

**A REFLECTIVE SUMMARY OF
A DIGITAL SINGLE RELEASE CAMPAIGN**

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1. Introduction

When it comes to releasing music in the digital era, the planning and execution of a comprehensive release campaign is instrumental to the success of the release. Artists and record labels cannot afford to dismiss the importance of carefully planning each part of the process, or they potentially face losing out to competition in what is already a very competitive environment.

This reflective summary will look into my roles within the planning of a digital single release campaign. The campaign was overseen by four group members, Charles Rockall who managed finances and budgeting, Rory Grant-Wood was in-charge of video production, I oversaw A&R, music production, artwork and split the marketing duties with Fergus Brooman, who also prepared the electronic press-kit with Charles.

With so many different factors affecting a commercial single release, how does a team plan to make the release a success?

2. Music

2.1 Original single

When creating the original single, my role was to be the producer, co-writer and A&R. As an A&R I explored the music market to see if there was a particular area that stood out as having opportunity before drafting concepts for the single. Using SocialBlade (SocialBlade.com) to analyse the social media profiles of many different artists, I noticed it was the artists that had younger demographics that were receiving the best engagement from fans, most of which were pop artists with a main demographic between 14-21. From there I researched the most popular genres of music for younger ages, in 2018 52% of 16-19 year olds' favourite music was pop (Statista, 2018). Finally I

analysed pop from a musical perspective so I knew how the single needed to sound sonically, which I did by listening to the most followed pop playlists on Spotify and referencing them against Chartmetric.

The track was co-written by myself and Phoenix, Arizona based singer-songwriter Nino Lucarelli, who performed and engineered the vocal. We wrote 7 initial demos for project in London, United Kingdom as Nino was travelling close-by for a business trip, we then finished Keep Me Young over the internet as Nino lives in America. It was a good experience making the song as we treated the process as more of a business strategy rather than a creative process by doing everything backed by data, which put us in a strong position from the start and it is becoming more relevant within the music industry to work like this (Hu, 2018). However, collaborating with Nino overseas made the creative process more difficult as we had to use video calling for studio sessions which does not allow for the same working environment as being in the studio in-person does. I will need to familiarize myself with doing this because as technology progresses further, studio sessions will be done remotely, so working over video call will become common practice for me, we should have also used a productivity platform such as Monday.com to create a schedule for better organisation which would have resulted in a more efficient creative process. I am happy with the song overall but I believe it could have been a much stronger single with better organisation. Working on this project did change the way I view creating songs from both the perspective of a producer and an A&R, in the future I will analyse data before starting the creative process as I believe this increases the chance of creating a successful product.

As an alternative, I could have decided to create a house/club single as this is the area of the industry where Nino and I have the most experience. Doing so may have resulted in a higher quality of song due to our expertise, but it is unlikely the track would have been as commercially viable due to the decline in popularity of house music as a genre. In 2018 Electronic Dance Music's share of the market fell to 3%, which was the lowest it

had been for 5 years (IMS, cited in King, 2019). As an A&R I could have decided to hire more songwriters to collaborate on the song, in 2018 it took an average of 6 songwriters to make a hit record, so having more songwriters may have increased the chances of the release being successful (Owsinski, 2019).

2.2 Remix

I wanted the remix to help push the single to a wider audience who might not have heard the single in its original style, and increase playlisting response on streaming platforms due to the remix being a different genre, all with the hope that this would bring traction back to the single once the campaign results had peaked. When planning the remix I took a similar approach as I did when planning the original, my research found that deep house and techno genres are becoming more popular in clubs, especially in America, and so if I wanted DJs to play-out the song it made sense for the remix to be in an in-demand genre (Hricik, 2018). Ideally I would have preferred for the remix to have adopted styles from tropical house as it was due for release is summertime, however, if we wanted the remix to be played by DJs it needed to be a genre that worked in the club. Producing the remix did take up valuable time that could have been better spent on the marketing campaign, in hindsight it would have been better to consult with the finance and budgeting team to look into the possibility of commissioning an external producer to produce the remix. Doing this would have also opened up the possibility of having a more established artist with a larger fan base producing the remix, which may have helped with the promotion (Yia and Jiang, 2019). If I was to oversee the planning of a remix in the future, I would look outside of just making a club version of the original. In recent years Latin genres such as reggaeton have increased massively in popularity, crossing over into pop with 19 entries in the Billboard Hot 100 in 2017, up from just 4 in 2016 (Leight, 2018). Latin remixes are becoming very popular too, one notable success is the remix of Despacito reached number 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 in 2017 (Barkho, 2019). It would be a good idea to commission a latin remix, as

doing this may open up marketing opportunities in Spanish speaking territories, a demographic that the English version may not have been able to grow in.

3. Marketing

3.1 Playlist Campaign

As streaming has become the most popular way of consuming music, making up 80% of the total revenue for the music industry in 2019, it is incredibly important to make sure a release is marketed on DSPs (RIAA, 2019). I decided to run a playlist campaign via PlaylistPush, who would pitch the single to their network of independent curators on Spotify. There are two main benefits of doing this, firstly, if many curators add the track to their playlists this will result in a large spike in streams as well as wide audience reach. Secondly, this will show to the Spotify team that people are adding the song to their own playlists and are therefore enjoying the song. As Spotify is first and foremost a technology company, they curate their own editorial playlists mostly from reviewing data such as playlist adds, skip-rates and the duration of the song played, not the personal taste of the editor. So, by multiple independent curators adding the song to their Spotify playlists via PlaylistPush, this data should show Spotify that users are enjoying the song and may result in Spotify adding the track to their own, larger editorial playlists which hold huge influence and can break a hit record (Voogt et al., 2019). Whilst it could have been possible for me to extract email addresses from usernames on Spotify and then cold pitch the song to the independent playlist owners, this would have been very time consuming and results may have been poor. The campaign with PlaylistPush would have cost around £500 which I estimate to have generated around 200,000 streams over 6 months. Spotify reports paying an average stream royalty amount of £0.0065 which would have generated total revenue of £1300, thus being a good investment (Sehgal, 2018).

From planning the playlist campaign I learned how technology has removed the barrier to entry, how important it is to stay on top of current marketing strategies, and that just because there is a free alternative to something doesn't mean it will get better results (Middleton, 2015). I should not be afraid of investing money into something if there is a good plan, backed by data for how it should bring a good return on investment. I could have spent the same amount of money on a radio campaign, however this would have been very difficult to do successfully as COOL KICKS are a new artist project without a fan base, and radio stations are looking for songs from established artists. Also, Keep Me Young was aimed at a younger demographic so it would not have made sense to pitch to radio as the amount of younger people consuming music via radio is very low when compared to streaming (McIntyre, 2016). In the future I will ask for a higher budget for playlist campaigns as I believe they have the highest possibility of a good return on investment out of all marketing strategies, especially when running campaigns for pop music.

3.2 Online Marketing

I oversaw the online marketing segment of the campaign together with Fergus, we decided to focus our efforts on pushing the single on Instagram. As part of the strategy, we drafted a content schedule which listed the type of content we would post and the date of when it would be posted. As for promotion, we had a budget of £250 per month to spend on Instagram advertisements, which would consist of using the chorus of the lyric video and a link to the song on streaming platforms. COOL KICKS also had contacts with medium sized influencers and DJs who agreed to post the single on their stories. Personally I felt that our strategy for online marketing was weak as it was not backed by much research, it ultimately felt like we were spending money with a very probable low return on investment. However, it was necessary to invest money in attempting to grow the artist's social media following as having a large online following could have helped in getting better opportunities in the future, such as brand deals

which can be very lucrative (Forsey, 2019). From planning an Instagram campaign I learned that advertising on Instagram does not necessarily result in generating traffic to streaming platforms (New Artist Model, 2019). Instagram would have been a good option for advertising if COOL KICKS had released previous songs and had been active on Instagram for a while with a long list of back-catalog content that potential fans could view. If this had been the case we could have converted more viewers of the advert into followers, who may have then engaged with the track when it was released. Upon reflection, it may have been better to have advertised on TikTok, as the platform is completely designed around content that uses music. TikTok has been responsible for breaking streaming hits such as Cradles by Sub Urban, which now has over 100 million streams on Spotify. On top of that, TikTok's main demographic is made up of younger people in their teens, which is the same age we were aiming the single at. The organic reach on TikTok is also fantastic making it much easier for a video to go viral (Sachs, 2019).

4. Conclusion

Working on this campaign made me realise the importance of research and development within the music industry and how applying findings from data plays a crucial role in the success of a campaign. It is clear to see from the cases, that as we progress further into the digital age, the music industry is going to be driven more and more by data. Data has already started to change the way record labels operate, such as A&R, which used to be an entirely creative processes. Going forward, music companies will have to adapt to new marketing techniques by implementing more technology driven strategies into their campaigns, failing to do so will result in the company falling behind the competition.

From a personal perspective, working on this campaign has helped me to adjust my attitude to the way I view change. I am no longer put off by the idea of change, and now

understand that change is a crucial part of life that is necessary in order to evolve and grow both as a businessperson and an individual. Working on the campaign also helped me with operating in a team environment. I learned how to delegate tasks to others whose strengths are better suited to the task, and how to embrace criticism I receive from others by using it to help make my work better.

In the future I will definitely prioritise organisation and communication when collaborating to help maximise efficiency, as when working on the team elements of the campaign it did make me realise that the process could have been done faster and to a higher standard if better organisation protocol was put in place.

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