

BELIEVE MUSIC UK REBRAND

FOUNDATION IN INTERNATIONAL MUSIC MARKETING
ESSAY



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For better or worse, new technologies have always been a monumental force of change in the music industry. In the twentieth century the Compact Disc, still regarded as the best-sounding format even today, helped cement the major labels' industry dominance. CDs largely replaced vinyl records and incited two decades of continuous growth, more than doubling sales. (Wikström, 2016, p. 1) At this moment in history, record labels and related music publishers were the main industry gatekeepers. For artists, the record deal was the greatest business opportunity and entry into an otherwise largely impenetrable business. (Tschmuck, 2016, p. 15)

By the turn of the twenty-first century, however, new digital technology would serve to disrupt the value-added network (**see: Figure 1**). Peer-to-peer file sharing sites, like Napster and its subsequent copycats, are a classic example of how innovation can disrupt an entire industry and make a large number of its competencies obsolete. (Wikström, 2016, p. 1) Napster was a response to the industry's over-commodification of music. For many, these sites replaced the trip to the record store, enabling music fans to converse with one another and amass a large collection of songs without ever leaving their homes. (Alderman, 2002, p. 2)

Peer-to-peer file-sharing was just the start of digital advancements to test the major labels' stronghold. In 2003, Apple saw an opportunity to profit. It introduced its iTunes Music Store, turning physical sales to digital and monopolising the market. Apple caused irreversible disruption, redefining music companies' organisational structures, work processes and professional roles. (Wikström, 2016, p. 1-2)

"From the invention of the gramophone to the advent of electric and electronic instruments, to the recordable cassette tape ... the music industry has always made a

big leap in size, revenues, and profits when the next wave technology hit home.” (Kusek & Leonhard, 2005, p. 140) The introduction of the download market in the 2000s’ was ultimately responsible for the industry turning a commercial corner. Growth was so pronounced that it created new opportunities, a need for middlemen “aggregators”. (Harrison, 2017, p. 167) This need saw a rise in independent distribution companies, such as Believe Music. Believe and its competitors enabled artists to upload their work in order for it to be distributed to all music and streaming portals worldwide in just a few clicks of a mouse. (Tschmuck, 2016, p. 16) But distribution companies need to pay close attention to emerging technologies if they want to maintain market position and relevance, Much like Apple, who retired its iTunes software in favour of its streaming counterpart, Apple Music, (Dredge, 2019) companies need to be prepared to pioneer change, not just reluctantly embrace it. (Kusek & Leonhard, 2005, p. 140)

I decided to re-brand Believe UK as they are a company that is harnessing new technologies and disrupting the status quo of the music industry doing so, as per their values, with respect, fairness and transparency. They are also, according to Tileyard’s website, “the world’s largest fully independent distribution company” and responsible for “discovering breakthrough artists including Bastille, Mura Masa, Nao, Lizzo, and James Vincent McMorrow.” (Tileyard, n.d.)

Working with 850,000 artists, Believe or Believe Music, is a French record label, music services and music distribution company. Founded in 2005 by Denis Ladegaillerie, Arnaud Chiaramonti and Nicolas Laclias, Believe has a number of in-house record labels and distribution companies, giving them an advantage over its competitors. Most notably, Believe is the parent company of the leading DIY distributor

TuneCore. (Believe, n.d.) Last year, Believe's global revenue rose by 30.7% to €577.2m. (Music Ally, 2022)

Not just a music distribution giant, Believe has a number of revenue streams including video channel management, sync, publishing, project funding and various marketing services. According to Kieth Jopling, a Consultancy Director at MIDia Research, as quoted by Pastukhov (2022), the next big success story in music will be marketing technology. Jopling believes this will be an opportunity “[f]or anyone who can give a sense of automated tools, with attribution, that would allow us ... [t]o know what’s working sooner, and to know which are the songs to invest in on a bigger scale - because they’re already working.” It is highly likely, therefore, that an innovative company like Believe could be the ones behind the next technology that reshapes the industry.

My aim is to certify Believe as *the* company to rely on when it comes to music technology. In order to establish Believe at the forefront of new technologies, I deemed a rebrand necessary to create lasting impact. A rebrand will re-invigorate Believe and create a strong, cohesive brand image across all platforms as well as in the consumer’s mind. As part of the re-brand, I decided to introduce a new tagline - one that builds up Believe’s current mission, “to develop artists and labels in the most suitable way, at each stage of their career and development, in all local markets around the world with respect, expertise, fairness and transparency.” (Believe, n.d.) The new tagline, visible on the new company website, is ‘Your music. Our local experts. From here to everywhere via the latest technologies. Let’s Believe in the future of music together.’ This tagline is impactful and succinctly explains Believe’s vision, embodying the company’s values with added excitement.

Believe's current logo (**see: Figure 2**) is clean but very corporate, potentially giving the wrong impression to smaller artists and labels. The logo isn't representative of Believe's innovative approach to the music industry. In addition, there are several other brands, including Apple Music and Beats by Dre., who use similar branding. Hence I decided to develop a new brand identity to support this vision.

'Believe' is a strong company name intrinsic to the brand's identity, encompassing its mission. The decision to base the new logo (**see: Figure 3**) around the brand name was influenced by the current logo, as well as Reis and Reis (2009), who state, "The other component of the logotype, the trademark, or visual symbol, is overrated. The meaning lies in the word, or words, not in the visual symbol." It became evident that instilling the active properties of the word 'believe' into the logo would be most impactful. After all, belief is not just at the heart of Believe's business but the wider music industry too.

The decision to maintain a Sans Serif font was obvious. This typeface is clean and honest (Samara, 2006, p. 40), matching Believe's values. I did, however, update the font slightly so as to subtly indicate the brand's new vision to the consumer. I also paired the text with an upward curve to subliminally convey growth and positivity. In addition, to ensure that Believe is instantly recognisable as a tech company to new audiences, I included a streaming motif for the letter "V". This iconography can be extended, used as an emblem throughout Believe's website and assets, which will create a cohesive brand image.

Believe is a widely renowned company. I considered changing their prominent branding colour from red to an alternative but concluded that this would be detrimental to their business. In the music industry especially, brands become

synonymous with a colour, e.g. green (Spotify) and orange (Soundcloud). Thus, red has stayed central to Believe's new logo design. "[R]ed is an active colour: it grabs the eye, demanding attention, popping out at us where other colours recede..." (Perryman, 2021) To better represent Believe as the forward-thinking technology music tech company it is, I consciously opted for a more vibrant shade of red.

I did, however, opt for the new logo to feature a gradient. Inspired by the colours and symbolism of a sunrise, the addition of purple hints at luxury (expertise) and white connotes honesty (respect). (Perryman, 2021) I wanted to drastically alter the logo to signify a new era for the company, but one that was obviously born out of their current identity. Symbolic of unity, I made a circle central to the brand's image. Within the logo, the circle represents the globe and this works synergistically with the gradient to reinforce the message of growth. The new branding is professional, exciting and memorable. The new logo is three dimensional and fluid; characteristic of an ambitious company that will be at the forefront of change in its industry.

Believe's website and social channels are likely the first touch-point for prospective clients. For a company that specialises in digital marketing strategy, a lack of focus on its website and social channels could be reducing their credibility and deterring people. Through competitor analysis I found that Believe's website (and social channels) did not match up to that of its rivals - most notably in terms of functionality and creating visual interest. Believe's website did not leave a lasting impression. Neither did it convey the image of an innovative company whose people are excited about its technology, artists or labels. Instead, the website felt cold and corporate.

At present, Believe's website does not automatically redirect to the viewer's local territory. It took opening a sidebar and numerous clicks to navigate to Believe UK's website, making individual territories' place in the business incoherent, especially as Believe (n.d.) states, "Music is first and foremost about local communities listening to artists singing in their local language shaping local culture with their music." My first priority, therefore, was re-focusing the local communities by ensuring the website automatically redirects to the user's country.

Something that *is* evident on Believe's website is the importance of its employees: "We believe in the power of our people, who grow every day to best develop our artists and become the leaders of tomorrow in the music industry." Believe (n.d.) Believe employs 1500 people worldwide, 60 of whom are based at Believe UK's headquarters at Tileyard, London. Believe frequently refers to its employees as "local experts" and, colloquially, "Believers". Alongside the company's in-house record labels and distribution services, the reach and expertise of its employees is Believe's main USP.

While Believe's website does convey its employees' importance by placing them on its homepage, this could be executed better. The current images used feel stuffy and the typeface renders the employee bios almost illegible. Positively, however, the website does feature obvious employee testimonials. These testimonials are evidence of a good working culture and show that employees are invested in the company's ethos. These website elements help to positively influence wider brand perception so I wanted to magnify them in the rebrand. To better showcase Believe's employees as a USP I decided to make them the focal point of the homepage. Clicking on the

photograph opens up a new page to reveal engaging written and video content that profiles a selection of employees. (see: **Figure 4**)

As well as Believe's website, I found their Search Engine Optimisation to need improvement. When Googling 'Believe UK' the first result is for a Christmas experience website. To solve this, I propose starting a monthly blog in which industry trends and their artists and labels are discussed. This will provide keywords and improve the company's search engine ranking without having to pay for Believe to be displayed more prominently on the webpage.

For the social media strategy, I opted to focus exclusively on Believe UK's social channels. My rationale for this was that Believe UK's social media presence is severely lacking in comparison to its competitors, both in terms of content quality and engagement. It's also vital that all digital content has cultural significance. Thus, local territories would best be responsible for their own social media accounts; with Believe's head office running its central accounts. This decision was also encouraged by previous marketing experience from my professional career. While working in the student accommodation sector, each individual student property had its own social media accounts alongside the brand's own, central accounts. This strategy made for a more cohesive brand image over competitors, clearly linking all of the businesses' pages while allowing for regional relevance.

Overall, I found there to be a distinct absence of strategy across Believe UK's social channels. This lack of focus severely misrepresents the company's capabilities. Although Believe's digital content is predominantly alert-based, the call to action on posts was frequently unclear or missing entirely. A confused message and content

repetition across all of Believe's platforms is likely to blame for the poor engagement they are currently receiving. As a result of this, I wanted to introduce a unique purpose for each social media platform. The aim being to increase social media engagement by at least 50% across the board. As Believe's target audience appears to be record labels primarily and their artists secondarily, the demographic we are trying to appeal to is likely 23-43 years of age, both males and females, city dwelling, and tech savvy. Accordingly, I opted to focus on growing Believe UK's Twitter, Instagram and YouTube accounts. The targets I set for the first six months were: an increase of 2000 Instagram followers, 1000 Twitter followers, 5000 YouTube subscribers and 1000 Spotify followers. Admittedly, these are ambitious targets, but in accordance with OKR goal setting, if 65% of the target is achieved then the campaign will be considered a success.

The proposed campaign for Believe UK comprises two complementary elements - an employee training programme and a brand awareness campaign. In order for Believe's employees to provide optimal support to clients they need to be knowledgeable of their own technology and developing technologies, including: NFTs, A.I. and the metaverse. Employees will attend a series of workshops and lectures in order to achieve this understanding. Subsequently, employees will host their own workshops as part of a monthly events calendar for existing and prospective clients. In conjunction with social media and an events calendar, a monthly newsletter and weekly blog posts will help to raise brand awareness among the target market and incite further self-promotion opportunities.

Fundamentally, the learning campaign feeds into the brand awareness campaign. By upskilling its employees and having them cascade the learned

information through workshops and tutorials, Believe will build a reputation as the most innovative business in its field. Said events will also bring in new and future revenue from Believe's TuneCore clientele. By relaying varied "taster" skills and solutions sessions, Believe will be able to create a sense of customer goodwill, converting TuneCore's larger artists to their bespoke services. The proposed "We Believe" programme is another way to raise brand awareness. This initiative is a competition open to artists from marginalised and underrepresented backgrounds to win a funded campaign worth £5000. If a success, with ROI being observed through received positive press, this programme would become a yearly venture. "We Believe" is an opportunity for Believe to inhabit its values, prove their commitment to a fairer music industry, and provide a platform for artists who may otherwise go undiscovered.

If this brand awareness campaign is successful, clients will soon regard Believe as *the* place to learn about new technologies. Believe's brand perception will be evidenced through conduction of a brand awareness survey prior and post rebrand. Marketing activities will also be subject to regular review, adjustment and deployment in line with The Deming Cycle. **(see: Figure 5)**

Ultimately, this rebrand and campaign will help to cement Believe UK's vision. The new brand identity clearly demonstrates a business that has longevity in the music industry by being ahead of the curve. As a result of my efforts, Believe's reputation will not just be "a leading digital distributor and artist services company" (Believe Music UK, n.d.), but a company that is pioneering the music industry's future through technology. Believe will lead and set new trends where others will simply follow.

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Figure 1 (Tschmuck, 2016, p. 15)

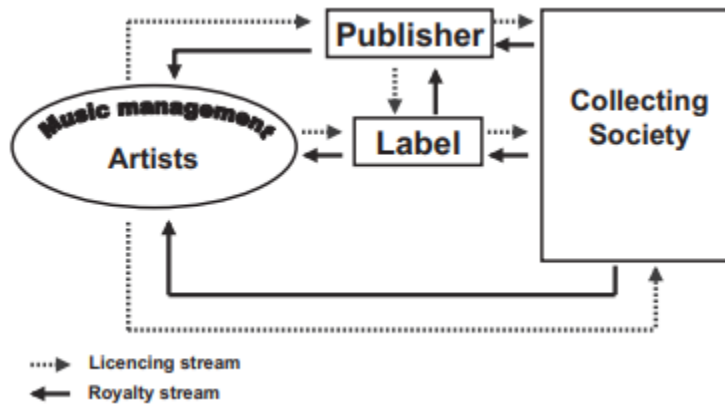


Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

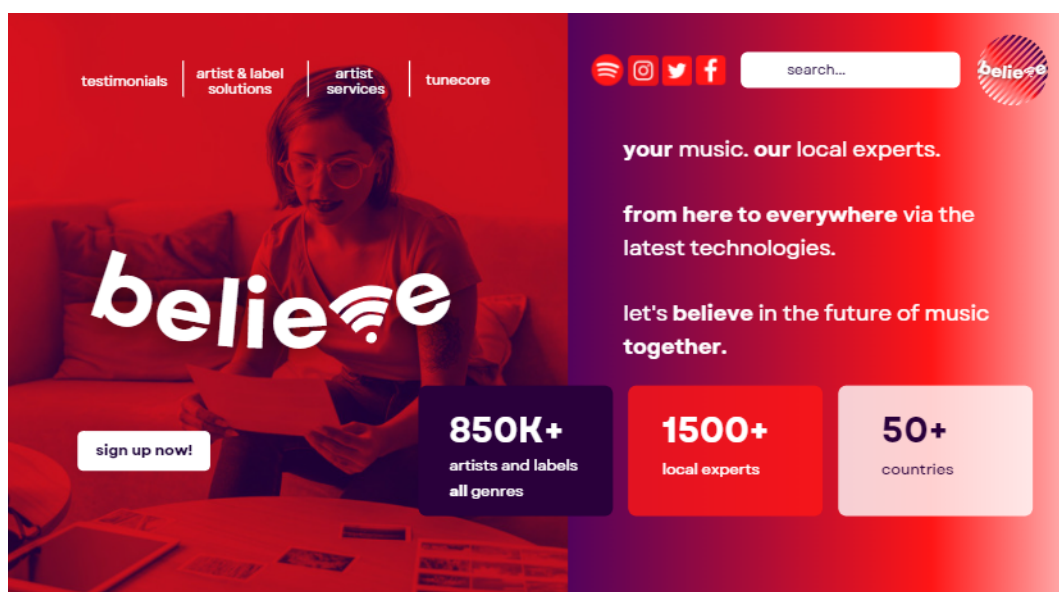
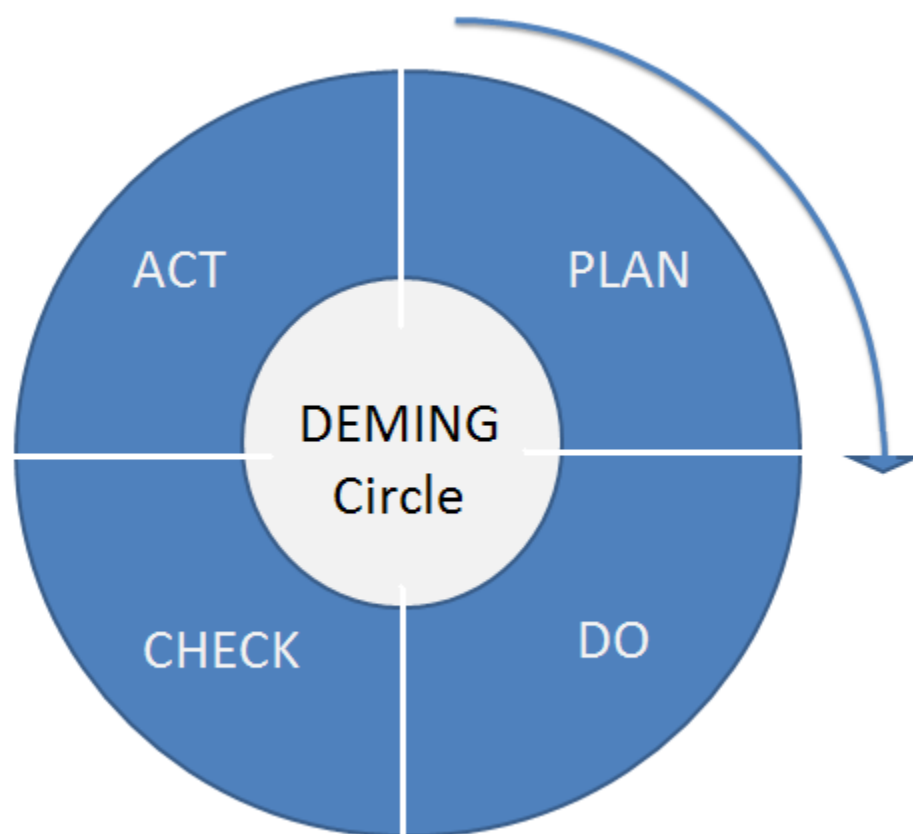


Figure 5



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