

PROFILE LYRICFIND

Wax Lyrical

Here, Darryl Ballantyne, the founder of Toronto-based, legal lyrics database, LyricFind tells *Music Week* how and why the company was launched in 2004

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A century ago, the main source of revenue for music publishers came from selling sheet music with lyrics and notation. The sources of revenues for publishers have evolved over the years and are now more complex and diversified. But one source has remained virtually non-existent for decades: the licensing of lyrics.

The digital era has changed this. Publishers have discovered that lyrics featured high on search engines, and the myriad of sites offering unlicensed lyrics to consumers were proof that there was a potential business there. But how could songwriters and publishers finally convert consumers' thirst for lyrics into a real business?

Enter LyricFind, the operator of what is arguably the biggest legal database of lyrics, fully cleared and ready for licensing. LyricFind has become the one-stop-shop of choice for many third parties willing to license lyrics, mostly large streaming platforms.

"LyricFind is one of several lyric companies which have been around for several years. The good things about it are that it seeks to provide a licensing solution for otherwise unlicensed or difficult to license uses and to pay those monies through to publishers," says Jane Dyball, CEO of the MPA group of companies, who is currently in discussions with LyricFind.

Founded in 2004 by Darryl Ballantyne, the Toronto-based company has become a reference in the world of lyrics. "We license lyrics and then track the royalties and channel them back to the appropriate right owner or its representative," explains Ballantyne, who started the company by borrowing \$50,000 from his mother. "We are privately-owned," he says. "My mother has since converted her investment into stock."

To ensure that it had content to compete with unlicensed sites, LyricFind first secured lyrics from music publishers. "We have deals in place with all the main publishers, covering over 100 countries," adds Ballantyne. Then, in order to create the conditions for a business-driven licensed market, LyricFind had to bring down the number of unlicensed sites. Working with the the National Music Publishers Association in the US, LyricFind has approached all



Darryl Ballantyne: "It's a good time to be in business"

the major unlicensed lyrics sites and offered them deals to become licensed sites, and many have.

Starting with lyrics in English, the company now includes lyrics in many different languages. "We support English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Chinese; we just added Korean and Russian will be next," says Ballantyne. All the lyrics are sourced from recordings transcribed by in-house staff.

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DARRYL BALLANTYNE, LYRICFIND

For Ballantyne, one of the keys to growing the lyrics market is to provide platforms with synchronised lyrics that will flow as the music is played. "More and more, this has become the only way to integrate lyrics because it provides such a great experience [for users]," he explains. "Deezer is a good example of integration of our content into music. We do it for Shazam, and other platforms."

One of the most recent deals made by LyricFind was with Google for its service Google Play Music, which adds to existing clients like Pandora, iHeart, Shazam, Deezer and Amazon Prime. Ballantyne does not hide that "Spotify and Apple Music are high priority targets."

Ballantyne says that services that can provide integrated or synchronised lyrics see a 5% increase in session time, but also benefit from a different attitude from users. "There's a huge increase in active session versus passive sessions," he says. "Having synchronised lyrics transforms the experience from a lean-back to a lean-forward experience. There is a huge difference from putting music in the background than watching the screen for lyrics. It increases the value of advertising rates and you get a much more engaged audience."

In the future, Ballantyne says he wants to continue to build the company by expanding the number of languages covered and secure more global licensing deals, a task which falls on the shoulders of Robert Singerman, VP international publishing, who is based in New York. "Robert is globe-trotting and discussing with all the PROs and publishers around the world," says Ballantyne. "We are doing more and more of those deals."

The UK is one of those targets. Ballantyne says there's been a lot of discussions with PRS For Music "to find ways to get the ownership data and to distribute payments there. We're talking to pretty much everybody – PRS, MPA, ICE, MCPS." Adds Ballantyne, "In the UK, we're making progress on establishing a subsidiary there, though obviously Brexit causes us to pause a bit and reassess."

Ballantyne would not elaborate on the financial results of the company, beyond saying that the company is profitable and has been for years. "It is now a good business, but it took a while," he reflects. "Now we can put money into building a better royalty system. The more lyrics we can integrate, the more we can create revenues for publishers and songwriters."

For most start-ups, the exit strategy for LyricFind would be to sell out, but Ballantyne rules that option out, for the moment. "We used to think we'd have to sell to have a good exit. For us now, if the right offer comes along, we will entertain it, but we are very happy running it and growing it. We are profitable and in a huge self-sustained growth-mode. We don't need to sell."

