



BRANDS, CONSUMERS, AND THE ((('SOUND'))) BETWEEN

NINE KEYS TO MARKETING
THROUGH AND WITH MUSIC



SPACE

It's all about space. Activating the space that exists between brands and consumers.

The Physical Space—stores, venues, pop-ups, and a range of other environments.

The Emotional Space—brand storytelling, conversations, narratives, and moments.

The Experiential Space—extending the brand beyond the bricks and out into the world.

It's within these spaces where connections happen. Where relationships begin. Where brand moments are stitched together to form impressions, drive loyalty, and build advocacy with consumers that they can rally around. Whether micro or macro they all add up to fuel a brand's identity.

Brands are part of everyday lives and occupy critical space in a consumer's meta-story. A meta-story that is making both emotional and transactional investments back into a brand in ways that shape life patterns, dictate consumer behavior, and ultimately make personal identity statements about who we are. It's life and it's how we live it.

Cornerstone to this meta-story is music. The most emotional content a brand can use to communicate its identity. A medium transcending transaction and resonating not only inside, but outside of the moment of purchase. It's a lifestyle medium that perpetually bonds brand and consumer, the only global medium that has the power to unite and influence.



RETAIL IS THE NEW RADIO

Today, it's widely recognized by record labels that a bulk of music discovery is from brands.

Radio has narrowed its playlists to well-established top-40 acts and often the most profitable radio stations feature oldies music. Brands want to feature music that works for their retail environments, and the selection isn't based on SoundScan sales or how much the artist has been promoted by its label.

With the traffic that flows through retail outlets, the potential exposure for artists to the customers of a brand is huge — and growing. Every day, tens, even hundreds, of millions of people in retail locations get to hear music they either know or otherwise would not have heard, and with the accessibility of devices, apps, and socially focused streaming platforms, they can discover and interact with music like never before. Brands that can effectively leverage music as part of their marketing strategies in-store, online, at event, and on-device are in the best position to gain a return on their investments.

Brands have become tastemakers, and retailers — whether online or offline — are the new record stores, where consumers can listen to music and respond to the experience by buying what they hear. As one of the biggest purchase drivers in the world, music can help brands take advantage of emerging trends.



118 billion
Total music streams in 2013



1.26 billion
Digital track sales in 2013



7.6 billion
Total U.S. retail foot traffic in
November and December 2013



533 million – Average
number of unique monthly visitors to the
top ten U.S. retail websites in Q3, 2013



1,746 – Average number
of active songs in a fashion
retailer playlist



200-300
Average number of songs
in a radio station playlist

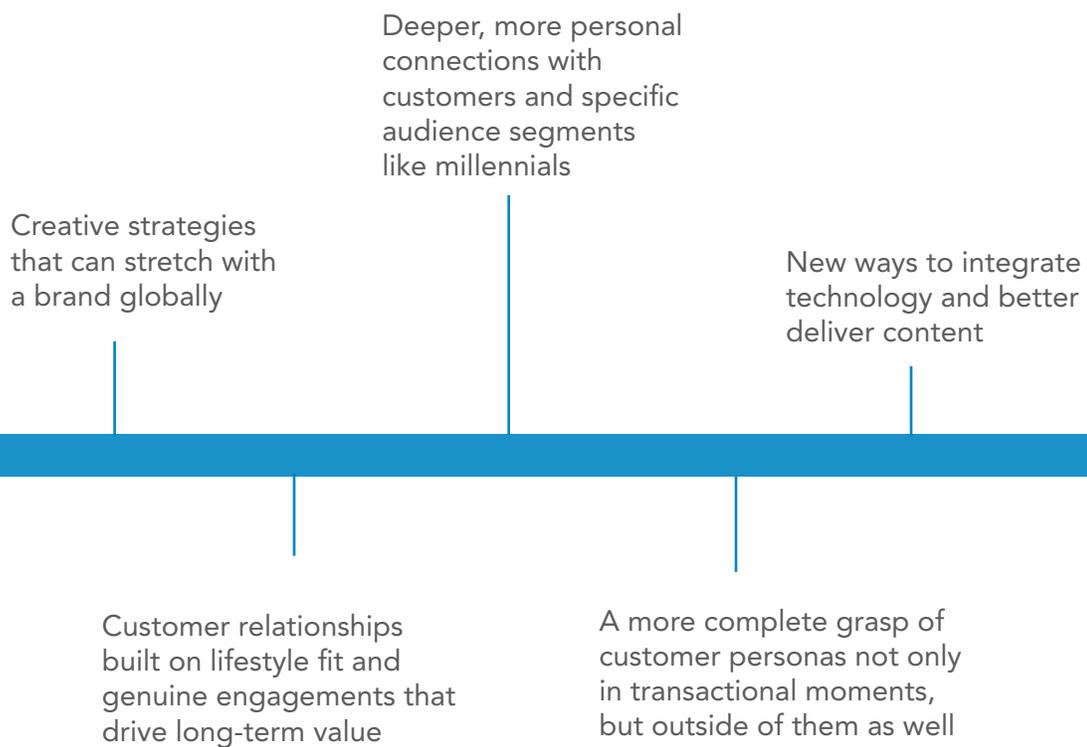


170 – Average
number of songs on a
Spotify playlist



**COMBINING
CREDIBILITY
AND CONTENT**

The leading global brands understand that music is a critical part of the customer experience and are using the medium to achieve the same things:



From the countless, day-to-day conversations our creative teams have with their clients, nine key themes consistently surface and rise above the rest. Each of these themes is becoming more and more critical to combining credibility and content.



1

MUSIC IS MILLENNIAL CURRENCY

Like fashion, music is a form of self-expression — one that millennials self-identify through more than any other category. Traditional goals like buying a house or a car might not seem as attainable as they once were, but one's personal brand? Now that's something easily owned. Through jeans and headphone jacks, consumers tell the world who they are and who they want to be.

The retail brands that are successfully integrating music do so through thoughtful, interesting opportunities for millennial consumers to co-create and actively participate in culturally relevant, branded experiences. They range from intimate but epic store parties to sponsored educational workshops to crowd-sourced design initiatives. When their customers participate, they do so willingly because the brand is creating a meaningful connection, providing real value, and delivering joy. And at the end of the day, isn't that what music is all about?

In discussing music-focused digital content strategies, marketers of brands often say, 'We want to be that BFF. You know, the one that's always in-the-know. And music is an important part of that conversation.'



2

THE GLOBAL CONVERSATION IS ABOUT COHESION

“We’re being asked by brands today, ‘how can we make the music in our store environments work globally?’ They want cohesion across borders, yes. However, they also want to connect with guests in more meaningful ways, by understanding the local culture.”

Though brands today want in-store experiences to be consistent across borders, they also want to connect to their customers — where they live — in ways that are relevant and perhaps a bit unexpected. The music in-store must be the conversation starter. When done right, the conversation feels familiar. And when done wrong, the effects can be polarizing.

Brands want to be able to say, “This is our brand. This is our core sound. But this is your ‘hood and we get it. Therefore, we understand you, our customers.” Engaging the core customer in that conversation, globally — through in-store content, social media, and other communication platforms — is what will lead to success.



3

THE EXPERIENCE STARTS AND ENDS WITH THE CUSTOMER

Much of what happens when it comes to curating a playlist for a brand (and their customers) is observing, listening, and trying to figure out who they are. What they like, how adventurous they are, what motivates them, what's their comfort zone.

Central to the brand immersion stage for a Music Supervisor is observing, listening, and determining what makes the audience tick. What they like, how adventurous they are, what motivates them, their comfort zone — essentially what matters and why. Just like one would with any other part of a marketing strategy.

Defining these archetypes helps generate new ideas while crafting the auditory identity that fits with the overarching brand framework. Brands should always ask their sound agency how the music strategy aligns with audience segments. It's so much more than genre or channel.



4

IF YOU FAN A BAND, YOU FAN A BRAND

Music supervisors help interpret the line between the brand's core shopper/target market and who they aspire their customer to be. It's about finding a balance between the comfort and discovery that will resonate and, in turn, create that common ground.

When customers turn to brands for lifestyle extensions they want to hear content that's cool and relevant. True music fans love discovery and if customers are hearing and discovering music in-store, it's a beautiful way for a brand to build loyalty. If a customer hears a song and ends up adding it to her playlist or seeing the band in concert, she'll remember where she heard it first and associate it with the brand. The brand becomes more relevant to that individual.

Music and brands are becoming much more associated with lifestyle choices and specific cultural settings. It's the marriage of comfort and discovery.

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5

AUTHENTICITY REIGNS SUPREME

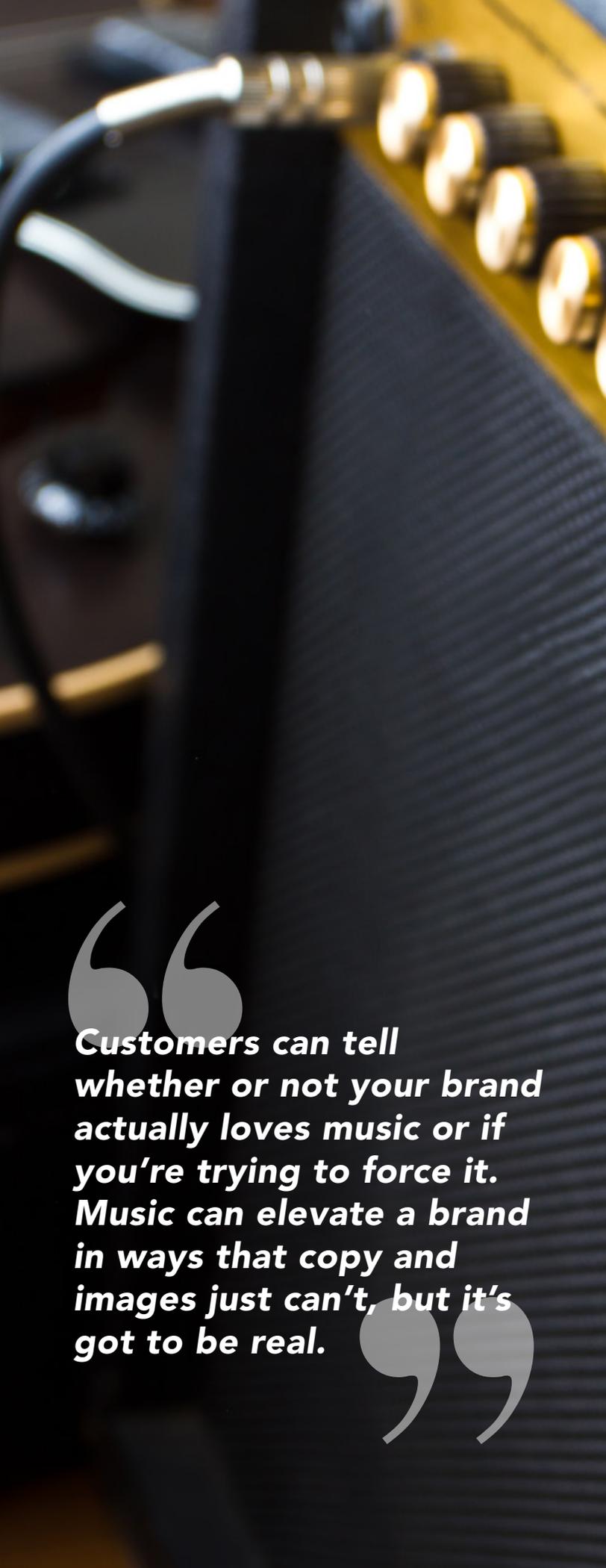
While not every artist is eager to see its name paired with a brand, many will say that it has at least become accepted, if not expected. Artists realize the benefits of lending their music to a brand to gain exposure, and maybe more importantly, to put gas in the van or cover recording costs.

But that doesn't mean all branding opportunities for bands are created equal. Many attempts to merge music and branding use music purely as a prop. These campaigns basically serve as ads with a band tacked on as an afterthought; an attempt to try to reach a new customer, or so it appears. Ravenous music fans are smart cookies, and they can smell a half-hearted attempt from a mile away.

Authenticity is best found when brands can work in tandem with artists instead of trying to eclipse them. By going beyond just exclusive show footage and doing something that actively engages music fans without heavy handedness — when done right — can transcend a campaign. It's a way to broaden the output of music that people are excited to digest, whether they are buying something at that moment or not.



The best executions are when brands can work in tandem with artists instead of trying to eclipse them. This is what drives authenticity.



6

YOU CAN'T FAKE THE FUNK

There's no shortcut. A healthy branded music program is supported from the top and managed by those who respect music as the powerful bonding agent that it is, those that can take the appropriate time to vet and advance music discovery opportunities aligned with the brand experience. And for retail, restaurant, and hotel brands, that experience spreads well beyond the storefront.

Sharing music with customers is a chance to display passion, create common cultural ground, and impart a sense of place and belonging. Companies who actively contribute to the music ecosystem and cultivate a genuine appreciation for it will benefit from the fertile social soil that exists between brand, art, and audience.

The best-in-class do this by carrying a unified message with them wherever they connect with their customers. Artist spotlights, sync licensing for ads, concert and tour sponsorships, online music playlists, and music posts on social sites, all of these require a genuine editorial point of view with guts and purpose. And there's a reward for it that can't otherwise be bought: trust.

“Customers can tell whether or not your brand actually loves music or if you're trying to force it. Music can elevate a brand in ways that copy and images just can't, but it's got to be real.”

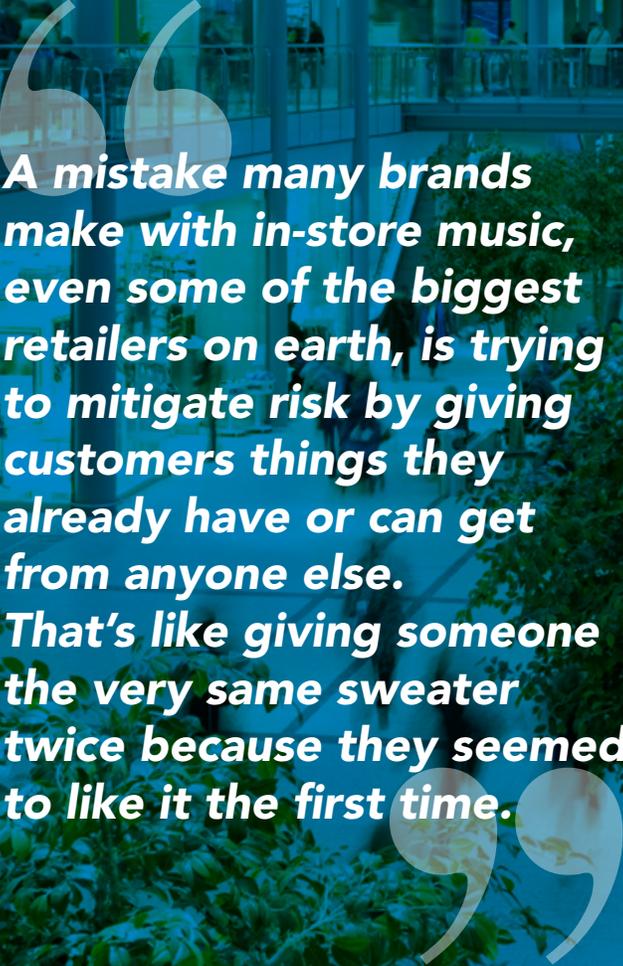


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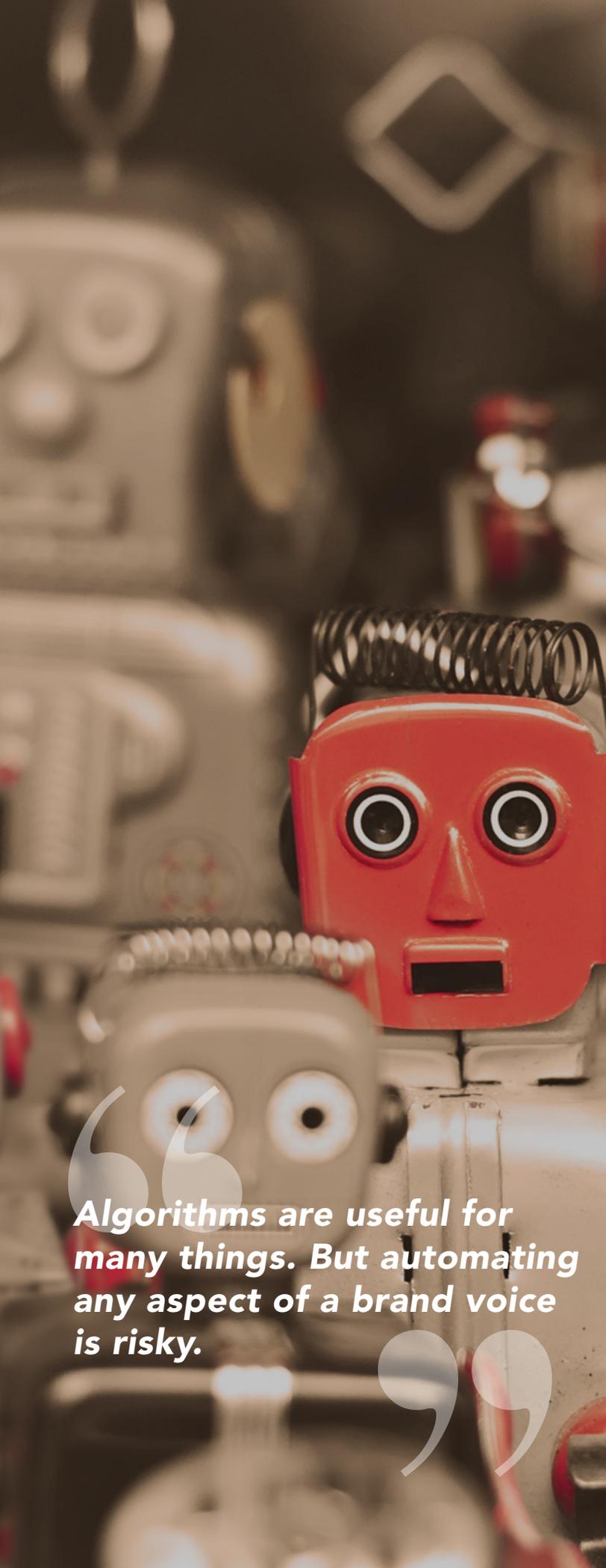
THINK QUALITATIVELY, NOT QUANTITATIVELY

Treating music like a passion instead of an appliance means taking the numbers out of the selection process and taking some risks. A mistake many brands make with in-store music, even some of the biggest retailers on earth, is trying to mitigate risk by giving customers things they already have or can get from anyone else. That's like giving someone the very same sweater twice because they seemed to like it the first time. Or like giving them the same sweater they've seen on 100 other people.

By the time a song makes it near the top of the Billboard charts, chances are good that a lot of customers have had enough of it (granted, those songs are on those charts because a relatively large number of people purchased them). But including songs just because they're chart toppers is nearsighted for several reasons, not the least of which is that Billboard tracks sales, not style.



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8

ALGORITHMS DON'T ALWAYS DELIVER THE RIGHT RHYTHM

Algorithms are useful for many things. But automating any aspect of a brand voice is risky. Sure, it's possible to pick a few representative artists and ask a program to deliver songs of the same kind, and that might work for a while. But eventually, the wheel will have to be touched to prevent massive repetition and disconnected content.

Artists aren't necessarily consistent in style and the metadata used by algorithms to link songs into threads is still fairly coarse. Users have to feed the software more and more information, and could end up spending more time babysitting the autopilot to mixed results or inadvertently "thumbs-downing" a playlist into over-pruned monotony. And no matter how advanced the catalogs, metadata, and algorithms get in the future, music-on-autopilot can't easily adapt to changing floor-set themes, promotions, seasons, or day-parts (easy mornings, upbeat days, high energy nights and weekends, etc). Relegating important music choices purely to quantitative and automated methods for economy's sake is missing an opportunity to tell a more compelling brand story about the environments, the company, and what it stands for.

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9

STAY AHEAD OF THE CURVE

With everyone trying to become the next Grizzly Bear, it does beg the question, “where do you go to find the alternative to independent music?”

For companies constantly pushing to stay ahead of the curve, it's essential to know where to look for emerging talent. Brands now hire music consultants, music marketing experts, creative agencies, labels, and media branding companies to research and deliver unique music-driven content. With the right partner, the creation of this “brand sound” can extend to every consumer touch point, from online, to on-device, to in-store, to on television, to events.

Music curation is crucial in today's market and without an expert truly engaged with the marketing strategy, the outcome can appear forced and trite. Any company wanting to make their mark should partner with qualified music curators, whose passion shines through in their work. These individuals help craft a brand sound that matches objectives, audience, and geography with genre, BPM, and so much more. With the right music supervision, brands can always be the first to the party.

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PlayNetwork is the leading innovator of branded customer experiences — a global provider of brand storytelling and publishing, original content and entertainment media, digital innovation and software development, audio/visual systems engineering and integration, in-location and on-hold messaging, advertising networks, and support — all under one roof. The result? Breakthrough, omni-channel experiences spanning a range of industries, in-store and beyond.

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