

# The International Standard Recording Code (ISRC)

A Powerful Tool For Royalty Collection, Administration, And Anti-Piracy Safeguards In The Digital Arena

## THE ISRC FORMAT CONSISTS OF 4 CODES:

**Country Code:**  
The registrant's (sound recording copyright owner) country (2 characters).

**Registrant Code:**  
The code of the registrant that allocated the ISRC (3 characters).

**Year Of Reference Code:** The year in which the ISRC is allocated to the recording (2 characters).

**Designation Code:**  
The code assigned to the sound recording by the registrant. This code may not be repeated within the same calendar year (5 characters).



**EXAMPLE: ISRC JM-S1Z-99-32476**

## WHAT IS THE INTERNATIONAL STANDARD RECORDING CODE?

The ISRC is a unique international identifier for sound and/or music video recordings. Comprised of a 12 character alpha-numeric code, the ISRC functions as a digital "fingerprint" for a sound recording and/or music video recording. **Unlike a Universal Product Code** the ISRC is tied to the recording and not the carrier of the recording (CD, cassette). In addition, the ISRC remains allocated to a recording regardless of changes in ownership. It is an extremely powerful tool for royalty collection, administration, and anti-piracy safeguards in the digital arena.

## ASSIGNING A NEW ISRC

A new ISRC must be allocated when a new sound recording is created, for example:

1. a sound recording is remixed;
2. changes in the playing time of a sound recording are intended "musically or artistically" and are longer than 10 seconds (playing time is measured from the first recorded modulation to the last recorded modulation);
3. a previously released recording is partially used as part of a compilation; and lastly,
4. a "full restoration" of a historical sound recording is performed by re-mastering, re-pitching, re-equalizing, de-noising or de-clicking a sound recording to meet contemporary quality standards. The registrant of the recording has discretion when making the determination between full re-mastering (sound restoration) and simple re-mastering (reproduction without sound restoration).

## **ENCODING ISRC**

The ISRC is encoded at the mastering stage of the recording. In the case of music videos, the ISRC appears in the time clock for all analog formats and on the label outside of the box.

Software such as TOAST 8 TITANIUM, ROXIO JAM, WAVEBURNER PRO and MASTERLIST CD can be used to encode ISRCs into digital sound carriers such as CDs.

## **ISRC FAQs**

### **Q. What does it cost?**

**A.** IFPI and its representatives such as JAMMS, assigns registrant codes and answers questions regarding implementation of the ISRC program for free. There is no charge for these services. It can be done without special investment in equipment or technological measures. It only requires you to develop an internal system for administering ISRCs.

### **Q. What does the code mean?**

**A.** ISRC is a unique identifier for sound and music video recordings where one, and only one, identifying code is allocated to each version of the recording. For code allocation purposes, the ISRC is separated into its different elements. However, when the code is being used, it is the whole number that represents the sound or music video recording and no significance should be accorded to any one element. In particular, the registrant code cannot be assumed to identify a current rights owner as the recording may have changed hands since code allocation. Additionally, rights may vary territory by territory. Further, the year of reference cannot be assumed to be a year of recording. It represents the year the ISRC was assigned, which may or may not be the year the sound recording was released.

### **Q. When should the ISRC be applied?**

**A.** The first owner of the rights to the sound recording usually assigns an ISRC. However this is not always the case. If the first owner of the sound recording did not assign the ISRC, then the current owner should assign it. Once assigned, the ISRC identifies the sound recording throughout its life. Changes in ownership do not affect the ISRC. An ISRC must be assigned to every different sound recording of an album but not to an unchanged sound recording when it is reused on a new or compilation album. To guarantee the unique identification provided by an ISRC, the reuse of an ISRC that is currently allocated to another sound recording or version of the sound recording is not permitted.

**Q. Will I need to create a new ISRC for a remix?**

**A.** Yes, The following are types of sound recordings that will require new ISRCs:

- Remixes, edits or new versions of a sound recording
- Sound recordings with changed playing times
- Partially used sound recordings (i.e., faded in or out)
- Fully re-mastered sound recordings (sound recordings with fully restored sound qualities)

If a company decides to change the title of a sound recording, with no alterations to the sound recording itself, we recommend keeping the same ISRC.

**Q. What if a sound recording has more than one copyright owner?**

**A.** One company in the split ownership must be responsible for the ISRC assignment.

**Q. Can you register a sound recording that has been previously issued, but never assigned an ISRC?**

**A.** Yes. Although an ISRC should be assigned by the first owner, this does not always happen. Sound Recordings that have not been assigned ISRCs by their first owners can be assigned ISRCs by the current owner. The Registrant Code will be that of the current owner of the rights and the Year of Reference Code will be the year the ISRC was assigned.

**Q. How do I apply for the ISRC Registrant Code?**

**A.** JAMMS sources ISRC codes on behalf of its members from the International ISRC Agency.

**Q. Is JAMMS the National ISRC Agency for Jamaica?**

**A.** NO! JAMMS is not the National ISRC Agency. There is in fact no National Agency operating in Jamaica at this time, and there is unlikely to be as the International ISRC Agency has advised that it is seeking to introduce a new system for issuing ISRCs internationally. JAMMS is however affiliated to the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) and so is in a position to apply directly to the International Agency for codes on behalf of its members. (The International ISRC Agency is an Agency of the IFPI).

**Q. If I am not a Member of JAMMS can I get an ISRC through JAMMS?**

**A.** Because JAMMS is accountable to the International ISRC Agency for those ISRC codes its sources on behalf of Record Labels, it only sources ISRCs for its member Labels. This allows JAMMS to maintain reasonable accountability over ISRCs allocated and assigned through it. In effect JAMMS sources the ISRC Registrant Code and manages the assignment of codes thereafter on behalf of its members as a service to them.

**Q. As a Non-member how do I get an ISRC Code?**

**A:** In the absence of a National Agency Non-Members can apply directly to the International ISRC Agency for the ISRC Registrant code.

Persons wishing to apply to the International Agency can contact the Agency using email: [isrc@ifpi.org](mailto:isrc@ifpi.org) and make their request. N.B This recommendation is not a guarantee by JAMMS that the International Agency will issue an ISRC Registrant Code. The International Agency makes its own determination.

**Q. How long does it take to obtain a Registrant Code?**

**A.** It can take on average three business days from their receipt of the request form. The request form can be mailed, emailed, or faxed to JAMMS.

**Q. How is the Year of Reference Code allocated?**

**A.** This 2 digit code reflects the year in which the ISRC is assigned, irrespective of when the sound recording was originally fixed. The sound recording copyright owner is responsible for assigning the Year of Reference Code.

**Q. If recording rights are sold or transferred does the ISRC change?**

**A.** No, if the sound recording remains the same, so should the ISRC.

**Q. At what point in the recording process should the ISRC be allocated to a sound recording?**

**A.** The ISRC should be encoded in digital sound carriers in the pre-mastering or authoring process in accordance with the specification on the format used. The ISRC should be allocated to a recording when a master is completed and the decision to release a recording has been made.