On Audio Identity

This summary is the basis for the Marni Offbeat concept. It gives an introduction and overview about the world of audio branding and provides context about audio identity.
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Music is perhaps the most affective way of communication, therefore the right music matters.

The strategic use of music to create a memorable brand identity that the audience can connect to is called sonic branding. It is part of the manner in which a brand communicates. The focus lies in creating memorable messages and associations.

Music especially but also audio in general holds a lot of power. Music can generate various reactions; it can deeply affect our emotions and instigate feelings of familiarity that can be tapped into to create a lasting bond. This is what great brands do through the use of sonic branding.

Sonic identity is more than just picking some pretty song. It is equally rooted in the brands values and personality like the visual or verbal identity. It is important to realize that an effective sonic identity should be incorporated in all of the brand’s communication in order to ensure consistency and cohesiveness on all channels.

A great sonic identity captures attention, creates recognition and tugs on emotions.

The strength of a sonic identity is often greatly influenced by its relationship to visuals, as it rarely stands alone, and the audience doesn’t process the two separately. The conscious attention is mostly focused on the visual identity while sonic messages are processed intuitively. An effective sonic identity will work together with the visual identity to complement, create a unified message and fill the gap that a visual identity alone would not be able to fill. In the end a brand can only engage its audience effectively when it utilizes all elements of its identity.
Hearing is the first sense we develop in the womb. Already as an embryo we start to learn and recognise sounds. We process sound subconsciously, making its reaction emotional rather than rational, which is its greatest value for branding.

Music is also a strong memory trigger in itself as well as has a strong associative power. It can work as a cognitive trigger to places (Spain, France, etc.), eras (Middle ages, eighteenth century), subcultures (Hip-Hop, Grunge, ..) and so much more. There have been experiments in supermarkets showing that people will buy French wine when French music is played and German wine when German music is played. A small detail in our subconscious makes a big difference in the decision. Because, we don’t need to listen in order to hear. Making us receptive at all times to the audio signals and messages that float around.

Audio Branding makes it possible for brands to reach consumers in places they usually can’t. Be it emotionally or through new media.

Brands can utilize those triggers and associations to relay their message on another level. Either using sonic elements on their own or in combination with text or visuals, adding a communicative layer. Brands attach themselves to genres or artists benefiting from connotations or establishing their own.

Benefits
Audio Branding can take any forms as long as it is consistent with a brand’s communication. It is any sound/musical expression by a brand from advertising music to the voice of the receptionist.

A brand can have as many audio outlets as it likes as long as they complement each other and are part of the brand strategy. Overall audio branding is today a stronger part of brand experience than only message communication.
Possible expressions of audio branding

JINGLE
A short musical slogan together with a tune. Almost exclusively used in radio advertising.

SONIC LOGO:
A sonic logo is the audio equivalent of a visual logo (think Intel or T-mobile)

BRAND SONG (LUFTHANSA)
A bespoke song expressing the brand’s values and mood that can be used in a variety of scenarios. (Lufthansa’s brand song is played in presentations in air and lounges)

SOUNDSCAPE (TELEPHONE WAITING LINE)
A Soundscape is less catchy than a brand song, intended for background purposes and there to be often readjusted for different uses. (Telephone on hold lines)

PRODUCT SOUND
Some products have close to no sound whereas are nothing but sound. They can be asset or a liability and become more and more engineered. (Think how does the closing of your car door sound. /the closing of the lid of your compact powder, or your electrical toothbrush.)

ADVERTISING/ CORPORATE FILMS
Depending on its purpose film music is either campaign or brand specific.

SPOKESPERSONS:
Is the voice male or female? Young or old? Squeaky or deep?

PRESENTATIONS / FASHION SHOWS:
What kind of music or sound is used for brand presentations? Is it live or recorded? How loud is it?

RETAIL/OFFICE/CONFERENCE MUSIC:
What do customers/clients hear when they enter your brand space. What do you own employees hear?

WEB/DESKTOP/MOBILE:
On any website sound can be integrated. The questions is is it in the background, or is there a player with curated music by a brand.

GAMES/APPs
Many games and applications use music. Do they have notifications sounds? Music? Or is it maybe even about music itself.

PODCAST:
Podcasts give a brand the opportunity for editorial content, but also again the question of speaker and tones of voice.

Even though not their own specific medium celebrity and musician endorsements should also be seen as a part audio branding as well as sponsored concerts and events.

Never forget: Also silence communicates a message.
Leading companies in the industry. Strategic players and innovators with experience. They are to go to agencies for sonic branding.
Sixième Son

FDJ: French lottery: To stand out among competition the FDJ added an audiovisual signature to all of its commercials. A mix of cheeky, festive and mysterious that enforces the brand's uniqueness and strengthens its relationship with the public.

Sixième Son is one of the most established consultancy firms for audio branding. The company was established in 1995 in Paris and since has set up offices in Moscow, Chicago and Barcelona. The company concentrates exclusively on audio branding and environmental sound design. With brand consultants and professionals composers on the team they see the process through every step of the way.

Sixième Son does work through all industries and regularly wins awards for their outstanding work. Their case studies are published on their website and give great insight into how a major consultancy deals with the development of an audio identity for clients all over the world.

French Open: An audio identity for the tennis tournament based on the texture of the court, the values of tennis and epic musical elements creating an anthem.
Massive Music is an international music agency, founded 2000 in Amsterdam. It is very much an all rounder agency, covering all aspects of music. From legal consultancy to sonic branding, voice sourcing, licensing, arranging sponsorships, source talent or develop audio strategies. They do it all. And for all industries, be it advertising, broadcasting, interactive or film.

Headquarters is still in Amsterdam but have further offices within London, New York, Los Angeles and Shanghai.
Sonic Branding & Music Activation: Cornetto Cupidity Campaign:
Headlining the global campaign is a catchy brand song called “I’m In Love” which to give it local relevance is interpreted by local and international stars artists.

Sonic Branding: Developing Carlsberg’s auditory identity. As part of global rebranding sonic branding was chosen as a key tactic to convey the brand values and deliver the brand message. Massive Music developed a four note sonic device that could be implemented into all touch-points.

Idea: “Drinking a Carlsberg is a reward for daily acts of courage.”
TRENDS

Audio Experience

Over the last year the experience economy has been growing with consumers spending their money towards ‘things to do’ rather than just buy.

This shows well in the UK’s 2014 (consume) data, where restaurants and bars had the highest increase in sales/turnd over of 10.7% year-on year in November alone.

This has also influenced the practises of audio branding. Here it shows itself in a move away from (repetitive / static) signifiers towards listener interaction as well as creation. It is all about creating a personal experience significant to the individual. Engagement becomes a choice by the consumer making interaction if chosen all the more in-depth and powerful.

An example from last year is the Google Night Walk, a virtual walking tour through Marseille. It was created to encourage people to discover more with Google Maps. Other than usual tour guides it let the user explore the surroundings at their own pace. The project was done in collaboration with Julie de Muer, a French urban storyteller who creates audiowalks. The tour had an audio guide and relayed more information through pop-up info boxes and embedded videos, but was
otherwise driven by sound including the ambient noises of the city, outdoor recordings and customised music.

Philips used a similar approach to promote the quality of their audio products and engage with consumers that seek outstanding music experience. ‘Obsessed with Sound’ gave users a new listening experience to the Metropole Orchestra. A unique interactive video that let users single out every detail and discover more about the musicians. Each musician could be singled out, listened to their unique part and see every note they play. It let users dive deep into the orchestral experience communication all the while that with Philips they are able to hear those details.

An even more product sound focused experience came from Mercedes with ‘Sound with Power’ campaign, that explored how sound has the power to ignite different emotions including that of the new Mercedes-Benz E 63 AMG engine. Its online campaign included a digital mash-up tool that let consumers create their own music out of a range of musical sounds and Mercedes sounds. Even though the campaign ran in late 2013 the tool is still online and used today and regularly shared through social media.
All areas of communication have been influenced by the rise of more storytelling. Consumers are so used to having access to information when and where they want that there is only a small window of time to grab their attention and stand out.

This has also affected audio branding. Audio becomes more and more conceptual driven, less mainstream and more likely to stand out. The story and values trump catchy tunes and strict attachment to musical styles.

The most outstanding recent realisation is the Colour Concert conducted by Neil Harbisson as part of Vodafone’s ‘Firsts’ campaign. The campaign was about personal innovation and inspiring people to think in a new way. Harbisson is colour blind but has already for 10 years a camera antenna attached to his brain that translates colours around him into sound frequencies making it possible for him to see colour. He taught a children’s choir what notes go with which colours and then held a concert in Barcelona’s La Sagrada Familia setting its interior and window colour scheme into music. Vodafone also sponsored an app for the...
occasion that held the same functionality as Neil’s antenna making it possible for viewers to hear their surroundings. The music on its own wouldn’t have been very exciting but together with its story and setting had high emotional value.

For her latest Dover Street Market Opening in New York Rei Kawakubo wanted to also translate the feeling of beautiful chaos into sound, which lead to the store having its own unique soundscape. It is a juxtaposition of something chaotic, with mechanisms exposed with different live sonic aspects that are actual strange audio textures. A mixture of fragility with that that is absolutely fixed. It takes shape in form of audio sculptures that were built from formerly intentionally destroyed audio equipment, reconstructing it and stripping away the outer shell to create a ‘not too perfect’ sound in the hope that passerby(es) might have a moment of their own landscape as they cross.

Another abstract approach to the sound of fashion is Showstudios project ‘The sound of clothes’ which is a musical making of soundtrack to five collection of London Fashion Week S/S14. Showstudio visited the designer’s studios and recorded all the sounds connected with the production of the collection including knitting machines and the tinkling of crochet needles. All sounds were remixed into music track with some sound staying as they were and others being altered to resemble beats or instruments. The songs then were supported by visuals that focused on breaking the collection up into abstract elements and creating visual audial story to the collection.
CONCEPT


MARNI


AUDIO BRANDING


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