

SOFIA GOBBI *LETHE* EP MARKETING CAMPAIGN

In his book *The Longer Long Tail* (2009, p. 5), Chris Anderson suggests how the mass market is turning into a mass of niches. Over the past decade, democratizing production and distribution has enabled people to discover what they like and want in a world of endless variety, thanks to fans and influencers amplifying word of mouth. At the same time, Seth Godin (2003, p.31) states that targeting a niche market is the best way to break a product through to the mainstream, arguing that it is more likely that followers of that niche will spread the word, eventually reaching the masses. Accordingly, this paper will demonstrate how targeting a niche market – rather than the mainstream – is the best way to launch new artist Sofia Gobbi's career. In his article *1,000 True Fans* (2008), Kevin Kelly explains how an artist only needs one thousand true fans to make a living. This is because such devoted fans are the kind of people who will spread the word to their family and friends, invest a lot of capital, and travel long and far to see their favourite artist perform. Thus, by targeting a niche market and aiming to garner a thousand true fans, our goal is to engage, strengthen and grow Sofia's fan base in order to build a successful launch pad for her career during the first 10 months of her debut. In addition to establishing a loyal following, we also aim to grow a fan base within the music industry. As Anderson (2009, p. 74) states, "measured by the amount of attention a product attracts, reputation can be converted into other things of value: jobs, tenure, audiences, and lucrative offers of all sorts". Accordingly, making a positive first impression and building a good reputation will increase the likelihood that music-related businesses (e.g. record labels, publishing companies, etc.) will want to work with Sofia. Hence, the following campaign will outline the necessary steps to make a strong first impression when breaking her into the music industry. Through digital and physical advertising, creative direction and strategic promotion techniques, this research will show the best ways to propel Sofia into becoming one of the most exciting up-and-coming artists of 2022.

GOALS AND ACTIONS

Sofia Gobbi is an Italian-American pop singer-songwriter, whose music comprises of big pop choruses, introspective lyrics and 70s rock-inspired melodies. She has been singing and songwriting since she was 8 years old, and now at 23 is preparing to launch her debut EP, *Lethe*, at the beginning of 2022. Our main objective is to engage and grow her fan base throughout the launch of her EP, acquiring a loyal following and attracting interest from record labels and managers alike. Throughout this 10-month campaign, we will focus on developing press, radio and DSP opportunities, organizing a student live tour, creating eye-catching visuals, and engaging in brand partnerships and influencer marketing. As Bob Baker (2013, p. 48) argues, audiences today are passionate about discovering new music, preferably through trusted recommendations from influencers, magazines, friends or tastemakers. Accordingly, we want fans to feel like they have "discovered" Sofia, rather than feeling like they have been marketed *to*. Therefore, it is important that this campaign sees Sofia collaborating with

influencers and tastemakers, ensuring her exposure to a variety of potential new fans. Additionally, we aim to grow fan engagement through social media and DSPs by 50%. Because Sofia's target audience comprises of Gen Z and Millennials, social media is the best way to target them, as they are highly digital-savvy and spend most of their time on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and TikTok (Tankovska, 2021).

STRATEGY

Following Baker (2013, p. 17), our marketing strategy to successfully launch Sofia's career involves generating brand awareness, building relationships, and producing revenue. To identify Sofia's target niche, we have followed Anderson's (2009, p. 17) argument stating that "in the tyranny of geography, an audience spread too thinly is the same as no audience at all". Hence, since Sofia's lyric-oriented music mostly resonates with English-speaking demographics, we have outlined her target market as being from the US, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Additionally, seeing how artists similar to Sofia (i.e. Olivia Rodrigo, Ashe) deeply resonate with audiences in Norway and Indonesia (Kworb, 2021), we have decided to target those markets as well. Lastly, Italy also represents an important market, since 70% of Sofia's current fan base resides there.

In *Purple Cow* (2003, p. 84), Godin suggests identifying a niche market first, and only afterwards creating a remarkable product – not the other way around. In his own words, "this is not marketing done *to* a product. The marketing *is* the product". Indeed, we have outlined Sofia's target market as being music-obsessed, English-speaking, introverted Gen Z and Millennial students who love self-reflective lyrics, pop culture and are passionate about social change. To make Sofia stand out from her competition, we have built the marketing into the artist herself. This can be observed in her striking flame-inspired eye make-up, her memorable 'bursting-heart' logo as well as her innovative, emotionally-intelligent lyrics.

Our marketing strategy also involves building relationships, which Sofia will do by sharing a monthly newsletter through her website and by posting personalized, frequent, relevant and anticipated content on her social media platforms (Godin, 2007, p. 27). Additionally, this part of our strategy will see Sofia regularly updating playlists and uploading new music on DSPs like Spotify, Apple Music and Amazon Music. Although social media is a great way to bond with fans online, nothing beats the deep connections made through in-person interaction. For this reason, Sofia will embark on a student live tour following the release of her EP. By performing in cafes and pubs on – or near – university campuses, the songstress will be able to strengthen relationships with her target audience, which mainly comprises of students.

Although we expect to generate revenue through DSPs, our strategy focuses on capitalizing mostly through retail and brand partnerships. This part of our strategy will feature selling merchandise through Sofia's website in the form of signed CDs, T-shirts, caps, as well as digital downloads. As Baker (2013, p. 119) notes, an artist's job is to "create merchandise that helps [their] fans express who they are – not just sell them stuff with [the artist's] name and logo on it". This is because Permission Marketers like ourselves must make every interaction about the consumer, meeting their needs first and foremost (Godin, 2007, p. 115). Therefore, Sofia's merchandise will feature innovative designs centered around her lyrics rather than her name, since that is what her fans resonate with the most. In addition, partnering Sofia with fashion brands will increase engagement with current fans and expose her to new audiences within her niche. This will fast-track Sofia to her target market, helping her assume natural credibility and trustworthiness (Baker, 2013, p. 141).

CAMPAIGN

The campaign supporting the launch of Sofia's debut EP will occur over 10 months, from August 2021 to May 2022, and will be split into two phases. The first phase will take place from August to October 2021, overseeing the launch of Sofia's website and establishing relationships with influencers, press and radio 3 months ahead of her first release. As Godin states, a tribe that thrives must be motivated, connected and leveraged (2008, pp. 28-52). For this reason, the first part of the campaign will also feature repositioning of Sofia's social media platforms, where audiences old and new will get to know the artist on a personal level, facilitating interaction between fans.

The second phase of the campaign will take place between November 2021 and May 2022. During this first month, we will promote and publish Sofia's poetry book, *Keelhauling*. The collection will serve as a teaser for her upcoming EP, previewing the inspiration and themes addressed in her songs. Sofia will become the first artist to publish poetry books as a companion to each music collection she releases throughout her career, which we expect will create media exposure and deepen fan connection. Subsequently, Sofia's first single 'Goodbye' will be published on January 14th, 2022, followed by her second single 'With Gold' on February 11th. We have decided to publish these singles during the first two months of the year since the market tends to be less saturated during this time, and because people tend to be more open to trying new things at the start of the New Year (Pastukhov, 2019). Additionally, Sofia's song 'With Gold' is the perfect anti-Valentine's Day anthem, so releasing it on the Friday ahead of February 14th will increase its chances of success and virality. Finally, Sofia will release her EP, *Lethe*, on March 4th, 2022. By this point, her preceding singles will have gathered a larger audience and created hype around the release. This final part of the campaign will oversee promotion and advertisement around the EP launch, followed by the *Lethe* student tour and a heightened focus on business-to-business marketing.

CREATIVE DIRECTION

As Godin (2003, p. 33) states,

marketing in a post-TV world is no longer about making a product attractive or interesting or pretty or funny *after* it's designed and built – it's about designing the thing to be virus-worthy in the first place.

In fact, the author and business executive advocates for investing in the product itself rather than in advertising, giving the marketing budget directly to the designers and creatives (2003, p. 57). Hence, we have decided to apply Godin's theory to Sofia's marketing plan, considering she is still an independent artist with a limited budget. Indeed, we plan on investing a third of our budget into creating compelling, unique and engaging visuals, working with top designers, photographers and directors like Petra F Collins and Savana Ogburn. Because Sofia's target market is highly digital-savvy and spends most of its free time on social media, we will regularly share creative content on Instagram, YouTube and TikTok (Tankovska, 2021). Additionally, with Gen Z audiences streaming an average of 23 hours of video each week (Morgan, 2020), we will invest £2,000 out of our £5,000 budget into creating remarkable, high-quality video content (e.g. music videos, acoustic sessions, etc.).

One example of this can be seen in Sofia's monthly "Fake it till You Make it" YouTube series. Each episode will parody a popular show like "Vogue's 73 Questions" or "The Late

Late Show with James Corden”, which more established artists appear on when promoting new music. Because Sofia is still a small artist, she does not have the status to guest-star on these shows yet. Thus, taking matters into her own hands, this YouTube series will serve as a unique way of promoting herself and her music. Showcasing Sofia’s sense of humour, grit and talent, the show will also act as a form of public manifestation toward her goals, and of quite literally “faking it until she makes it”. As Godin (2003, pp. 70-1) suggests, parodies tend to lead to an increase in media exposure, profits and sales. Therefore, we expect this creative series to increase brand awareness among fans, the media, and music businesses.

PROMOTION

In *The Longer Long Tail* (2009, p. 102) Anderson introduces a case study on emerging artist Bonnie McKee. Robin Bechtel, who managed her marketing campaign, learned the hard way that artists like McKee have a greater chance of selling music after promoting it on the radio only if they have built an online fan base first. Artists who do not tend to only get single-song downloads, since listeners are not invested in them as artists, but rather are solely interested in one of their songs. For this reason, it is important that we dedicate the first three months of Sofia’s campaign to engaging and growing her online fan base. This will ensure that when she does release her music, she is supported by a strong and dedicated tribe. In McKee’s case, the problem was not marketing or positioning, but rather a lack of support from a loyal, dedicated fandom. Indeed, Anderson (2009, p. 103) argues that selling music to online consumers requires “more than a catchy single; it requires a real fanbase, ideally one spreading the word online”. Hence, it is imperative that Sofia grows a strong and supportive following ahead of her 2022 releases, by frequently sharing authentic, personalized and anticipated content on social media (Godin, 2008, p. 28). Only then will we begin to promote Sofia’s music through radio and press.

Countering McKee’s case study, Anderson demonstrates how a pre-existing fan base can positively impact artists releasing new music. Indeed, when the band My Chemical Romance began sharing new content online teasing new music, they already had a strong fan base, which they had garnered through touring and from their first album. Hence, when fans finally received the content they had been anticipating, they reacted with excitement and by spreading the word on and offline, some even requesting their music on radio stations. This resulted in the band receiving the airplay it needed to greatly increase its popularity and, consequently, its fan base (Anderson, 2009, p. 104). Therefore, it is important that we begin to engage and grow Sofia’s fan base ahead of her EP release. This way, by the time she publishes her music, she will have a larger audience supporting her. As Baker (2013) suggests, in the age of social media and of the empowered music fan, word of mouth is one of the strongest forms of promotion. Thus, it is imperative that we dedicate time throughout our entire campaign to engaging Sofia’s current fan base as well as acquiring new members.

ADVERTISING

As previously stated, the best marketing approach to launch Sofia’s career is to invest in creating a remarkable product, rather than building remarkable advertising around a mediocre product (Godin, 2003, p. 34). However, we must dedicate a portion of our budget to targeted advertising as well, in order to make Sofia’s niche market aware of her in the first place. Before gaining permission to advertise to this audience, however, we must build trust. And trust is built through frequency. Godin reminds us to be personal, specific, relevant and

anticipated in our advertising, since “frequency builds trust and permission facilitates frequency” (p. 54). Additionally, business author Jay Levinson highlights how an ad must run at least 27 times to achieve its desired impact. This is because individuals only see 1 out of 9 ads, and they must see one at least 3 times before its message gets across (Godin, 2006, p. 65). Also, because people already pay little attention to advertising, those that run infrequently tend to get ignored altogether. Hence, for the public to view Sofia as familiar and trustworthy, we must deliver frequent, targeted advertising that easily makes an impression. For this reason, we will run both digital and physical ads, exposing Sofia to potential fans and businesses within her market. Virtual ads will appear on social media platforms and DSPs like Instagram, YouTube and Spotify, which are the most used by Sofia’s target audience. On the other hand, physical ads will be placed in strategic locations in proximity to students and music businesses, such as university campuses and music hubs like Tileyard, in London. This is because, in Godin’s own words, “frequency leads to awareness, awareness to familiarity, and familiarity to trust. And trust, almost without exception, leads to profit” (p. 69).

Godin continues his argument by stating that once we notice that the consumers we have targeted *want* to hear from us, as Permission Marketers we will replace continuing interruption with ongoing interaction (2006, p. 72). At this stage, Sofia will begin communicating with fans through a monthly newsletter called “Sofia’s Journal”, which will include personal thoughts, recollections and new lyrics she has penned. To give customers a greater compensation compared to what they are asked of, the songstress will also host giveaways, private listening parties, as well as other rewards, which will eventually lead them to granting more permission. Additionally, because the response rate to an affinity program or a free sample can be up to ten times higher compared to an ad asking for a sale (p. 52), customers will be asked to insert their birth date when signing up for Sofia’s newsletter, which will automatically enter them into a birthday club. Sofia will then send personalized, handwritten cards to make fans feel special and celebrated on their birthdays, strengthening connections and building even more trust. Therefore, by offering rewards in exchange for fans’ permission, Sofia will build trust with her customers, which, in turn, will lead to an increase in support and sales.

CONCLUSION

Following Long Tail and Permission Marketing techniques, we have demonstrated how establishing a solid fan base at this early stage of Sofia’s career is indispensable to her future success. Since the best way to expose her to new audiences is through visually stimulating content and targeted advertising, we will invest over a third of our budget in creative direction. Whether it be musically through Sofia’s relatable and emotionally-intelligent lyrics, or visually through her eye-catching signature make-up and music videos, having identified Sofia’s “Purple Cow” is what will help her cut through the clutter in today’s saturated market. However, having found her Purple Cow, we are now faced with two challenges: milking the cow for everything it is worth, and finding ways to profit and extend from it for as long as we possibly can (Godin, 2003, p. 64). Often, after brands have taken great risks to become successful, they will stop taking risks – which, ironically, is what brought them success in the first place. This inevitably leads such businesses to becoming stale and static, preventing future growth and expansion of their tribe (p. 65). However, we are confident that Sofia’s talent, creativity and open-mind will always rise to these challenges should they come up in the future. What matters is that we continue to follow the four steps of the Purple Cow by getting permission from customers, giving them the tools needed to spread Sofia’s message, exploiting the Cow to its furthest extent, and reinvesting capital to repeat this process all over again,

understanding that what will make her stand out this time will not be remarkable the next. Most importantly, we must remember to always put the customer's needs first, by designing, pricing and selling exceptional products that we imagine they would love and be excited to share (p. 96). Thus, by identifying Sofia's "Purple Cow" as well as engaging and growing a loyal tribe through frequent, personalized, anticipated and creative messaging, we are confident that this campaign will provide the support Sofia needs to becoming one of the most exciting emerging artists of 2022.

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