



SongSeekers™

MusicEquity[®]

The Power of Music in Branding



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The Power of Music in Branding

‘The erosion of mass markets and consumer trends towards customisation and personalisation is driving marketing towards an experience-based economy.’

(Steven J. Heyer, COO, Coca-Cola – Madison + Vine Conference, February, 2003)

Music is a powerful medium that can bring the emotional qualities of products and services to life and help activate a Brand promise. The beat of the music can literally connect with the heartbeat of the consumer.

The power of music and how to use it to achieve greater success in the brand arena, however, is currently misunderstood and undervalued. This paper discusses four principles that will help companies recognise the value of music in the context of branding. It will also address how to evaluate music opportunities and successfully integrate them into a wider, long-term business strategy. The four concepts discussed are as follows: Music Identity, Music Strategy, MusicEquity and Music Differentiation.

Music Identity

Brand identity carried through music

In recent years, consumer purchase decisions have become more weighted towards emotional attributes rather than functional benefits. As we become increasingly 'high tech', we crave personalisation and 'high touch.' Subsequently, experienced-based marketing that focuses on communicating the emotional values of Brands is the current trend and way forward.

The true marketing potential of music is that without any other stimulus, it can access a mood, emotion, and deeply move specific demographics within a target market in just a few seconds. In addition, the heritage of music, through the artist, genre, etc., can reflect a culture, a time period and lifestyle without even playing a note! Musicians and songwriters themselves have an innate talent for making connections and distilling a message into its essence. They are often dreamers and visionaries who operate on an emotional level - natural drivers of direction and catalysts for expressing complex social issues in contemporary voice. In addition, with new multimedia platforms such as interactive mobile phones, music can further extend its reach and ability to impact the consumer on a multitude of levels.

The television commercial has historically been the initial platform where Brands have used music to support a visual idea. It is therefore a logical first place in creating a Brand's Music Identity.

The GAP creative teams have excelled with this approach. The GAP has a very clear and compelling music DNA: fun, edgy, innovative, approachable and personal. The consistency of the style of its television commercials, plain white backdrops with young energetic multicultural people, with bold exciting music, is The GAP identity glue under which a host of different products have been successfully launched. They have created a formula that clicks in the consumer's mind. The GAP clearly understands that building a Brand by 'tone of voice' requires repetition and exposure.

The GAP have repeatedly used this format and as a result helped promote artists' new tracks in seasonal commercials. When singer-songwriter Rufus Wainright appeared in a Christmas commercial, the record company began promoting him as "that guy who appeared in The GAP commercial." Macy Gray got her break in a Baby GAP commercial and more recently Marianne Faithfull and Taryn Manning closed the generation gap demonstrating once again how a strong Music Strategy could be used to convey a message on a powerful z and continue to reach the right markets.

What then emerged is the most interesting and significant dimension to all of the above. The public started to talk about The GAP commercials outside of the environment of the commercial - its reach was extended and other media started to contribute to its PR strategy without it costing the Brand a penny.

Rather than The GAP commercials looking like a rip off from something from MTV, artists from Brandy to Britney Spears and The Backstreet Boys copied The GAP style and looked like a GAP ad. The company had developed its own aesthetic, which spilled out into music and other advertisements.

By creating great commercials that placed trust in the music to provide something more compelling than any close up on the logo or expensive shoot, The GAP have created a music metaphor for consumers to feel great about their products. A Brand is essentially a promise. The GAP has used music to help define their promise and carry it to consumers.

Many companies, however, make the mistake of having a multitude of music messages sent out at one time or over a period of time, without any coherent connection. Every time a Brand uses music in any area of its marketing it will create an asset or a liability for the Brand depending on the success of music selection and usage: the artist, the arena and the platform. If this is true, then it surely it follows that every time a Brand is considering using music, every customer touchpoint, every B2B communication and B2E dialogue should be spoken in the voice of the Brand reflecting its core values, lifestyle and essence of the Brand.

"What does my Brand sound like?" is the key question that every Brand intending to use music should ask and be able to answer. This is not to be confused with "Sonic Branding" which is more of about the audio identity best demonstrated by Intel Inside 4 note melody or the angelic sounds that every computer sings out from Bill Gates' Microsoft as it is opened.

The "Sound of a Brand" is more complex. It is the emotional response to the Brand that is evoked universally, from the commercial players in the management of the acquisition of music content/property right through to the consumer on the street at the receiving end. The "Sound of the Brand" is about the initial connection made by the consumer on a conscious or subconscious level between the Brand and the music being used.

One of the intangible qualities of music is that it can say something about the power of a Brand simply by association. Consider the message from Microsoft when they used The Rolling Stones copyright “Start Me Up” for the Windows 2000 launch. Almost every newspaper headlined the story with the alleged \$8,000,000 paid for this track. Microsoft were forgiven for not using the original Rolling Stone master sound recording, (a fact this was never openly communicated.) All that the public remembered was that Microsoft paid more than ANY other company for a song for a commercial from one of the biggest bands in the world.

The initial message from Microsoft was “ We are the biggest players in town”

But whilst Microsoft paid this legendary sum of money for the use of the copyright, the question is, with this kind of capital investment, what did it do for their long term **MusicEquity**, was it measured and what was subsequently leveraged from the association? (The author would like to define **MusicEquity** as ‘the net commercial value of the Brand’s relationship to music taking into account its assets and liabilities that can be commercially leveraged and measured in other areas of its marketing activities’.)

As Brands experience rapid globalisation and try to extend across cultural differences the need for vehicles that can consistently convey an organisation’s core values and defined associations becomes increasingly pressing. A clear and strong music identity can represent what an organisation wants their Brand to stand for now and in the future. Music can provide an external picture for customers and can act as the internal pulse of business strategy.

Music Strategy

Music Industry gets Commercial

Given that CD sales are plummeting as more and more people are downloading music and that it is becoming increasingly expensive to promote artists, the Music Industry is beginning to really embrace the importance of their music being used in a commercial and the benefits of the exposure.

Currently, however, both parties approach the Brand – Music relationship with their own individual agendas and the question remains open as to who benefits more from the association. This results in neither party fully leveraging the power of their partnership. The Music Industry is also very unpredictable and entrepreneurial, moving so quickly when an opportunity does arise that it leaves little space for third parties outside of the inner sanctum to participate, other than by default unless they were partners in the initial process.

The Music Industry should look to recent success stories of where music in a commercial has directly helped their bottom line. A great example is Nike's recent use of an old, relatively unknown Elvis track as the soundtrack to a commercial. The commercial gave the track huge airtime on broadcast media, something that the radio stations would not give to an artist who had been dead for 25 years. The PR machines then moved into action. The hype was not about the quality of the commercial or the cost of the shoot but the fact that the Elvis estate had been persuaded to allow a modern remix of the track by a popular DJ, JXL and that this was the 25th anniversary of the death of a superstar. The amount of column inches that the partnership produced was beyond the wildest PR expectations.

BMG, the record company that own the Elvis catalogue, have spent the last 25 years repackaging and reinventing the Elvis back catalogue with a very steady but modest level of success. Off the back of this commercial and the subsequent No 1 single hit in 22 territories, they were able to produce and release a new CD of the Elvis No 1's over the last 25 years and shifted tens of millions of copies of the album. What made this CD so powerful was that it included the latest hit No 1 "A Little Less Conversation" which charted in the year of the 25th anniversary.

It is relatively simple to see who were the principle financial beneficiaries of the Elvis partnership. The key question is what more could have been leveraged for Nike, had this been part of an overall Music Strategy with objectives, aspirations and financial opportunities clearly mapped out.

So what are the issues? Why, if there are two major industries willing to work together does there need to be a change in cultural and business practices? If there is to be a collaboration between content and marketing, there has to be a longer term strategy that is about creating value and relevance to the consumer, a connection that has integrity on both sides and which in the short term satisfies shareholders. A symbiotic convergence between Brand, ad agency and record-company needs to occur.

In the past, disparate divisions of the Music Industry have been given second-handed insights to work with i.e. music ideas that have been attached onto the conceptual and finished stages of a promotional idea or even after the commercial has been on air. The problem arising from this pattern of 'partnership' is because the music parties are not part of the thinking that defines a Brands core values, target audience etc., it can be difficult for them to develop promotional activities that tap into the essence of the Brand. This leads to a lack of synergy between overall Brand strategy and music identity. A vast amount of time and money is then spent trying to marry the two.

This can create a negative experience for the Brand, not understanding why the music route was chosen in the first place but also with neither party qualifying what went wrong.

Exceptions to this rule (GAP, Levis, Target, Pepsi etc.) can be spectacular. Dirty Vegas "Days Go By" might have been a flop if it had never been featured in a spot for the Mitsubishi Eclipse, but the commercial launched the previously obscure song into the music charts and helped it receive a Grammy nomination for Best Dance Recording. "The most powerful proof is when a DJ comes onto the radio and says, 'And now, the Mitsubishi song.' It's hard to explain the phenomenon," says Pierre Gagnon, Mitsubishi Motors N.A. president and CEO. "What we're so pleased with is we know we're breaking through when these songs become more popular."

The key issue Mitsubishi should now be addressing is how to convert PR attention into commercial buys. How do you make the success of music translate into more car sales?

In order for a Brand to fully leverage the power of music they need to ask a fundamental question before saying yes to any opportunity to use music. Do we have a Music Strategy?

Can we clearly answer these four questions?

- i) What can music say about the Brand?
- ii) What types of music activities will carry the Brand's positioning, personality and core attributes?
- iii) What music ventures will be mutually beneficial for the Brand and for a Music Industry partner?
- iv) How is the Brand going to achieve this?

If a Brand cannot answer these four questions with a clear and consistent response then they do not have a clearly defined Music Strategy. A Music Strategy should actively seek to engrain a co-ordinated music identity within a Brand's cultural fabric. Every audio representation of the organisation – from television commercial to elevator music - should powerfully convey the company's music "DNA."

Integrating music into the whole marketing strategy is the key. "If your marketing is intrusive, you're going to lose them, so you have to provide entertainment that's an asset to their life" (Jarrod Moses CEO Grey World Alliance on behalf of P&G Pringles latest entertainment partnership July 2002)

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Measuring the Value of Music to Brands

One of the reasons that music is currently undervalued by many organisations is because it is difficult to directly measure its impact and influence on sales. When researching the success of music in a campaign, its value is often measured using the following parameters: “How will it facilitate communication of a rational message specific to the campaign?” But is this an adequate benchmark?

The Music Industry measures its success by Billboard Charts. Brands and agencies are often seduced to use this standard to measure the secondary benefits of a Brand using music, because their ‘partners’, The Music Industry, set this as their criteria. Being a No 1 record is sexy and carries with it a certain amount of kudos, but what does it say about the Brand itself?

Naturally, companies know through sales when a product or service is successful, but how much analysis is done to measure the extent to which these results can be attributed to music. The following questions should be answered: What is the MusicEquity of an Artist, track, genre etc.? What is the heritage of this music? What intangible benefits could this music inject in the Brand? Is the music creating a Brand liability or a future asset that I can leverage? What opportunities can the Brands’ equity create for the Music Industry?

The fundamental underlying question that needs to be introduced into the decision making process is “What is the current MusicEquity of my Brand and how will the use of this music affect it?”

David Aaker uses five dimensions when measuring Brand Equity: Lifestyle, awareness, perceived quality, associations and loyalty. Interestingly, David Heron reasoned that music effectively contributes to a Brand’s marketing strength through: Entertainment value, structure and continuity, memorability, lyrical language, targeting and authority establishment.

In today’s Brand profiling, is MusicEquity a concept that is even considered let alone a value that is actually measured and how would this evaluation add to marketing solutions? Brands should be able to make informed decisions about music usage with the same confidence that it assesses every other aspect of its promotional and communications activities.

With a valuation of the **MusicEquity** a Brand can begin to ask the questions that must be answered to create intellectual music properties that move beyond the box, the can, the bottle, the logo and help create consumer relevance and consolidate consumer loyalty.

Music Differentiation

Designing emotions that make 'the difference' in the marketplace

Music is in essence emotional and there are few other elements of a Brand that have the power to be as responsive to people's needs for sensory pleasure and to promises of delivery. Research has shown that people relate to Brands in a very similar way that they relate to people. They form relationships based on personality, appearances (style and image) and trust. Great music can create yearning for a Brand, self-confidence and security through ownership, and make us feel as if we belong to a larger group. Arguably, it is not just the music that evokes the emotion but rather the whole Brand or image of that music entity.

Music can define a relevant, differentiated and credible value proposition. Especially in markets where there is a high degree of competitive convergence, music is often the deciding factor as whether the customer buys your product or service or your competitors. "What a customer hears may make the difference between their choosing and not choosing your Brand" (Gerald J. Gorn The Effects of Music In Advertising on Choice Behaviour 1982). Music can make the difference.

Conclusion

What will create the impetus for change? “Economic pain and economic opportunity. On an intellectual macro level, both industries are already there. But the thought isn’t being translated into action just yet, because some are afraid of missing out on important pieces of cultural connection. But in time the fear will subside, or the fearful will lose their jobs. And if a new model isn’t developed, the old one will simply collapse” (Steven J. Heyer, COO, Coca-Cola)

In a marketplace where compelling messages, consistent delivery and emotional experiences are at the heart of a Brand’s success, organisations need to actively develop fully integrated and powerful multimedia music strategies. A shift in current thinking from regarding music as a soft service function to a cornerstone of business strategy needs to occur. More understanding is vital so that each party in the collaboration appreciates the value of each other’s strengths, with each partner looking at the other as one to work with over a period of time and not for a one-off transaction. If self-interest is replaced with collaboration and respect, win-win benefits will result for both the Brands and the Music Industry.

Music is an incredibly powerful vehicle that has the power to convey the emotional attributes of products and services while simultaneously creating layered, textural experiences in our lives, and it is there for the taking for the marketers.

Contributor

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With over 22 years experience of running her own strategic music consultancy, Ruth is constantly fascinated by the ways that music is used to sell products and services. The new division of SongSeekers, 'MusicEquity' is the result of a lifetime of her experience in observing the ways in which Brands, Agencies and the Music Industry continue to transact in music and yet miss the true currency of their exchange. It is also the direct result of continuous dialogue and collaboration with her amazing children, Daniel and Rachel, who are now Brand Strategists in their own right, in Music and Design respectively

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