

MA International Music
Marketing
Element 1. Essay
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"It is a noisy old world" (Ryan, 2016) just one of the many quotes used to stress the significance and importance of engaging with audiences today. With so many new tools, infographics, analytics breakdowns, apps, stores, shares, likes, tweets and retweets at our disposal. We can all agree that "marketing activities" will forever play a fundamental role in business and our everyday lives. (Brenner, 2019)

These fundamentals very much remain the same, and even more so for music artists and creatives. That "for one to stand out, one must scream loud", but how exactly? How does an artist cut through all this noise in a market with such saturation, where supply exceeds demand? We are all familiar with the odds stacked against artists today; however, one has taken the liberty to follow with some stats here if we are not. There are over 15 million songs uploaded each year, equating to 40,000 new tracks a day and 280,000 tracks released every Friday competing for playlists placements and support on just Spotify alone, excluding the uploads taking place on the other Digital Service Providers (DSPs) like your Apple Music, Deezer, Amazon and others.

Furthermore, with end-users being more "digital savvy" than ever before (Mckinsey & Company 2020), In a world where consumers are bombarded by marketing messages every quarter (M, Blackwell 2007). The artists' responsibility is to now adopt a more sophisticated approach and marketing to drive engagement rather than marketing to drive transactions.

Although many artists and creatives have seen this as an opportunity to rise to the challenge and reap the benefits of staying on top of their ecosystem, many artists may find the idea of being "digital savvy" discouraging and would not know where or how to start.

"There are few certainties in the world of business, but one thing is for sure: if you do not let customers know about your business, you will not stay in business for very long." (Ryan 2016)

We draw the focus of this literature to a somewhat "solution" to these problems. An artist service and campaign management company, "Autonomy". Their current operation objectives are to generate maximum awareness for an artists' release campaign and make sure the artists' marketing messages are effectively amplified. [1]

Autonomy was founded by Richard Englar & David Rowell, both former Marketing Directors of major and independent labels such as Sony Music, Warner Music and Chrysalis Group.[2] Englar and Rowell anticipated a shift within the music industry in the early '00s when many bands and artists were being dropped from their major and independent labels (A EL Gamal 2012) and were looking for alternative methods to release their records without the aid of a major label framework.

Noticing that they were ahead of the curve, and quickly realised that this was a major growth area in the industry. Facilitating campaigns and artists services for Robyn, FEEDER, Daniel Dempsey to current contemporary artists like YUNGBLUD. [4]

In 2021, Autonomy sees itself as a better company and uniquely positioned to be the to go Digital campaign company and lead by reputable individuals, which is just as important. "Leadership is the art of giving people a platform for spreading ideas that work." (Godin, 2008)

By advertising mainly by word of mouth within the music industry's trade, where they have managed to situate themselves in a position to maintain repeat and respectable business by being the one of the first to go to market with their services. *A first mover is a service or product that gains a competitive advantage by being the first to market with a product or service. Being first typically enables a company to establish strong brand recognition and customer loyalty before competitors enter the arena. (Tarvner E 2020)* In response to this, one cannot help but ask themselves, is that enough?

Touching base on what was discussed earlier of many new and established artists may be unaware of such service. Which again is an opportunity for new business.

As we continue to dive deeper into Autonomy's brand at face value, some businesses may cover so many things in their services that the core understanding of what they do may get lost in translation. Tracking back to the quote by (Ryan 2016) of "if you don't let customers know about your business, you won't stay in business for very long."

"The easiest thing is to react. The second easiest thing is to respond. But the hardest thing is to initiate." (Godin, 2008) As we begin to initiate, the literature will start with detailed insight and analysis of the Autonomy brand. Their core objectives, production process and revenue streams through the SOSTAC (Situation Analysis, Objectives, Strategy, Tactics, Actions and Control) planning framework (PR Smith 1990), which will then lead us to the implementation breakdown

of the new Autonomy rebrand and an integrated marketing communication strategy to help clients and artists understand the company's positions significantly. Along with an outlining of key aspects of contemporary marketing theories and concepts.

Situation analysis

Where is the company now?

In 2006, as the traditional record label systems began to break apart, Autonomy managed to build a reputation by delivering tangible and meaningful results across various music artist services, covering everything from A&R, distribution, digital to creative execution, and all things' marketing'. The company aims now to treat each project individually and remember that the artist is at the heart of it all. With ad spend on social media platforms increasing massively in the last ten years. Artists and labels need to take products to where the audience exists and Autonomy to ensure this happens by operating with an outlined approach to manage social media and digital marketing aspects of each campaign to communicate the artists' message emotion effectively.

Autonomy's main purpose is to bring solutions to labels, management companies and music artists. Showing their understanding of the marketing mix practice and the seven p's formerly known as the four p's (McCarthy 1960) throughout their services.

So, where does the company sit in this ecosystem?

According to David Rowell, Autonomy is more akin to modern music management companies than other marketing operations. Label services companies (AWAL, Platoon & PIAS) are not competitors [3] With Autonomy's considerable experience, They see themselves as a complimentary and effectively modern management company with the end to end ability to accompany and add value to an artists creative and release journey.

How do they advertise currently as a company?

Word of mouth, the effect of being first and maintaining an unblemished and a more surfaced level reputation. Brands have survived in the past based on people to create a brand and relay its identity. People behind the business are very important in a product or services likely / ambassadors for better or worse. To criticise, one can argue that word of mouth is not enough in this day and age. For the brand to evolve, they would need to do the very thing they offer to their clients.

Objectives

Having clear **core values** help ensure that sections of the business are aligned and working towards the same objectives in order to support the **company's vision** and shape its culture.

There are three core values that Autonomy adheres to. The **ability** to work with fantastic and young and innovative professionals adapting to the times and bringing fresh approaches and ideas to Autonomy. Showcasing **drive**, organisation strategy, and a real love of music along with self-deprecation and a good sense of humour and comic timing can also be useful. They are ensuring that the client is always at the centre of our campaigns. They are working together to achieve collective goals. **Listening** intently and adding value and support where necessary. The ideal client is one with great tunes, vision, tenacity and a willingness to listen and realise that we don't collectively believe in the potential success of the project how could anybody else

Autonomy has six main revenue streams via retainers and other income from other operations outside of the services.

Campaign Management which accounts for 35% of the company's revenue and being the largest income stream out of all their services, allowing Autonomy to assess the artists/clients channels and find opportunities to generate more engagement through initial campaigning elements. I.e. Social media, work with management artists and any of the existing team to reinforce all the "brand values and make sure these are amplified correctly to media, industry and consumer. Socials inc. Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, Twitter and will provide options for TikTok and Triller and running advertising and growth campaigns and day-to-day social media platforms. With artists now being adept at posting social media content it's important for Autonomy to join forces and bring in an overarching strategy to ensure all imagery and messages fit together for the project's long-term benefit.

In order for them to continue highlighting the importance of establishing an artists campaign message. Autonomy conveys the stature and relevance of constructing a digital strategy that works in hand with the rest of the campaign, and the team chooses to employ.

It's easy to recognise that a digital advertising campaign is only as effective as the creative assets available to work with and Digital Marketing commissions and Ad spend contribute towards 25% of Autonomy's revenue streams. It is important that they use highly targeted advertising techniques and unique tools to drive traffic to artists' DSPs. They can do this by running advertising campaigns that generate Spotify followers efficiently or drive new fans to Apple Music and YouTube campaigns to locations and territories that make the most sense for the rest of the campaign. Autonomy must make sure they have systems to capture useful and useable data for retargeting,

Creative Management retainers and commission on certain works makes up 8% of its revenue, which approaches campaigns from both a creative and marketing perspective. Autonomy collaborates with artists to ensure authentic imagery is used throughout the campaign and stays true to the artist message and persona, translates the artist's vision into unique visual content that is authentic to the artist, creatively interesting and with purpose. This can include working campaigns with visuals already created or building concepts from scratch with a creative map for consistency and authenticity with the general campaign's message.

Artist Management, similar to Campaign management commission and retainers making up 5% and A&R Management is making up 10%, there are also other services, for example, distribution and label services making up 17%.

Among their clients are some of the world's biggest corporations, including Fox, BMG, Ministry of Sound, Island Records, Sony Music, Polydor, Universal. Despite the current situation with the pandemic, **FEEDER** reaching **Top 5** in the Official Album charts after 15 years was a major achievement, along with **Lucy Spraggan** also reaching the top. **Damien Dempsey's** live prowess, film and latest album have all been highlights. The band **aliens don't ring doorbells** in the **US Top 30 radio charts** in less than nine months.

One can easily understand Autonomy's client base's logic is mainly repeated business and referrals via word of mouth. Which, of course, is a benefit for any business. However, to rely on word of mouth only rather than external marketing for new business via their channels. One would say that they are limiting themselves to the possibilities of working with fresher clients who can open them up to a fresher demographic.

Strategy, Tactics, Actions and Control

After reviewing Autonomy's activities, purpose, financial and organisational information, let us proceed to the branding analysis.

"Marketing is not the art of finding clever ways to dispose of what you make. It is the art of creating genuine customer value." (Kotler, 1999).

Autonomy's current branding showcases a bold and clean approach. You can see that the main characteristics, along with an interesting spin on the capital letters' arrangement, AUT-ONO-MY is a small red square at the end. Highlighting that the company is quite self-aware of how they want to be perceived. There is an opportunity to create branding identities for the company's different activities and services to give a more concise and digestible ethos and understanding of the business.

However, there is still room for improvement on this. It's important that the Autonomy rebrand brings clarity towards their individual business activities. As the go-to company for creative, campaign, artist and digital, there should be elements of this shown in their rebrand.

customers are still confronted with an awful lot of sloppy marketing. Websites that underperform; Facebook questions or comments that aren't answered; telephone or email leads that aren't followed up: poor integration with offline communications that complicate or even contradict basic marketing principles. Time-compressed, information-fatigued customers are angry and satisfaction levels are wavering. (Chaffey, D and Smith, PR 2013)

It is almost a "practice what you preach" scenario for the company as they would need to prove with value points and highlights of previous achievements, which can be influenced by what the consumer should know about the brand, what they connect with. Autonomy must perform online as well as offline. Audiences don't care what you say. They only care what they are left with AFTER you've said it. (Bounds A 2010)

The biggest advantage to refreshing the look and feel of your brand is the ability to reach new customers. When you focus on new aspects of your business and promote them correctly, people will take notice. Rebranding can offer the stimulation your business needs to create new growth in an ever-evolving market. (Cain, 2020)

In a world where trends are constantly changing, it can be hard to maintain a modern image. Rebranding is an option that business owners often overlook, but this strategy is key to keeping a company like Autonomy at the top of their industry. From connecting with new audiences, setting it apart from its competitors and opportunities for Autonomy to boost their Bottom Line. I thoroughly recommend that we implement this strategy.

Regarding the user experience of the AUT-ONO-MY brand, the website home page is interactive with a TV projecting a showreel of the companies that I think is their previous work. Although it is eye-catching and pretty much falls in line with the perception of being the go-to company for digital and creative, the site is still yet to describe what was done for the clients and partners. The website has no hyperlinks to the company's social media platforms, i.e. Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, which will then send an end-user to hunt down via google. The lack of redirects to other activities on the website. The use of the words Digital, creative, management and A&R without specifying which of these services connect to which client could work against the companies favour.

The social media pages, a lack of cohesiveness in the display picture and banners across all platforms and the lack of redirects to other activities on the website. On the latter, Autonomy may well be content with the business being repeated and referred via word of mouth rather than actively looking for new business.

As part of my branding proposal, I decided to build entities around the business activities in order to bring a more concise and straightforward messaging to the Autonomy brand stronger.

I would suggest renaming the company, from "Autonomy Music Group" to "Autonomy Group", still maintaining the AUT-ONO-MY logo with the original black background with bold white text and red square, acting as the holding company to the company services which has now been broken down to subdivisions and give it the exposure it deserves.

The renaming of the services to their own independent entities, adding different background colours to represent each subdivision for a more focused and streamlined approach. Creative management renamed "Autonomy Creative", Digital management renamed "Autonomy Digital. A&R and other services renamed "Autonomy Artists" and Campaign management renamed

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