

MA International Music Marketing

Module: Creation in International Music Marketing

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Methodology: Gibbs' Reflective Cycle.

4847 words

Description of the Experience:

I was tasked with the responsibility of proposing and subsequently developing a three-year marketing campaign for an artist or entertainment product/service. I had to define the subject of the campaign and therefore chose to develop a marketing plan for an entertainment product/service - a resource called **“COLD ORANGE's Artist Strategy Guide: Laying the Foundation”**, which aims to equip independent artists who do not have access to, or the resources required to work directly with marketing professionals in their career development. It also aims to set a new industry standard practice for developing artist strategy - providing a high-quality experience, consistently. Within the proposal I had to outline the strategy and tactics to be employed in the marketing of the subject of the campaign. This involved the creation of various assets such as timelines, milestones, budgets, and strategy diagrams that highlighted the choices and designs behind the three-year campaign. Following this, I had to design and submit a portfolio of artefacts that demonstrates the campaign's strategy, tactics, planning, project management, branding, visual and media assets through various sections in which I highlight the brand, the product, various elements of the marketing such as targeting, campaign goals etc.

Before I began this process, I had already developed the product which had been helpful for creating an innovative and structured campaign concept. I knew that I had wanted to work on a campaign that was not just another artist campaign, and to create a succinct, budget friendly plan that could be implemented with ease, while still being able to hit realistic, practical targets. I found myself deeply involved in the process of trying to understand what it is that I wanted to accomplish by developing such a campaign, and why it would be an appropriate choice for the product I have been developing. Before I started the campaign development, I decided that I had wanted to create a highly detailed, but simultaneously flexible campaign that could be implemented in order to expand the business beyond the product itself - aiming to achieve the business's various goals, and by extension, the brand's mission and vision. If my goal was to develop such a campaign, it could be said that the outcome of this process has been successful - however, it isn't exactly as I had imagined it to turn out for various reasons. This is because, whilst I had been working to develop this campaign, extraneous factors had also taken place such as dedicating time for work placements - which had extended beyond their initially planned timeframes. Additionally, I had found myself busy with freelance work,

as well as planning for a large-scale impromptu business trip to take place in December. With all of these variables in play at the same time as my time that was also dedicated to working on this final assignment between September and October, naturally time had to be sacrificed - and therefore, the highly ambitious nature of the detailed campaign had to be adjusted for time constraints.

Feelings about the Experience:

The proposal had to be submitted by the 26th of August, which at the time I felt challenged by because there was not a lot of time to develop a concept from scratch. During the development of the proposal, I eventually began feeling very confident about the potential that the campaign itself held. It felt as though all of my thoughts and concepts I had developed for the campaign proposal were very clear, concise, and calculated - I felt as though I had a very defined direction or path to follow. Fastforward to September which was inundated by various other tasks and responsibilities unrelated to the assignment hand-ins, and I began feeling like I was out of touch from my original planning and conceptualisations designed within the proposal. By October which has been the only free time I could dedicate to the creation of the portfolio, I felt frustrated, confused, and challenged by the task of trying to re-capture the thoughts, sensations and initial passion I had felt while developing the concepts for the proposal.

It was as though I had a vision that suddenly became muddled by doubt, uncertainty and the looming deadline which was telling me that I had to make a decision, otherwise I was never going to finish what I started - which is not a feeling that I have found conducive to creating my most inspired work. However, with this said - I felt that the pressure had also forced me to become more innovative with my approach to campaign development. I felt as though I had a strong enough foundation in my ability to plan and structure concepts - but with the amount of new ideas I had flowing in, I felt disappointed that I was forced to delimit the amount of focus and time and energy that I could actually dedicate towards the development and implementation of within the campaign strategies and tactics. I found the experiences of creating a proposal and the experience of creating the actual portfolio for the project to be an interesting dichotomy that highlighted my ability to plan, and how well I could handle the implementation of said plan when faced with the natural challenges that arise in any project

management cycle. In one sense, I felt elated that I was capable of developing a plan that was so concise, structured, and unique - while still being highly aligned with the hierarchy of objectives that made the process valuable. On the other hand, I felt disappointed and disillusioned that I had to make the executive decision to simplify my plans for the sake of meeting expectations and deadlines.

While writing this reflection, I feel as though this is a natural part of any project cycle - but it makes me want to work harder, and gain more experience and insight so that I can continue to make ambitious plans with significant amounts of detail, while being able to still fit within the limitations of deadlines and expectations imposed by briefs etc. as I recognise that these are also incredibly important aspects of the industry which also serve an important purpose. Interestingly, I also found myself feeling tinges of imposter syndrome and questioning whether the campaign I proposed and began developing was even worth doing - I found myself feeling conflicted about the value of the product, and whether or not I still identified with the purpose I initially set for this product and campaign - and therefore whether or not I should quickly develop another campaign to design, or if I should continue working on it despite having conflicted emotions and beliefs. Ultimately, I decided to continue working on the same campaign I had proposed in August, but work on re-framing the way I look at the value of this campaign and how it would fit into my development for the future.

Evaluation:

After giving it some consideration, the actual development of the campaign portfolio was on-large a very conflicted experience. I find the answer to the question of what went well and what didn't go well to be very subjective. This is because it feels as though, in some sense, I am asking myself whether or not this campaign design has any value without being able to even implement it, *and* whether or not I have done everything in my power to make the campaign design meet the expectations of a university assignment - which I do not believe to be the benchmark for successful or valuable professional campaign design. Therefore I find it difficult to be entirely objective in the process of evaluating what parts of the project I have done 'well' and what parts of the development had gone 'poorly'. However, for the sake of this reflective assignment I feel it is necessary to define what 'good' and 'bad' must look like

within the framework of the assessments. Therefore, I will define 'good' as the project's process's and activities' ability to be innovative, logically consistent, strategic (maintaining a wide perspective so to identify and work towards long-term success defined by the terms of the campaign), and realistic in terms of my means of practically implementing the campaign - outside of the hypothetical that provides me with the ability to act as though I have access to infinite resources.

I will subsequently define 'bad' as the inability to be logically consistent, strategic, and realistic with my campaign development choices. However, there is a middle ground which is unaccounted for which I feel is necessary to also address - the academic definitions of 'good' and 'bad'. Based upon the assignment brief, the portfolio itself has the ability to be quite flexible - it doesn't just have to be an artist campaign, despite the majority of the example artifacts being based upon this archetype - which ultimately leaves my unique choice of a product marketing campaign in a sort of 'grey-area'. This means that there are no specific expectations for what artifacts my portfolio must contain aside from those that cross over (such as budget, timeline etc.), this lack of definition highlights that there is some ambiguity in the ability to define 'good' and 'bad', as it is ultimately subjective, almost entirely depending on the context of the campaign itself. This leads me to conclude that the most appropriate approach to defining the terms of what can be considered 'good' and 'bad' in the context of this evaluation is the level of detail that can be provided in the justifications of my choices within the campaign strategy. This provides a balance between subjectivity & objectivity - naturally consistency, strategy, and the practicality of a concept is very important, but the ability to support these choices with evidence is just as important when creating a persuasive argument for a particular set of decisions.

This is where I would say I feel my biggest area for improvement lies within the creation of my strategic portfolio. While I have provided evidence for my decisions, the process of amassing relevant evidence within the scope of this assignment & timeframe to support my decisions has been fairly difficult as I have found there to be a significant lack of appropriate sources, case studies, and other forms of research that back up my decisions within the context of marketing such a product - especially since there is no financial goals outlined within the objectives of the campaign itself. Of course there is the option to conduct a study for primary research - however, there would not have been enough time for the results to have significance. All of the campaign goals are focussed on exposure to the brand and the

product, gaining feedback and proof of concept for the product itself - which ultimately would lead to the implementation of further campaigns upon confirmation. Objectively, I would say that the output of academic research I have provided to back up my campaign's tactical choices is lacking detail & quantity for the purposes of this assignment. However, I also believe that for the sake of practical application determined by the campaign's outlined objectives, the project management frameworks I have chosen to follow, as well as the purpose of the product - I would say that I have provided sufficient evidence to support my choices - especially as the Berenchodt Project Management Model (*appendix 1*), Maslows' hierarchy of needs (*appendix 2*), and the Deming Cycle (*appendix 3*) when implemented together cannot function without the recognition that - no matter how much planning or evidence is presented - you as the deployer of the strategy will not know the results of your particular implementation process, until it has been implemented (**Leckstein, 2022**), (**Harrison, 2022**). This highlights that, while past performance is important to take into consideration, it is not a guarantee for future results to behave exactly as they had in the past, hence why I have made these various project management models and cycles a foundational element within my overall strategy for that very reason.

While that is certainly an area for improvement, it is difficult to say whether or not that is even an area that could have been improved upon given the circumstances (lack of accessible data). Additionally, I would say that my campaign design lacks a more detailed insight into particular campaign activities/tactics - such as providing further information on the various networking events I could tackle, more of an insight into the process of organising meetings with artists, further example assets provided to provide a clear idea of what social media content would be posted - and perhaps a better explanation of how the content strategy itself would be implemented. I would say however, this is of the least concern as the primary campaign objective and activity for the portfolio was not social media or networking events. These elements were of course important supplementary functions to the campaign's structure, and I do believe that it could have been made clearer the roles that these activities played within the portfolio and their varying levels of importance. Despite these areas for improvement, I would say that my strategic development of the campaign in the proposal stage (and carrying over into the portfolio development), has been incredibly well structured - so much so, that despite lacking various highly-detailed, data-backed case-studies to inform my decisions, the structure of the strategy lends itself to being intuitive, innovative for being structured into phases, and for being able to recognise the various high-level

stages/conditions that need to be met before moving onto the next campaign activity developments.

All of the campaign activities had been designed to be implemented in conjunction with one another in order to all support the singular goal of attaining an audience - meaning that if one activity isn't providing results, there are three others to make up for this. If none of the activities provided results - then this is where the true value of the project management models I have chosen would arise - experimentation in marketing is key, and this would provide real-time data that would allow me to make informed decisions to improve the strategy moving forward.

Analysis:

Upon reflection, the choices I had made during the campaign development process through the initial stages of the proposal, and subsequent stages of the portfolio development, were made in the attempt to create a very clear, concise, realistic marketing plan that could be implemented with the aims of gathering further data throughout the implementation process. I think that part of me understood that it would be a difficult process to ascertain data that was directly relevant to the context of the type of campaign I was trying to develop - and therefore, I wanted to take into account this difficulty, and prioritise actions that would help me to ascertain this data through the process of implementation. This would only be a realistic option so long as the stakes for the campaign implementation were low-risk financially, and in terms of the resources spent. It has been a uniquely challenging process to work within the ambiguous confines of the assessment brief - and the decisions I have made reflect this challenge. Within a brief that has not defined key terms such as 'campaign', whilst using 'strategy' and 'tactics' interchangeably - it has put a lot of responsibility on me to define for myself how to interpret these word choices in order to create an appropriate product to be assessed.

I define a campaign to be the design and implementation of a series of carefully considered (strategic) actions intended to achieve a desired result. Because of this, I approached the project with the understanding that a 'three-year campaign' is defined as: a series of carefully considered actions implemented over the course of three years, intended to achieve a series of predetermined desired results. I had therefore determined that my campaign objectives could

effectively remain the same over all three years, while aiming to scale the results accordingly. The design for my strategy was directly influenced by training-acquired knowledge in addition to the research conducted for this particular assignment. The training that I had obtained was from Dan Black, the Lead Marketer Responsible for many of Independent Label 'Dirty Hit's early successes. The training was focused around the concept of 'the fan journey', and 'fan acquisition theory' developed through his various professional experiences, and those of his professional colleagues (**Black, D. 2021**) This, in combination with the procedures taught to the International Music Marketing cohort at Tileyard Education, had influenced my understanding of what role various tactics play and the importance of the various elements of campaign development at certain points throughout the design and implementation. Some of these procedures have been challenging to justify however. This is because there have been many lectures that essentially taught us what to do in developing a marketing campaign, such as outlining objectives, determining target audiences, the value of various tactics such as organic social media content and paid advertising within campaigns - as well as the importance of non-digital marketing activities such as networking. Considering this fact, I now realise that I have neglected my ability to cite lessons and interviews as supporting evidence for my strategic and tactical decisions. This would have been incredibly helpful in the further support and justification of my choices to implement social media content campaigns as well as the various live-events for the purpose of audience acquisition.

I am still feeling unsure about whether I have included enough detail in my justification and sources - however, I acknowledge the unique context of my campaign design being largely responsible for this. The ambiguity of the brief coupled with my unorthodox project design has resulted in this sense of uncertainty. I now feel that I have placed perhaps too much of an importance on the initial design on the strategy (*appendix 4*), and as a result - this has resulted in the under-development of detailed activities to be implemented throughout the campaign's three years. Despite having a gantt chart that outlines the project timeline I now feel that this approach could have benefitted from an accompanying calendar or timeline that highlights very specific activities. Rather than providing a generalised outline of the *types* of content assets to produce, or the *types* of events to attend - I now believe that this project's design could have greatly benefitted from listing specific examples of the content that needed to be created for specific stages of the campaign with data that backs up these activities, as well as specific examples of events to attend, the dates they are scheduled, and the goals and aims of these networking outings.

Through the process of creating this campaign strategy portfolio, I have realised that there could be an indefinite amount of sub-elements that need to be considered in every facet of a campaign strategy. I am now of the belief that - of course the campaign itself has it's own objectives, and therefore we develop campaign activities to help meet those objectives - but we need to actively create measurable activities that allow us to learn and grow from - and therefore I now believe it is imperative to take a simultaneous macro *and* micro approach to strategic development. For example, in the case of this campaign strategy's primary objective of audience acquisition, we recognise that there are four parallel campaign activities that work to achieve this objective. However, on a smaller scale, it's important to look at the more immediate objectives, targets, and milestones of the various activities themselves that allows for the campaign management (myself) to measure the success of the activities in actually attaining the main campaign objectives. If our campaign activities consist of attending a series of networking events, it would be preferable to identify the value that each event would bring to achieving our stated milestones, who would attend, what strategic connections are we trying to make and why would they be beneficial, and what do we hope to achieve whilst attending these events - not to mention, how can these objectives be scaled as the campaign progresses. These are the types of intricate details that provide further structure and strategy into the process of designing a campaign - and I can now see that this would have been the ideal result from spending time creating a campaign of this sort.

Conclusions:

It feels as though it is appropriate to conclude that the choices I had made in the proposal, had a significant impact on the process of designing the campaign portfolio. I had designed the majority of the strategy within the proposal stage, believing that I had completed it in so much detail for the assignment's purposes that I was left to create a portfolio that grew around the proposal - a nearly finished strategy to begin with. I would say that there was a level of egoism that had come into play which obscured my vision for the overall plan because the minute details were masked by the grandeur of larger concepts. However, it is those details which are most important in the development of a truly strategic plan. This conclusion is made from the acknowledgement of various occurrences throughout the process - notably: the adjustments that needed to be made for the sake of curbing the

overly-ambitious aspects of the proposal in order to fit the time constraints of the brief. This occurrence had occurred due to my ambitious nature working in conjunction with a time constraint for the proposal submission date, as well as an initial design that I had believed was already finished. The most significant take away from this is that, it is important to always maintain a clear vision for a project, maintaining a consistent focus on the various levels of the project that is in development.

Essentially, it is important to be aware of the big picture, while also being able to understand how the smallest of details and actions can impact the overall flow of the project. I realised this too late in the development of the portfolio, as I am well practiced in ‘big-picture’ concept development, but lacked the foresight to see the importance that the expansion on smaller details would have in the overall persuasive ability of my portfolio. Following this experience, I am left with a number of questions... I would like to know if it is possible to create a successful strategy portfolio that is not as detailed as I assume it should be, based on the evaluations and analyses in the aforementioned sections. I am also wondering what the professional industry standard for a campaign as such would look like? Additionally, Is it wise to create and implement such a highly detailed plan with the full awareness that there are so many variables at play that could drastically impact the outcomes of the campaign? I would feel quite reluctant to rely on data that is not my own, and would be fairly skeptical about trusting industry standard ‘best practices’ that are not in direct relation to the nature of the campaign. Taking all of this into consideration, I would say that my biggest take-away from this experience is to spend more time deeply considering the nature of the campaigns I am designing, their objectives, and the means by which I have available to me in order to work towards the accomplishment of these objectives. While it is important to have a solid strategy to follow that is based upon research and data - it is equally important in a practical setting to not spend *too* much time on the initial planning before trying to ascertain proof of concept... or in other words, relevant supporting data that is acquired for the sake of the specific campaign I am working on.

This is to take into consideration the variables that could potentially derail the front-loaded investment of developing a highly-detailed strategy that doesn’t account for change. The importance of flexibility in strategy and planning is just as valuable as the research - otherwise the investment in planning may not be able to be justified. Moving forward, I feel that I may need to learn more about how to develop specific detailed elements of campaign

activities: for example, what the most appropriate types of content to develop would be for an organic content and paid ad campaign, especially for the purposes of marketing and selling an entertainment industry product. After further thought, the amount of research conducted on these smaller details makes a significant impact on the overall ability to carry out the implementation plan for such a campaign. In contrast to the previous argument that over-preparation and research may not always be worth the investment, it also could very-well be worth the investment. Therefore I believe my final conclusion would be, that it is imperative to seek an appropriate balance in preparation and flexibility, ambition and sensibility when developing any marketing campaign within the arts and entertainment industry.

Action Plan:

In trying to address the implications that this experience has for my future, I feel it is necessary to restate the purpose that this project campaign was trying to fulfil within the context of my professional development goals. Within the next five years, I aim to become a self-sustaining, self-employed brand and marketing strategist that works between the UK, US, and East Asian Music Markets with a focus on Japan and South Korea. The purpose of the product (outlined in the portfolio) aims to equip independent artists that lack the resources to access the professional assistance that brand, business, and marketing professionals can provide to aid in artist career development. It also aims to set a new industry standard practice for developing artist strategy - providing a high-quality experience, consistently. The marketing campaign strategy was intended to complete a few tasks: firstly to provide assistance to the widest artist demographic possible, secondly to create a resource that assists my practice by fast-tracking potential clients into a functional stage where they can make the most out of the services that I can provide, and finally to act towards amassing an engaged community of potential clients who would be interested in working with me on bespoke projects following a successful experience based upon accessible inbound marketing techniques.

While it is difficult to objectively state the success of the project management cycle for developing this campaign strategy without implementing it - I would say that I now am in possession of a completed strategy that has put me in a position to implement it immediately.

This implies that I could feasibly be on the road towards reaching my greater career ambitions and upon finishing this reflection, I have a list of actionable steps to follow to strengthen the weaknesses/areas for growth within this project - ultimately strengthening my skills as an international Music Marketer. What I have learned from this experience is that the value of my results can be measured by the intention of the initial goals - and in this case I feel it is safe to say that I have achieved my initial goals that had positioned me for growth and professional development through the various stages of this project cycle. I have learned more about the strengths and weaknesses of my approach of front-loading campaign strategy, while also being awakened to the levels of projects that I neglect providing enough detail to as well. I am now in a position to recognise the true value of having a perspective that balances both macroscopic and microscopic approaches to strategic development - which I believe will have a profound impact on my professional growth, aiding me on my way towards my 5 year goal. This has been a fantastic learning experience that has highlighted my good and bad habits, it has brought light to many of the issues I had been experiencing up to this point, especially those that had cost me confidence in professional settings - such as the ability to develop the actionable steps in more detail and understanding how those steps feed into the greater holistic structure of a marketing strategy.

If I were to change aspects of what I had done in this project management cycle for a future project, I would start by trying to increase my awareness of my capabilities in assigning tasks to be accomplished within certain timeframes. This is because I had found myself in a position of overplanning and assuming I had more time than I did to accomplish tasks - only finding this out far too close to the assigned deadlines. Because of this, I found myself having to make unwanted adjustments to my original detailed plans, even needing to omit content in order to finish for the submission dates. In order to fix this for the future, I believe it is important to keep better track of the responsibilities required of me and the timeframe I have to accomplish all of these tasks by creating a timeline. This was the foundation for the rest of the issues I had experienced, as I had created very high expectations for myself only to under-deliver on what I believe I should have been able to submit instead. Therefore, my next steps are to work to improve my time management skills in conjunction with managing my ambitions for the various tasks I am assigned in order to always be able to deliver strong results without overworking or under-delivering.

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