

Universal teams with TuneCore to discover talent

July 9 2009, By RYAN NAKASHIMA , AP Business Writer

(AP) -- Universal Music Group's distribution arm is teaming up with digital track distributor TuneCore, a move it says will give it a leg up in signing up-and-coming artists without a recording deal yet.

TuneCore, which allows musicians to upload digital songs for distribution on [iTunes](#) and [Amazon.com](#) for a flat annual fee, has become one of several ways for unsigned acts to sell songs before getting deals with [record labels](#).

Several big TuneCore sellers have gone on to sign deals with labels recently, including NeverShoutNever!, led by 18-year-old Christofer Ingle, to Warner Bros. Records, and Drake to Universal's Young Money label.

"This gives our labels a wonderful look at potential new upcoming talent long before they would even come close to be on anybody's radar otherwise," said Jim Urie, president and CEO of [Universal Music Group Distribution](#).

Under the deal, TuneCore will support new Web sites for Universal that will host uploaded songs from unsigned artists. Universal is the world's largest recording company and a unit of France's Vivendi SA.

TuneCore financial backer Guitar Center has also agreed to sell Universal and TuneCore CDs at more than 200 of its retail stores in the United States.

TuneCore founder and CEO Jeff Price said the deal will give the artists a better chance of interacting with record label executives and having their music at retail outlets beside established acts.

"What's in it for the artist is the opportunity to move up into a larger system," he said. Placement of CDs in Guitar Center stores, he added, also "helps a band feel more legitimate and more real."

One deal skeptic said it was unclear how the partnership would benefit unsigned artists, because record labels are already fiercely competing to sign new talent that have proven they are commercially viable.

"What is clear is that they would like their CDs to be sold in Guitar Center," said Lawrence Kenswil, a former executive vice president of business strategy at Universal, and now an entertainment lawyer for Loeb & Loeb LLP in Los Angeles.

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