

DUMMY MAGAZINE
DMY RECORDINGS
DMY EVENTS
DMY APPAREL

MA INTERNATIONAL MUSIC MARKETING

TERM 1. ESSAY

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In a world full of noises, one has to scream louder than the other voices, but not all of them scream loud enough to be heard. In other words, not all voices get exposure. Everything we learned during these past three months revolves around the idea of screaming louder.

The majority of aspiring artists follows a hard and tortuous path before gaining recognition. Even if it is the artists' responsibility to promote their work and put it out in the world, the media also have their part to play. This is why I decided to choose DUMMY as part of this assignment. My unconditional love for discovering new music, and especially artists that are yet to be signed has also guided my choice. In my opinion, their music is, although imperfect, more authentic and promising than established artists' work. It is of paramount importance to give these aspiring artists a platform and to recognise their uniqueness. Otherwise, many of them get discouraged and stop doing what they love most, and it is a shame that the industry fails to support and recognise them as legitimate artists. It is also a shame for us, music lovers, potential listeners and potential fans if we can't have access to all of them. Our music libraries would be filled with much more content.

DUMMY is a music discovery brand created in 2005 as a quarterly print magazine, that relaunched in 2009 as an online magazine, focusing on discovering new artists and mostly unsigned ones. At dummymag.com, one can also read industry news, like how the Covid-19 pandemic is impacting the music industry and its artists, articles about new releases and find specific playlists and hosts DJ mixes. The playlist "NEW HYPE" showcases new releases across all genres and all types of artists, whereas the playlist "BRAND NEW" introduces new releases from under-the-radar artists from around the globe in selected genres. These playlists and mixes are widely shared on Spotify and Soundcloud, and are sometimes curated by guests, like Jamz Supernova from BBC 1xtra.

But DUMMY is not only an online magazine, it is also a recording and publishing company with a roster of six artists. It has also elaborated a physical strategy by integrating live events to its marketing mix, with more than 50 events organised since 2011, in Los Angeles, New York City and London, inviting rising artists such as Greentea Peng, who is today renowned in the neo-soul and urban jazz genres. Part of the physical strategy, it is also important to mention that DUMMY launched its clothing brand. At the moment, there are 3 collections of which 2 capsules collections in collaboration with artists.

Being already renowned in the music discovery universe, DUMMY magazine can and has to reach a larger audience to keep existing. Its other activities represent a strength, but also contain a few malfunctions that can hinder the company's evolution as a whole.

How can the DUMMY brand become a seamless, credible and leading music discovery platform in order to meet its ambitions and create momentum?

As a first step, I will focus my analysis on a general overview of the DUMMY brand, its financial and functional components and its current branding. Then, I will suggest a new branding and an integrated marketing communication strategy composed of international and local projects that could significantly help to reach a larger audience and harmonise the company's positions.

DUMMY's main purpose is to **make discover** new artists to its audience. Its content mainly attracts people from 15 years to 30 years old as it deals with artists from specific genres that themselves attract Millennials and Gen Z. As a brand exist primarily in the mind of the consumer and can be defined by the latter, the DUMMY brand is young, for young people. For music enthusiasts, DUMMY possibly is part of their go-to media when it comes to discovering new artists. This glaring **proof of authenticity** is why the company must, by all means, maintain its unique approach. Not only is it its very essence, it is also a formula that works as the monthly audience it reaches through the online magazine, mailing list and social media pages is no less than **500.000 Millennials**. However, a lot of people do not have the time nor the energy to take this step and need someone to hold their hand and tell them where to go. We will discuss how later on. There are five core values at the very heart of DUMMY. First, there is an immense **passion** for music and a dedication to putting new talents under the spotlight. Otherwise, it would have no reason to exist. Then, a certain **consistency** and commitment to its mission can be observed, as about ten articles per week are written, content on social media is posted daily, and the playlists are updated every week. This is a crucial element for any company whose primary activity is digital-based, as regularity is key to increase an audience and a following. **Diversity** is one of the company's core values, as it has various activities, operates across different channels – the website, social media, Spotify and live events - and deals with different types of music. The **international** aspect of DUMMY is also worth noting as the company has held events in the UK and the USA in the past, and the artists showcased are from all around the world. Lastly, the **uniqueness** of the brand's approach is obvious. When most online blogs focus on writing about high-selling artists, DUMMY is one of the few to bet on small artists. These five values highly increase the chances that the brand has to be perceived as authentic and leading in its field.

But how does DUMMY **earn money** if its main activity is based on promoting small artists for free ? Well, the company has six main revenue streams. Although its mission is to promote rising artists without asking for compensation, it sometimes **publicizes** established singers at the labels' public relations department behest. This must account for 5% of the company's revenues. The **events** stream must be small, around 5%, as the ticket price for each event held last year never exceeded £10, and most of them were free. There is also the

recording and publishing activities. The two of them combined must contribute for 10% of the company's total income. I made this estimation based on the number of streams achieved by the six artists of the DUMMY's roster. The **merchandise** revenue from DMY apparel must be around 15% as the most sold items are hoodies that cost £75 or more depending on their rareness and the collaborations they are part of.

Finally, DUMMY's largest revenue streams are **ads-based** revenue and **data selling** that account for 65% of its income. Like most digital companies, it needs to sell advertising spaces on its website to be lucrative and cost-effective. Even if it gains money from selling merch and event tickets, DUMMY's main objective is not to sell products to its consumers, but to **drive audience** to its website and social media pages so its clients ads are seen and clicked on. Among their client's are some of the biggest or richest corporations in the world, including Pepsi, Adidas and Levi's, and also big companies in the music industry such as Boiler Room, Mixcloud, Sonos, Bose... The advertising clients of DUMMY are carefully selected by the founder of the company. One can easily understand the logic behind these specific choices ; it would be better for DUMMY to only collaborate with clients from the music industry, but the company can't say no to big contracts with brands like LYNX or XBOX. In terms of **partnerships**, DUMMY has partnered with brands such as Dr Martens and Mixcloud to organise some events before and has organised events at the Ace Hotel London Shoreditch as well as at the LA and NYC venues before in exchange for advertising spaces on the website. Last year, DUMMY has also partnered with the festival STRAWBERRIES & CREEM, whose ethos is "celebrate the heritage, champion the future". It resonates well with DUMMY's DNA and this is why this partnership is smart and makes sense for both parts. Moreover, DUMMY's social media pages gather more than **200.000 followers**, with the largest figures being made via the DUMMY magazine profiles on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Partnering with DUMMY is a real windfall for any event organiser that wants to reach a broad audience. After reviewing DUMMY's activities, its purpose, its financial and organisational information, let's proceed to the branding analysis.

DUMMY's **branding** is quite simple and clean. If you refer to the portfolio, you can see that the main characteristics of the branding are black and white, bold and italic capital letters. The three branding assets used for the company's different activities create a cohesive universe as they all share the same characteristics, that could still be improved as this is all too simple and dull. It is not memorable. For a brand to make an impact and be remembered, the consumer or user needs to recognise the brand in a very short time. DUMMY must raise its **brand awareness**, which is "the degree to which people are familiar with or prefer a particular brand" (Cambridge, 2020).

This can be influenced by what the consumer knows about the brand, what he connects with and what is attitude is. Brand awareness is even more essential for creative companies that are more emotional as opposed to functional. And this is why branding is so important for DUMMY. When companies create branding strategies, some executives think mainly of the

brand identity which refers to “how a business presents itself to – and wants to be perceived by – its consumers” (Streng, 2018) and encompasses the essential features of a brand. But once the strategy is established, they forget to put themselves in the place of the consumer/user and don’t look at their **brand image**, which refers to the “perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory” (Keller, 1993). In other words, there is the brand from the company’s perception, and the brand from the consumer’s perception. It is obvious that when building branding strategies, teams have to consider the consumer or audience experience. But they can be biased, or not focus enough on it as their ideas just flow. Once the strategy is implemented, a common mistake is that they fail to step back and reflect on the outcomes of the strategy, which when done, gives a lot of insights on how the consumer reacts to the changes. From my own **user experience** of the DUMMY universe – the website and social media pages, I was at first disturbed by the simplicity of the logo, and the lack of redirections to other activities on the website. On the latter, all activities are gathered at the same place. DMY artists is a page on the magazine’s website but it only shows Corella, without any sign of the other five artists.

As part of my branding and Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) proposal, I decided to rename the activities to make the DUMMY brand stronger, more powerful than it is today. I would suggest renaming the recording activity, from “DMY artists” to “**DUMMY recordings**”, and putting a link at the top left of dummymag.com to easily navigate to a dedicated website, that would honour the roster and give it the exposure it deserves. I would repeat the same process for the “DMY apparel”, that would become “**DUMMY apparel**” and create a specific website too. The branding used would be the logos featured on the slides 20-23 of my portfolio. It is important to manage the visible brand elements consistently. This is why I decided to keep most of DUMMY’s actual branding characteristics, that is to say, the bold and italic capital letters. But I decided to add some **yellow** as colours can trigger specific parts of the brain. Yellow, for instance, refers to happiness, optimism, energy and warmth but also loyalty and creativity. This is a pretty accurate colour to represent music and a music media. A **positive brand attitude**, conveyed via elements as simple as a colour, will have an impact on a consumer’s mind as he will think of the brand with positive emotional associations.. When managing umbrella-brands – brands that have under the same name many activities (i.e Easygroup with Easyjet, Easygym, Easyhotel, Easybus) – it is important to remember that all parts must make the overall brand image stronger, not weaker. There is an idea of **synergy**, firstly introduced by Aristotle that explains that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”. As this also applies to marketing and umbrella-brands, this marketing concept is called

synergistic marketing, meaning that the brand image appears stronger when under the same concept, compared to each activity considered individually.

In my opinion, the DUMMY brand would be more cohesive with a **uniform logo** for all activities. How the consumer perceives the brand is essential. If it is not memorable, he will not want to visit the website again.

To summarise, we already saw that for DUMMY's strategy to be effective, it should be focused on increasing brand awareness through a more cohesive branding across all its activities, resulting in an over-flowing and obvious synergy. To really make turn DUMMY into the leading music discovery platform, it needs to broaden its community all around the world and bet on one of its core value: its **international vision** and audience. The team at DUMMY magazine is composed of 21 editors, which is substantial, and could be a key element for the following project. To increase DUMMY's audience, the articles must appeal to other **communities** than fans of specific music genres. For example, if an artist in Spain has a small following over there but a big following in London, it could be beneficial for the magazine to write an article about them. The HR team could also consider posting job offers on recruitment websites in France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Nordic countries and countries in Asia, Africa and Northern and Southern America to recruit volunteer editors so they can write about their latest and best discoveries from their cities across the globe. This way, DUMMY could reach various communities that would **identify** to the artists from their home countries. On the long run, and if there is enough money to do it, events could be organised once there is enough material to do a **gig**, or maybe a festival.

Earlier on, I mentioned giving more exposure to the DMY artists, now DUMMY recordings artists as part of the **local strategy**. Taking a look at the statistics on slides 6 and 7 of my portfolio, one can see that these creators could highly benefit from a showcase. This could be organised at the Two Tribes Brewery as the setting is awesome and there is no fee to book the room, and this would also give back to the community. During this event, it would be possible to sell some DUMMY apparel clothes ; the creation of 15 t-shirts per artist would be needed and if not all of the items are sold, the remaining stock could still be sold on the DUMMY apparel website. Two weeks ahead of the show, a sponsored post should be posted to promote the event with the possibility to win free tickets. It is logical to organise contests on social media because it integrates the audience to the strategy and in the meantime helps to build a relationship with the user or consumer and creates continuous two-way communication. Last but not least, the **Open Mic sessions by DUMMY** would be a regular event throughout the year, starting with a basis of three events plus a finale. The goal is to discover new talents that would have been preselected by the team through individual submissions on social media. At the end of each session, only one artist would be chosen by a jury of tastemakers and the fourth and last event of the season will see all winners of the previous sessions compete to win an **EP contract** with DUMMY recordings. A month and a half before

the first event, the social media team will have to run a sponsored campaign to find the competitors that will have to tag @DUMMYmag for their application to be reviewed. Owned campaigns through user engagement is a very good way to create viral content and raise brand awareness... And when this pandemic is over, DUMMY could consider establishing new **partnerships**, why not with the Glastonbury's Emerging talent scene for the festival's 50th edition... in 2021 ?

DUMMY is a company like no other. It owns and operates through several channels and this is what makes it complex. With four activities, it can be hard to draw parallels and make it all make sense. But with a good branding and a focus on the consumer experience, by working out all the flaws and weaknesses of the system whilst always putting the values of the brand at the centre of the strategy, DUMMY can be a leading music discovery platform locally and internationally.

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