

# **Merchandising For Life**

MA INTERNATIONAL MUSIC MARKETING

TERM 1. ESSAY

Emily Rose Talbot

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We all have some sort of merchandise item from our favourite artists, whether it be a t-shirt or a tour program on your bookshelf, maybe even a limited-edition screen print. Merchandise allows us to have a small part of the artist and the brand in our homes or allows us to express ourselves to the world.

Merchandising For Life (MFL) is an independent London based company who specialise in providing quality service for all aspects of Tour Merchandising, from the design process to stadium merch trucks. At MFL they offer an array of services to ensure that the artists they work with are getting the most out of their merchandise range and how they sell that to their fans.

The aim of the re brand and marketing campaign is to give MFL a fresh, modern approach in order to keep up with competitors. There is a huge lack of social media presence therefore potential business is being lost. Not only absent on social platforms but absent everywhere else. MFL need to be shouted about and be celebrated for the services they provide. Therefore, by placing them in environments where potential clients are located is necessary. Here is what I am planning to do.

There are a few merchandising companies that are similar to MFL. One of the main competitors is 'Bravado' who mainly work with the artists under the UMG label. As they work with huge global artists, they aren't able to offer the personable approach that MFL do. However, their social presence and over all branding is very modern but still professional. The curation of their social platforms is a perfect balance of showcasing the products and the artists.

MLF have an excellent reputation in the industry and have worked with huge artists such as Beyonce and Thirty Seconds To Mars. Their reputation of providing excellent customer service and quality product has kept them at the top for over 20 years. As the company director states 'Word of mouth, recommendations, relationships and repeat business' Petett, G (2021) Email to Emily Talbot, 10 March. Is how MFL as a business has been built however, now is the time for adaptation.

With '53.6% of the world's population using social media with the daily average usage of 2 hours and 25 minutes' (Chaffey , 2021) having a solid social presence is crucial. With the likes of TikTok joining the social media world, the battle to get seen has become harder. To be seen you have to be present. Currently at MFL the socials are hugely lacking and have not been used in nearly 10 years. By utilising these tools their advantage, they can build engagement and a following to spread the word about the company.

Video is King. As humans, studies show that our attention span is 8 seconds this has dropped by 4 seconds in 15 years. Creating visuals that are attention grabbing is vital, as we will naturally lose interest. As MFL are involved in all aspects of the merchandising process there are multiple opportunities to produce interesting and engaging content.

'As well as more brands looking to utilize videos, consumers are now watching more videos than ever before. It is estimated that the average person will spend 100 minutes every day watching online videos in 2021. This is a 19% increase compared to daily viewing minutes in 2019, which stood at 84.' (Chaffey, 2020) Not all content across platforms must be different, it only has to be formatted differently.

By creating a video series called "The Process: Pencil to Purchase" [1] can show how the team at MFL work. One of the core values of MFL is 'Transparency in business' Petett, G (2021) Email to Emily Talbot, 10 March. Showcasing the honesty in how MFL works with the client from start to finish allows new customers to see how MFL run their business, care about the client's needs and involvement of the process. This series can be featured across all socials including the website. The videos can be broken down into in-feed posts, stories, and IGTV for Instagram. 30 seconds clips for TikTok and full videos for Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

**the process:  
pencil to purchase**



*Figure 1, Pencil to Purchase video series designed by Emily Talbot*

As discussed in Forbes 'content marketing and search engine optimisation (SEO) is constantly evolving... Video continues to be a big driver of traffic.' (Wagner, 2017) By optimising the importance of video to drive social engagement as the algorithms are, maximising video content is essential. Video lends itself to adaptation and development. For MFL focusing on the different aspects of the process and artists. This series can include interviews with the MFL team, printers, artists and/or managers, touring merchandising managers.

Merchandising For Life is located on the Tileyard campus. With this location there is a huge opportunity to collaborate. At Tileyard Education there is a constant flow of fresh new artist wanting to promote themselves and become successful in the music industry.

Tileyard education offers courses for a multitude of topics with-in the music industry, with this there are so many possibilities to work with other students to create something new.

Often when starting out as a new artist the marketing fundamentals are forgotten about. 'we take the time out to sit down and go through it with them, educate, help them grow and build' Petett, G (2021) Phone call to Emily Talbot, 17 March. Promotion, one of the Seven Ps of marketing is the creation of the brand awareness, relaying brand values, creating brand loyalty and advertising. With this in mind Merchandising For Life creating a partnership with Tileyard Education would act as a teaching tool for new artists and the opportunity for them to work with an experienced and capable team, in order to produce brand awareness, i.e. merchandise.

This can be done by setting up events on the Tileyard campus for artists to meet with members of the MFL team and discuss what services they can offer in order to help them grow. As MFL work with the design, production and e-comms elements there are multiple ways in which artists can use their services. Having an array of items out to show the quality of production out for people to see will show the standard of production and how a merchandise range can be more than just a t-shirt.

MFL is a small team of ten staff alongside "a pool of independent road guys/gals that go out on tours. These people need to represent us so presentation/vibe/manners are all important as well as making sure the merch is well presented and the stock/money and sales sheets being spot on nightly." Petett, G (2021) Email to Emily Talbot, 10 March.

MFL pride themselves on having people who positively represent the MFL brand and values. As this is a key factor in the success of the business so far it is important to maintain this reputation and celebrate it. By having casual events to work with fresh new talent and the team is a great way to start that relationship off.

This gives both business and client an opportunity to discuss different price points and explain how the business works to those who aren't quite sure. Education on this topic can also be used as another branch of the Tileyard and MFL partnership. The university offers MA International Music Marketing and MA Music Business courses which leans towards an opportunity to host a master class to discuss the benefits of merch for promotional materials for your brand and the financial benefits and opportunities for the artists.

This masterclass can then be widened to other institutions such as BIMM University. By educating them on the importance of the merchandising business it allows creating awareness of the MFL name and quality services. When working with these universities it is mostly like going to be on a design and production basis at the start, this allows for a student discount deal, for example 10% off of a minimum order of t-shirts or free stickers with 'x' number of orders.

In order to obtain new clients, you have to advertise in a location for your target audience to see it. Music venues is an obvious location for MFL to have posters/flyers to gain more clients and lead them to the socials and website. The target audience for MFL are musicians and artists managers, who need a merch supplier or are open to discussion about obtaining a new one.

The demographic of a live music attendee is the band, the crew, the fans, venue employees and the industry. This allows for so many options to advertise and engage with the target audience as there is a common interest of all of the people in one space.

By creating bold, straight to the point adverts to break through the noise of a venue would be an excellent way to do this. As venues often advertise their own upcoming shows inside the doors there is already a location ready for a MFL poster, ranging from A4 on the back of the toilet doors of the digital screens in the foyers.

This can then be transferred into a festival environment. The walls containing the festival ground are an excellent example of this. In 2019 'more than five million people attended music festivals' (Department, 2021) the attendees would have seen the adverts lining the walls of the site. By using old school poster and paste is going to attract attention as long as it stands out. The use of large and bold typography, minimal and clean cut it will stand out from the crowd. Festivals also lean towards adaptations of the designs and also the message opposed to the venue advertising. General admission posters can contain the MFL handle (@merchforlife) to up the social numbers and engagement. Coinciding a giveaway around the time of the major festivals is also an excellent way to ensure engagement with new followers or new visitors to the MFL platforms.

However, obtaining a space in a guest area where most of the ideal target audience will be located it pushes the MFL brand to the fore front of their minds. By adapting the adverts from suiting the demographic but also after analysis of the psychographics of potential clients the information and message must be changed to be more appealing to them. 'psychographic profiling is done on what is known as the IAO variables, namely interests, activities, and opinions.' (Manola, 2019).

MFL are ultimately targeting people involved in the music industry on a larger scale in order to obtain the most amount of profit. Using a slogan something as simple as 'Let's Talk Merch' plants the seed. [2] There isn't any forceful language only suggestive, it gets the potential client thinking about their own merch range and how they currently do business.



*Figure 2, Poster mock-up for MFL festivals designed by Emily Talbot*

With the excellent reputation that MFL already holds it is more than likely that the artists/managers have already heard of MFL by word of mouth but due to 'very little social media engagement or pushing of the website' Petett, G (2021) Text Message to Emily Talbot, 15 March. People do forget, and your business ends up getting left behind. Again, referring back to the idea of being seen to be heard. By planting your feet firmly in the environment where your business is needed and essential it is going to be hard to be ignored.

Another expansion from this can be having a pop-up tent at some of the UK's smaller festivals in order to showcase the products and services that MFL can offer. A perfect location for this would be Slam Dunk festival and one day festival held in two locations over a weekend. With alternative/pop-punk, rock music filling the bill. MFL already hold a partnership with Slam Dunk and are the providers for the festivals merchandising range. At Slam Dunk there is a large area dedicated solely to the individual merch vendors from the bands on the line up. Many of these are acts from outside the UK and create Slam Dunk exclusive items. Additionally, to this many acts are on the same record label and many of these have their own tents in order to sell items of a similar artists who aren't playing, and attendees might be a fan of. I think this would be a great opportunity for MFL to gain new clients by holding their own tent to showcase the product range and have potential clients meet the team. [3]



*Figure 3, MFL Tent for pop-up events designed by Emily Talbot*

As MFL 'look after clients how we would like to be treated ourselves' Petett, G (2021) Email to Emily Talbot, 10 March. It allows potential clients to understand that also not only UK based but internationally too. MFL already work with clients in the US it would be an opportunity to grow that client base. The festival also offers a chance for fans to meet the bands through signing tent, which is hugely popular. This is usually sponsored by a brand assorted with the festival, for example in 2019 it was sponsored by 'Impericon' and online merchandise retailer. Each fan also gets a branded postcard to use for the signing. If MFL were to sponsor the signing tent it is another way to push the name into the limelight.

When looking at the competitors in the market it is very apparent that MFL were in need to update their branding. The current logo for MFL was concise and scalable, however felt outdated. The use of the blue for

the colour scheme connotes a very corporate business alongside the affiliation that blue tones hold amongst social media platforms. 'Color psychology is the study of colors in relation to human behavior' (Ferreira, 2019) Research shows that the use of Black 'is symbolic of mystery, power, elegance, and sophistication.' (Ferreira, 2019) this is apparent in the luxury retail industry with likes of Chanel and Nike. By changing the logo to black and white elevates the MFL brand into the newer sophisticated market where their competitors seem to already be.

Using a contemporary condensed sans serif typeface which has 'connotations of modernity and innovation' (Unknown, 2019) is so important to ensure engagement with clients who are looking to work with a team who are up to date. 'sans serif fonts give off a feeling of being casual, informal, friendly, and very approachable.' (Lavine, 2020) The feeling of being casual and personable is then reinforced by the text of throughout the re design. [4]

**merchandising  
for life**

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for life**

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for life

*Figure 4, Re-branded logo designed by Emily Talbot*

UX and UI design is so important in order to stand out from the crowd and drive the user through the navigation of the website. Search Engine Optimisation: the being easily located via an internet search engine. 'Google has clarified this repeatedly. There are no tricks or magic bullets that make a site search-friendly, just the value of the information it provides. And the ease of accessing and consuming that information once a search is initiated.' (Edic, 2019) This means that by inclusion of key words and phrases associated with your business is so important. Otherwise, your website is getting push further down the search page and ultimately having less click through. The information found on the website was valid and important however is getting lost, the lack of engaging visuals isn't enticing for the user.

By creating a fresh dynamic website which hold lots of visual's assets draws the user in, wanting to know more. By creating multiple subpages, each explaining the different services and what MFL stand for It should drive enquires about new business. The purpose of a brands website is to celebrate and show off your skill set and abilities and start a dialogue with new clients. [5]

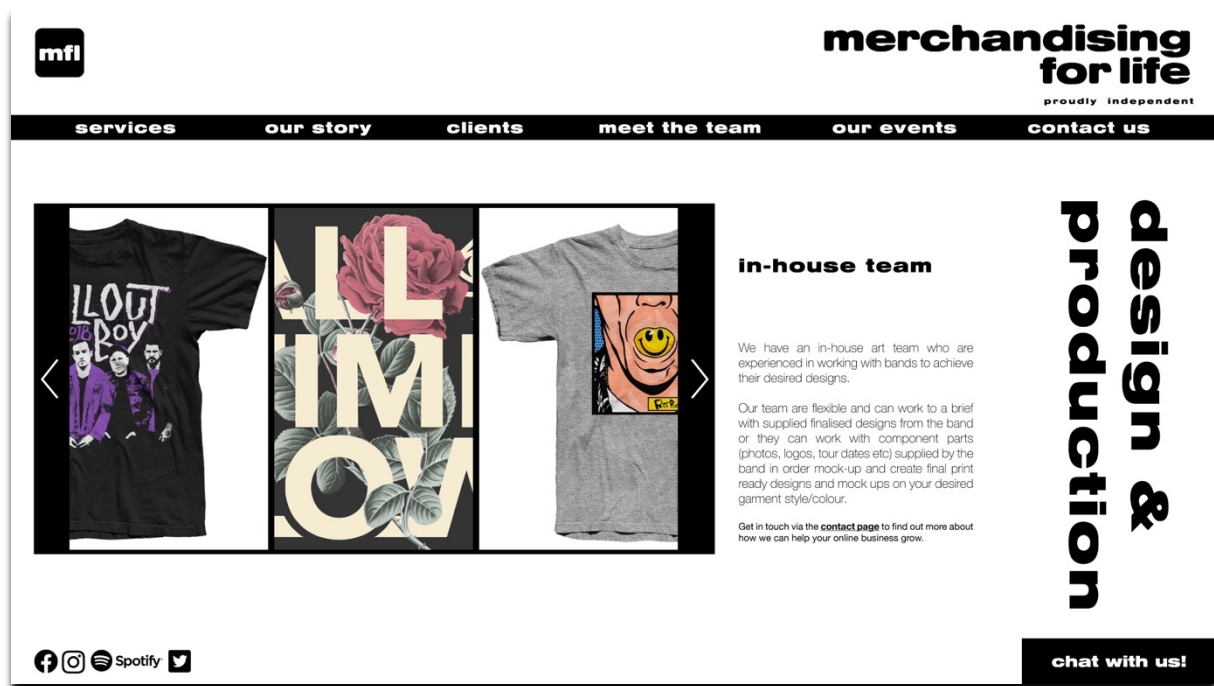


Figure 5,[5] New Website details, designed by Emily Talbot

*The inclusion of a meet the team aspect on the site pushes the personable approach that MFL have. Having a bio section gives the customer an idea of who they are and what they stand for. Accompanied by a photo, putting a face to a name, again pushing that idea of getting to know the people you are going to be working with. Additionally, an inclusion testimonial from valued clients, this will coincide with the team's experience and passion for the business. Showing evidence that they're respected have the backing from huge names in the industry. This can then be used as a part of the video series of static posting for social media.*

Curating an MFL playlist on Spotify with all the latest releases from the clients is a way to celebrate your client base and can be constantly updated. This is also another chance to show what the team at MFL are about, having staff members curating a monthly playlist of their current favourites. This platform can be shared easily, not only on MFL socials but the clients as well. Spotify is 'becoming a core platform for engaging with customers... there are three pillars for brands when it comes to their presence on Spotify. Playlists, Paid ads, Podcasting' Creating a chance to enhance engagement is always a smart move to make.

MFL can offer everything from the design all the way to the on-tour merchandising manager for a three-month run. As we know content is so important, by providing the clients with ready to post content around their new merchandise range takes the pressure off of them. By including the option of providing a look book as an add on option. Producing video and static content for all artists as well as MFL socials to show off the new merch release. This gives the fans a something to look forward too, building anticipation from teaser posts. Additionally, know knowing what you are going to pick up from the merch table before the show.

The more you can offer in-house the less hassle it is for your client. At MFL adapting the services to keep up to date with how quickly new technology is developing is crucial. As well as posting social media content is vital in the success and growth of a business as well as an artist. Looking into the option of producing NFTs (Non-fungible token) for some of the larger artists would be a great way to break away from the normal services. An NFT allows for a person to own a piece of digital artwork and there is only one exactly like it, it cannot be traded for something similar.

For example, 'bitcoin is fungible – trade one for another bitcoin' (Clark, 2021) the benefits of creating NFTs for artists to sell is 'ownership of the work (though the artist can still retain the copyright and reproduction rights, just like with physical artwork).' (Clark, 2021) For artists with an older demographic who have the disposable income. Owning an exclusive piece of art or alternative digital album cover for your favourite band is a mega fans dream. Producing NFTs is still developing and growing in the crypto currency market but it shouldn't be ignored.

If all of these elements were put into action over the course of a 6-month transition period Merchandising For life would certainly be seen and heard. The modern approachable user interface and visuals will keep MFL at the forefront of artists minds and will only gain business and engagement with this plan implemented.

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