



musicequity

COMPLETE MUSIC BRANDING

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Music Branding- What's the Real Score?

© Ruth Simmons FRSA - songseekers group

songseekers™

48 Broadley Terrace, London UK NW16LG

TEL 020-7724-2420 FAX 020-7706-1025

info@songseekers.co.uk

www.songseekers.co.uk



More than ever, Brands purport to interact through our social and emotional sensibilities to make personal connections and build trust with us. Whatever the Brand sector - soft drinks, automobiles, cellphones, athletic shoes or video games - our senses will either respond positively, negatively or not at all, impacting our level of interaction and desire for the Brand offering.

Thirty to forty years ago, the suggestion that we would be able to recognise and understand Brand values from a pantone colour, a font style or a name was as questionable as implying that we should be able to recognise a brand from its sound. Today, an entire industry has been built around tactile and visual processes involved in understanding and building Brands, from graphics to the semiotics of names, from packaging to colour.

We have no shortage of graphic and visual design firms specialising in these practices, as well as agencies and consultancies handling tactical execution of promotions and global research companies giving feedback on consumer response levels. With the executions of all these regimens subjected to critical company policy and benchmarking, it is no surprise that these organisations and their gurus have become critical components to a Brand's DNA, ensuring that their marketing strategy delivers the level of trust and focus that consumers expect and require.

Do Brands Really Understand Their Consumers In Relation To Music?

The eminent personality psychologist Raymond Catell remarked, "so powerful is the effect of music, that one is surprised to find in the history of psychology so little reference to the use of music." It is no secret that Brands invest a great deal of energy and money on comprehensive research to fortify their evolving trust -relationship with consumers. They do this because they understand that if this trust is violated or misused, the customer/client is gone. So why are so many Brands still reactive in their choice and usage of music? Are Brands asking themselves "do we really understand our consumer in relation to music, not just their lifestyle, but what makes a heart beat to the music?"

Good marketers know that the key to maximising the effectiveness of any campaign is to identify the primary targets and speak to them in a clear and original way. When Brands want to use music in commercial enterprise and really engage with its target market, context, motives and influencers that support their own profile, values and personal relationship with their consumers, are important factors to established prior to investing in elaborate mechanics, artist endorsements, sponsorships or even music for advertising commercials. And unlike moviemakers, Brands also have to be mindful of prohibitive legislation, competitive activities and the need to sell product.



On closer analysis of many Brands' music usages, it would seem that their music strategies are almost as varied as the genres of music selected, with the focus on the mechanics and a back rationalization for the final choice of track(s). The reality is that the delivery platform itself - the format of the end mechanic- often decides the music content, because it is held hostage to budgets and other parties' agendas, not to a set of music criteria attributable to the Brand. If we can affirm that that music is an integral part of a Brand's DNA then we can affirm to construct a strategy by which these are realised.

The "sound of a brand" is more than 8 octaves or some catchy melodic identity. It is also not just about genre, words, artist profiles, or the carrier. It is about who you are, your values, how you behave and how you communicate. It is about the emotional touch points that require a deeper understanding than just the contextual touch points, such as CD/downloads, give-aways, press kits, in-store muzak, sponsored events or even commercials. If music is to become part of the Brand collateral, your choice of music and how you use it, must underscore and harmonise with every other method of communication that you have both internally and externally.

If by definition, communities are made up of people who share values and if music embodies values, then music communities are made up of people who share values. When a Brand uses a style of music because it wants to appear cool to a specific target market, but does nothing else to put itself in the value set of that music, the result could be a community that will question not only the intention, but also a Brand's integrity! An effective alternative would be to use music that enhances the fit between the values of the music, the Brand and the consumer's values.



Curators of Art vs. Purveyors of Commerce

It appears that in one corner we have The Music Industry; the so-called curators of the art, entrusted to protect music's values, but in reality fighting for their own survival, with shareholders and quarterly figures taking priority over long-term strategy. In the other corner we have the Marketing and Advertising Industries, now waking up to the fact that building music collateral should be an integral part of their brand strategy - although not quite sure how to make it a strategic asset and increasingly influenced by a new party in the production and creative team, the Cost Controller.

With regard to the Music Industry, Brands should be aware that they are often viewed as cash-rich knights-in-shining armour, arriving with sustenance, just in time to rescue them from the downward spiral of fiscal neglect that they are facing more and more from their traditional revenue streams. With the Music Industry fighting for its very existence, it has come to the stage that almost anyone is jumped on who will offer transportation out of the hole.

So the big question - Are the Music and Marketing Industries, reducing the emotional currency of music to mere dollars? By ignoring the long-term investments of artists who have already paid upfront with endless touring, long nights in the studio, and a personal life investment of several years on very little money to build a relationship with their audience - the fans. Is the top line of a song being compromised for the bottom line? A universal confusion is evolving between the value and worth of music by the owners and the users that is creating an emotional struggle for the recipients - a Brand's potential community.

We have all witnessed the apparent lack of speed or willingness to adapt by the Music Industry in granting rights to new applications. To the Rights Owners, everything that is different from the original purpose of a recorded master is recognised as secondary exploitation of the initial music rights. For the Brands, it is easy to get swept away with the whole glamour of the carrier - the exciting ways to use new media to reach out to consumers.

In defence of the Music Industry, it is vital for Brands to remember that when being seduced by sexy marketing tactics, that the reality of using music is not a predictable commodity, existing within a totally consistent emotional or commercial marketing framework. As a result, Rights Owners can seem unreasonable and their answers can take time. If this is not clearly understood and factored in up front, the final choice of music or music project, may be the result of issues that have nothing to do with what is right for the Brand, its Music Equity™ or its emotional promise to the consumer.



The Road to Music Equity™

If we are to maximise the role of music in our branding we must fully acknowledge and understand the power of music and how it's role is significant in our marketing. It is tempting when time is short to rely on the creative choices of a colleague simply because they love music and have a great CD (iPod) collection. But is this really good enough and would we take this approach in developing and protecting other areas of the brand collateral?

Whatever the delivery platform, unless these concerns are addressed in advance by those with the knowledge to resolve them in tandem with the strategy, great creative ideas will stay on the drawing board, Brands will settle for mediocrity and the state-of-the-art technology could be yesterday's model. If music reaches the parts that other tools cannot reach, that special emotional realm, then we really have to look deeper, understand better and respect the product and the process more.

If Brands are really to get to grips with music branding, the content - the music itself and the carrier - which is everything from sponsored download to TV commercials, embedded CDS, audio logos, games, ringtones, call holdings, etc, must be separated. The essence of the music itself, its integrity, what it says and what it means must become a priority.

Brands have to be able to measure the role of the music, the influence of cultural differences both on the commercial front and consumer facing, demographics, the impact of music activity and how all of these affect their ROI. This is Music Equity™ and Music Integrity™. These all-important factors are more relevant to the Brand's success than the Music Industry's yardsticks, which are related to volume sales, number of downloads and chart positions. Simply put, it's not just the music we use, it's the way we use it.



To get a great and sustained performance, Brands will need to make an initial investment to really understand their 'style, audience and venue'. They will need to find a conductor that can identify all the players, knows the total music score, not just one of the parts and can prepare the Band - err, the Brand - to get a performance that is worth listening to, that will positively affect their bottom line. If it is hard enough to obtain answers to the questions you are currently asking, and we are to really integrate music usages into the Brand's collateral, it is really important to know and understand what questions we should be asking about music. Without this filter, Brands will continue to get hazy research that simply addresses music recall and likes or dislikes. We need not only to be looking at what music people are listening or even to where, but how and why.

Those Brands that really invest the time to understand all aspects of the "sound of their brand" and the whole language of music, will communicate in an unmistakable voice with their audience. Using Music will become more than a series of disparate tactical music executions. Awareness and impact will increase because market gaps will be strategic not opportunist knee jerks to competitors' activity or an Artist's schedule, enabling procedures and practices for purchase decisions to be made with a sense of clarity that will improve cost benefits. Brands will be able to develop music policies that give defined shapes for all who want to use music to add a dimension to the branding. By identifying their needs, Brands will find themselves with music communications that congruently and consistently reflect the Brand's core values- endorsing their Brand differentiation.

And 'finale' - in recent months, there appear to be many branding specialists, real experts in their own fields that have jumped on the music bandwagon, believing they can 'sample' their existing marketing jargon to create a remix to their communication repertoire. Evaluating music, understanding the innate essence and placing a value on the worth of music to all parties is a very different tune. One is a substantiated strategic approach; the other is a quick fix co-opting of an often-misunderstood subject.

Using music to really connect is an area that will take more than friends who work for a record label, or a fat CD collection or a few marketing soundbites to convince the real audience. They just may turn around and bite you right back.



Contributors: Ruth Simmons and Steve Yanovsky

Ruth Simmons is Managing Director of **songseekers**, a dedicated music consultancy that is based in London that is now celebrating its 25th year. **songseekers** was one of the first companies to tackle the complexities of using and licensing copyright music for advertising and promotion; to set up an independent creative resource for marketers and to address and answer the question "You may now what your brand looks like, but do you know what it sounds like?"

Steve Yanovsky is based in New York and is a marketing communications thought-leader with extensive operational experience within the music, film entertainment and video game sectors and their associated distribution channels. His agency, BrandAlchemy, develops and executes marketing strategy, and evolving media and communication technologies.

Ruth has recently been elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. She is currently developing an initiative and platform with Steve for the RSA about the role of music, the impact that music has on brand marketing and consumer behaviour and its efficacy as to how Brands can use music to enhance their Corporate Citizenship positions.

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For further information contact Ruth Simmons at:
ruthsimmons@songseekers.co.uk

Steve Yankovsky at:
yano@nyc.rr.com