

Bands for Brands – How much do they really have to fit?

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1. What you want is some bombastic ...

In 1995, in a commercial for *Levi's* "Double Stitched" jeans that was shown in cinemas worldwide, a song was used that transformed its singer into a reggae pop megastar. The story of the commercial and the music fit perfectly: In a clay animation, the ultra cool Mr. Bombastic wearing his indestructible *Levi's* jeans rescues a helpless woman from the flames of a burning skyscraper. The song "Mr Bombastic" and the charismatic deep voice of the singer are as ultra cool as the heroic protagonist of the commercial. Right at the beginning, the stage name of the singer can be heard briefly: *Shaggy!* Jamaican artist *Orville Richard Burrell* was already a successful international musician, but it was the massive attention the *Levi's* commercial attracted that resulted for him in a comeback and international success culminating in a Grammy award in 1996. Both sides profited from this cooperation, *Levi's* as a commercial brand and *Shaggy* as an international artist.

The following article deals with the subject of brand artist partnership, which is becoming increasingly relevant, and introduces a model for determination of a definitive fit between brand and artist.

2. Status quo in the advertising and the music industry

For several years, an exciting constellation has developed in the advertising and music industry, both of which are undergoing a fundamental paradigm shifts. Most affected is the music industry, where after a short-lived boom after the launch of the compact disc in 1983 a serious crisis has set in following the total digitalization of the music supply. This concerns mainly the sound carrier market, which is still at the hub of the music industry. In the centre of this paradigm shift in the music industry are new income-creating potentials for artists and the discourse on future function and relevance of music businesses. While proponents of the distribution perspective cling to the current model of market cultivation of the music industry and call for a rapid adaptation for the digital music market, the proponents of the content perspective question all traditional process of the music industry. The latter have recognized the extent of change and are developing concepts for new sources of revenue.

The disintegration of the dogmatic separation between principal and ancillary rights in music utilization is possibly a significant step towards new concepts in music marketing. Essentially, principal rights of music utilization include marketing of rights of use of composition and production of music. To date, these are observed mainly by music labels, publishers and collecting companies. All other rights of use are termed ancillary rights and belong directly to the artist or his/her management. These primarily include live performances and use of artist images in merchandising/licensing, advertising contracts and other forms of cooperation with brands.

While up to now, principal rights of music utilization are at the fore of commercial use, the economic focus is increasingly shifting towards the commercialization of ancillary rights. Already, the majority of revenue in the music market is not generated from the sale of music per se, but from the commercialization of the relevant ancillary rights. Most attractive for the artist is the commercialization of his/her image as it requires not too much additional work and expense. Thus, a distinct change can be observed in the attitude towards the advertising industry.

While in 1968, *Jim Morrison* deemed the potential use of the song "Light My Fire" in a commercial for the car manufacturer *Buick* to be in league with the devil, it is today almost taken for granted that *Lenny Kravitz* (obviously motivated by an appropriate remuneration) was inspired by the market values of the Vodka brand *Absolut* when he wrote his song "Breathe" exclusively for this company. In 2006, *Absolut* communicated this fact with its "Absolut Kravitz" campaign including an own web site with free downloads of the song and various remixes. By now, cooperation with brand producers, i.e. brand artist partnership, has become a constant factor in the marketing of a pop star. The advertising industry, just as the music industry, albeit not quite as dramatically, is also experiencing a period of change. The reasons are mainly the increasing information overload and consumers with marketing experience, who respond to advertising far more knowingly and deliberate. Here also, the effects of digitalization can be noted which offer increasing opportunities to avoid adver-

tising (e.g. through video on demand, pay TV, HDD recorder, TV commercial filter etc.) and for individual consuming (e.g. via *youtube.com*). While above-the-line advertising continues to claim most of the communication budget, a trend towards below-the-line advertising is becoming apparent. The separation between above- and below-the-line is increasingly discarded by advertisers. Instead, individual advertising features are linked and integrated in holistic communication strategies.

3. Branded entertainment and brand artist partnership

While in the 1950s and 1960s, commercials resembled consumer information, the advertising of today must first of all be emotional, captivating and entertaining. It has to offer the consumer more than simple product information or it runs the risk of not being accepted resulting in ineffectiveness or negative impact. Therefore, brands are increasingly including their advertising message into their own or other tailor-made entertainment. Branded entertainment may be defined as the convergence of the advertising and the entertainment industry attempting to reasonably and authentically combine the advertising message with a relevant entertainment content which would not exist without the input of the brand. It is mainly found in the area of pull marketing, while push media may also be employed. Thus, brand entertainment comprises an almost unlimited variety of manifestations.

In the area of TV and radio, there is the advertiser funded programming (AFP) comprising not only classic program sponsoring but also provision of complete sections or entire shows by a brand. The idea to sponsor the content of radio and TV shows or to actually produce them is almost as old as radio itself. For example, between 1923 and 1933, NBC stations broadcast the popular weekly music show "The Cliquot Club Eskimos" sponsored by the US American drinks manufacturer *Cliquot Club Company*. In 1924, the *Washburn Crosby Company* bought an entire radio station (WLAG) to broadcast the "Betty Crocker Cooking School". In 1932, *General Mills*, as the successor of the *Washburn Crosby Company* launched the first real soap opera "Betty and Bob".

Today, several brands have their own TV station on the internet, often including extensive music offers (e.g. the Mercedes Mixed Tape music magazine at *mercedes-benz.tv* or Tommy TV at *tommytv.com*). Other online forms of branded entertainment are, for example, corporate pod- or vodcasts, brand's own web radio players or free music downloads. In the area of live entertainment, mainly sports, music, comedy and theatre are involved. All of these can be termed events. Initiation of an event from outside for the purpose of brand communication is generally considered sponsoring. If the event is organized from within, this is called event marketing or sales promotion. In the long run, all types of branded entertainment have one thing in common: They communicate on an emotional level and offer the recipient added benefits resulting in significantly stronger brand bonding than through conventional advertising.

Music is the perfect content for branded entertainment. It can be easily (digitally) distributed and integrated in almost all communication channels. Pop music (in the broadest sense also rock, metal, punk etc.) also offers the advantage of the global music culture. Music provides intercultural and meaningful semiotics and optimum opportunities for differentiation with its almost unlimited and constantly changing reservoir of genre. And finally, the compactness of musical items is a significant aspect for new distribution methods. A free download of a pop song in mp3 format or a music video on youtube is a completely different affair than the download of a *Wagner* opera. One characteristic of pop music is the fact that often (but certainly not always) the artist and not the music is the main attraction. As the long-time rock artists of the band *Survivor* sing in "It's the singer not the song!":

*"When there's magic in the music
It's the singer not the song
When it's comin' from the heart
All the people sing along
It's the man behind the music
It's the singer not the song"*

Hence, branded entertainment with pop music only makes sense when the respective artist is incorporated in a brand artist partnership. This cooperation can be designed in many ways and offers uncountable links for cross promotion. Thus, target groups which have been difficult to reach with conventional advertising can now be focused on with branded entertainment. Its protagonists, the pop stars, are idolized by their fans and have enormous power as opinion leaders. Mostly, they have a clear-cut profile with a distinctive image. Their music videos are often like commercials for an entire life style and thus for a complete range of products. Their music moves people and often expresses what cannot be put into words. And the lyrics of their songs (especially those from critical and politically active artists) can impart messages which normally may not find the same level of attention. Manufacturers who promote their produce with the assistance of *John Lennon, Jimi Hendrix, Kurt Cobain, U2, Ozzy Osbourne, Madonna* or *above* can (!) issue a strong statement about their brand that reaches far beyond the respective piece of music. Therefore, pop stars are most attractive as advertisers for many brands and are increasingly integrated into brand communication with far reaching cooperation. The artist's perception of the advertising industry has also changed along with the above mentioned paradigm shift. Advertising is no longer considered to be incompatible with artistic aspirations, but rather an opportunity for the realization of productive synergies. For many a newcomer, cooperation with a brand offers considerable promotional support, such as for the newcomer band *The Subways* whose song "Rock 'n' roll queen" from their debut album was used in 2006 as background music in the advertising campaign "Your fragrance, your rules, your song?" for the *Hugo Boss* perfume "Hugo". The band attracted extra attention because the audience of the first TV spot was asked to vote

on the Hugo web site for their favorite from a choice of three more of the band's songs for the upcoming TV commercial. Artists who are already megastars are not only delighted about the financial aspects of brand communication. In 2004, *Christina Aguilera* composed her song "Hello" exclusively for the world premier of the second generation *Mercedes* A-class. She performed the song live at the launch which was simultaneously used as background music in the advertising campaign. She profited from worldwide media presence, while at the same time, improving her image towards more integrity.¹ The fact that the song could be downloaded for free exclusively and for a limited period only from the *Mercedes-Benz* web site attracted an even bigger media echo. One example for the strong trend that is currently evolving in brand artist partnerships is the brand-owned music label "Green Label Sound" which was founded in 2008 by *Mountain Dew*. This is a program especially aimed at promotion of newcomers through free music downloads on greenlabelsound.com. However, closer inspection reveals that it is simply another form of free music download, comparable to the Mercedes Mixed (mercedes-benz.tv/mixedtape).

The only real and at the same time successful music label managed by a non-music company as branded entertainment is the label "Hear Music" which was founded in 2007 by *Starbucks*. It resulted from the cooperation with *Concord Music Group* and was the outcome of a music compilation program by the same name from Starbucks, which had been in existence since 1999. It profited mostly from the direct chain of distribution via Starbucks branches worldwide. Most CD sales were probably impulse purchases giving in to the temptation to buy from the invitingly presented music on offer while waiting for the ordered coffee. The multisensory and thematic fit between brand and coffee experience plays a key role here: everything fits, the smell of coffee, the taste of coffee, the look and feel of the branch interior, the music from the loudspeakers and, finally, the choice offer of music CDs at the cash register. Artists who have published under this label include megastars such as *Paul McCartney, Alanis Morissette, John Mellencamp* or *Joni Mitchell*. As already mentioned, Starbucks is an isolated case profiting from established distribution channels and relying on a professional music label. The competence to build up pop stars continues to remain with actual music companies, labels and publishers. Another innovative and unconventional example for successful branded entertainment with music is the label "DEF Mini Records" which was set up in 2007 by the agencies *BBDO Germany, .start* and *Interone Worldwide*. This is an obvious advertising campaign of the *Mini* motor car presenting a fantasy label with plenty of wit and irony that satirizes common clichés of the music industry. In contrast to Green Label Sound and Hear Music, the audience clearly realizes that this is simply an advertising campaign dealing in a sympathetic way with a serious issue.

¹ Of note, regular image change used to be a distinct characteristic of this artist.

The especially cast bands are all named after the most important safety features of the Mini which also appear in the lyrics. For example, the Country singer *Runflat* sings in his song "Another 100 Miles": "50 Miles an hour, a nail stuck in the tyre, a little light is warning me ... but I shift one gear higher". Another example are the punk rockers *The Disc Breaks* with their hit single "Save me": "One road one curve the perfect blend, the ABS won't let me end" (defminirecords.com).

4. Image transfer from pop star to brand

Partnerships between brands and pop stars are usually intended to increase brand popularity or to cultivate an image. Below, the aim of image cultivation will be discussed which may be divided into three subcategories:

- Image creation: Due to the novelty value when a brand is launched, its image has not yet become consolidated with its target groups. In this case, brand artists partnership offers the opportunity to build a unique brand image.
- Image modification: If the existing brand image does not represent the intended image, brand artist partnership can be used to move the brand image in the desired direction with target groups. Radical changes should be avoided here.
- Image stabilization: Even an already existing and well positioned brand image requires continuous attention. Brand artists partnerships can help to support the brand image through associations with the artist.

Although self evident, the essential importance of decisive target definition for every communication campaign cannot be stressed often enough. Despite the fact that target definition always stands at the beginning of every process model it is often marginalized due to time pressure or aimless actionism. Once a campaign has been decided on the first creative ideas will bubble forth before the direction of the campaign has become clear. Thus, image transfer and maximum fit between artist and brand will soon be discussed despite the fact these are per se mutually exclusive as will be shown below. A preconceived target definition, however, is based on careful actual-theoretical analysis of the brand image which will determine whether an image must be built, modified or stabilized. In order to establish a purposeful and definitive amount of image fit between artist and brand, a model can be used which is essentially based on the congruency theory by *Osgood and Tannenbaum*. With this model, direction, extent and distribution of a possible image transfer can be decided on. According to Osgood and Tannenbaum: „[...] changes in evaluation are always in the direction of increased congruity with the existing frame of reference" (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955, p. 43).

This model is based on triadic relationship structures between recipient, artist and brand. In the initial situation, the recipient has already formed his/her personal opinion of the artist and the brand, which may be located on a continuum between the positive and the negative

pole. If the recipient notices a positive relationship between artist and brand, he/she will unconsciously and automatically attempt to conciliate his/her present opinion of the artist and the brand. In advertising psychology, this is referred to as congruence through cognitive reorganization. Usually, it implies that both opinions are moving towards each other. If, for example, an attitude towards a brand was not as good as the attitude towards the artist, the artist will lose some of his esteem, while the brand will gain some. The actual extent depends on the degree of the relevant polarization, i.e. how negative or positive the attitude had been. Here, firmer attitudes are more resistant to change than weaker ones, i.e. in case of incongruence; firmer attitudes will be changed less than weaker ones. If the aim of communication is an image transfer from artist to brand (image creation or image modification), the artist should be positively polarized by the respective target group significantly more than the brand. This ensures that the brand image and not the artist image are influenced. On the other hand, for the artist, the congruence theory implies that his/her image may be affected more or less through cooperation with a brand depending on incongruence and polarity constellation. From the point of view of the artist, careful examination of the potential partner's image is highly recommended. However, in practice, this is rarely done sufficiently.

Another important aspect of the model is the credibility of the partnership between artist and brand since with increasing incredibility a brand's image effect decreases and it could, in the worst case scenario, reverse to a negative one. The general aim of image cultivation implies that the artists contributes at least the same if not even more positive image values to the partnership than the brand.

Based on a given brand image, the interplay of congruence pressure (dependent on artist image) and incredibility in relation to image affect of the brand can be demonstrated in a diagram. For this see figure 1. Here, the best areas for image aims, creation, modification and stabilization can be deduced.

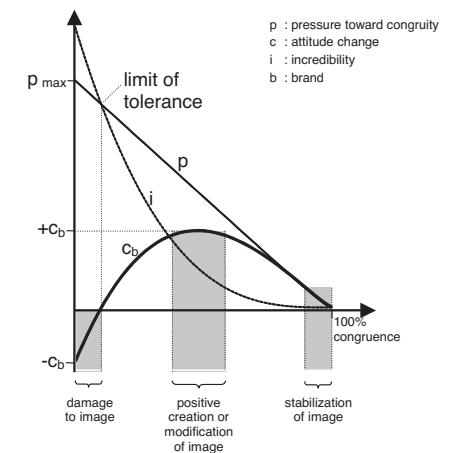


Figure 1.
Areas of image effect
in brand artist partnerships.

As shown, depending on the target of communication, a different degree of congruence (fit) should be aimed for. Hence, to create or modify a positive brand image, a degree of congruence with maximum transfer potential (+cb max) should be selected. This corresponds with a moderate incongruence where the partnership between brand and artist is still considered credible. For stabilization of the brand image, on the other hand, maximum congruence should be aimed for. In case of extreme incongruence, a high level of incredibility can additionally damage the brand image resulting in the so-called “boomerang effect” where the exact opposite from the desired effect occurs. The critical point between positive and negative image effect is $i = p$ representing the individual limit of tolerance of recipients.

Regarding credibility of a brand artist partnership, this model not only allows prognoses on direction, extent and distribution of an image transfer, but also simultaneous assessment of potential risks for the cooperation partners.

5. How to find the right artist for partnerships

To ensure selection of the right artist for a partnership two additional factors apart from the image fit must be considered in a filtering process. These relate to sound identity and the respective target group (see figure 2). Obviously, pop stars have a distinct sound identity determined by the music they produce. This comprises, e.g., genre, instrumentation, general emotional appearance, timbre and the singer’s voice. The fact that brands have sound identity should be apparent after reading of this book. In a first step in strategic planning for cooperation with pop stars, it must be determined what sound profile the artists in question should have to achieve the desired fit.

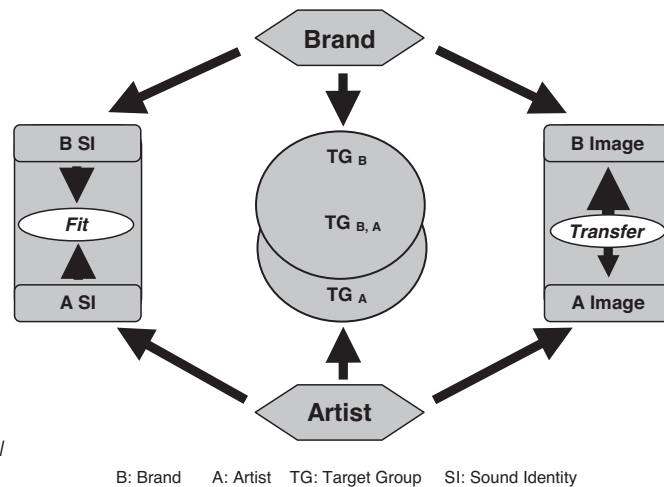


Figure 2. Three factor model of artist selection.

Next, the target group of the relevant artists must be compared with the brand’s target group. For this, a variety of tools for target group segmentation is available whereby the choice of tool depends on the requirements of the brand. Once these two filtering processes are completed, only a small selection of potentially suitable artists should remain. Finally, in the last and most elaborate step, the relevant artist images must be compared with the brand image to achieve the desired fit.

6. Conclusion

The image of advertising has changed. Advertising no longer has to be pesky or allege things which are untrue or misleading. Instead, advertising can be authentic, cool and entertaining. Here, exclusive partnerships with pop stars offer brands a high potential for distinction. And a complete fit of artist image and brand image is not mandatory. Indeed, a moderate measure of positive incongruence offers the highest potential for the image effect of an advertising campaign. A too distinct misfit, however, may result in image damages. Therefore, the following points should be preferably considered when planning brand artist partnerships:

- What is the image aim? Should the image be created, modified or stabilized?
- Depending on the aim, the anticipated measure of congruence must be determined between artist image and brand image.
- The credibility of the partnership must be considered as moderating variable. Hence, brand image modification can only be performed in small steps in the medium or long term. Too dramatic “image jumps” may be seen as not credible by recipients and result in reactance.

References

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quotation:

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In: Bronner, K. / Hirt, R. (eds.): Audio Branding. Brands, Sounds and Communication.
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