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Introduction

This reflection covers my thoughts and self-realisations from the group project for the Creative Music Management module. I worked with Denis Simms and Jonathan Farmer to develop a single and remix for release, devise a marketing and promotion plan and outline the resources for Chloe Rona's new single called 'High'.

Here, I focus on the four artefacts I presented in my individual portfolio while evaluating and assessing what I have learned and what I would or could do to improve the project or myself if I were to do it again.

I also reflect on three main types of technology that has an impact not only on the industry but also consumers as they are all connected. I explore any opportunities and consumer needs that are unmet while also exploring unknown facts as questions with an intention to go and do further research.

Portfolio Reflection

Single and Remix - High

One of the first tasks Denis, Jonathan and I undertook with Chloe was to listen to the songs she wanted us to help her develop. One track stood out significantly which is the single and remix presented in the portfolio - High. The process from demo to the final master took approximately four months due to resourcing issues i.e. finding a producer who is a good fit for Chloe's music style and working methods. This pushed back our timelines so we were unable to release the track in April. We had also hoped to benefit from Chloe's prior release 'Cruel Intentions' due to investment in PR to promote the track to music blogs, however we missed the window for that opportunity.

My involvement with this task was more of an advisory role as music production is not yet a strength of mine. An interesting lesson for me is the number of iterations required to get the sound just right. As I am not a producer, my ears did not pick up on quality or timing issues in the same way the rest of the team would hear flaws. It was useful for me to also be exposed to the song development process, but it was done in a way that I am not used to. When I used to co-run a record label with a record producer, I would be in the studio all the time but this was before digital files were the norm. I felt detached from the song development process and unfortunately I was not able to attend recording sessions at Tileyard.

I learned from this process that being close to the artist and the song process is important to me. Regarding the production delays, I feel this is more of a human and creative process issue and in the future I will assume that a music project without a producer is not a project., just yet. Or alternatively, work-for-hire musician sites could help Chloe build a network of favoured producers from around the world. They can be found on sites like Soundbetter, BeatStars and AirGigs (Hermann , 2018).

Branding, Artwork, Iconography and Video

Our approach to working with Chloe is long term due to her amazing potential but with short-term views associated with the assignment. We spent a couple of weeks establishing her artist brand before looking at her song branding because a narrative needed to be created so that she is recognisable via tone of voice and visuals online. Denis asked on asked a fellow student behalf of the group to help us update Chloe's iconography and a few times the results were off brief.

As Chloe was the creative lead on all her branded outputs, my involvement was consultative which I enjoyed as I do this role in my own business with my clients. An important aspect of this experience is that Chloe detracted from her usual dark, black and red colour palette to a design that was completely the opposite being light, bright, clean and simple. I was surprised at first because I would have thought that changing your brand visuals can hurt the brand but I liked the fact that she did something different visually. I am always up for taking calculated risks in business and hopefully this will pay off. During the iconography briefing stage I remember feeling somewhat confused when the results were not as expected. It is something I have experienced many times before in my world as an freelance marketing consultant and can be easily remedied with a simple but clear creative brief or a mood board to give the designer direction and inspiration.

After seeing it this few times in my line of work, it has become clear to me that some creatives are not always armed with the tools of the industrial creative industry ie advertising and marketing agencies. After advising Chloe on how to brief the designer we received more inspired designs. In the future, I would consider building a 'toolbox' of documents, templates and other resources to help artists navigate commissioning work with freelancers so that it is less frustrating. Or even they can use the tools to develop their own assets.

Marketing and Electronic Press Kit

I developed the marketing plan with a view to build Chloe's audiences, her brand and get buzz so that she can use the gains as a stepping stone to the next project. We learned quite quickly that building buzz from the 'Cruel Intentions' release required more momentum and support from her PR agency. It also needed extra resources to give it the attention needed and therefore the 'High' release will need to adopt a more grassroots approach working with influencers and friends networks plus amplifying activity with budget for advertising.

As this is my expertise I felt more comfortable leading in this area but it made me more aware of the fact that I do need to come out of my comfort zone and become more of an all-rounder in this industry if I want to continue working with directly artists. The most interesting part of this experience is the conversation of whether music PR is worth the money. From my experience, PR is usually measured with the same stick as marketing when it delivers completely different results. Jonathan encouraged Chloe to build relationships with blog editors herself to potentially get more value from the medium. Also PR is a much more valuable tool when used with other types of marketing or advertising.

In this particular experience I have learned that significant resources are required behind a release and therefore my marketing plan is probably just a tip of the iceberg. In terms of best practice, I have observed that emerging artists do need most support with their marketing around their release date so that they can know how to leverage other marketing channels rather than over-promoting to their fans on social media.

Budget

The budget covers a wider scope of activity than the initial seed money given by Tileyard that includes investment from funders and crowdfunding activity, with expenses going out to resources for radio plugging, live shows and merchandise in addition to normal marketing and music production costs. To date funding has yet to be secured for the live project and we are likely to continue with the project beyond in to next term with the resources we do have.

Jonathan developed the budget and I was really happy to see that he presented a version with realistic costs for a release campaign. Although we could release a single on a smaller budget than the £500 we received, seeing the numbers provides good insight. My participation here was that of a consultant/advisor and as a team we discussed the expenses splits to ensure they were not too far off the mark.

The scope of digital marketing and the pay-to-play nature of social media means that it is becoming more costly to run campaigns. There are many youth brands who are looking for tie-ins with musicians and music sponsorship is likely to rise. I would consider seeking out investment even from local companies but the tie-in needs to make sense both to their customers and Chloe's fans.

Digital technologies reflection

Social media & social advertising

Social media platforms went mainstream over ten years ago with many musicians being the early adopters at the time. Platforms such as YouTube and Instagram have helped so many artists garner attention from fans and labels alike, yet the application of best practices in my opinion is quite low among many musicians. I am unsure as to why this is the case but I believe there is still a wide opportunity for artists to be heard even in today's noisy digital environments.

I have found being among songwriters, producers and artists at Tileyard Education for the last 6 months has given me a lot of insight into how some people perceive social media. YouTube is still the number 1 site for music discovery but there are so many artist channels with not much content until their next release if there is one. I find it interesting when I am asked "What should I say?" on social media as artists are communicators albeit in a different form. I would like to know if influencers and entrepreneurs who are successful on social media have received training or they are natural born introverts and if many possess completely different traits from them. I would also like to know what would musicians need to make them more confident in using the platforms effectively.

There is still an assumption that most people know how to use social media to promote themselves and emerging artists are potentially losing out the most. Until they are in a position to have a social media team, there is a need to teach or coach them to have the bare essentials of storytelling and being social, on social media.

Ecommerce - lack of integration

The vinyl revival trend raised the question again with respect to access over ownership of music. With fewer independent record stores and the experience of buying music in a supermarket feeling odd, ecommerce will be left to bring up the rear to get music into the hands of the consumer. Given the lack of integration of many of the music ecommerce platforms with other online stores, the experience may continue to be poor and hamper sales.

Zapier is a well-known global industry platform that hosts plugins and digital tools that enable disparate platforms to automate their user's workflows. So for example, Survey Monkey can be integrated with Slack with one app. For the music industry there is very little in the way of integration between music platforms. Where is the app that integrates Spotify with MusicGlue? While you can embed Spotify into the platform visitors cannot purchase tickets, merchandise or other goods without leaving Spotify. I do find this frustrating as there is a lot of money left on the table. There are fans who are happy to spend money but the means do not exist.

I am not quite sure what I can do about this in the future but, I realise that in many ways music consumer needs and opportunities are still not being met. I just wonder if there are any entrepreneurs in this space as a one stop online digital experience for consumers. I believe the approach to the siloed music technology space is just a reflection of the fragmented music industry system and integration or consolidation may be inevitable.

Music consumption platforms

Many labels hail Spotify for saving the music industry due to the increased revenues through licensing and royalties. However, it has been questioned whether the model is sustainable for the next ten years in its current form as profitability is low and artist payout rates for signed and unsigned musicians are not paid in relation to who listened to their music. However, the future looks bright for voice activated systems.

I am still surprised by the fast adoption rate of smart speakers, and that's probably because I have left the early adopter club and become a laggard and a very cynical one at that. More people are using their smart speakers for music than for shopping which offers a huge opportunity for artists and music companies. Smart speakers may lead the mainstream adoption of the internet of things, just like how the iPod took digital music to the masses in the early 2000s. Would the value of music devalue as it becomes more ubiquitous? Or does the music industry need to find ways to make music have more intrinsic value to people's lives?

The point I have picked up here is that the music industry no longer owns the digital music consumption stage. I have often wondered why the music business does not learn to trade

directly with consumers. However they are in the rights management industry where perhaps revenues are more stable in the business to business world of music.

Conclusion

In this reflective summary I have reviewed the lessons I've learned during the group portfolio exercise. Although my role was more advisory with the exception of the marketing and social media stages which I led,, I noted that I wanted to get closer to the creative process of recording in particular.

It became clear to me that the work with artists requires an all-rounder skillset and mentality and I would need to break out of my comfort zone of developing strategies to really add value to a content side of a music project. I was also made aware how ill-equipped many emerging acts are when it comes to promoting music. Many best practices are not embraced, known or even understood when it comes to social media so many opportunities are potentially lost for really good talent until they team up with a social media or content editor to help them.

When it comes to budget, we must explore new ways to raise revenues for music projects. While there are many funders, there are also brands who see the value in partnering with a music act.

E-commerce is an untapped area for the music industry. The experience for music fans to hand over money is pretty much tolerated because there is little integration between music platforms like there are in the team collaboration world through sites like Zapier. In a world where Spotify integrates with Apple Music which integrates with Netflix which integrates with an Internet of Things household item, a whole world of opportunities opens for artists and music labels. Smart speakers are driving consumption of music, but will the music industry ever be involved with serving consumers? And if not why not?

Reference

Hermann, A. (2018). *Work-For-Hire Websites Give New Life to Songwriters, Producers and Beatmakers*. Available: <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/8449507/work-for-hire-websites-give-new-life-to-songwriters-producers-and-beatmakers>. Last accessed 16th May 2018.