shops
• How do I find Web shops?
• How do I research? How can I tell the good ones from the bad ones?
• What's a good strategy for my sound library?
About Partnering

• How do distributors think?
• How do I choose a good partner?
• How do I decipher a contract?
• Should I negotiate? About what?
• How do I get my sound library into their shop?

About Common Problems

• What can I do if my sounds don't sell?
• How do I avoid, or resolve problems with partners?
• How do I start, and keep plugging away?

If you are curious about any of these questions so, then this guide is for you. I'll answer each of them, and much more, inside.
What Business Do I Have Writing This Book?

That's a great question. I'm glad you asked.

Allow me to describe how I began sharing and writing about sound effects.

I've worked with sound since 1996. I originally began as an assistant sound effects editor in Toronto, Canada. I became enthralled with field recording after plugging holes in the facility library.

Since then I've recorded sound effects in deep caves and in distant deserts. I've scurried across countries capturing the sounds of cities. I've travelled across the planet recording sound effects. I've had the pleasure of contributing recordings to films such as *Ali*, *Batman Begins*, and others. I've provided sound effects for commercial DVD libraries and downloadable sound Web shops.

I've also worked to grow these shops. I've collaborated with dozens of sound effects and music Web stores to improve and add to their online collections. I've tracked down new libraries for them. I've carved folders of scattered clips into collections. I've added over 250,000 sounds to Web shops.

In 2010, I took everything I learned and built a home for my library of 20,000 sound effects at [airbornesound.com](http://airbornesound.com). And since early 2011, I've been writing about field recording, sound effects, creativity, and sharing sound on [creativesfieldrecording.com](http://creativesfieldrecording.com). And, in December 2012, I wrote a book exploring the craft of capturing sound, called *Field Recording: From Research to Wrap*.

I now support myself entirely with my sound library, working two hours a week.

It's been a fantastic, exciting journey. It's one you can create for yourself, if
you like.
Why Am I Writing This Book?

I began to notice two interesting things while working with sound on the Web. I saw how people responded to exceptional audio. I also saw a unique effect of sharing sound on the Internet.

It's not news that the Web allows us to share information essentially free of charge. What is new is that it has transformed the way sound pros create.

Sound creators were previously chained to libraries on CD's and DVD's. They had to flip through dozens of jewel cases and load tracks via CD players. They waited for collections to be delivered before they could use them. This is not the way sound pros work now. It actually impedes their creativity. I'll explain more in the section "Sound Web Shops Today."

I also saw the effect of remarkable sound. Fans responded ecstatically to thoughtful, crafted libraries. Weak, inauthentic collections languished. I saw that people were eager for good sound, and were thrilled to pay for it.

What's significant is how these two things worked together. I've been involved with sharing sound on the Web since 2000. At that time, the Internet wasn't as sophisticated. Even so, I saw it had an immense impact on helping sound pros create. They could access better tools. Their projects became nuanced. Their work carried more impact.

There was a huge demand for remarkable sound delivered over the Web. This is even more important today.

There's another reason I'm writing this book. It's something I've realized recently.
In February 2011, I began writing about field recording sound effects on creativefieldrecording.com. By far the most common question I received was, "How do I sell sound effects?" In fact, the question was so common I became aware of a strong need to learn about sharing creative sound. There was a chasm between the desire and accomplishing it. The world of sharing sound was obscure. It wasn't clear which tools were needed. Fear of risk was commonly mentioned. I realized that there was a need for more detail than I could provide on my blog.

Initially I thought to link to advice posted elsewhere. To my surprise, no one was writing about sharing sound. There wasn't a guide for selling a sound library online. It didn't seem to be discussed at all. The result? Gifted sound pros wanted to share sound but didn't know how.

My goal for this book is to bring these people together: to help creators craft libraries and share them with the sound pros that crave them. I believe this knowledge will help spread more meaningful sound into the lives of audiences worldwide.

It's exciting. It means that there's better sound out there to draw from. In turn, the projects we work on and share will be better too. It's an encouraging feedback loop. Better projects will inspire us to record finer sound effects. The cycle repeats.

It also has the potential to turn creativity into freedom. This freedom helps sound pros pursue their passions.

There's no reason you can't do this as well. I want to show you how.
I'll share what I've learned from over 15 years of experience. I'll help you understand the scope and context of sharing sound. I'll include ideas for strengthening libraries. I'll explain common missteps. I'll show what to avoid.

This will help you streamline your efforts and save time. My goal is to help give your creations to the widest audience in the quickest, safest way.

And, most importantly, this book will help you share your creativity and free you to follow your passion.
How Can You Use This Book?

Sharing sound effects on the Internet is not new. That doesn't mean it is obvious. In fact, it's convoluted. I've spent the last 15 years learning how to sell sound online. I will share what I've learned.

This book will look at one specific way to share sound on the Web: distribution.

Distribution is a method of hosting your library on a partner's Web shop. In turn, they share it, either free of charge or at a cost, and they pay you a commission from each sale.

Why am I focusing on distribution?

Distribution is the quickest, easiest way to begin sharing remarkable sound with the world. It costs you nothing. It may take a month of your time, usually less.

There are other ways to share sounds, of course. You can build a bundle or database website and run it yourself. That's much more complex. I'll discuss that in future books.

Here's what we'll cover in this book:

- **Why Sell Sound Effects?** The benefits and risks.
- **The World of Selling Sound Online.** How websites and libraries share sound today.
- **Your Sound Library.** Beginning and shaping a sound library. Comparing your collection to existing libraries.
- **Preparing Your Library.** Organizing your library for distribution.
Preparing sound and data.

- **Finding Distributors.** Determining your library's approach to sharing. Researching Web shops.
- **Partnering with a Web Shop.** Making contact, signing a contract, and getting your library online.
- **What's Next?** Working with Web shops. Next steps.
- **Common Problems... And How to Avoid Them.** Mistakes you may make, and what you can do about them.
- **Resources.** Lists of websites and software. A sound library hit list, and wish list. Sound library templates.

I'll write mostly about sound effects. The ideas can apply to music and samples as well. In most cases, you can just swap words. Selling music is indeed different in certain cases. I'll note that in the text. When music is mentioned, I'll be referring to **royalty-free production music**, also known as **stock music**, or **buyout music**. The **needle-drop** or **laser-drop model** is far more complex and won't be discussed here.

Also, we'll assume that you already have access to a computer, sound editing software, and recording equipment. If you don't have them, don't worry. I've suggested options.

Throughout this book, I may suggest websites, apps, and services I prefer. Understand that technology changes quickly. What may be the top website now may be bankrupt next year. An app that is useful today may be bloated in six months.

For this reason, I'll describe the apps with a bit of context. Use Web searches to find alternatives. I've also included software and website lists in the "**Resources**" chapter.
The Legal Stuff

Disclaimer: I can't be held responsible for any losses you may incur in your business endeavours.

My goal for this book is to teach you to share your sound library with others on the Web.

I will show you what I've learned with nearly 15 years of experience crafting a sound library, partnering with the best Web shops, and selling sound effects online. These tips and tricks will help you focus and avoid mistakes. You'll have an easier time than I did. You'll get work done quickly. You'll have a great advantage.

It is important to note that for all I'm sharing, I can't do it for you. I can tell you every trick I know, but that doesn't guarantee that you will retire by Christmas. This book won't automatically solve your problems. Success will ultimately depend on you. Why?

It's up to you to create an amazing, inspiring sound library. It's up to you to invest time to bring it to life and share it with the world.

Your creativity and effort, not the book you're reading, will be the largest contribution to success. A checklist of actions will only get you so far. If you embrace your creativity, express it well, and craft a valuable library, you will succeed. I will help you do this, but the acts of creation and expression must come from you.

That's exactly what will distinguish you: a meaningful, powerful library embedded with your personal imprint.
And that is precisely what your fans demand.
Why Sell Sound?
Who Sells Sound Effects?

Why would anyone sell sound effects?

I've worked with dozens of library creators. I've noticed that they have much in common. Who are these people?

These people work on sound daily and love it. They've done this for years. They've recorded clips occasionally, as needed. Then they realize they've gathered an impressive collection of sounds over time. It's the product of years of hard, inspired creative work. They realize others will appreciate their talent. They want to share their library and make cash at the same time.

Or perhaps they're recent film school graduates. They've purchased sound effects or music before. They're bursting with ideas and would like to share them, like the Web shops they've browsed.

These two examples highlight an important point about beginning to distribute a sound library: selling sound effects or music begins as an incidental career. Owners of sound libraries typically already work in post film, gaming, multimedia, or music composition.

Prospective library owners certainly can start from scratch. Some of the biggest websites are run by people with minimal experience in sound. They're businesspeople who want to sell to others. They're savvy. They are aware how to highlight the benefits of products. They know exactly who wants what they're selling, and who will pay. Sometimes they buy libraries and share them without hearing a second of audio. There's nothing wrong with that.

However, most people begin selling sound libraries slowly. They already work in audio. It's their passion. They hear sounds or riffs in ways that others
miss. They're thrilled with new, rare sounds or an uplifting melody. And they're excited about sharing it.

These passionate people create inspired sound effects and music. In turn, they motivate other listeners. Every project that brushes with their library will be enhanced by their creative expression. And this is exactly what we need. We need more of these people creating and sharing.

What kind of person is this?

This person is you.
The Benefits
Why Sell Sound Effects?

Need more reasons to get started? First, we'll start by looking at five:

1. We need remarkable sound.
2. Creates passive income.
3. Low impact.
4. Low risk.
5. Freedom.
We Need Remarkable Sound

I believe that our sense of sound is underrated.

It's understandable. Sound is intangible. It's different with vision and touch. They're far more direct and noticeable. People take the sense of sound for granted.

It's for this reason that we need more great sound. Sound has immense power to inspire and immerse. Thirty seconds of your favourite song transforms your mood. A detailed, immersive sound effects atmosphere submerges you in another mental space. Edgy songs add tension and grime to thrilling film scenes. Vividly recorded explosions thrill or terrify us, depending on the context.

Often, sound effects and music do this on their own. Sometimes they collaborate with video, film, or space to create something larger than the data of a sound file.

Right now, this sound work isn't common. But imagine: what if more inspiring sound was available worldwide?

We need more of these meaningful sound creations. They'll contribute to other projects. They'll motivate listeners to produce other inspiring works. And the cycle will continue.

If you're a sound professional, you know what it means to be inspired. Your favourite song, field recording, book, or movie empowers you. You also know the humbling experience of inspiring others through your work.

Selling your sound library creates an incredible opportunity to share inspiration, expressed through audio, with others.
Perhaps you're not even thinking about the audience. Some creators feel an uncontrollable need to express themselves. It's something they can't keep inside. They need to share this.

With a unique, expressive sound library, you have the potential to do all this.

Do you identify with these ideas? You're already ahead of your competition. You are a creative professional who has transformed ideas and emotions into reality.

Sharing this with others is incredibly rewarding. Recognition for your work, whether through discussion or revenue, is incredibly satisfying in itself.

You have a sound library we need to hear. Why? It's beyond just requiring widgets for a project. Your sound will contribute great things to the films, radio broadcasts, and art installations around us. When your work joins them, you do more than merely share sound: you spread ideas. The shortage of good sound and ideas is so great, that when they are finally shared, we become inspired.

This is why I can't stress it enough: we need your remarkable sound.
Creates Passive Income

Let's be honest. One of the most compelling reasons to sell sound effects is for the cash.

The scope of the Internet means you can reach sound professionals in the most secluded corner of the Web. The market for sound effects and music is immense. New films, television shows, video games, and ads are created daily. As of May 2012, YouTube uploads 72 hours of content per minute. All of these projects benefit from exceptional sound effects and music.

When selling sound effects on the Web is done right, it generates passive income. This means that you will make money from your sound library with little effort. If you organize your sound library well using my suggestions, it will require no maintenance. You will make money in your sleep.

Of course, if it were that easy, we'd already have thousands of sound libraries online. But we do not. It takes effort to craft a meaningful sound library. It is only after the background work is complete that you can cruise on your success. And of course more work must be done if you want your library and earnings to grow.

It is an incredible feeling to be paid for your creations by people you've never met. It's validating. I still remember my first sale. It's encouraging.

It's possible to wake in the morning, check your PayPal account, and realize that you're done working for the day.

This is especially helpful for freelancers who are subject to irregular seasonal work. Which leads us to our next benefit of selling your sound library: mitigating downtime.
Low Impact

Selling a sound library is a good match for composers, sound editors, and field recordists.

Often, these creative workers have a rhythm to their careers: relentless schedules followed by weeks or months of inactivity. Crafting and curating a sound library is something you can do during downtime between jobs.

Another benefit? Crafting a library keeps you busy. It avoids the unmotivated slump that creative pros inevitably experience between jobs.

Not a freelancer? Don't have intervals without work? Are you working daily without large tracts of free time?

You can create a library while you work your day job. This is the way I started the Airborne Sound library. I began cutting my DAT recordings one hour a day before I went into work. Now it's paying my bills. All it took to start was a daily habit.

It's possible for you, too, to transition gently out of your job and let your sound library work for you.
Low Risk

One of the best benefits of selling a sound library is that it carries virtually no risk.

I've crafted Airborne Sound specifically to be low risk. I'll share how later.

Generally, though, it's inspired by two ideas: low overhead and investing only time.

I've heard larger sound libraries have paid $75,000 to create a sound effects website. They're quoted timeframes of years to complete it. I've seen similar numbers starting comparable projects myself.

It's astounding. I created Airborne Sound for a small fraction of that price in under three months. And honestly, I could have done it faster and cheaper. And you can do this too.

It costs almost nothing to begin selling your sound library. Most of the technologies you need are free, or can be borrowed.

You're doing most of the heavy lifting by reading this book. I'll share tricks that will help you organize, sell, and maintain your library for essentially no cost, minimal overhead, and little risk.

Because you have no costs, your only major investment is time. Recording, editing, and mastering a sound library does take time. There's no way around that. But this is time you can invest yourself. You don't need to pay staff. You can create and nurture your sound library between gigs or on weekends. And, after your sound library is established, maintaining it takes little effort.
What does this mean?

It means you'll have minimal risk. If you have low risk, you'll also have low stress. This contributes to our final benefit: freedom.
Freedom

Our time on this planet is finite. We only have limited hours to be creative and experience life.

Once you sell your sound library online, you'll find that you will work less. You'll have freedom to pursue your passions instead of work.

Yes, it did indeed take time to record the thousands of sound effects I share at Airborne Sound. I diligently mastered each of those clips. Organizing the library didn't happen overnight. Creating the website took thought, planning, and work.

I found that, after this initial work was complete, I became incredibly free. My workload diminished. I had more time to follow my passions. I was able to let my creativity guide me. Now I work less than two hours a week to maintain my sound library. If it wasn't for the freedom my collection gives me, my blog at creativefieldrecording.com or this book would not exist.

You can do this too. And I hope you do. Why?

I believe that when sound pros have more freedom, they're easily inspired. They'll be more creative. And we'll all reap the rewards of better, more inspiring sound effects, instrument samples, and music compositions.
This is a sample of *Selling Creative Sound*. Share it with as many people as you like.

Buy the full version at [creativefieldrecording.com/books](http://creativefieldrecording.com/books).

Learn more about field recording meaningful sound effects and sharing them with others at [creativefieldrecording.com](http://creativefieldrecording.com).

Download sound effects at [airbornesound.com](http://airbornesound.com).

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