



Group Lemonade

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ABSTRACT

This essay reviews and analyses my involvement in our group portfolio submission and the work we have created. It also discusses the current trends in the music industry, and how digital media has impacted the promotion of new popular music releases.

Introduction

When I first saw the group allocation, it made me quite nervous, because only my allocated group had 3 students who had not engaged with our live sessions and who are not part of our group chats. I have tried to attend as many live lectures as possible, but due to starting a new job as an artist manager in music management and publishing company Tier Music in February, some last minute meeting requests often have meant that I have had to catch up on lectures. This, alongside catching Covid-19 in March, has definitely made attending sessions challenging. Nevertheless, I have come to know the people on my course, so not being familiar with any names in my group was a surprise to me at first. On the other hand, I hoped that people who manage working and studying at the same time, probably know how important time management is, and would know how to be productive when working to strict deadlines.

We first started our group communication through Beebop, but could not find Federica La Ferrera in the system. We had some issues with Beebop messages in general and in hindsight, we should have immediately exchanged numbers and continued our communication on another platform. We also did not hear back from Ransford Laryea to confirm our initial meeting time so it was not surprising that it was just Jennifer Hukins and I on our first Zoom call.

Initial Meeting and Group Roles

Because of the fact that four members had suddenly become two, to me, our first meeting was already more of a problem-solving session, rather than an introductory meeting where we could spend time creating an agenda and a structure to our meeting, or setting a timeline for multiple deadlines. Prior to our call, we were hoping that we could use Ransford's original project for the assignment but because we struggled to communicate with him, we could not really plan anything just yet. Despite that, I believe our meeting was extremely effective - we conducted an informal audit of our skills and experiences and through our conversations we learned where our expertise lied. I also offered a plan B, which was to use my brother Karl Killing's work if Ransford would not reply.

Once it was confirmed that Ransford would not be participating in our group assignment, Jennifer and I met up again via Zoom. Based on our discussion on the previous call, I suggested the roles that best suited our respective strengths. I am currently part of an artist management team, and I have previously managed projects and worked in social media marketing; I also have some experience in working on artist releases. Moreover, given that Karl is based in Tallinn, which is where I am also currently living, it made more sense for me to liaise directly with him.

We were slightly concerned with our timeline, but in my experience, it is often considered a luxury to have months to prepare for a single release anyway, and frequently details are being finalised just weeks or even days before the release. After having met Jennifer, I had the confidence that we could manage everything with just the two of us. We gave ourselves 5 days to conduct initial research in our areas and develop our tasks; we constantly kept in touch via WhatsApp.

Branding and Marketing

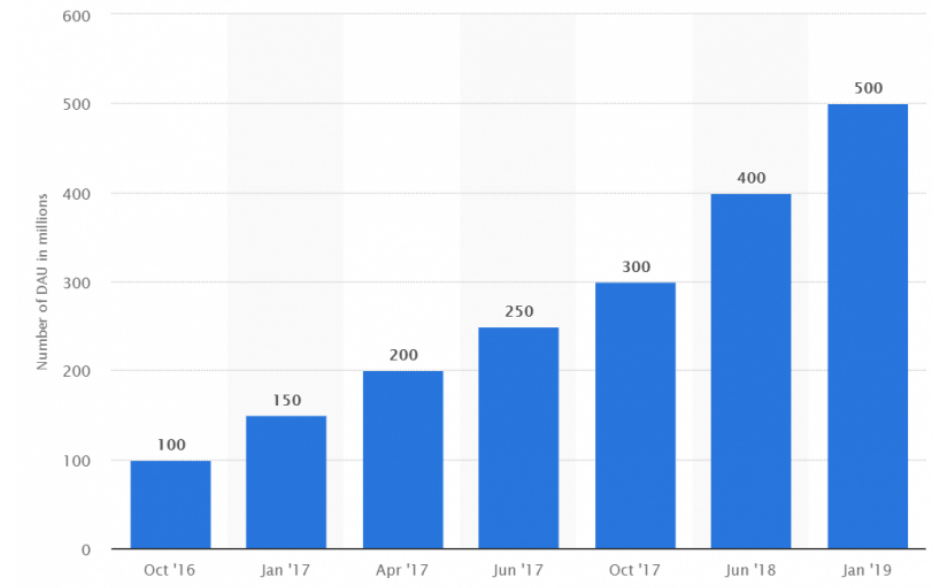
I have always found social media marketing fascinating. Having experience working in organisations as a digital marketer for musical collectives/artists, some of the workshops, webinars and research I have engaged with as part of my professional development in the last 2 years could be considered completely irrelevant in 2021. With algorithms and platforms changing daily, it can be challenging to keep up with new additions, and whilst the marketing principles remain the same, the ways of implementing them can change within days.

After familiarising myself with Karl's social media, it became clear that he is not engaging with his followers enough. Karl (2021) has got 13.5K followers on Instagram, which is also his main social media channel. His following fanbase is young, with almost 74% of his followers being under 25 years old; more than 70% of his followers are women. In my opinion, having a following this size can be both an advantage and a disadvantage. On one hand, it is guaranteed that whatever he posts, his core fanbase will engage anyway, and given that his main audience is teenagers/young adults who are the most active age group on social media, it is one of the easiest target audiences to work with. However, there are not as many options for testing, errors, and trying different approaches as it would be possible with smaller acts who may not have fully established and developed their name, fanbase and brand yet. Nevertheless, Karl is still discovering his individual image and as a 19-year-old, he is bound to go through different phases in his development, in both his musical and personal journey.

For our social media marketing campaign we decided to set our main focus on Instagram. We conducted research on multiple artists who have similar target audiences with Karl, such as Bazzi (2021), lauv (2021), alexander 23 (2021), and Jeremy Zucker (2021); we analysed their posting style, schedule, branding, and their approach to engaging with fans. All of these artists make their social media seem very organic, authentic and artist-driven, which is what their audiences want to see; it is relatable for their followers because although having millions of them, they have not lost the DIY style - it makes the audience feel as if they were part of something personal and intimate. Mark Knight (2018) states in his article that fans should be considered as friends, and just like with any friendship, it takes effort and work to maintain it, so receiving a *like* or a *follow* should be the start of the conversation, not the end of it.

When putting together a plan, I wanted to make sure that Karl would be comfortable with everything he posts, and that it would still work with his image, whilst finding ways to get the engagement numbers up through engaging Instagram stories and posts. According to a Cisco study (2020), by 2022, 82% of all online content will be video content, with ephemeral

content gaining more popularity. Ephemeral content is something that is available only for a short duration and disappears afterward (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2021), such as Instagram Stories. People's attention span is short and once they have seen a post or a story, the likelihood of them wanting to see that again is minimal. This theory is backed by the substantially increasing numbers of Instagram Stories' daily active users in the last 5 years.



Statista, 2021

I often find that some artists are so focussed on the creation process that once they have finished writing their music, they think their job is done. Actually, this is where the real work starts. It's great to think differently but remember most people don't (Knight 2018). It is important that the work is easily accessible on every popular platform - if a product is amazing but no one can find it anywhere, all the effort is a waste of time. Of course, it can also be the other way around, and a product that is not of a high standard gets backed up by clever marketing and a vast marketing budget, therefore does extremely well.

Having recently created and realised a social media release plan in conjunction with Warner Music for NOËP, an Estonian based artist, I believe that for our release plan with Karl I was able to identify and apply the most current trends, whilst making appropriate adjustments based on his target audience.

Karl is also being followed by many musicians and producers all over the world, which I thought would be useful when promoting the remix of his single. I had the idea of making the stems of his original song available for everyone to download, so people could come up with their own remixes, and Karl could then repost and share them. Through collaborating with other producers and musicians, Karl's music could be introduced to new audiences and it could be helpful for gaining new fans, and even start new creative collaborations. In the future, similar challenges could also be expanded to TikTok. I have not seen many production challenges as such on the platform yet, so this could be something unique to try out and on reflection, I could have already added it to our marketing plan for Skin Tight's remix to test how it would do on a platform that is new to Karl.

Our project is unique in a way that we are looking at multiple markets simultaneously - Estonia, UK and the rest of the world. If a UK artist is doing well nationally, there is a good chance they have already gained some international attention as well, whereas because Estonia is a very small country, it is relatively easy to get national coverage but difficult to reach international audiences. Nonetheless, in my opinion, we are experiencing one of the most exciting times in music marketing, where it has never been easier to reach billions of people, regardless of their geographical location. However, because there is more music available for consumers, the challenge lies in being unique and making your voice heard. In the future, it might be beneficial to create multiple marketing campaigns with emphasis on different aspects, for example creating a standout storyline to introduce him in new regions, and use the approaches that have previously been tested nationally in other markets as well.

Additional Assets

Throughout the campaign, we have been trying to showcase the authenticity and realness in Karl's posts and actions, and one way of showing raw talent is through live performances. We thought showcasing live vocals and him playing guitar without any post-production would demonstrate his abilities as a musician so we created a stripped back acoustic version of the song. We used Leroy Sanchez' (2017) live video of Versace on the Floor as our first reference, but due to weather conditions and pandemic restrictions we filmed the performance in his studio, which definitely was not the preferred location. In the future, we could improve the video by making it visually more engaging and attractive by finding an interesting location outdoors.

Communication

Developing meaningful interpersonal relationships can be challenging, but it is more important for the artist manager than any skill or talent (Allen, 2018). In my experience, artists can often be very difficult to liaise with. They often miss messages, forget meetings, ignore the deadlines, which is essentially why they need to be managed. However, my communication with Karl was excellent. Obviously, he is my brother and we are close, therefore we knew how to work together, but it was very enjoyable for me to see him in his professional environment - he was very easy to work with and he was very helpful. Although it would have been more interesting to me to work with someone new, both Jennifer and I feel that the main reason we managed to create our portfolio this quickly was due to Karl's cooperation and professionalism. Knowing that I can trust him eliminated the stress factor that I have previously experienced when working with other artists.

The communication between Jennifer and I has been excellent throughout the project. Both of us have taken a substantial amount of responsibility for our work, and although having more to do with just the two of us in our group, I actually believe that it allowed us to spend less time on Zoom meetings, planning, or chasing people, and more time on doing the work. We both met every deadline we gave ourselves, we were organised, attended every meeting, and although we did have a challenging start, once we were working on our tasks, everything fell into place very quickly. Jennifer was very easy to work with, and I felt I could trust her.

Conclusion

This assignment is an excellent way for students to learn and acknowledge that in this line of work, it is expected to be effective and efficient at numerous different tasks, from writing press releases to artist liaison and budgeting. A career in artist management requires a continuing - almost daily - education by paying attention to what is happening in the music business and other industries and events that affect it, and what that means to the artists they manage (Allen, 2018). It has also made clear that I do enjoy working with artists on their releases and my main interest still lies in artist management. What I find most enjoyable is the fact that I can help someone achieve their goals and realise their potential, and although some of the daily tasks are the same, every day can be different, depending on the artist and the company you work with. Having had some practical experience in most of the tasks in the given assignment was definitely helpful.

I feel that this assignment is challenging for online students who may not have access to the resources required - something that has also been compounded by the pandemic. The reason we were able to put this project together this quickly after our difficult start was because my brother was happy to help us, otherwise we would have struggled to find any artists from the programme because we do not know them and often, online students are not based in the same city, or even in the same country. If students are on campus every week and know fellow students from different courses, it is definitely easier to create a successful portfolio. Going forward in my studentship, I need to be more proactive with trying to meet more students. Nevertheless, I enjoyed working on the assignment and I am very happy with our portfolio.

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