

Write a 2,500 word reflective summary which explains your portfolio and reflects on the impact of new technologies on the music industry.

In this reflective summary of the group assignment, I will demonstrate my involvement in the tasks and provide an critical analysis of how our group tackled the assignment, providing a overview of the process and how I would tackle these same tasks differently; from the initiation stage with how tasks were assigned of tasks through to final elements of the plan including the finalising budgets and financing. Throughout, I will draw upon new technologies which have impacted the music industry in all areas, from recording through to connecting with fans.

In our first meeting as a team, like all consecutive meetings, took place on Google Meets. This enabled the group, who are based across the UK and one member in Austria, to be able to connect instantly and regularly. Our first meeting was an opportunity to discuss which artist to approach for the assignment, and we agreed to reach out to another Tileyard student of the Music Production course. After an initial agreement from the student artist she unfortunately stopped responding to our messages, so the group made a decision to reach out to other artists instead. This setback delayed the process by a few weeks, so we were under some time pressure to get another artist on board. Each of us then put forward artists we know from our own network, outside of Tileyard, and put our preference to a vote; with the majority voting for Maia Onda.

Maia is an artist based in Austria, this opened up potential factors we needed to consider such as her key markets and what her reach is in the UK. Maia being based in Austria didn't strike as an issue to us, as we know the power of the connected digital world enables artists to connect to fans around the world instantly. One notable Austrian artist who has been successful on an international level in recent years is Mavi Phoenix. His success is a combination of pure talent, a strong visual identity and a powerful story to tell (Boyd, 2020). To build on this, Ari Herstand puts it, "whether you like it or not, your story is just as important as your music". (2023, p. 30). As long as we build a compelling story for the release which is relatable on a mass scale, we are on the right path to success. With the chosen single for the release plan, 'Echoes', having a strong theme around suffering with mental health, we agreed to coincide the release date with World Mental Health Awareness Day. This day falls on Tuesday 10th October 2023, so keeping in mind the traditional release day for music being a Friday to give popular artists the best

chance for maximum chart impact (Skelton, 2018) we opted for a release date of Friday 13th October 2023.

We digested the assignment criteria and discussed how to divide the tasks up amongst each member. We used this as an opportunity to give a brief overview of our personal skills and professional goals; my experience being from a Media Partnerships background and professional goal to be an Artist Manager. This is a correct approach to assigning appropriate tasks to each member, as this ensures our skill sets are matched. As Stojanovic (2023) describes, there are four different ways to assign tasks; based on priority, availability, skill level and preference. All four of the factors should have been considered when our group distributed these tasks, as in reflection we mostly assigned by preference, followed by skill level, and we had not considered the other two factors which are equally as important.

Tasks were distributed on an individual level, rather on a holistic approach. For example, Kirsten took on the Artwork / Iconography assets as she has had previous experience in this during her Event jobs, whilst I took on the Music Video as Video Production was my dissertation for my BA (Hons). This in turn resulted in very different visual concepts for the Artwork versus the Music Video. In the digital age, strong visual branding for an artist is important now more than ever. As Interscope Records' Maria Ramirez describes, "new talent is seen" (2019), elaborating that artists are seen on Instagram feeds, thumbnails, homepages and so on. With this in mind, it is essential to have a role focussed solely on the creative direction, and ensuring the branding was strong and consistent throughout all channels and assets.

In reflection, it would have been best to divide the group in the following roles from the initial stage:

- Marketing and Communications Director: leading on owned, earned and paid marketing strategies, informing best practises and technologies for promotion, EPK, press releases → Elle
- Creative Director: leading on creative briefs and concepts for artwork, moodboard, video, photography and iconography) → Kirsten
- Manager / Business Director: lead A&R for the artist and remix artist, budgeting, sourcing a distributor, organising metadata, fundraising, timeline projecting → Anya

- Experience Director: all tasks around artist-to-fan relationships such as event planning, merchandising, touring, live experiences and more → Emma

This would allow each member to delve deep into each sector, and avoid moments of uncertainty on what tasks to complete next.

In the assignment, my tasks covered multiple areas across creative, marketing and business:

- Leading on paid and earned media strategy, with appropriate KPIs based on budget
- Music Video
- Creating the EPK
- Drawing a budgeting plan for income and expenses
- Release plan overview and timeline
- A&R with remix producer
- Organising metadata
- Recommending the distribution strategy

As a result of not having clear and defined roles in the group, many of these tasks were added on over time rather than at the beginning of the process. Going back to Stojanovic's points around assigning tasks, we should have considered priority of the workload and availability of the team members as both of these were contributing factors to inefficiency.

One of my largest responsibilities in the group was the paid and earned media strategy for the release. Whilst many major artists will have the opportunity to have their marketing paid for by a record company on a non-recoupable basis (Harrison, 2021), the majority of independent artists will have to make the decision whether to take on marketing themselves or outsource to a company. There's a wealth of services available to independent artists on how to market their music, particularly in the digital and social world, some of those companies being Genera Studios (2023), Blinding Talent (2023) and Noiselash (2023). These companies offer excellent services to help artists with their marketing, and essentially enable them to keep doing what they do best - making music. As part of the group assignment for Maia's release, we decided to keep all paid digital marketing in-house given our collective knowledge and experience into marketing. The overall goal was to maximise streams and downloads on release day, and in order to achieve this it was essential to break down the different goals and KPIs. By following

the marketing technique of funnel marketing (Sprout Social, n.d.), our first goal is to drive awareness of the single prior to launch. This is for targeting new listeners, but also existing fans who are not aware of the release date; we want everyone relevant to know the single is coming out and to build anticipation. Secondly, is to drive consideration by retargeting previously engaged users and offering a reason for them to buy. And lastly, is to drive conversions by encouraging potential new listeners and existing fans to click through to stream or purchase. Whilst these steps had been laid out in the marketing plan there are some areas we could improve on to help drive further consideration, which in reflection we could have included more at this stage. One way we could have achieved this is through free giveaways, whether in the form of a free download or merch, in exchange for an email address. As Wilnau (n.d.) describes: “You earned the trust of a loyal fan because you provided them with insane value for absolutely free—first. The more they like you and your music, the more willing they were to go down the “funnel” and buy your E.P”. As already described in this summary, marketing music is much more just about the song itself, so innovative methods are essential to maximise the success of the release campaign and ultimately gain new fans.

With technology continuing to evolve as the world enters the age of Machine Learning, this opens up exciting new technologies which can help artists to promote their music. WMR Music Group are investing in advanced AI and Machine Learning to determine where artists’ biggest fans are and target future fans with the same tastes (WMR Music Group, 2022). This essentially eliminates ‘guess-work’, which is what many traditional marketing strategies offers. By investing into data and learning everything about listeners on a granular level, artists can be smarter with how they are spending marketing budgets.

Whilst AI and Machine Learning is enabling budgets to be spent in cleverer ways, the role of traditional marketing channels are still hugely valuable. However, there is a question mark over the role of agencies and whether their fees are valid, when there is no guarantee that their contacts will agree to promote a release. As Herstand (2023 p. 81-82) explains, if a publicist is well known and respected, then they will get a reply. But if they are not, then they are still charging the artist for their service either way. Companies such as Groover and MICCO were put forward for the release of Maia’s single to ensure we’re still aiming to be featured across different media outlets, but at a much smaller cost compared to what a PR agency would charge. Groover (2023) offers a cost-per-contact business model and MICCO (2023) offers a small monthly subscription of less than £10 per month. Whilst this option will take time and

resources to personalise emails and messages to each media outlet, it is very valuable for the artist on a tighter budget.

I was also responsible for getting together the Music Video asset, which I opted for a lyrics video concept. Lyrics videos have proven to be hugely popular, with CeeLo Green's lyric video for F*uck You uploaded onto YouTube amassing 11 million plays independently (O'Keeffe, 2014). There have been instances where fan-made lyrics videos have racked up an enormous amount of views than the original artist's own music videos, taking Taylor Swift - Enchanted as an example with the unofficial lyrics video by Taj Tracks amassing 24M views (YouTube, 2022). This is a type of music video all artists need to plan into their release schedule, alongside the higher production of an official music video featuring a performance or narrative.

For future releases, I would also consider expanding music videos to the TikTok audience, exploring sped-up music videos, or more commonly known in the TikTok world as 'Nightcore', named after the Norwegian producers (George, 2022). This also opens up an innovative opportunity to partner with a well known remixer on TikTok, helping the release to organically grow further on social. These types of music videos are a reflection of where media consumption is today and that living a fast-paced life is the norm, particularly for younger generations, according to Tree: "the current state of living in a digital society, with the advent of social media and online dating, is that we're all quickly swiping to see what's better" (as cited in Campbell, 2023). However, as Billboard highlights (Leight & Bain 2022) there are copyright and intellectual property issues that arise as these types of music videos when rising artists remix songs with uncleared samples, using the Southstar and Robin Schulz battle as a reference. To consider 'Nightcore' music videos on TikTok, it would be advisable to properly research which remixer to partner with and to ensure all samples are cleared, if there are any in the track.

The final area I will focus my reflective summary on is the distribution strategy we agreed on, which was using DistroKid's services. DistroKid offer a fantastic service where artists keep 100% of their royalties, and DistroKid only charge a small fee of \$20 per year. Companies such as Music Gateway (2023) offer a more integrated service to artists which include sync licensing. Sync licensing has the potential to be a steady and lucrative revenue stream for artists, but as Price (2023) describes it can be a complicated avenue to explore if an artist is unsure: "you really need to break out of your own musical comfort zone, and try working in different genres, or moods you've previously not delved into. It stands to reason that the more tracks you have

out there, the higher the likelihood that they will be used.” Without the right guidance, artists are not likely to be successful in sync opportunities. Music Gateway make this process simple, and different sync placement revenue splits depending on the subscription tier. For all pop songs, I consider a sync placement strategy in order to maximise the potential reach and revenue of the track.

Whilst this is a tried and tested way of distributing music, it is worth exploring other areas to maximise revenue

Whilst I’m proud of the release plan we got together, despite internal and external challenges which I will delved into the summary, there are certainly areas which can be improved on for next time I work in a group, ranging from project and task management techniques through to embracing newer technologies and trends across marketing and promotion. Whilst some reflections would have potential to be successful for a pop artist such as Maia Onda, taking the ‘Nightcore’ TikTok trend as an example, these techniques would not work for every type of artist. As a manager for a rock band, they would benefit more from other ideas discussed such as driving consideration through free giveaways or exclusive content. This is purely because it suits them as a brand image, which ultimately needs to be authentic to the artist in order to be successful (Ditto Music, 2019). There are no set rules or playbook to refer to when it comes to a release plan for a single; as Amy Madrigall says (as cited in Herstand, 2023, p. 36) “we play in a game with no rules. Just because it worked one way for someone doesn’t mean it’s going to work that way for you. Figure out what’s going to work for you”. Although it can be hugely challenging, it is extremely liberating that independent artists and their teams have the opportunity to experiment with their release plans and find a process that works for them.

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