The Case for Independent Music Rights Verification

Why AI platforms refuse licensed music requests — and how rights.dev removes the reason to refuse.

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Executive Summary

AI assistants are refusing requests for licensed music — not because the music is unavailable, but because they cannot verify that a given supplier is properly licensed. Without independent verification, refusal is the only rational response. rights.dev removes the reason to refuse.

The infrastructure for AI commerce is already live. The Agentic Commerce Protocol (OpenAI and Stripe, September 2025) and the Universal Commerce Protocol (Google and Shopify, January 2026) define how AI platforms complete purchases at scale. Both are operational. Neither addresses whether a music supplier holds valid licensing rights.

The gap is structural: existing music rights registries — MLC, HFA, CISAC, and others — record who owns rights. None of them record who is licensed to supply music: with what rights, in which territories, and through what dates. That is the specific information AI platforms need before they can serve a request. It does not exist in a machine-queryable form anywhere.

rights.dev is that layer: an independent, machine-queryable registry of verified music licensing relationships. Licensees register the relationship. Rights holders confirm it. rights.dev issues a cryptographically signed Rights Cleared credential. AI platforms query the registry in real time and receive a signed credential — or a documented rejection. The refusal reason is gone. The transaction completes.

Every verification query is logged. Every credential returned creates an auditable event. Rights holders gain, for the first time, a machine-generated record of AI-mediated music activity — usable for royalty calculation, licensing negotiation, and compliance audit.

press@rights.dev

1. The Verification Gap

The Refusal Default

Every day, AI assistants handle requests for licensed music — compositions, recordings, licensed editions. In the majority of cases, a properly licensed supplier exists and is ready to fulfill the request. The transaction does not complete.

The reason is not missing supply. The reason is missing verification. An AI platform processing a music request faces a binary choice: fulfill from a supplier it cannot verify, or decline. Serving unverified supply exposes the platform to significant legal and reputational risk. Declining is the rational default.

This is not a failure of intent. Rights holders have the agreements in place. Licensees hold valid licenses. AI platforms would prefer to serve the request. The gap is structural: there is no independent, machine-readable system of record that an AI platform can query to confirm supplier authorization in real time. Until that infrastructure exists, refusal remains the default response to licensed music requests.

The Missing Layer

Music licensing is well-documented — but only at the ownership level. Existing registries serve essential functions: MLC administers mechanical royalties for compositions in the United States; HFA licenses mechanical rights; CISAC connects authors' societies internationally. These organizations record who owns music rights.

None of them record the next layer: who has been licensed to supply music, for what rights, in which territories, and through what dates.

This distinction matters precisely. A music retailer licensed to sell digital downloads of a composition holds a valid mechanical license from the rights holder. That license is documented in their agreement. It is not documented anywhere that an AI platform can query in real time. The retailer is licensed. The AI platform cannot verify it. The request is refused.

This is the verification gap. It is not a gap in ownership documentation. It is a gap in licensing documentation — the specific, relationship-level layer that connects rights holders to their licensees and makes those relationships machine-queryable for the first time.

The Cost of the Default

The refusal default is costly across every party in the chain. Rights holders lose revenue from a channel that is actively scaling. Licensed suppliers lose sales they are authorized to make. AI platforms lose capability and user trust. End users receive refusals for reasonable requests. No party benefits from the current state.

The aggregate cost is material and growing. AI assistants are becoming a primary channel for content discovery and purchase. The Agentic Commerce Protocol and Universal Commerce Protocol are scaling rapidly. The longer the verification gap persists, the more revenue is permanently displaced rather than merely delayed.

2. The Framework

The SSL Precedent

The verification problem rights.dev solves is not new. The web faced an analogous problem in the 1990s: how could a browser confirm that it was communicating with a legitimate server, without downloading and interpreting that server's legal documentation?

The solution was not to require browsers to read legal agreements. It was to create a certificate infrastructure — a system of trusted authorities that could vouch for a server's identity cryptographically, in milliseconds. Browsers verify the certificate. The padlock appears. The connection proceeds.

> ***rights.dev applies the same model to licensed music.***

rights.dev is the certificate authority for licensed music. The Rights Cleared credential is the certificate. The query API is the handshake. The signed response is the padlock. AI platforms do not need to interpret licensing agreements. They verify a credential from an independent authority and act on the result.

Structural Independence

The SSL model works because certificate authorities are structurally independent. No certificate authority can issue a certificate that advantages one browser over another. The authority derives its value from neutrality.

rights.dev operates under the same constraint. The registry is independently operated. Governance belongs collectively to founding rights holders — not to the operator, and not to any individual rights holder, licensee, or AI platform. No single organization controls the standard. The credential schema, audit process, and revocation protocol are defined

collectively and applied uniformly.

3. How rights.dev Works

The Registration Model

The rights.dev verification model is designed for the constraints of agentic commerce: real-time decision-making, high query volume, and zero tolerance for latency. The protocol is intentionally minimal.

Step 1 — Licensee Registers

The licensee initiates the process by registering the licensing relationship with rights.dev. They select the rights holder, the type of rights granted, the territory covered, and the term — start date and end date. No agreement text is submitted. No confidential terms are required. rights.dev never sees the underlying agreement.

Step 2 — Rights Holder Confirms

The rights holder receives a confirmation request and verifies that the registration is accurate. They are not providing new information — they are confirming what the licensee submitted. rights.dev records the confirmation. The rights holder may also revise or revoke a credential directly at any time, without waiting for the licensee to initiate a change.

Step 3 — rights.dev Issues a Credential

A signed Rights Cleared credential is issued as a certificate, tied to a unique license ID. Cryptographically signed with Ed25519. Timestamped. Queryable in real time. Revocable immediately if the licensing relationship changes.

Step 4 — AI Platform Verifies and Serves

The AI platform queries rights.dev with the license ID. Verification returns in under 100 milliseconds. A cleared response authorizes the transaction. A not-cleared response documents the decline. The refusal reason is resolved or the declination is evidenced.

The Credential Schema

A Rights Cleared credential contains the following fields:

— license_id — Unique identifier for the licensing relationship

— rights_holder — The rights holder who confirmed the relationship

— licensee — The licensed supplier

— permissions[] — Granted permissions (digital_delivery, ai_commerce, pay_per_download, print_on_demand, self_print, educational, commercial)

— valid_from / valid_until — Credential validity window

— revoked — Real-time boolean revocation status

— issued_by — "rights.dev" — the issuing authority

— signature — Ed25519 cryptographic signature

— schema_version — Credential schema version for forward compatibility

The credential schema is published at schema.rights.dev/v1 and versioned. Schema changes require collective governance approval.

Real-Time Revocation

A Rights Cleared credential reflects the current state of a licensing relationship. When that relationship changes — a license expires, is amended, or is terminated — the credential is revised or revoked in real time. The rights holder may initiate revocation directly at any time. AI platforms that have registered webhooks receive immediate notification. Subsequent queries return a not-cleared response. No human intervention is required at the point of enforcement.

rights.dev references licensing agreements. It does not access, store, interpret, or expose their terms. Confidential license terms — royalty rates, territory restrictions, deal structures — remain entirely private. Only four data points are ever recorded: rights holder, type of rights, territory, and term.

The Audit Trail

Every verification query to rights.dev is logged and timestamped. Every credential returned creates an auditable event tied to a specific licensing relationship. Query log data belongs to the rights holder — they see which AI platforms queried for their content, and when. rights.dev does not share query data between rights holders or licensees.

This record is foundational for royalty calculation in AI commerce channels, licensing negotiation informed by actual demand data, and compliance audit of AI platform behavior. It does not currently exist anywhere. rights.dev creates it as a byproduct of verification.

4. Governance

Collective Authority by Design

rights.dev is independently operated. Governance of the standard belongs collectively to founding rights holders. The rules that govern what rights.dev does, how credentials are issued, and who participates are not set unilaterally by the operator. They are defined collectively by the founding governance body.

No record label, music publisher, AI platform, or other industry participant controls the operator. The credential schema and verification protocol are open standards — designed to outlast any individual operator.

What Founding Members Govern

— Credential schema — fields, types, and structure of the Rights Cleared credential

— Audit standards — how licensing relationships are verified before credentials are issued

— Revocation protocol — conditions and process for real-time credential revision and revocation

— Admission standards — criteria for future rights holders, licensees, and API integrators

No individual founding member holds veto power. Decisions require collective agreement. Founding member seats are permanent and not transferable.

What Governance Does Not Cover

The governance body has no authority over the underlying terms of any licensing relationship. rights.dev references agreements. It does not access, store, or expose them. Royalty rates, territory restrictions, and deal structures remain entirely confidential.

5. The Moment

Why This Standard Must Be Defined Now

The International Standard Book Number was not mandated by any government or regulatory body. It became the universal standard for identifying published works because the publishing industry aligned early, defined the format collectively, and every platform — booksellers, libraries, distributors, retailers — built to it.

Those who helped define that standard found it reflected their interests. The schema choices, the adoption requirements, the governance structure — all shaped by those at the table when it mattered. Those who arrived later adopted someone else's framework.

> ***The rights.dev credential schema, verification protocol, and governance model are being defined now. Founding members define them. Everyone else inherits them.***

The Agentic Commerce Protocol and Universal Commerce Protocol are already live and scaling. AI platforms are actively seeking licensed music to transact. The verification layer is the only missing piece. The organizations that establish that layer now are not early adopters — they are the authors of the framework the music industry will operate within.

The Pilot

rights.dev issues its first Rights Cleared credentials in the digital sheet music vertical — a content category with well-established licensing relationships, clear rights holder structures, defined permission types, and natural demand from AI platforms. Sheet music is where the standard is proven. Music broadly is where it scales.

Join rights.dev

Two paths. Choose the one that applies.

Founding Membership — For Rights Holders

Permanent governance seats. Collective authority over the standard. An auditable, machine-generated record of AI-mediated music activity. Apply at rights.dev/apply

Developer API Access — For AI Platforms

Early access to the verification API. Signed credentials in under 100ms. Real-time revocation webhooks. Request access at rights.dev/apply