

MJ Duke Campaign Analysis

This essay aims to analyse and comment on the marketing strategies used within the planning and execution of a campaign for a recording artist. As my first real-life experience of organising a campaign, the use of marketing and business management principles was advantageous in the planning and execution, as mentioned, but also in my analysis of how successful the campaign has been.

Introduction & Context

The artist in question is a 28-year-old man (he/him) named MJ Duke. I have known the artist for over 10 years. From the perspective of campaign management, that brings with it both benefits and disadvantages which will be discussed further in the essay. MJ Duke is incredibly talented, with an exceptional voice and a distinguished aptitude for songwriting. His music focuses on mental health issues as well as love and heartbreak with his fiancée being his muse for a lot of the work.

He has experienced some level of success since 2019 when he began taking his musicianship and career more seriously and at that point, he began to release music regularly. 9 releases including 8 singles and an EP had garnered him an adequate number of followers on Spotify and social media platforms. However, he stopped releasing music in 2021 for reasons I would come to understand were due to his mental health. From my perspective as a prospective marketing agent/campaign manager, it appeared he needed some assistance with kickstarting the marketing of his future projects, but I soon realised that a more hands-on approach would be necessary.

It became apparent that there was going to be a lot of work involved in bringing the artist's level of marketing to a basic functional level. Conversations between myself and the artist revealed his aversion to social media which he also assumed played the majority role in any potential marketing ventures we may engage in. It is important to note that this became the focal reason for the issues I faced in my role working with him.

Most of the work involved during my time with MJ Duke was concerned with changing his mentality surrounding marketing, motivating, reminding and organising the artist rather than the campaign itself. My desired role as a marketer in this project instead became that of an artist manager. 'The stress that comes with managing an artist is set in motion when the manager begins promoting the artist's career' (Allen 2022, p26). With MJ Duke's career requiring a revival post-hiatus, the stresses attached to this project were apparent. Allen goes on to say that artist management creates pressure for people who prefer order and

predictability. Working on the campaign given these parameters has highlighted these kinds of pressures.

I have developed an understanding of the nature of working independently or within a small agency as opposed to a large label with in-house marketing offices. While this more hands-on approach can be more difficult and pressured, it can also yield better results providing the artist is cooperative and able to ensure that their obligations to the campaign are met.

As a result of the difficulties described, a succinct and exciting campaign proposal was put forward to the artist but only a very basic one was adopted. There were suggestions of crowdfunding a vinyl release, competitions for fans with prizes of attending a studio session with the artist as well as more monetised forms of content such as Patreon. Instead, very basic principles and techniques were deployed.

Initial Actions

To have an idea as to where to take the campaign, the marketer must have an understanding of the artist. This is imperative to be aware of the existing narrative in their brand as well as to aid them in either continuing that narrative or in this case, reshaping it and building something that pushes towards their objectives.

An interview was conducted to garner this understanding. 'Interviewing is also a research process...the confirmation and collection of facts' (Beaman 2011, p13). This was particularly useful in dissecting the artist's existing narrative, providing me with information on musical and stylistic influences. I was also able to learn about his interests and values which included video games, the production of music instrumentals and his experience volunteering for Barnardo's children's charity. The interview, however, did not provide much insight into the artist's objectives. When asked what he wanted to achieve from the campaign, a blanket statement of "I just want to get more fans" was the response. I made suggestions as to whether he wanted to increase his brand awareness, engagement or drive merch sales or a combination of multiple goals. The artist objectives from the accompanying portfolio section were then agreed on. One of the most important objectives for MJ Duke was the transition from online marketing into real-life events and live shows. This is something that was a considerable motivator for him.

MJ Duke's motivation was a subject that became more important as the campaign planning and structure took shape. Recognising some symptoms of depression in the artist I conducted a test to determine how severe it was. Based on the *Burns Depression Checklist* (Burns 2002, p 20), the artist scored 57 out of 100, placing him in the severely depressed category. Further research into how depression works within individuals showed that he showed at least some amount in every one of the ten Cognitive Distortions defined by David D. Burns in his book *Feeling Good*. In particular, the distorted thought behaviour of 'all or nothing thinking' whereby the individual sees scenarios in black-and-white categories and that the only two successful outcomes from the campaign would be a successful one or a failure. This then put additional stress and pressure on the artist whose response was that of avoidance for fear of failure. This is corroborated by *Manson's Law of Avoidance* (Manson 2017, p 130) where the more something threatens your identity, the more you avoid it.

If we consider the SWOT analysis within the portfolio element of this assessment, we can see that MJ Duke has a wealth of strengths and those strengths provide the artist with a plethora of opportunities. For instance, the high budget combined with the fact that he does not have any income or time constraints. This in itself relieves the artist of pressures that most people face, let alone creatives and art-makers. However, an argument against this could be that this economic comfort gives a sense of safety and doesn't provide the artist with the drive and motivation to carry their career forward with any vast momentum. One of the SWOT analysis weaknesses I determined was the issue of his mental health and how his mood swings would determine whether or not he would be receptive to marketing ideas and plans. In some instances, a proposition of a marketing tactic would be met well but after some days of planning how to exercise the idea in practicality, a decision would be made by the artist to cancel said tactic. Naturally, this creates pressure and stress when preparation is done for it to come to nothing. However, on reflection, with a more open discussion surrounding people with depression, anxiety and other neurodiversities, artists have the opportunity to help their audience come to terms with issues such as these. By openly discussing them, the walls of stigma are broken down which can ultimately lead to more engaging content and fans who have a greater affinity with the artist.

My audit of MJ Duke's marketing techniques showed a lack of concise but continuous imagery as well as an underdeveloped tone of voice that lacked confidence. Biographies across multiple platforms were either missing or not up to date. The artist did not have a website and posted once a month at the most on his preferred social media channels, Instagram and TikTok. The campaign plan initially considered the issue of "housekeeping". We updated and ensured all bios were homogenous across platforms and then began working on a simple but effective website.

Multiple factors led to the creation of a website for the artist. First, to boost SEO rankings through written content on the site, then, to provide an opportunity for fans to sign up for a newsletter that would feature blog posts, and announcements of new releases but ultimately to gather data on the audience that MJ Duke was attracting. There are many benefits to owning a website. For instance, it makes you appear more professional, you have total control over the look and feel of it and you can match it to your brand (Robley 2015).

Marketing Strategies

The prioritised marketing strategies that were used in the campaign were as follows:

- Creating a more comprehensive branding image.
- Content creation and social media strategising.
- Understanding the existing audience insights and using that data to target fans.

I will discuss and analyse the marketing strategies here.

Image Branding

Developing an image for the artist was important to the campaign. Bobby Borg says 'The look or visual style that your company projects is also crucial in building a strong brand personality. I'm not suggesting that you adopt some outlandish or over-the-top look, but just one that remains consistent with your brand's overall vision' (Borg 2020, p81).

The visual elements, as well as the tone of voice, were considered when adopting a new brand image. Based on the influences MJ Duke mentioned during our interview, I sought to give him the visual aesthetic of a 90s Hip Hop artist, using the same style of clothing and clothing brands that were synonymous with that time. Items such as a Coogi style sweater, made famous by The Notorious BIG, and brands such as Carhartt were used in a photoshoot that I organised and took the pictures myself. A conscious decision was made to use analogue film when taking the images to try and recreate the same tones and feeling that photoshoots and promos from the 90s had.

The tone of voice was another area in which I attempted to work with the artist on. Before the campaign starting, I noticed that his rhetoric online felt formal and lacking in confidence. This possibly could have been used to his advantage, adopting the image of an introverted and emotive creative, but it was completely at odds with some of the aggressive and arrogant content in his music and the visual aesthetic of a 90s Hip Hop MC. I recognised this disparity between what the artist wanted to portray and what he was actually portraying and made a conscious effort to reduce his stress when it came to engaging with his fans. This was done by providing him with scripts for content and posts on his social media platforms.

Social Media & Content Creation

As established, MJ Duke is not a fan of social media. This is a more and more common trend as artists speak out about the increasing pressure to "go viral," with Halsey, Charli XCX and Charlie Puth all speaking out about this additional pressure (Weekman n.d.). The interview conducted revealed an interest in video games and MJ Duke informed me that he was a user of Twitch, the streaming platform. With a passion for video games and music production, I saw this as a perfect opportunity for content creation as well as expanding into a new platform that has the propensity to be monetised and gamified more easily.

The monetary aspect of this decision was one that I felt would have a considerable persuading effect on MJ Duke considering his main gripe with more conventional social media is the lack of immediate results and tangible benefits. The ways in which artists and streamers can receive revenue from using Twitch number greatly. Some include paid subscriptions, donations during streams as well as the opportunity for sponsorships once the streamer has amassed a sizeable audience as outlined in *'And Today's Top Donator is': How Live Streamers on Twitch.tv Monetize and Gamify Their Broadcasts* by Johnson and Woodcock (Johnson & Woodcock 2019).

A schedule was created where the artist would have a wide variety of streams to do. These would include typical gaming streams, music production streams where the artist would make beats and instrumentals live and in-studio streams that showcase him working with his producer on future releases. An agreement was made on the schedule, but the artist failed to keep to it. This meant that growth on the platform was stunted and became a chore for him.

Further social media content creation ideas were also planned, including the use of memes as a form of marketing. Harshit Sharma describes in her journal about meme usage in marketing, how word-of-mouth marketing used to be such an integral part of selling a product, but this is now being transformed by the sharing of memes in a more digitally savvy age (Sharma 2018).

Audience Insights and Targeting

Using Spotify for Artists and chartmetric.com was essential in diving deep into the demographics and psychographics of MJ Duke's fans. The benefit to this is as follows:

- 'Further, identify the very specific needs and wants of your most likely fans.
- Customize your marketing strategies to effectively satisfy these needs.
- Create a more powerful image in fans' minds of what you represent. And...
- Speak in a tone that resonates powerfully with them.'

(Borg 2020, p31)

We learnt that the artist had a vast sum of their audience in the 18-34 age range, and they were predominantly male. While this worked in line with our strategy to target the gaming and streaming sector, a predominantly male market, I felt as if we were losing out on a potential opportunity for success within the 28-34 female demographic as well as the younger demographic. As a result, we built buyer personas for three target groups.

First was the "Gamer Guys" group, tapping into the streaming sector. Then there were the "Engaged Gals" demographic, which saw to utilise the love and emotive content of MJ Duke's music and attract women on the cusp of marriage. The third and final persona created was "Troubled Teens" with an age range of 16-18 who may also suffer from mental health issues. MJ Duke would champion the voice of these teenagers and would create content that is helpful and supportive to them.

This strategy would look to increase the affinity between MJ Duke's fans and the artist. Seth Godin tells us how people want to be a part of a tribe, to belong to a collection of people who share the same opinions and experiences, but that they also want to be led. (Godin 2014, p 2)

Project Management Analysis

There were some project management models and skills used throughout this campaign. To name a few of them, Belbin's Team Roles, the 6 Working Geniuses and the Deming Cycle. Belbin's Team roles discuss the need for different skillsets within a team to operate effectively. People are naturally gifted in certain facets of the working world, some are labelled as "Shapers" who lead and take charge, "Co-ordinators" who organise people and objectives, "Team workers" and "Completer Finishers" who can get tasks done efficiently and effectively. There are 9 roles in total and the optimum scenario for a team is to have someone who can occupy each of those 9 roles (Belbin 2010). When you are working in a small team, in this campaign's case two people, and one of them is unmotivated and unable to take on any of those roles, it becomes the other person's duty to take them all on. This can lead to burnout and frustration.

The 6 Working Geniuses devised by Patrick Lencioni work similarly. There are the Geniuses of a) Wonder b) Invention c) Discernment d) Galvanising e) Enablement and f) Tenacity (www.thegrowthfaculty.com 2022). Lencioni states that we are given two of these geniuses, with the other 4 being divided into working competencies, where we have some level of aptitude, and working deficiencies, where we have little to no experience or understanding. In a similar vein to the 9 team roles, there was a considerable amount of compensation for a lack of work from the artist on my behalf.

'The Deming cycle is a continuous quality improvement model which consists of a logical sequence of four key stages: Plan, Do, Study, and Act' (Process Street, 2017). This process was used considerably throughout the campaign planning and attempted execution. There was a large amount of time spent planning, but the doing process failed to meet the same levels of work put into the planning. Studying this lack of work provided opportunities to see where we could apply different approaches to the acting process. When these approaches are then not heeded or put into practice it becomes a cyclical process where movement and momentum within the campaign are not achieved.

Conclusion

This campaign was my first real-life experience in project and campaign management within the music industry. To say it did not achieve the objectives I set out for it would be an understatement. Frustration and difficulties marred the process of the campaign from the moment the planning stage was completed, and the action stage began. Working with musicians is well known to be fraught with potential pitfalls and difficulties but working with musicians who are unmotivated or unable to commit to obligations within a campaign makes this additionally problematic. While the campaign was not a success, there are lessons to be learnt from every failure. What this experience has taught me is that it is imperative to be acutely aware of what state of mind the artist is in when beginning work with them. Their mental well-being is obviously of paramount importance but so is that of the marketers. With that said, the artist I will work with in the future will have to meet certain criteria that will enable campaigns to be successful.

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