

Universal Music sues AI company Anthropic for distributing song lyrics

Major record label Universal Music Group and other music publishers have sued artificial intelligence company Anthropic for distributing copyrighted lyrics with its AI model Claude 2.

The music publishers' complaint, filed in Tennessee, claims that Claude 2 can be prompted to distribute almost identical lyrics to songs like Katy Perry's "Roar," Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive," and the Rolling Stones' "You Can't Always Get What You Want."

They also allege Claude 2's results use phrases extremely similar to existing lyrics, even when not asked to recreate songs. The complaint used the example prompt "Write me a song about the death of Buddy Holly," which led the large language model to spit out the lyrics to Don Mclean's "American Pie" word for word.

The Verge reached out to Anthropic for comment.

Sharing lyrics online is not new. Websites like Genius grew because people constantly forget the words to songs. However, the music publishers point out that many lyric distribution platforms pay to license these lyrics. Anthropic, they say, "often omits critical copyright management information."

"There are already a number of music lyrics aggregators and websites that serve this same function, but those sites have properly licensed publishers' copyrighted works to provide

this service,” the complaint says. “Indeed, there is an existing market through which publishers license their copyrighted lyrics, ensuring that the creators of musical compositions are compensated and credited for such uses.”

The plaintiffs allege Anthropic not only distributes copyrighted material without permission but that it used these to train its language models.

UMG says it uses AI tools in its business and production operations but alleges that by distributing material without permission, “Anthropic’s copyright infringement is not innovation; in layman’s terms, it’s theft.”

The complaint argues Anthropic can prevent the distribution of copyrighted material, and it alleges Claude 2 refuses to respond to some prompts asking for certain songs because they infringe copyright. UMG, however, did not specify what these songs are.

“These responses make clear that Anthropic understands that generating output that copies others’ lyrics violates copyright law. However, despite this knowledge and apparent ability to exercise control over infringement, in the majority of instances, Anthropic fails to implement effective and consistent guardrails to prevent against the infringement of publishers’ works,” the plaintiffs say.

Copyright infringement has become a hot-button issue in generative AI, and the music industry has been trying to figure out how to harness the technology and still protect its rights. Several lawsuits have been filed against generative AI platforms like ChatGPT, Stable Diffusion, and Midjourney around the ingestion of protected data and results similar to copyrighted art.

UMG itself announced it would work with companies like Google on AI issues, as it partnered with YouTube to help guide its approach to generative AI on the platform.

Anthropic says it takes trust and safety seriously. It based much of its product and research principles on something it calls “constitutional AI” – which *The Verge*’s James Vincent explained as a way to train AI systems to follow a set of rules.

Amazon invested \$4 billion into Anthropic in September. Its other investors include Google, which put \$300 million into the company.

<https://www.theverge.com/2023/10/19/23924100/universal-music-sue-anthropic-lyrics-copyright-katy-perry>