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Portfolio Essay
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Artist Overview

Becky Black is my stage name as an independent singer songwriter. The name was first chosen when I started writing my own music at 15 for one main reason: my lyrics were already being written in English and my future goal was to reach a Worldwide audience, so the choice for an English stage name felt like the best option compared to keeping my Italian name. At the same time, majority of my favourite artists at the time had stage names and I wanted to follow on their footsteps. Overall, “Becky Black” felt like the part of me ready to be on stage.

I won my first singing competition in Italy at 17, followed by other singing and songwriting competitions where I would get into the finals or win second place. When I moved to London I won a contest with a music agency, Paradise London. The prize involved me opening their acoustic stage at one of their events held at a venue in London, “Omeara”. The venue is well known for having hosted (and hosting) quite important acts such as Freya Ridings and Anne-Marie.

The next steps in my career would include registering with the HMRC as a “sole trader” since, as an independent artist, I have to see myself as my own business. I will have to keep track of my cashflow and eventually hire an accountant. In his book “Music: The Business”, author Ann Harrison gives different advice on how to approach this; she stated that accountants generally charge a fee rather than commissions and quote an annual rate for advising their clients (Harrison, A. 2016)

but, in this instance, I'd be best to ask different companies for quotes so that I'd get the best deal for what I currently need and what I can currently spend.

With this said, the accountant is a role I won't be hiring straight away - I need to see a stable income from my music in order to consider it. For the time being, I can easily still control my finances without an external help.

- **Budget**

As a starting point for the budget for my Single release, I will use the saving from the earnings from my previous Album. The Album was released in 2018 with 10 original tracks, produced with the help of a friend of mine.

The album's revenues came in different ways:

Online Streamings - as an independent artist with a limited budget, I'm subscribed to an online distributor called DistroKid, which lets me release my music on different streaming platforms by paying an annual fee of \$35. Compared to other distributors such as CDBaby and TuneCore, it's the only one to leave 100% royalties to the artist. From the releasing of the Album (March 2018) to December of the same year, the earnings from the Album streamings came up to \$300.

Physical Copies - I got 100 CDs printed for £150, and I sold each unit at £10. In the period going from the Album release (March 2018) to December 2018, 58 units were sold, leading to a net profit of £280.

Merchandise - To stay within budget, I designed the merchandise myself and searched for the best and cheapest online merchandise printing service. The final choice fell on a website called “onlineprinters”, which made me 50 shirts for £250. Between March 2018 and December of the same year, 25 t-shirts were sold at £15 each, which gave me a net profit of £125.

Concert - To promote the album, I organised a Headliner concert in my hometown. To stay within my strict budget, I had to take care of every aspect of the organisation (renting equipment, flying musicians from the UK to Italy, finding accommodations, finding sponsors, book radio interviews and so on) which, although stressful, helped me in keeping all costs as low as possible. Each ticket for the show was sold at €5. 150 paying people attended the concert (as I’m not counting guests), for a total net profit of €750.

The overall expenses from March to December 2018 (Appendix 1) which included paying the producer, the subscription with Distrokid, printing the merchandise, the album copies, all the show expenses and so on, totalled £1,485.

On the other hand, earnings came up to £2.855, which brought the net income to £1.370.

This sum can be rounded up to £1.500 from adding current personal savings, which would make for my current budget for the next 3 months (August 2022 till the end of October 2022) for my Single release campaign.

• Artists Comparison

To refine my personal brand and music genre and to have a clearer starting point for my listeners target, I took in consideration three of my main music models: Lady Gaga, Halsey and Bishop Briggs. All of them at different levels of their careers - Lady Gaga is a global pop-star, with an average of 65 million listeners on Spotify, Halsey has a slightly smaller audience but she's still relevant in the industry with an average of 40 million listeners and Bishop Briggs follows with an average of 3 million listeners per month. (spotify.com/artist)

What these three artist have in common is their transparency when it comes to lyrics and brand. Their message is straightforward and their music is honest and rough at points, their image is shown as strong, sexy and independent women who don't take "no" for an answer and know what they want from their music. Lady Gaga's genre revolves around pop and electronic pop, Halsey's music genre falls in the pop, alternative pop and R&B while Bishop Briggs's genre is electro pop, alternative pop and indie pop. My genre therefor takes inspiration from these artists's: electronic pop, alternative pop and R&B. My brand wants to reflect a mixture of these artists's as well, by keeping the strong independent woman image with honest and straightforward lyrics on different topics: self-empowerment, women power, personal experiences from loss, heartbreak and insecurities while also writing songs on current world situations, my mood board revolving around dark, mysterious colours such as deep red, black, dark blue and gold to create contrast.

- **Market Analysis**

Mulligan (2021) noticed how, in response of the Covid Pandemic, major record labels saw market share fall from 66.5% in 2019 to 65.5% in 2020, with independent labels seeing also a 0.1 point drop although, from MIDiA global survey of independent labels, independent labels as a whole grew by 6.7% (i.e. slightly below the market), but within the sector there was a massive diversity of growth rates, with smaller and newer independent labels growing faster than the market (Appendix 2).

In 2019, independent artists were the the ones performing best in the market. In 2020, they grew by 34.1%, which led to a first time breaking in industry, ending the year on \$1.2 billion while increasing the market share by more than a whole point, up to 5.1%. This reflect how the music industry is moving towards a. New age where labels are not as important as they used to be.

Today's technologies mean a new independency for artist not signed up with a label, as it's easier for them to push their music and take full control of it at their own pace.

“Eighty-three percent of independent artists said it's important for them to retain creative control over their music, compared to 74% of label artists. Artists in both categories say they think artists have more control of their careers than ever before — and that kind of empowerment means that artists no longer see signing to a label as the road to success. Average income paints a similar picture: independent artists

earned an average of \$12,860 a year off music, and label artists earned an average of \$23,913. About three-quarters of independent artists earned less than \$10,000 a year from music, compared to 61% of label artists.” (Daniels M., 2021)

Knowing your target is one of the most important aspects for an artists for a series of different reasons: it helps with your marketing and advertising strategy, with your brand and your goal. Varbanova (2021) analyses how the audience should be the real focus of the arts marketing strategy, as “an important part of the marketing plan is to identify who the audiences are, what their main characteristic are, and what their attitudes towards the creative programming is.” (Verbanova, 2021).

• **Target Demographics and Social Media Strategy**

“Digitalisation had been revolutionising the music business since the millennium in the same way that radio did in the 1930s” (Tschmuck, P., p 203, 2017) “which has made it easier for artists to stay independent and retain majority of their royalties“ (Tschmuck, P. 206, 2017).

From my Spotify worldwide analytics (Appendix 3), the graphic shows a considerable higher percentage of male listeners, with the higher age range percentage being in the 23 to 44 age demographic (25%), followed by under 18 (13%).

With this as a starting point, it will be easier for me to create more specific advertisings for my marketing strategy. From 2018, I invested £200 between March and December of that same year. For my single release advertisings I plan to invest an overall budget of £500.

£350 will go towards Facebook adverts. My demographics will be set in UK and Italy, UK being the country I currently live in and Italy the country I'm from and where my current audience number are higher, starting from an age range between 25 and 35. The advertising will start the month before the planned release of my single, in September 2022.

I will invest £50 every week in the first 3 weeks prior to the release and £90 in the two weeks following the release. The analytics results and the engagement response from the targeted audience will help me in narrowing my advertising demographics (or change it), which will also influence my choice on how to invest the rest of the budget (£150) within the following weeks.

Social Media Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube will also be playing an important role in my marketing strategy and advertising, as they come with free tools to reach the audience and, therefor, sponsor my music and brand.

To build interest, I will take the same approach as I did for my first album release: I will create a giveaway where the first 10 people to pre-save the single will get a free limited-edition t-shirt. From my last experience with the giveaway, this will create

momentum and a higher response within the audience. I will also search for music blogs to help me sponsor the upcoming single release.

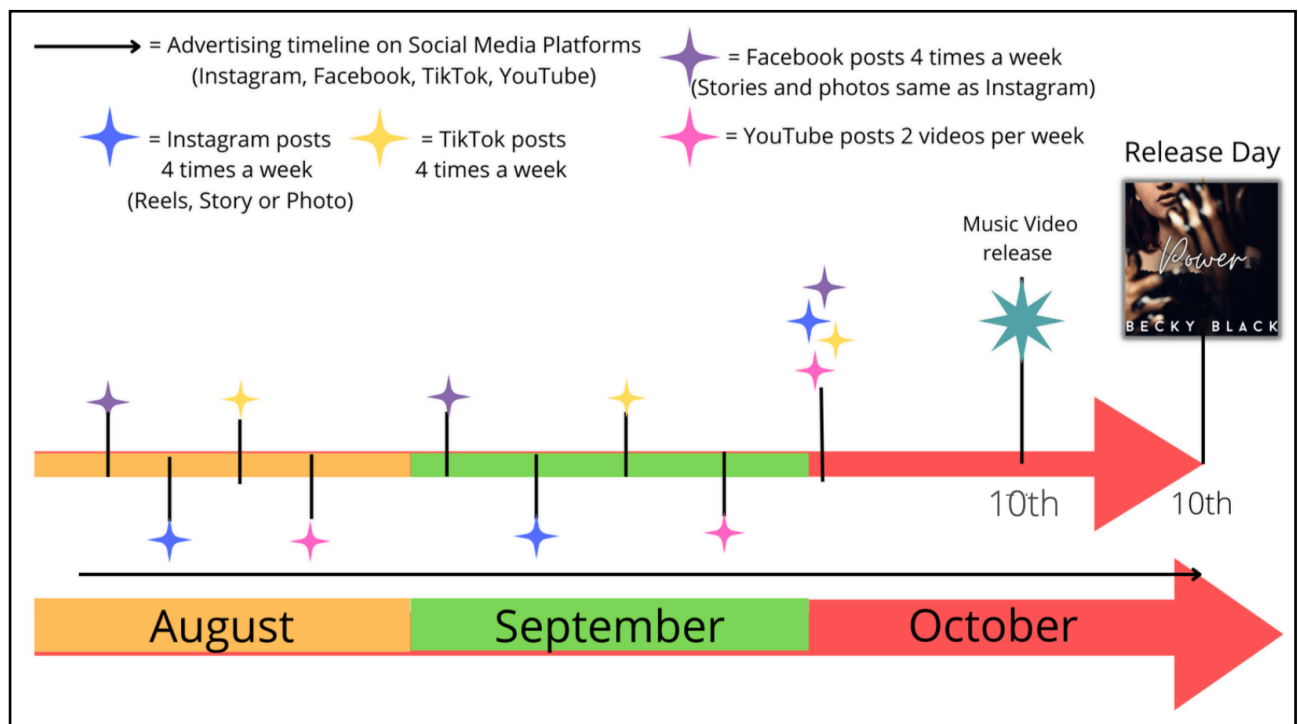
I will create organic content starting August 2022 to build back interest in my act on the different platforms, as they've been inactive for a couple of years. The approach will be to first find more opportunities at live performances, aiming at 1 gig per week, from which I will be able to use material to post on the different platforms (videos and photos), to post on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok at least 4 times a week and upload covers on Youtube at least 2 times a week, trying to keep up with the currently training songs to gain more momentum.

That way, it will be easier to build an audience while also getting ready to start advertising the Single.

I will start advertising the single in mid September, 3 weeks prior the release date, set on the 10th of October. This will start by slowly building up a momentum via the different social media platforms. Opposite to what's usually done, I will release the single's music video on the day of the release of the single.

This will give me more material to promote and work with. (1)

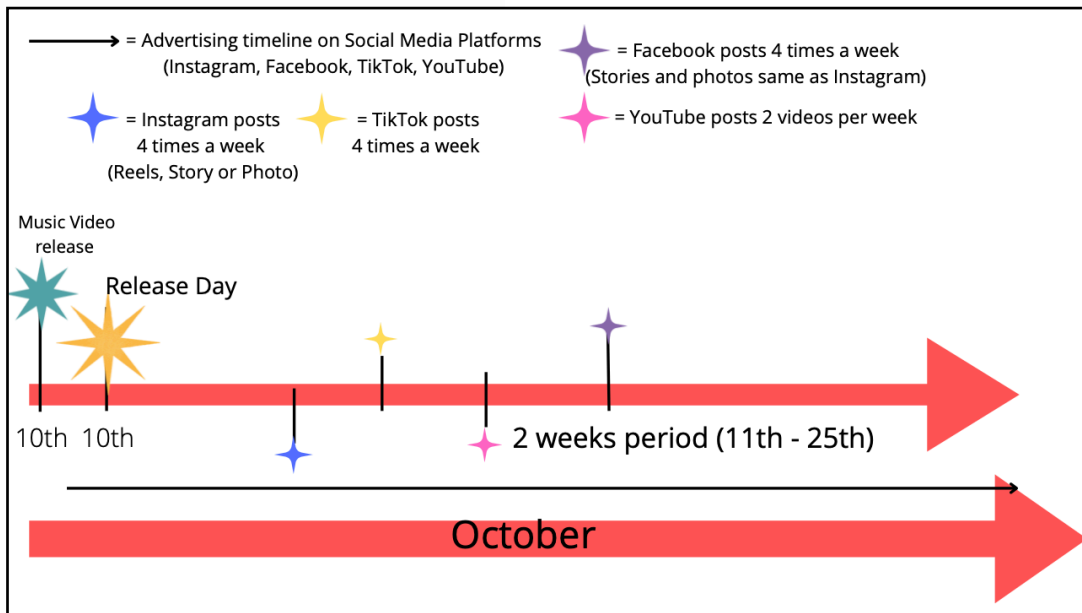
1. Social Media Strategy Timeline



The advertising will increase after the single release.

As Spotify for Artist has shown in their blog, "53% of releases peak more than 7 days after release" (fanstudy.byspotify.com) which means I will keep advertising the single for at least 2 weeks after its release. (2)

2.Social Media strategy after Release



I will need to grow my social media platforms by keeping the audience engaged by regularly posting new material. As stated previously, my current main social media platforms are Facebook, Instagram and Youtube, with respectively 1.480 likes, 769 followers and 508 subscribers, but I will also create a TikTok account to promote my songs and get more people to find me as, since 2018, TikTok has placed among the top 4 global apps (MediaKix, 2020) and keeps growing in popularity.

- **Becky Black USPs**

As a multi-instrumentalist, I can potentially perform on my own either on the guitar or the keyboards. This helps me in finding live performance opportunities faster as I don't have to rely on a session musician where there's no time to find or rehearse with one.

Another USP of my act is my ability to sing in different languages apart from English, such as Italian (my first language), Spanish, French and Japanese. Although I can only write lyrics in the first two, being flexible with other languages gives me the opportunity to record more songs and build a bigger audience by posting covers on TikTok and YouTube, while the ability to write lyrics in two different languages gives me the opportunity to work both in the International side of the music industry and in the Italian music industry.

- **Revenue Streams**

My revenue streams in the span of the next three months (August till October) would aim to come from different sources:

Live Performances and/or PRS for music: live performances can pay a certain amount per gig, although that is not always the case as, since I'm a relatively small artist and I'd search for events to perform my own original material, venue don't usually pay, and in such a small span of time and with little to show off, I can't expect to find a promoter. PRS for music on the other hand, pays for every live event for your registered original song, with the only con being that the venue (or event) has to be registered with PRS in order for them to pay you your royalties.

Streams and Digital Downloads: although in order to see a sustainable income I'd have to make a few thousand of streams, since Spotify pays artists between \$0.003 - \$0.005 per stream on average (ditto.com) by trying to increase my online presence and build an organic following, I'd expect my previous releases plus the upcoming single to gain more traction whitin the different streaming platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, Google Play, Soundcloud and so on. With this said, I this time I can't expect this to be one on my main source of income.

Merchandise: for the Merchandise I'd quote some of the lyrics of the Single. My main merchandise would be t-shirts and sweaters, to sell both at live events and online via my website.

TikTok and Instagram: by building an audience and growing my views, I should eventually be able to find small sponsors to work with and/or sell my merchandise by promoting it via the TikTok stories. The same will be done on Instagram.

YouTube: YouTube partnership program can pay you for advertisings on your videos if you have 4,000 valid public watch hours in the previous 12 months and at least 1,000 subscribers. If used right, YouTube can be a great source of income.
([youtube/creators.com](https://youtube.com/creators))

• Conclusion

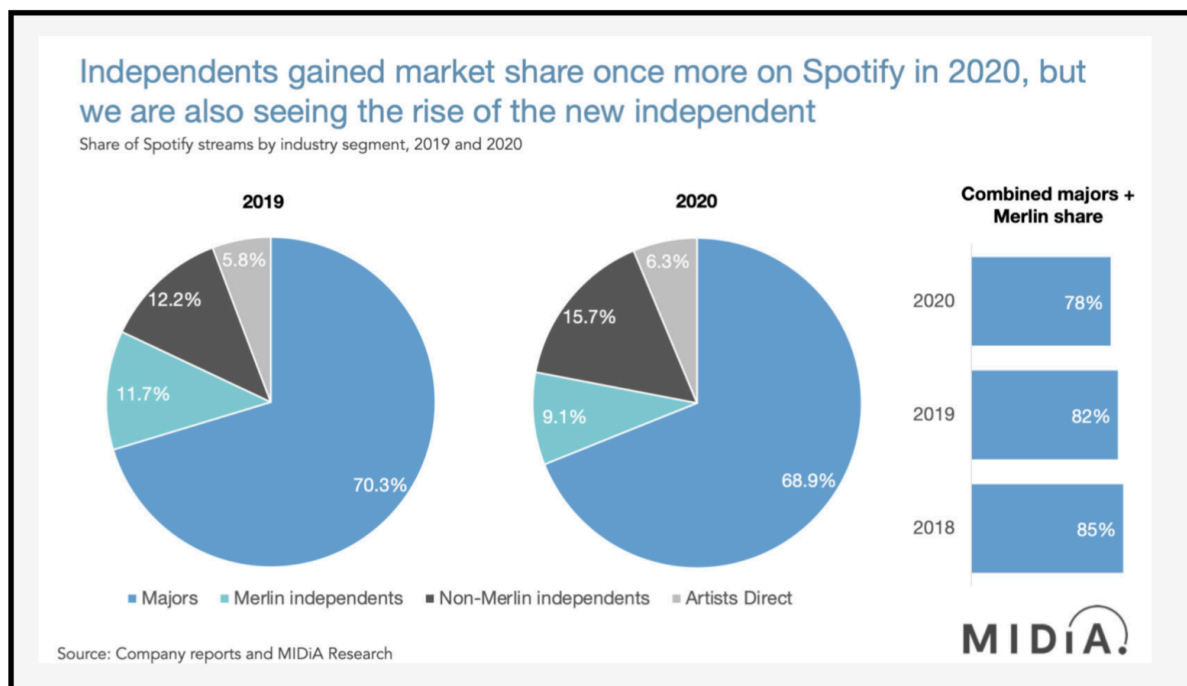
The single release campaign, as previously mentioned, will run from August 2022 till October 2022, with the single and its music video coming out on the 10th of August. In this timeframe, the goal is to build a bigger audience on all of my main social media platforms by posting content regularly in the form of posts, videos, reels and stories. My goal in terms of achievements within this period would be to see the Facebook page reach 2.000 likes (currently 1,476), the Instagram Profile to reach 1.000 (currently 769), the Youtube Channel to reach 1000 in order to being able to become a partner (currently 508 subscribers) and to build a TikTok account aiming to 500 followers in the span on the three months, and an average in Spotify streams for the single at 2.000 within the first week after the release.

Appendix

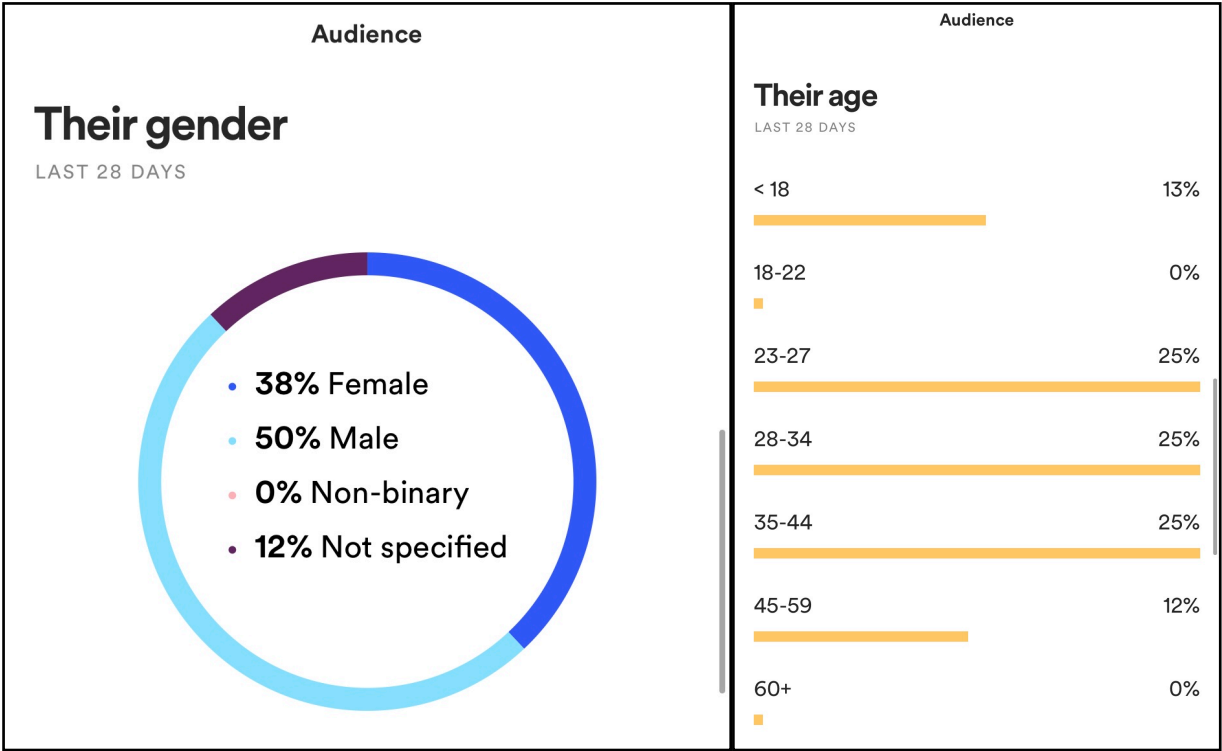
- **Appendix 1 - 10 Months 2018 Cashflow**

BECKY BLACK 2018 CASH FLOW													
Starting date	Mar 18 Dec 18												
CASH IN FLOW	Jan 18	Feb 18	Mar 18	Apr 18	May 18	Jun 18	Jul 18	Aug 18	Sep 18	Oct 18	Nov 18	Dec 18	Total
Album Digital Sales			50	30	20	30	30	40	20	30	30	20	300
Album physical Copies Sales			110	60	50		70	70	30	80	60	50	580
PRS							40			30			100
Concert Tickets Sales			750										750
Merchandise			200			100			75				375
Sponsors			750										750
TOTAL CASH IN	0	0	1,640	90	105	130	90	150	145	110	90	70	2,855
CASH OUT FLOW	Jan 18	Feb 18	Mar 18	Apr 18	May 18	Jun 18	Jul 18	Aug 18	Sep 18	Oct 18	Nov 18	Dec 18	Total
Producer			500										500
Album Copies			150										150
PRS Subscription			100										100
DistroKid Annual Subscription			35										35
Merchandise			250										250
Concert Venue			300										300
Musicians Wages			150										150
TOTAL CASH OUT	0	0	1,485	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,485
NET EARNINGS 2018													1370

- **Appendix 2 - MIDiA global survey of Independent Labels**



• **Appendix 3 - Becky Black Spotify Audience Analytics 2022**



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