
SonoSuite

SonoSuite

How to Turn YouTube Into a Revenue Line

For labels, distributors and aggregators



Contents

1. The revenue layers of YouTube

2. The Multi-Channel Network,
seen from your side

3. The revenue that lives
in third-party videos

4. Protection and monetisation
as a single decision

5. What this builds in your
relationship with artists

6. Operating the ecosystem
with SonoSuite

If you are a label, a distributor or an aggregator, YouTube is already part of your operation. It shows up in your reports, your artists are on it, and the catalogue you administer is already there in some form. The question this guide addresses is not whether you are on YouTube. It is how much of YouTube your catalogue is actually taking advantage of.

The reason that question matters is that YouTube generates revenue in more than one way at the same time, and each way depends on a different mechanism. Some of those mechanisms are simple and almost automatic. Others require registration, configuration and continuous management to be switched on. The difference between a catalogue that captures some of these layers and one that captures all of them is not the quality of the music, it is which mechanisms have been put to work.

This guide explains those mechanisms one by one, focused on three concrete questions: how your catalogue can generate more revenue on YouTube, how it can be protected at the same time, and how all of this translates into value for the artists you represent. It is not a guide about what YouTube means for the individual creator, a subject that already exists in abundance. It is about what the YouTube ecosystem represents for those who administer catalogue and roster at scale, and why it makes sense to operate it from that position.

The revenue layers of YouTube

On YouTube, a single recording can generate revenue through different paths at the same time. It is worth starting by mapping what those paths are, because the rest of this guide rests on that foundation.

01

The first path is the artist's own channel: the videos they publish, monetised through ads and through the subscriptions of the people watching. It is the most visible path and the one most associated with the idea of "being on YouTube".

02

The second is YouTube Music.
When audio is distributed, YouTube automatically generates the Art Track versions, which pair the release artwork with the recording, hosted on Topic channels.
This makes the catalogue available and monetisable on YouTube Music, within the same distribution flow that reaches the other DSPs.

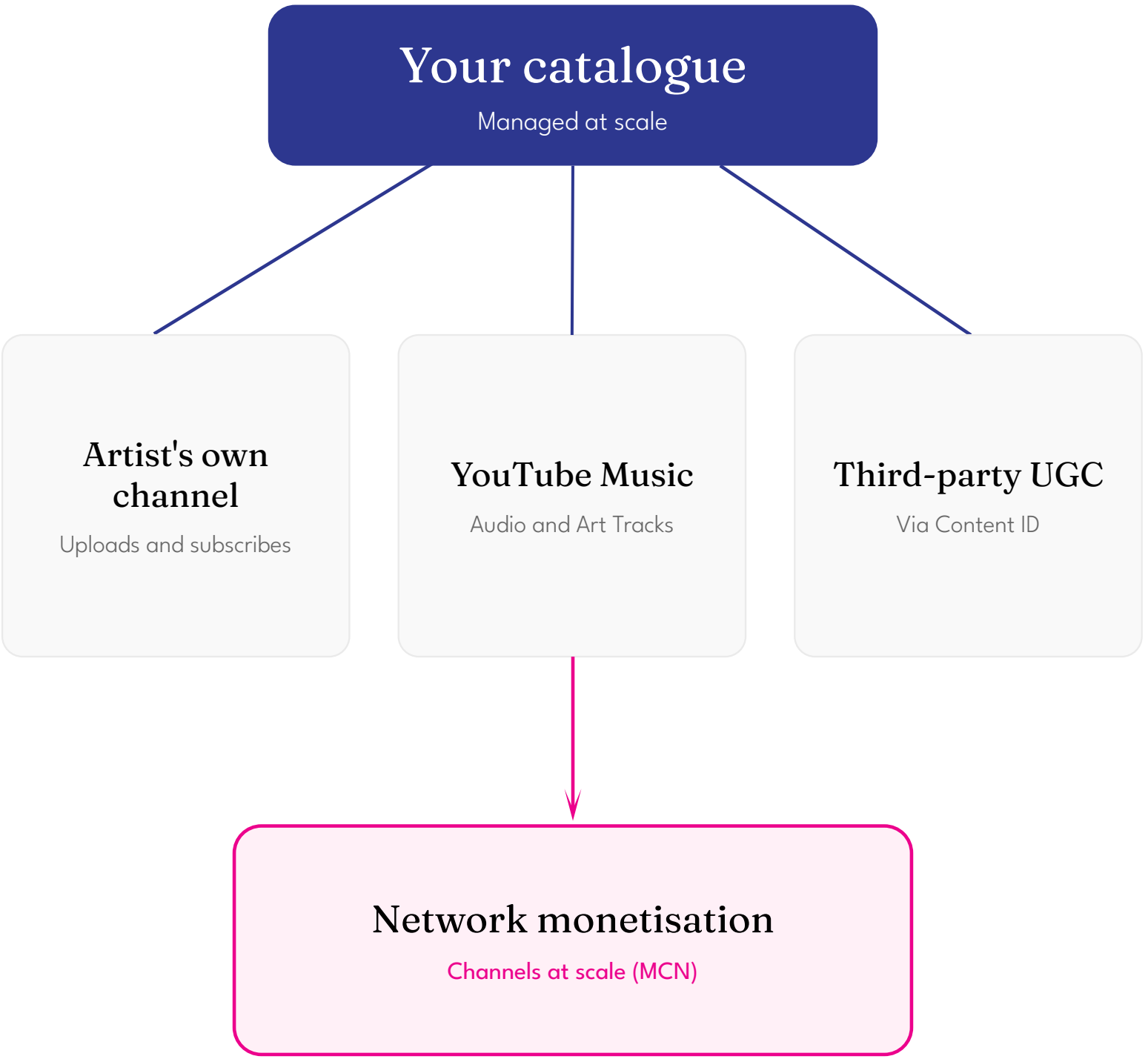
03

The third path is different from the first two, and it is where most of the opportunity that tends to go unnoticed sits: the videos made by other people that use your recording. A cover, a lyric video, a video with the track in the background, a compilation. Each of these is third-party content that contains your catalogue, and by default the revenue from that video goes to whoever published it, not to whoever holds the rights to the music.

04

The fourth path is the network layer, the Multi-Channel Network, which allows many channels to be managed, monetised and optimised under a single relationship with YouTube. It is the layer that turns channel management from an individual task into an operation at scale.

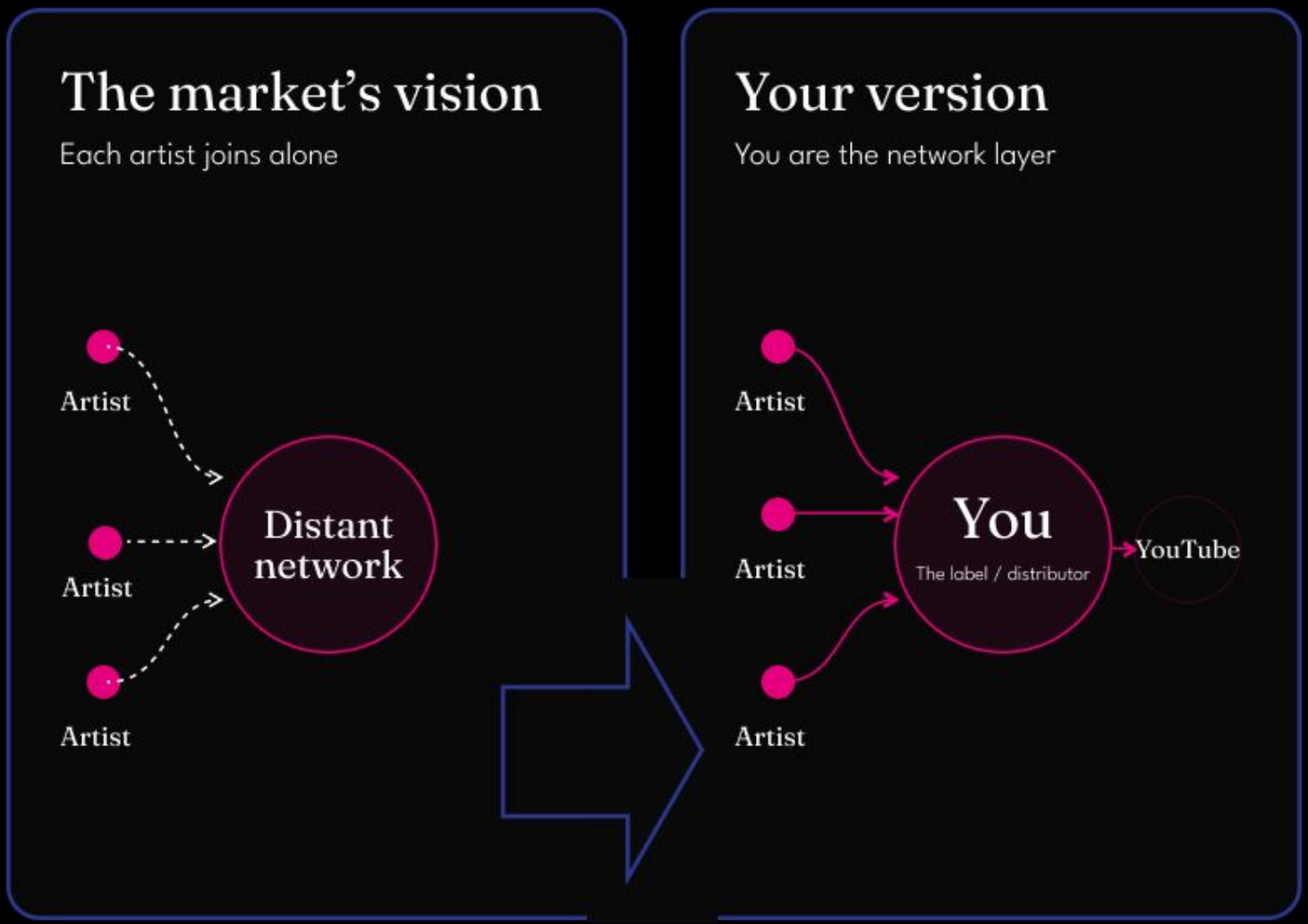
The idea that organises this guide is this: on YouTube, a recording does not correspond to a single revenue stream, it corresponds to several, and each one depends on a specific mechanism to be captured. The chapters that follow walk through those mechanisms, starting with the network layer, which is where the logic of scale is clearest.



The Multi-Channel Network, seen from your side

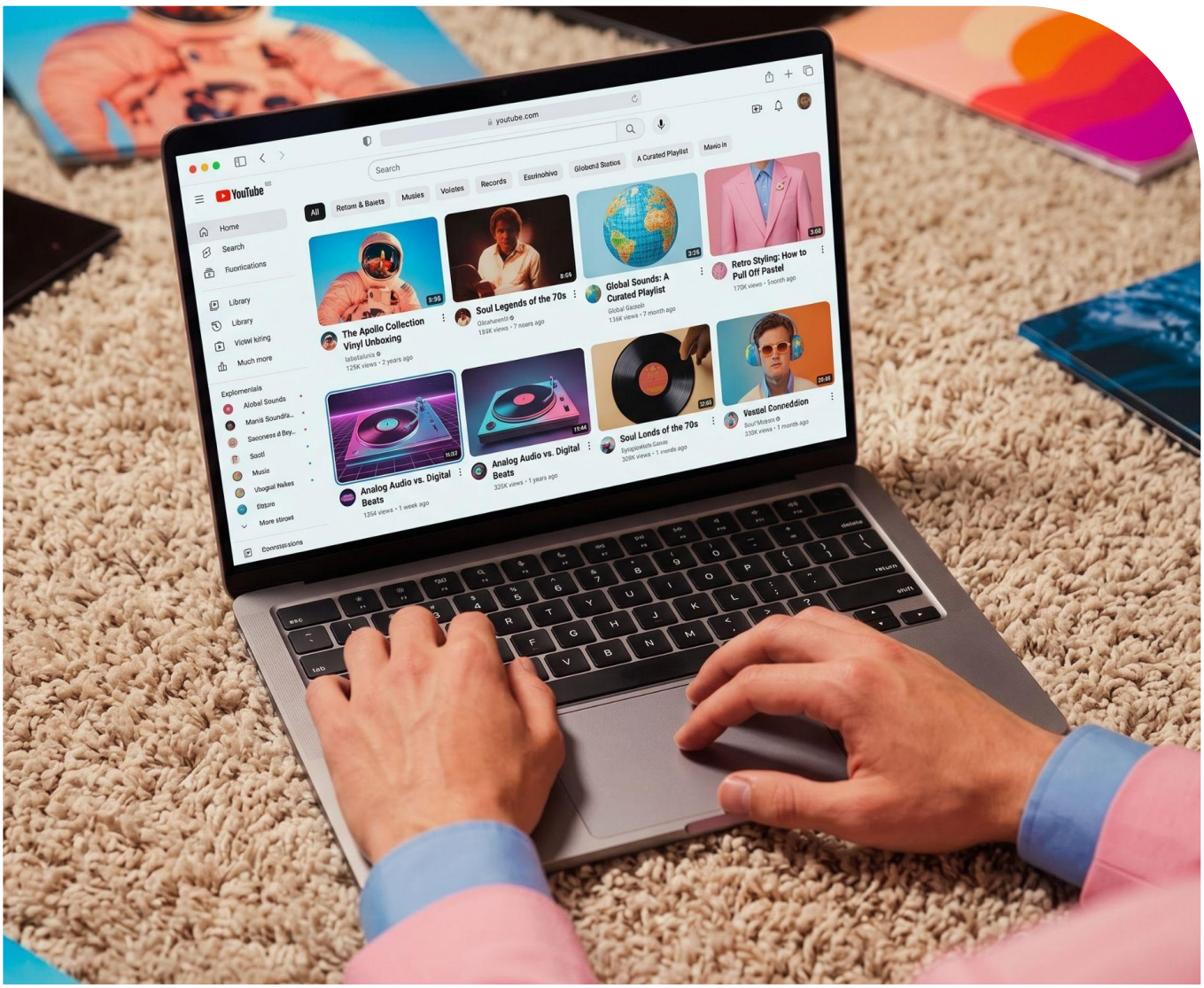
A Multi-Channel Network is a structure recognised by YouTube that allows a single content owner to manage, monetise, protect and support many channels under one relationship with the platform. That is the technical definition, and it is precise. What changes everything is the position from which you read it.

Most of what is written about MCNs is addressed to the individual creator, who decides whether or not to join a network, hands over a percentage of their revenue, and receives tools and support in return. That is a valid reading, but it is the reading of the party receiving the service. For a label, a distributor or an aggregator, the position is different. The network is not something your artists join one by one. It is a capability you can hold on behalf of your entire roster.



This difference in position has a concrete consequence for the structure of the relationship. An MCN affiliates two types of channel: affiliate channels, managed at scale within the network, and owned-and-operated channels, run day to day. All channels in the network still pass YouTube's review and follow the platform's monetisation policies. What the network structure offers to whoever holds it is the ability to operate rights, monetisation and channel performance across many artists at once, instead of each artist having to navigate YouTube on their own.

It is worth being precise about what this position involves, because that is where its real value lies. Holding the network layer is not relabelling a third party's service. It is taking on the role of setting policies, resolving the specific cases the platform presents, and deciding how each artist's presence on YouTube is run. It is an operational role, with technical work involved, and it is precisely that demand that makes it hard to replicate. It is also important to mark a factual limit: the network does not bypass YouTube's rules. Channels that do not meet the requirements of the YouTube Partner Programme do not become eligible simply by being in a network. The network operates within the platform's rules, not around them.



The revenue that lives in third-party videos

Of the four revenue paths, the one that lives in third-party videos is the one that needs the most explanation, because it is the least obvious and the one that depends entirely on a specific mechanism to exist.

Every day, people make videos that use recordings that already exist. A cover, a remix, a fan-made lyric video, a gaming stream with the track in the background, a reaction video, a compilation. Each of these videos is published by someone who is not the rights holder of the music, and by default it is that person who receives the advertising revenue from that video. The recording is yours, but the earnings go to whoever published it.
The mechanism that changes this is Content ID, YouTube's automated rights-management system. It is worth explaining how it works, because the mechanics are what everything that follows rests on.

When a recording is registered in Content ID, YouTube generates a fingerprint of it, a unique sonic reference. From then on, the system compares that fingerprint against every video uploaded to YouTube, continuously and at global scale. When it finds a match, that is, a video that contains that recording, YouTube automatically raises a claim on that video on behalf of the rights holder. From that claim, the advertising revenue of that third-party video can be directed to the rights holder, instead of staying with whoever published it.

What you already collect

Artist Channel + YouTube Music

WATERLINE

What you are not collecting

Every third-party video using your catalogue

Fan uploads, covers, lyric videos, gaming streams, reactions, compilations

- **Invisible by default**

Content ID
makes it
collectable

One artist claiming their own UGC is minor. **Across a whole roster, it is a revenue line.**

There are two characteristics of this revenue layer worth explaining carefully, because they follow directly from how the mechanism works.

First characteristic:

The first is that this revenue does not depend on any new production. A recording registered in Content ID keeps generating new claims as long as other people keep creating videos that use it. Since this kind of use, covers, edits, videos with the track in the background, happens continuously and independently of the rights holder, UGC revenue does not follow the same curve as a release. It does not concentrate in the release window and depends on how much the recording is used by third parties over time, which can happen long after a track's streaming peak. This is a consequence of the mechanics, not an assumption: as long as people are using the recording, there are claims to be made.





Second characteristic:

The second characteristic is why this layer makes sense at scale. Registering and claiming the use of a single recording is a small effort with a small return. Applying this systematically to an entire catalogue, to every recording of every artist on a roster, is what turns a one-off task into a revenue stream with its own trajectory. The value is not in the act of claiming itself, which is standardised, but in doing it comprehensively and without gaps, which is only viable at the scale a label, distributor or aggregator already works at.

And there is a point of precision that needs to be stated, because it is where this layer demands real competence. Not every recording is eligible for Content ID, and registering the wrong thing is not neutral, it is harmful. Recordings with uncleared samples, tracks with genuinely contested rights, or the same recording registered by more than one party at once, generate ownership conflicts. When that happens, the revenue from that recording can be held until the conflict is resolved. For that reason, operating this layer well is not about registering as much as possible, it is about registering correctly, knowing in advance what qualifies and what does not. That distinction is what separates a clean revenue line from a series of conflicts.

Protection and monetisation as a single decision

Protecting a catalogue and monetising it are usually thought of as separate goals. One is defensive, preventing misuse. The other is commercial, generating more revenue. Within Content ID, the two happen through the same mechanism and the same action, and explaining why is the core of this chapter.

When Content ID finds a match, the rights holder is not limited to accepting or removing the video. For each registered recording, they set a policy, which tells YouTube what to do whenever a match is found. There are three policies, and each can be customised:

Block

The video is made unavailable. This can be done by territory, which allows monetising in markets where the rights are cleared and blocking only in those where they are not.

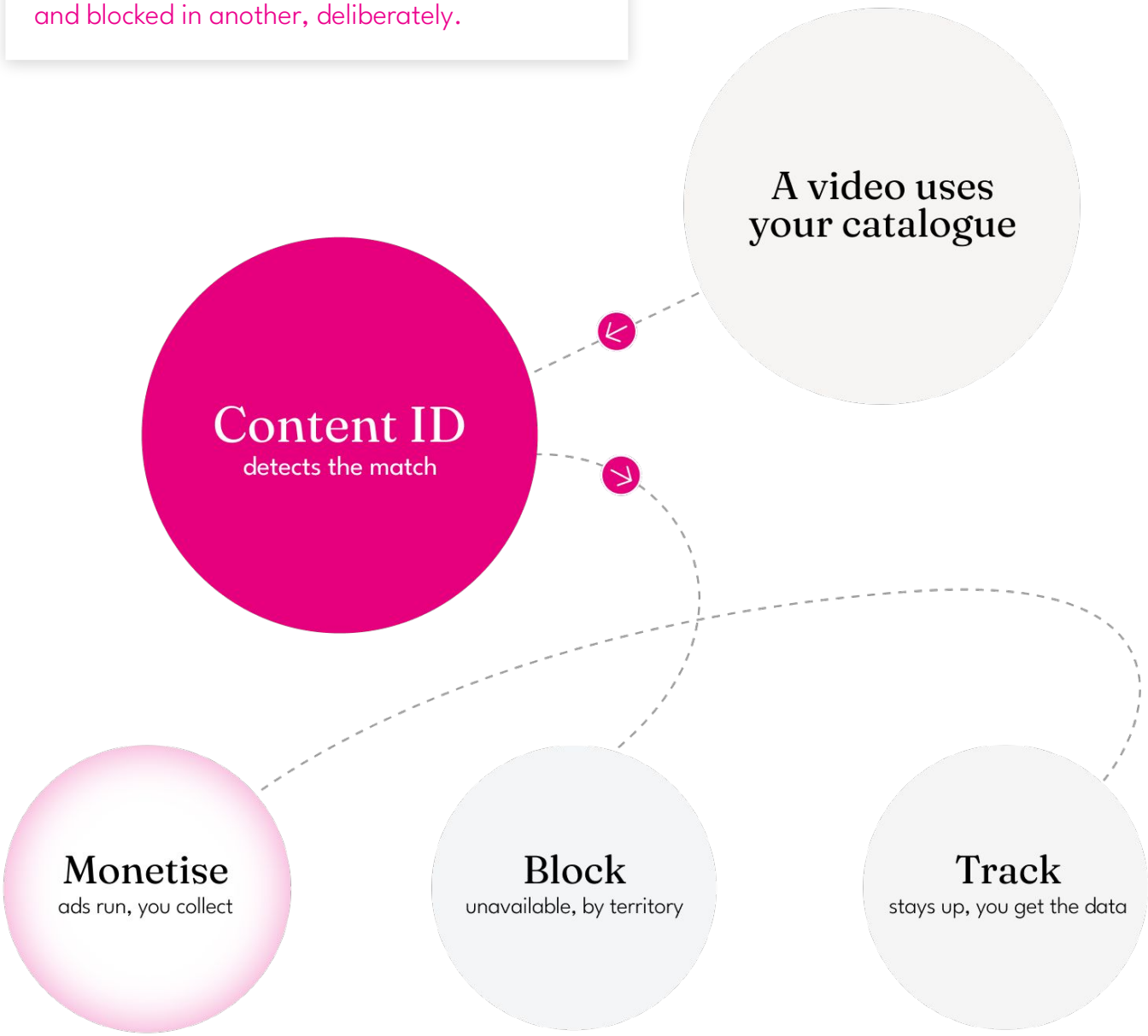
Monetise

The video stays up, ads are shown on it, and the revenue is directed to the rights holder. It is the default policy for music and the one that generates revenue.

Track

The video stays up without generating revenue, but the rights holder captures the data on it, such as views, reach and geography, that is, where and how the recording is circulating.

These policies are set per recording and per territory, which means the same track can be monetised in one market and blocked in another, deliberately.



The same detection that protects the catalogue is what monetises it

From here follows the point that reorganises how this layer is thought about. Since each match found is a policy choice, and not a problem to be eliminated, a third-party video that uses your recording does not have to be treated as something to be taken down. It can be a source of revenue, depending on the policy applied. Removing a video is a legitimate option, but it is a decision that gives up the revenue that video could generate. The tool lets you choose, case by case and by market, between revenue, blocking and monitoring.

There is also a consequence of this capability that goes beyond direct revenue, and that is relevant to the relationship with the rights holders you represent. The block and track policies are the concrete way of demonstrating control over a catalogue. Being able to tell a label or artist that you have visibility over every use of their work on YouTube, and that you decide, by market, what happens to each of those uses, is a level of control that adds value in itself, regardless of the revenue it generates.

Finally, it is worth being transparent about the demands of this layer, because that is what makes it a durable advantage rather than a trivial feature. Setting policies well is not applying a single rule to everything, it is deciding by territory and by recording. And ownership situations, when more than one party has a valid claim on the same recording, through a co-write, a cleared sample or a feature represented by another party, need to be resolved, because an untreated conflict can hold the revenue rather than simply lose it. It is not a configuration you set once and forget. It is a layer that has to be run continuously, as the catalogue grows and the platform's rules change. It is precisely that operational demand that makes it a valuable capability.

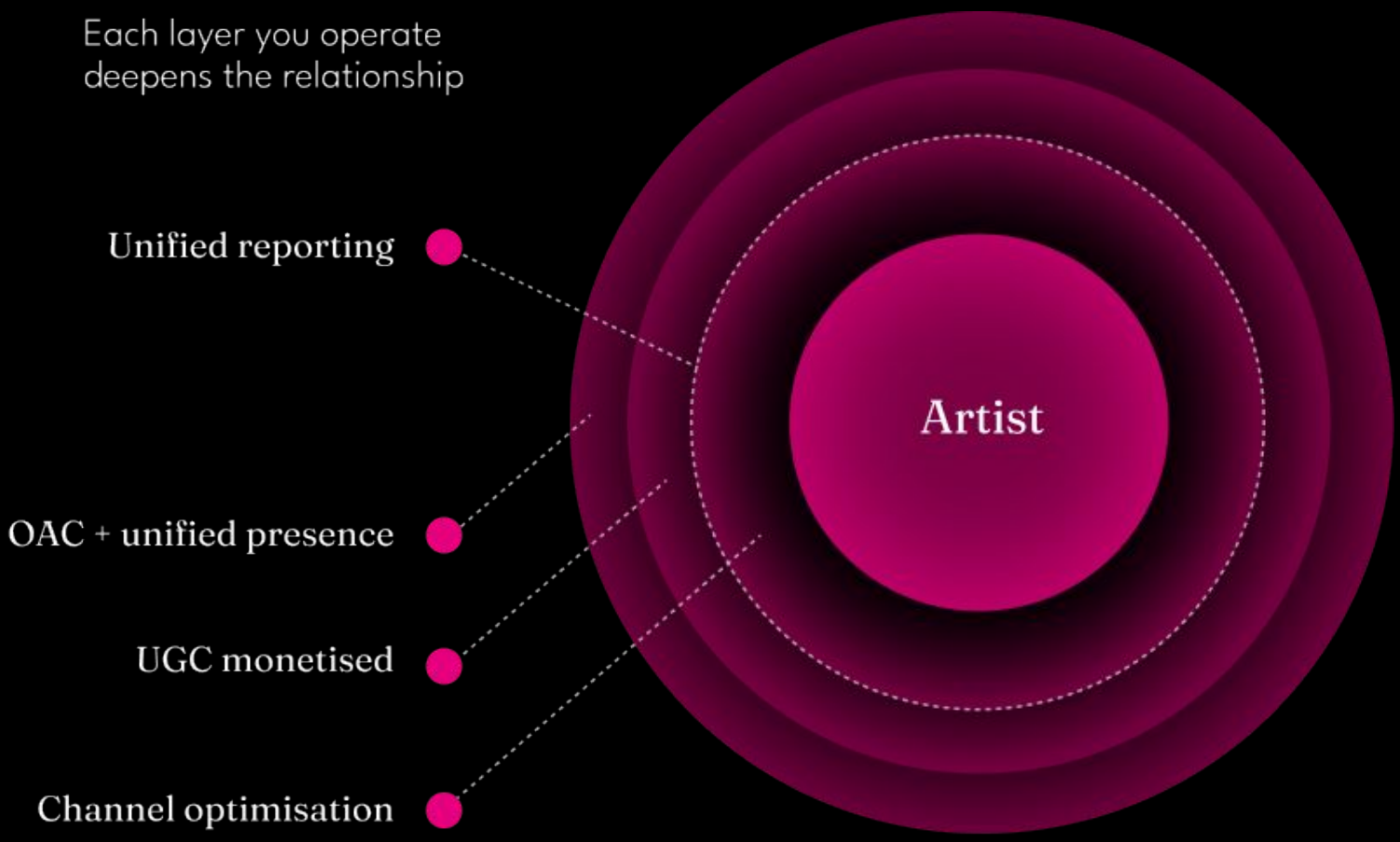


What this builds in your relationship with artists

Beyond claiming third-party use, the network layer makes it possible to work directly on the artists' own presence on YouTube. It is worth detailing what this involves, because these are concrete services, not a generic idea of support.

The first is the Official Artist Channel. YouTube tends to fragment an artist's presence across several points: the personal channel, the Topic channel generated automatically from distribution, and, when it exists, a Vevo channel. The Official Artist Channel consolidates all of this into a single verified channel, with the music-note badge, combining the subscribers from the different sources into one count and giving access to the analytics tools for artists. SonoSuite provides the setup and verification of the OAC. It is worth noting a point of precision about how it works: the OAC is a consolidation of existing channels, not the creation of a new channel, and depends on specific YouTube eligibility criteria to be approved.

The second is channel optimisation: the organisation of metadata, channel and playlist structure, and the release best practices that help the catalogue get found and keep the audience within it. The third is performance support: the continuous monitoring and resolution of the specific problems, tied to claims, monetisation and channel configuration, that are hard to resolve individually, because the artist alone has no direct line to the platform.



The point to understand here is how these services accumulate. An artist whose YouTube presence has been consolidated into a verified channel, whose third-party use is being monetised, and whose YouTube earnings appear in the same reporting they already follow for everything else, is connected to you through several services that work in an integrated way. Each of these layers is one more point of connection between the artist and whoever operates these services for them. This is not a consequence of forced retention, it is the natural result of delivering value on several fronts at once: the more layers that work well, the more substantial the relationship becomes.

There is also a reason this works particularly well from the position of a label, distributor or aggregator. The recurring criticism of the traditional network model is distance: a network that affiliates many creators it does not know tends to give little individual attention, especially to the smaller ones. That distance is inherent to being an intermediary with no prior relationship with the artist. A label, distributor or aggregator does not start from that position, because the relationship with the roster exists before the service. Operating the YouTube ecosystem from that existing relationship combines the technical capability of the network with a closeness that the traditional network model, by its own structure, does not have.



Finally, what makes all of this present itself as a coherent offering, rather than a set of loose services, is the reporting layer. The UGC revenue, the channel monetisation and the YouTube earnings are reported in the same royalty management tools you already use for the rest of the catalogue, with royalty administration, splits handling and revenue reporting. YouTube becomes one more visible revenue line inside the same operation you already run, rather than a separate dashboard to be checked on the side.

Operating the ecosystem with Sonosuite

Throughout this guide, a pattern repeats: each of YouTube's revenue layers depends on a specific mechanism, and the mechanisms that generate the most value, Content ID and the network layer, are the ones that require correct registration, policy setting by territory, resolution of ownership conflicts and continuous management. The value of these layers is concrete, and switching them on is an operational matter.

That is what SonoSuite is for. As a white-label platform for labels, distributors and aggregators, SonoSuite is the operational arm that runs this ecosystem on your behalf: registration and policy management in Content ID, the network layer for your roster's channels, Official Artist Channel setup, video and YouTube Music delivery, all reported in the same royalty management tools you use for the rest of your catalogue. The relationship with your roster is yours. SonoSuite provides the capability that lets you operate the ecosystem for them, under your own brand.

The technical demand this guide described, the eligibility criteria, the policy decisions by territory, the ownership conflicts, is precisely what an operational partner covers. You keep the revenue layer and the control over your catalogue, offered to your roster as your service, without building from scratch the technical structure that supports all of it.

Stop leaving your catalogue's secondary revenue to chance. Talk to a YouTube specialist at SonoSuite.

In one conversation, we look at where your catalogue's YouTube revenue is going uncaptured, map which mechanisms are already active in your operation, and show you how the Content ID and network layers can be activated under your own brand.


SonoSuite