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Universal Onboard With France's Deezer

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By Aymeric Pichevin, Paris

Universal Music has signed an agreement with French ad-supported on-demand streaming service Deezer, which will provide users from 35 European and Mediterranean countries free access to almost 1 million titles.

Deezer co-founder Jonathan Benassaya told Billboard.biz the deal with Universal was based on revenue sharing with a minimum fee per stream, plus an advance paid by Deezer for an amount "in line with the market."

"Advertisement funded services for listening to music are part of those new offerings that allow more people to discover artists and their work, while also respecting the rights of artists and producers," president of Universal Music France Pascal Nègre said in a statement.

In August 2007, Universal Music France protested in a press release against Deezer using their catalog without their agreement. Named Blogmusik until last August, the service had actually closed in March 2007 after an action taken by French authors and publishers society Sacem and by independent record labels collecting society SPPF. The service vowed to go legal and relaunched in April 2007, but has since kept offering a comprehensive catalog, including the four majors. To date, Deezer notably signed agreements for the French territory with Sony BMG, Because Music and digital aggregator Believe. Benassaya says an agreement with Warner is close.

Deezer service is translated in over a dozen languages and claims 5.5 unique visitors per month overall, 65% coming from France. While acknowledging the ad-supported model on on-demand streaming services is a tough one, Benassaya notes most of Deezer's users progressively listen to Deezer webradios and semi-interactive radio, which are more profitable: "On demand streaming is pretty comfortable," he says, "But after a while, our users don't know what to listen to anymore. They need to be guided."

Based in Paris, Deezer counts 15 employees to date.

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