

## Effective and Sustainable Branding Starts With Music

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So what's the next step for music in marketing campaigns? Well, for starters, creating tracks that aren't "ad music" in any traditional sense. Imagine if music itself was the branded content. What if there was such a thing as "branded music content" as opposed to music simply playing a supporting role to visuals in a spot or webisode?

Music's role in advertising is always changing. Years ago, chief marketers used jingles to sell every product imaginable: Think of those catchy tunes as predecessors of today's sonic branding tags. In recent years, scoring spots with hit songs or obscure gems has become a major trend. And now, in the still-developing field of branded content, music continues to do what it has done for decades: inflect the visual content of ads.



**SOAKING IT UP:** Sprite's "Pool" commercial caught on globally because it has no copy, but it does have alluring visuals and a song people liked. Essentially a music video, consumers shared and discussed it online.

### Speaking in song

Right now, opportunities are emerging where music is both the star and the (brand) message. "In the world of branded entertainment, if someone has a portal or a site to bring you original music, I think it could be an exciting, instantaneous, viral way for people to discover and pass around tracks," advertising heavyweight and Beyond Belief Managing Director Mark Sitley told me recently.

It's not as if people are exposed to new artists through radio play; they find singers and bands when friends refer them, generally over the net or MySpace pages. Music sponsored on someone's site could be an effective enhancement to a brand by presenting something the consumer wouldn't ordinarily have been exposed to.

The interesting thing about that is marketers don't know who the audience is. And because the music is passed virally, from friend to friend or site to site, it takes on a life of its own. You are going to see a lot more of that in the future.

Mr. Sitley says that what eventually happened with our score for Sprite's "Pool" is an example of the kind of cutting-edge work he's talking about.

### Falling into Sprite

Human, the company where I work, in February 2005 created a commercial through Ogilvy, Hong Kong, for Sprite, which it intended to run only in Asia. For two reasons, it exploded. One, there's no copy throughout the entire spot. It's just cool visuals of guys playing basketball on a hot court. One of them opens a Sprite bottle and the basketball court turns into a swimming pool.

Because there is no copy, it translates well in China, the U.K., Brazil, Denmark and other countries. Essentially, it was a music video, and people liked the song, performed by our in-house musicians.

The other reason for its explosion: With the advent of the internet and access to Google, you can type in "Human," "Sprite," "pool," and "song" and the ad will come up. People discussed "Pool" in music chatrooms, advertising chatrooms and on blogs. Technology allows for the easy access, which enabled people to discover the source. It's a concept that's gaining traction.

Our friend David Elsworth, director-creative development, Asia, at Coca-Cola, makes a key point regarding this type of branded entertainment with his mantra: "Branded content is not pushed at people but requested, downloaded, collected or shared."

### **Communication**

In other words, brands now can drive the culture via the underground and the internet. Websites such as YouTube, Google and eBay can function as two-way streets for brands: Brands discover who their consumers really are, and consumers let brands know what they want.

Josh Rabinowitz, senior VP-director of music at Grey Worldwide, New York, played a key role in the creation of Sony's "Carry On," the campaign that set the precedent for sonic branding. "Music is the only byproduct of what is achieved in advertising that crosses all language barriers," he says. "Dialogue and even humor don't translate. Doing one piece of branded content where one size fits all is very hard."

The simple melody that identifies Intel and McDonald's instrumental version of the "I'm Lovin' It" campaign theme song are successful examples of sonic branding. Sound snippets might travel far and wide, but we should elevate the game.

The world is becoming more complex, and consumers are hungry for something that is more interesting and dynamic. You have to take it to the next level. The premise hasn't changed. What you're doing is taking a sonic identifier -- now it's a song -- and creating your own equity. Any marketer is going to tell you its No. 1 goal is to get more bang for its media-buying buck; to get the brand idea to live beyond the media spend. Building a hit song is one way to do it. We have to start investing in content that we can own and is sustainable.

### **Pseudonyms**

Today, many pop musicians work on a number of projects simultaneously, using a variety of names. Similarly, the work that we create for branded-music content projects might not carry the music house's actual name. Gnarl's Barkley is a great example of what's going on right now. The new-model band comprises neo-soul singer Cee-Lo and DJ/producer Danger Mouse, both of whom have collaborated with other artists.

Chief marketing officers are going to start taking advantage of that. They don't want to hire a "name" performer such as Britney Spears. She may have a hit album right now, but what about scandals and negative blowback? There is brand liability and vulnerability because of what's going on with that artist. When we work on a project, the name is not going to be Human. Sprite will make up a name -- just like "Gnarl's Barkley" -- that it owns.

These types of initiatives are going to start building momentum. Someone -- whether an artist or a record label -- is going to realize this is a business niche and take it over.

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