

Content Marketing
amplifier

the Medium is the Message

Five Music Marketing Ideas
That Could Pay Dividends Now

by Glenn Sabin

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Other than Walmart and McDonald's, times are tough for most brands out there. Not only is this one of the worst financial climates we've ever seen, but consumers are going out of their way to ignore marketing messages. According to the *New York Times*, network television lost approximately 3 million viewers over the last three months of 2008. According to *min* magazine, advertising pages plummeted 26 percent in March 2009 from last year. And let's not get started on newspapers.

Let's face it: the dominance of traditional marketing/media is over. Advertising is no longer the best way for the majority of companies to go to market. Savvy marketers realize this and are making some necessary changes to their marketing mix, moving significant dollars online. Good, right?

Not so fast. Even though marketers are changing their

Times Have Changed

marketing budgets toward a more online focus, many organizations are still marketing in the past. According to separate studies from *ContentWise* and *Junta42/BtoB* magazine in 2008, consumers and business marketers still allocate over 70 percent of their marketing budget to traditional marketing efforts such as advertising, tradeshow/events, and traditional public relations, even with the growing shift to online media.

But just moving your creative online won't do the trick. Click-through rates for online display now average less than 1 percent according to Wikipedia. Worse yet, these rates continue to drop and are getting so bad that both media companies and brands are being forced to look for new alternatives.

The channels, whether print or online or in-person, are not the problem.

Telling Stories

Even if you wanted to, you can no longer rely on traditional media channels to spread your message. Those channels are either drying up or proving ineffective.

If you really want to be an effective marketer today and into the future, you have one choice—learn to tell your own story. Even though it may seem like the darkest of times, it is actually the greatest opportunity we’ve ever seen for brand marketers. Whereas in the past we had no option to communicate indirectly with our customers, today we can develop unique, helpful and entertaining content that, if valuable, customers will distribute themselves. That’s how companies like Procter & Gamble can develop their own media sites such as HomeMadeSimple.com and BeingGirl.com, which have attracted millions of customers that actively share Procter & Gamble content. Or how about the infamous Blendtec example, WillItBlend.com, with videos boasting well over 100 million unique viewers? The site has caused Blendtec’s business to skyrocket.

These companies are telling their own stories directly to their target customers. They are distributing free yet compelling content that is tied to their brands but doesn’t actively sell their products and services. **Stop right here.** This is an important distinction. It’s not about creating better stories about your products. That won’t work. It’s about creating stories that speak to your customers—valuable, relevant, and compelling content that helps people in some ways. The stories are tied to your products, but don’t sell your products. That’s how product will move now and into the future.

It's No Different in Music

If you're reading this, you most likely understand the idea of a buyer persona—or a detailed representation of whom your customer is—and that your customer is influenced by music. You have identified a connection between your brand and a certain kind of music or artist. And you aren't alone. Leading brands like Nike, Walmart, and Mercedes-Benz have all done the same.

And it's not easy to make that connection ... but it can be done.

To help, we've developed five ideas that we feel can be implemented by most any brand who wishes to drive consumer behavior through the lens of music. As you review these ideas, notice that some can and should be “mixed and matched” to help tell your story more effectively. You'll also notice that almost all of them contain an element of social media. Why? If your unique story can't be shared, you'll never see the action you desire, and social media is perhaps the best way for people to actively share your story. Now on to the list. Here are five music marketing ideas that:

- YOU CAN IMPLEMENT IMMEDIATELY TO YOUR TARGET CONSUMER
- DON'T HAVE TO COST YOU AN ARM AND A LEG
- CAN LEVERAGE WHAT YOUR CUSTOMERS WANT THE MOST FROM YOU, NAMELY FIRST-RATE INFORMATION AND ANSWERS TO THEIR PROBLEMS



Idea 1. The Content Filter

As you research information about your customer as it pertains to their musical passions, what do you find? What kind of information are they looking for? Is it detailed information like the history of jazz or classical music, or is it more pop-culture driven like celebrity-based music?

Once you have a clear understanding of what they're looking for, and whether it's more information- or entertainment-based, how can you help provide that information to them?

In publishing circles around the world, there is talk of a content filtering model. This means that an online media service is created, but no "new" content is generated. The point? Take all the related information in the marketplace from all credible sources and filter it so that customers can easily find and manage the information.

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GOAL:

Not to develop all the content in a particular segment, but be the “editor” in a market and present people the best content in that market or that topic. Be the enabler of the information they are looking for.

THE PAYOFF:

You position your brand as the trusted content provider, bringing your customers the information they need, much like Google does. The difference is, you are weeding out the irrelevant content for them, saving them time and directing them immediately to valuable information.

EXAMPLES:

Alltop, called the digital magazine rack, provides relevant groupings of blogs and news sites on almost every subject imaginable.

Looking for jazz news? Go to <http://jazz.alltop.com/>.
How about music news at <http://music.alltop.com/>?

Newser, a news-filtering site, has created the same concept, with a twist. They take their news from outside sources, but develop a custom abstract of the content so that readers can get to the information they want more easily. It’s sort of a CliffsNotes for news.

TURN UP THE VOLUME:

Develop custom Twitter accounts to distribute the information as it enters your filter site. Create a voting tool within the site so customers can tell you what sources they like best. Better yet, be sure customers can help refine the tool by including their own recommendations.





Idea 2. The Microsite

Although microsites, or content-specific sites, have been around for over a decade now, they are still effective if they provide value to customers.

As in the above content-filter model, a microsite focuses on a niche informational or entertainment desire from your audience. The difference with a microsite is that the brand develops original content to drive engagement throughout the site.

Microsites may be mostly textual, but more and more are integrated with or based solely on video.

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GOAL:

Become the trusted expert for that area of music information or entertainment. The project could also be campaign related—a place to drive engagement and behavior from traditional activities, including sponsorship activation.

THE PAYOFF:

Not that we should have to mention search engine optimization here, but if you develop valuable content around a key music topic, Google will drive traffic to you.

Great content will be shared and passed around, if you make it easy to share by using social media tools. The best part? You can track it through analytics.

EXAMPLES:

Walmart and Unilever partnered to create *Soundcheck* (<http://soundcheck.walmart.com/>), their original performance video series with some of the world's leading musicians.

JVC produced a jazz microsite as part of the 2008 JVC Jazz festival (<http://jazz.jvc.com/>). The site includes a series of articles on the festival musicians.

And finally, check out Mercedes-Benz and their online music magazine site (<http://www.mercedes-benz.tv/index.php>). The series of video shorts makes us want to buy a Benz.

TURN UP THE VOLUME:

Most microsites fail because the content is walled off, only available within the site itself. Don't make that mistake. Your goal is to spread the ideas, not to protect your content. Give it away freely. Let the bloggers have at it. Put presentations on SlideShare.net. Link out to other sites. Comment on outside blogs. Locate related media sites and give them the content. Post it on Facebook. Develop a specific Twitter account for it. Listen to your customers with search.twitter.com and Google Alerts and make sure those people talking about related content know about your story. Great storytelling can't spread inside a bottle.

And don't forget to use the power of online news releases. Key stories/findings should be promoted using tools such as PRWeb, PR Newswire, or Marketwire. Backlink keywords to help with the "search engine juice."





Idea 3. The Magalog

Did you know brands that develop and distribute a custom magazine see an average 8-percent sales uptick (APA, 2007)?

Did you also know that consumers spend an average of 25 minutes with a branded custom magazine?

The point is that great content, whether in print or online, engages. And now, since there are less custom magazines in the mailbox, the opportunities are greater than ever.

The problem? Yes, printing and postage takes significant investment. Well, if you can't find the money for a standalone print custom magazine, how about transforming your catalog?

A “magalog” is a combination magazine and catalog. Basically, the brand tells an educational or entertaining story throughout the print piece (just like a magazine), but weaves in products throughout (just like a catalog).

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GOAL:

How many catalogs do you know where your customers anticipate the arrival? Not many. Why not change that by integrating “must-have” information into your products section. Give customers something they can really engage in, as well as giving them an opportunity to buy.

THE PAYOFF:

Higher readership, more sales, and to top it all off, you’ll be creating some much-needed content assets you can reuse in other communication channels.

EXAMPLES:

One of the best examples of the magalog approach comes from LEGO. LEGO magazine (<http://club1.lego.com/en-US/legomagazine/default.aspx>) is actually a magalog where they create storylines for each of their products while at the same time clearly communicating that the product is for sale. For example, with LEGO’s new line of Indiana Jones sets, LEGO created a comic-book storyline for the character that related specifically to one of the sets for sale. After two pages of excellent content, turn the page and you see the sets. LEGO has been using this tactic for years, and it shows why LEGO is one of the leading brands in the world.

TURN UP THE VOLUME:

Don’t let the print version go to die—leverage those assets. Storytelling featurettes from the magalog can be easily promoted on your site in multiple locations. The magalog can also be repurposed as a standalone digital version, where video and customer testimonials can be easily inserted and shared by customers.

Looking for ideas on segmentation? Targeted LEGO magazines contain “Bionicle” comics, which promote a separate line of LEGO products through comic-book storytelling.





Idea 4. The Digital Magazine

Many marketers who hear “digital magazine” think about a PDF that can flip pages. Don’t let the term fool you. A digital magazine, done correctly, can be a true interactive experience. Some, like the Mercedes-Benz example, look like a video portal. Others, like KLM’s *I Fly* magazine, is an interactive experience shaped like a magazine (<http://www.iflymagazine.com/>). KLM mixes sleek design, high-impact video, sound/music and expert stories in the hopes of engaging KLM customers in ways that advertising simply cannot.

There is nothing you can’t do with a digital magazine, but you may ask, why digital magazine over a Web site? Actually, some consumers still like the “feel” of a magazine in an online environment. If that speaks to your customers, a digital magazine may be for you.

A digital magazine is also excellent for those brands that already create a print version. It gives you the ability to reach more customers and prospects, including international readers, as well as those customers you may not know about yet. It also gives you the opportunity to take your stories through to the next level, with integrated video or audio interviews.

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GOAL:

True engagement with customers. Easily track them spending time with your content.

Digital magazines can also be an invaluable retention tool. Target your best customers with content they can't find anywhere else.

THE PAYOFF:

Some readers of digital magazines spend 30 minutes or more engaging in content. What is that worth to you from a brand perspective?

EXAMPLES:

Project Analog from Microchip (http://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/hearst/projectanalog_200902/), on the latest in design engineering. It's worthwhile to note the difference about what can be accomplished with a digital magazine. First look at the KLM example, then take a look at this Spin digital magazine version (<http://digital.spin.com/spin/200902/?u1=texterity>), which is basically a replication of the print version. Which one has more impact?

TURN UP THE VOLUME:

A MySpace and/or Facebook fan page for your digital magazine makes sense here, as well as a Twitter account. Just be sure to continue to push out content from these sites, and not product or service messaging. If your story is told "alongside" your brand, you'll get the impact you're looking for. Finally, enable feedback throughout the site. If content is push only, you'll have a harder time spreading the ideas.

5. The Tweeter

We've mentioned Twitter quite a bit in this report. For those of you who may be new to Twitter, it's a micro-blogging platform where you are supposed to answer the question "What are you doing?" in 140 characters or less. Each Twitter account gets "followed" or follows others, much like "friending" on MySpace or Facebook.

The key to Twitter success occurs by *not* answering the question "What are you doing?" Who wants to hear about what you just put in your coffee or what you ate for breakfast?

Success comes from simply being helpful. Continually include helpful tips, tricks, information, relevant thoughts, etc., for the people you are trying to talk to.

In that respect, the opportunity is there for any brand trying to target a certain kind of passionate music lover. Let's say you're trying to target hip-hop fans. If so, start an account (from your brand—clearly noted) that provides up-to-date information about the world of hip-hop. Could be great articles, interviews, performance dates, celebrity news, and more.

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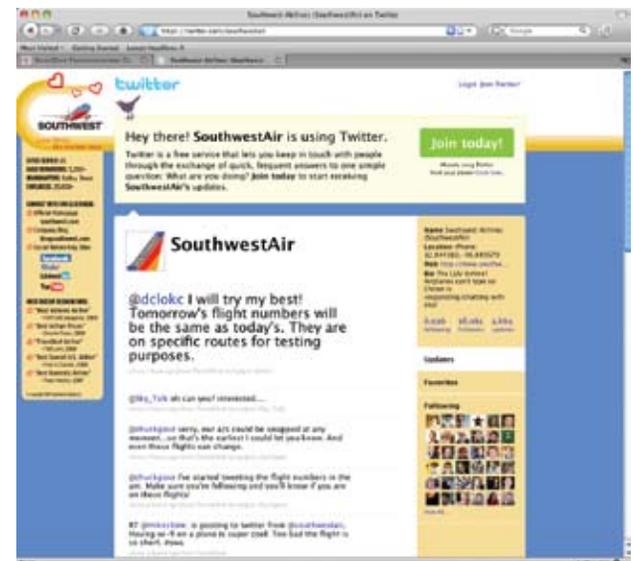


GOAL: Be the trusted information source for a particular music niche.

THE PAYOFF: Media sites and bloggers who use Twitter like this see more than 10 percent of their total traffic coming from Twitter. But probably most important, brands are having real one-on-one conversations with their customers like never before.

EXAMPLES: H&R Block (<http://twitter.com/HRBlock>) runs ask-and-answer sessions with their customers. Southwest Airlines keeps loyal customers up-to-date on everything happening in and around the brand (<http://twitter.com/southwestair>). Whole Foods distributes ongoing information to customers about organic recipes, food podcasts, and other information on healthy living (<http://twitter.com/wholefoods>).

TURN UP THE VOLUME: Not only can you use Twitter as a great social-media marketing tool, it could also be your greatest customer service resource. Dell now uses Twitter to monitor users who are having problems with Dell computers and immediately addresses the issue. Tweet about your broken Dell computer and expect a response in minutes from a company customer-service representative.



In Summary

Obviously there are many more ideas that can help you tell your story to music fans. Blogs, podcasts, eBooks, eNewsletters, and more all play a part and can be used with any of the ideas we've presented.

The goal here is to realize that the marketing of today and tomorrow begins and ends with direct communication with customers through authentic stories—stories that make sense to your brand and your customers.

Five years from now, this will be the rule and not the exception, but for today, the opportunity is yours. Strike while the iron is hot.

About Amplifier Content Marketing

Amplifier Content Marketing is a boutique marketing and publishing company specializing in innovative branded content and custom publishing solutions. From targeted music-oriented magazines to strategic venue distribution to innovative Web content, we live and breathe our expertise in music-driven content. Find us at our Web site (<http://www.amplifiercontent.com>) or contact us at 301.588.7171 to chat about these ideas and more.

GLENN SABIN
Chief Marketing Officer
gsabin@amplifiercontent.com

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