

FRANCE MARKET-ENTRY ADVISORY

The France Market-Entry Checklist

12 things every international label gets wrong
when entering France — and how to avoid them.

Didier Zerath

Former Marketing Director, Warner Music France & EMI

President, AMA France (8 years) — Founding Treasurer, IMMF

Why this checklist exists

France is one of the largest music markets in the world — and one of the easiest to enter badly. Not because the opportunity isn't real, but because the market runs on structures (collection societies, quotas, employment rules, relationships) that don't exist in the same form in the UK or the US. The result: international labels lose months, and sometimes real royalty income, to mistakes that are entirely avoidable once you know they're coming.

The 12 items below are the ones I see most often — drawn from advising international labels, artist managers and music companies on their French market entry.

01 No French legal or tax setup before selling

Assuming you can invoice, collect royalties or run promo in France without the right structure (a local entity, a branch, or at minimum a fiscal representative for VAT). Getting this wrong creates tax exposure that surfaces months later, not on day one.

02 Publishing rights left unregistered with SACEM/SDRM

Songwriter and publisher royalties on French exploitation flow through SACEM (performance) and SDRM (mechanical). Skipping registration, or assuming a foreign PRO's reciprocal deal covers everything automatically, is a common way to leave real money uncollected.

03 Neighboring rights ignored for the recording itself

Separate from the songwriters' rights, the recording (master) generates neighboring rights income collected via SPPF or SCPP depending on the producer's status. Many international labels don't know this layer exists until a French collection statement never arrives.

04 Radio strategy built without accounting for language quotas

French radio operates under a minimum-French-language-song quota (Loi Toubon). The exact percentage varies by station format and is worth confirming directly with Arcom (the regulator) before building a French radio plan — it materially shapes which stations are realistic targets.

05 Contracts drafted as if French copyright worked like UK/US copyright

French droit d'auteur includes strong, non-transferable moral rights for the author — they can't be waived the way certain UK/US work-for-hire clauses assume. Contracts written only against Anglo-Saxon copyright norms often need local adaptation before signature, not after.

06 A UK/US press and playlist strategy copy-pasted into France

Different gatekeepers, different relationships: French editorial playlist teams at Spotify and Deezer (with Deezer particularly strong on its home market), and a press landscape that doesn't mirror the UK/US trade outlets. What works in London rarely transfers as-is.

07 CNM support programs never explored

The Centre National de la Musique runs funding tracks that include international development support relevant to a foreign label active in France. Many overseas teams never learn these exist, let alone apply — worth a conversation before assuming market entry is self-funded.

08 Touring crew hired without going through GUSO

Bringing in French intermittent-du-spectacle crew or performers for one-off dates means going through the Guichet Unique du Spectacle Occasionnel (GUSO) — the single-window system for that employment status. Sidestepping it is a common and avoidable compliance misstep.

09 Trying to run France entirely remotely

A great catalogue and a strong home-market team aren't enough on their own. Day-to-day execution — press follow-up, playlist relationships, promoter contact — tends to stall without someone with feet on the ground and existing local relationships.

10 France treated as one homogeneous market

A Paris-only lens misses regional media, regional live circuits and regional retail dynamics that matter for developing an artist nationally, not just in the capital.

11 Trademark and name checks left too late

Skipping an INPI (France) / EUIPO (EU) search before committing to an artist or label name risks discovering, after the marketing budget is already spent, that the name is already registered locally.

12 Relationship-building started only once there's something to sell

French industry gatekeepers — labels, media, festival programmers — tend to favor long-standing relationships over cold, one-off pitches. Starting those conversations early, before there's an urgent ask, consistently outperforms a rushed market entry.

A NOTE ON THE SPECIFICS

Regulatory details — quota percentages, collection-society scopes, subsidy program rules — evolve. Treat the items above as a map of where to look, and confirm current specifics (Arcom, SACEM, CNM, GUSO) before acting on them for a live deal.

NEXT STEP

Not sure which of these apply to your situation?

Book a free 30-minute strategy call — we'll go through your specific market-entry plan and flag what actually needs attention first.

calendly.com/contact-didierzerath/30min