

How Songs Become Hits!

by Kenneth Wagner

Billboard's Keith Caulfield explains how songs climb the charts.

WHY DOES A SONG suddenly seem to be everywhere?

One week hardly anyone is talking about it. The next week it's all over playlists, videos, and the radio.

Billboard tracks what people are listening to most to create its famous charts, weekly rankings of the most popular songs and albums. Some songs shoot to the top right away, while others take months, or even years, to become huge hits.

Cricket spoke with Billboard charts manager Keith Caulfield about how songs climb the charts and why fans suddenly can't stop playing them.

How did you end up working on Billboard's charts?

I've always loved music and Billboard's charts. I interned at Billboard while I was in college, and I've been here ever since! Today, I help run Billboard's charts every day.



Global 200

Global Hit

Sabrina Carpenter's song "Espresso" reached number one on the Global 200 chart after fans around the world kept playing it.

"Sometimes a song can take months—or even years—to reach its peak on the charts."



Billboard Hot 100

Record Breaker

Drake has had more songs on the Hot 100 than any other artist ever.



Billboard Hot 100

Chart Takeover

Taylor Swift made history when every song in the Top 10 belonged to her at the same time!

Kid Albums

Kids Couldn't Stop Playing It

As of May, the *Moana* soundtrack has reigned at number one on the Kid Albums chart for 97 weeks.



Billboard Hot 100

Global 200

Huge Award Boost

After Bad Bunny won big at the Grammys and headlined the Super Bowl halftime show, fans streamed his music in huge numbers.

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How are the Billboard charts calculated today? Has that changed over time?

Today, computers can track listening and music purchases as they happen. Years ago, Billboard had to collect reports from record stores and radio stations.

What kinds of listening count toward the charts today?

Streams, song purchases, and radio play all count toward Billboard’s charts. TikTok videos don’t count directly, but songs that become popular there often get streamed a lot too.

What’s the difference between the Hot 100, Billboard 200, and Kid Albums charts?

The Hot 100 tracks songs, the Billboard 200 tracks albums, and the Kid Albums chart focuses on music for younger listeners.

Do some songs take longer to catch on?

Sometimes a song catches on right away. Other songs build slowly as more and more fans discover and share them. A song can even take months—or years—to become a huge hit.

Does winning a big award help a song or album climb the charts?

Yes. Big performances and award shows can introduce songs to huge audiences, causing more fans to stream the songs and helping them climb the charts.

What advice would you give young artists who want to make the charts?

So many of the artists topping the charts today became successful because they worked very hard to get their music heard. This includes Bad Bunny, Taylor Swift, or the real-life singers behind HUNTR/X from *KPop Demon Hunters*.

What makes a song a “hit” today? Has that changed with streaming?

Today, streaming helps show the songs fans really love because people can listen to their favorite songs again and again. That’s helped songs like “We Don’t Talk About Bruno” from *Encanto* and “Let It Go” from *Frozen* become huge hits.

How to Read the Billboard Hot 100

The Billboard Hot 100 ranks the most popular songs in the U.S. each week.

The week's top song!

week of April 4, 2020					
			LAST WEEK	PEAK POSITION	WEEKS ON CHART
1		↑	2	1	17
2		↓	1	1	16
3		→	3	2	21
4		↑	16	1	18
5		→	5	1	30

The Longest-Running Hit

The Weeknd’s song “Blinding Lights” ended up staying on the Hot 100 longer than any other song ever.

What Do the Numbers Mean?

LAST WEEK
Where the song was on the chart last week

PEAK POSITION
The best (lowest) number this song has reached

WEEKS ON CHART
Number of weeks song has been on the chart

STAR
Song has moved up the chart since previous week

How a Song Explodes!



What’s on Repeat for You?

What song are you playing again and again? Do you think it could climb the charts?