

Name: Karl Gordon, 1906316

Module: Creative Music Management

Assignment Title: Reflective Essay

Lecturer: Harry Leckstein

Introduction

My reflection on the group portfolio assignment is mainly on the many roles I felt I played and the team dynamics. My official position was as a Creative Director, although I also saw myself as the client and as a team leader. This impacted my motivation and sense of responsibility to get the portfolio and release strategy right. Our communication is another aspect I reflect upon when I consider the assignment experience. It undoubtedly felt challenging at times, especially as a team member abandoned the project after a couple of weeks. In addition to roles and team dynamics, I have reflected on the advancement of digital technologies and how this has impacted the process of recording, obtaining artwork and the way we promote the single. The journey has created several learnings for me to process and I plan to take these learnings to other group assignments and my professional career.

The role I played

The role I played - Creative Director

On finally reading the group assignment criteria, the part that immediately grabbed my attention was 'creating an original single of commercial music and its remix'. After our initial meeting via Zoom, we had a second meeting to discuss our strengths and weaknesses and who would be best suited for each role in building the campaign. I opted for 'Creative Director', Sharon and Rohan took on the shared roles of 'PR and Marketing', and Thando chose to be 'Head of Finance'. I would oversee the 'creation of assets' including song choice, mixing, mastering, and remixing the single while consulting with the group and liaising with artist management. Sharon and Rohan would devise a PR and marketing strategy including the EPK & social media campaign and Thando would deal with the budgets and help with marketing. Everybody was welcome to chip in freely where they felt they could contribute with ideas.

I chose the role of Creative Director because it played to my strengths. This role is firmly in my comfort zone, as I regularly prepare and oversee these types of assets in my career. In hindsight, choosing this role may have come at the cost of developing new skills. Upon reflection, I realise to improve on my weaknesses I have to learn more about the industry's business side, such as marketing, PR, legal, and finances, and remind myself that this is the main reason I have chosen the MA Music Business course. To challenge me further in future group assignments, I will make a conscious effort to be a bit more experimental with my choice of roles, rather than be anxious about roles I know less about. I can take confidence in my ability to learn, which I have proved to myself this semester.

The role I played - Client

In addition to my official role as Creative Director, I also feel I had a secondary role as an implicit client, as the artist we chose to work with was from my label. Before joining the group, the three other members of 'Purple Rain' already had an artist they were considering for the portfolio. On our first introduction via Zoom, I tried to gauge how far they had got with their ideas, and if the roles within the group had already been delegated. It didn't strike me that they had a solid plan in place, so I suggested another route. I had an artist who I had been developing over several years, signed to my label. We were in the process of looking for a new single to release and had funding for a video. It was a no-brainer as far as I was concerned and lined up perfectly with the assignment criteria and timing. On reflection, I wondered if I may have come across as bullish by coming late to the party and suggesting a completely new route. This made me reach out to the group to gauge if everybody was happy to go with my artist, and on our second zoom call, it was agreed that my suggestion was the best option and an exciting prospect.

As I had a vested interest in this assignment going well, I hoped for the best product and research we could produce to have a real-life positive impact for the artist and her single - for me, it was about more than just getting a good grade. From this perspective, I feel that my level of motivation was higher than the rest of the team. It may have also influenced my confidence in my role as Creative Director, as I already had a relationship with the artist and her manager. In contrast, my team members had to build an understanding of the music and the direction of the song through a series of meetings with the client over the project duration. Therefore, having chosen my artist for the assignment also made me an implicit client and enhanced my ability to work effectively on the project.

The role I played -Team Leader

Being the Creative Director and client may also explain why I took a more active role in leading the team. I tried to motivate the team and get everyone excited for the project, as a leader might be expected to do, and while I can see why the group may not have had the same levels of enthusiasm as me, it did feel as though we needed someone to take charge.

Communication in teams

A challenge to the project was team dynamics, and I was often frustrated by the lack of communication. Research has shown communication is a crucial component to teams completing tasks successfully (Bass, 2018), however, I found initially that it was only myself and Sharon who were sending progress reports often. I expected that we should, as a team, be meeting every few days, staying in regular contact for updates and progress reports, which in hindsight may not have been in line with other group member's lifestyles and outside commitments. There were many occasions where Sharon was the only person who I could get a response from on the WhatsApp group. Sharon and I, at several points along the journey, privately discussed our concerns. To try and combat our worry I had expressed in team meetings that we should meet every few days, that I am always available and would make myself accessible over Christmas and New Year. Maybe this was communicated too late. In future group assignments, we could benefit from agreeing at the outset the timing of meetings and agree on our expectations and the regularity of communication to avoid the angst that accompanied this journey.

The impact of digital technology on the development of teams

Another aspect that may have impacted our teamwork was our reliance on technology to communicate. There are several benefits to face-to-face meetings, especially when forming as a team initially, and this is supported by research, which reports virtual teams to take longer to build trust than face-to-face teams due to reduced opportunity to share social information (Wilson, Straus, & McEvily, 2006 cited in Costa et al. 2017). We did intend to meet up at the initial stages, however, due to the current pandemic circumstances, all our meetings were conducted virtually and this may have had an impact on our ability to collaborate as effectively as we may have if I had the opportunity to meet the team in person. I think some in-person interactions may have fostered team spirit, and the team could have met the artist in the flesh rather than on a computer screen.

The impact of digital technology on the creation process

The advancement of digital technologies on the creation of original popular music has given us the tools and lowered resources required to achieve a record release. This is in stark comparison to when I first got into the music industry in the late '80s. At that time 'most would-be artists wanted to be signed to a record label because it meant getting access to a professional recording studio, its international distribution system' (Wikström, 2013), and a dedicated PR and marketing department.

The impact of digital technology on the creation process - Recording

Technology has made recording tools smaller and more affordable, changing the shape of the market and saturating it with thousands of producers and artists. You now only need a laptop to make music, and may not need a single musical instrument, let alone a dedicated studio space. Technology has made making music more accessible, but I wonder if it has killed creativity and lowered the value of the product in some ways. For example, I used artificial intelligence to master this record, and while it is not my preference, it was necessary to reduce my time and expenditure. With the way music is consumed today, the aim is to produce a lot of content, as cheaply as possible so that streams can accumulate across many platforms. Daniel Ek, Spotify's CEO, is quoted as saying 'artists can no longer record music once every three to four years and think that's enough, it's about putting the work in and keeping a continuous dialogue with the fans' (Schatz, 2020). It is clear that Ek has never made an album, but this cultural change has also impacted the value of the recording process.

The impact of digital technology on the creation process - Visuals and imagery

Digital technology has also simplified and made the creation of branding and imagery much more affordable for artists. Whilst we opted for a professional photo shoot for this single, everybody has a smartphone with an integrated camera with excellent tools and effects for touching up images. I have used a photo taken on an iPhone as artwork for a single and used an app to create the imagery in the recent past. These advancements have also lowered the costs of obtaining professional photoshoots. At the same time, I think artwork does not have the same value attached to it as it did with vinyl and CDs, where the item was treasured. On streaming platforms, the artwork is something small that the listener takes less notice of.

The impact of digital technology on the creation process - Promotion

With 40,000 tracks daily being uploaded to Spotify alone (Ingham, 2019), a robust marketing and PR strategy is vital for a song to stand out. Technology has enabled artists to be able to self-promote on several platforms and without a lot of money to promote this record, it is the most cost-effective way to promote the song. The artist has a good following on Instagram and a decent monthly listenership on Spotify, and

consequently, these are two platforms to target for engagement with her fans. The social media calendar we have provided to her is comprehensive, and various posts are suggested to help develop a relationship with her audience and grow her fanbase. I have tried to use Facebook and Instagram ads in the past, but they had little effect, thousands of views, but very little actual engagement to be honest. Today's consumer is bombarded with so much information that all posts are fighting for their attention in the information age. There is a definite skill to master the art of self-promotion and algorithms and if you know how to use these properly, they can be very useful. In this respect, with additional time, I have identified this as an area for my additional development and would like to think further on the marketing and PR strategy. The portfolio has highlighted the importance of a well-considered release strategy, a component that can be overlooked by many unsigned artists.

Conclusion

In summary, there are many roles I have identified myself playing throughout this journey. My primary role as Creative Director has been my safe space and I endeavour to challenge myself in the future as upon reflection I have come out of the process with a desire to learn more on the components I wasn't as involved in. I have also reflected on the way our team has worked together and how this can be improved in the future. I believe establishing some key elements early around communication, the types of roles, and whether there is a need for a leader can benefit team members' expectations of how the team will work together. Digital technology has had a huge impact on our small team's ability to oversee the writing, mixing, mastering, promotion, and release of this single. I am comfortable with the technology around recording and artwork, however, I have identified promotion as a key aspect that I would like to spend more time mastering. The assignment process has shown me the strategy around release is an equally important aspect of the creation of assets.

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