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“Digital Marketing in the Music Business: Broken Down”

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Digital Marketing in the Music Business: Broken Down

From artist management and personal PR to the label side of the business, digital marketing has become absolutely paramount in maintaining relevance across the music industry. Third in line behind talent and production, marketing is the most important component in turning an artist to a star. Before the internet existed, aspiring artists had to rely on DJ's, radio stations, and members of the press to listen to their work and enjoy it enough to promote it on their platform. It is now an entirely different game, with the major players being social media sites



like Facebook and Instagram and streaming platforms like iTunes and Spotify. Anyone can have their voice heard in seconds by millions across the globe.

In contrast to other areas of the business such as finance or radio promotion that are more cut-and-dry, digital marketing remains an elusive concept despite its rising prominence. Everywhere you look, the definition differs slightly, with the most common words being “an electronic device,”

“online,” and “the internet.” It is easy to understand that it is marketing that occurs digitally, but what exactly does that entail? Advertisements? Social media? It was not until I became an active member of a three-person team this semester at the Country Music Association and found myself partly responsible for maintaining a digital presence on behalf of the company that I truly understood all that is involved. I have realized that digital marketing is best explained by breaking it down into the many separate components that, together, constitute a solid digital marketing strategy. This article will explain in detail what I believe are the five most important aspects and provide modern examples of each in action.

Website

A website is where your content lives and is arguably the most instrumental part of digital marketing. Regardless of what you're providing, whether it's music, photos, news, or product descriptions, you need to have a place where it is clearly displayed and readily accessible to potential consumers 24/7. A website serves as the home base for any artist, campaign, organization, etc, and extends to every aspect of a digital marketing strategy. When someone is looking for information, their first thought is typically to visit the website dedicated to that subject (or to Google them - which will bring them to the website). As the “backbone of an online presence,” as Alumnify CEO AJ Agrawal put it, it is crucial to keep your website user-friendly and up-to-date. Every advertisement, social media post, marketing email, press release, or general piece of content you put out will direct the consumer to your website, so the website must provide a clear picture of what your company offers.

Most of my time at CMA was spent editing and updating our 8 websites from the WordPress backend to ensure the most recent information was readily available. When a press release was sent to the media, it linked to our website, so I made sure that news was also up and ready on the website. When a new show for our Songwriter Series was announced, I posted the

details and ticket information on the Songwriter Series site. During the CMA Awards on November 14th, I was sitting backstage listening to the show through a headset so that I could update winners on our Awards site within seconds of their announcement. Although it was a televised event, there was a huge portion of our fanbase that did not tune in and was using the website for updates. Our audience numbers were up by over 4000% from what they are on a typical day, so having the information there was more important than ever.

Social Media

The use of social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat, and Pinterest, is an integral part of today's digital marketing landscape, especially in the music industry. Social media provides a unique opportunity for fans to engage with an artist on a level that extends far past just the music and into their personal lives. Additionally, fans rely on social media to discover new artists, learn more about and interact with ones they are interested in, and stay in the know on the latest news and upcoming releases. An important component of a strong digital marketing plan is a social media content calendar that is created in advance to plan when to post, what to post, and where to post it. This helps to stay on schedule and ensure that you're consistently keeping fans satisfied by providing new content.

Major artists Ed Sheeran and DJ Khaled are two examples that show social media's immense impact on marketing in the music industry. In late 2015, Ed Sheeran posted on his social media platforms that he was "taking a break from my phone, emails and all social media for a while... to travel the world and see everything I missed." Exactly one year later, Ed posted a mysterious image of just a blue square (see right). This sparked curiosity among his many millions of followers, and was what was to become the beginning of the promotional campaign for his next album, *Divide*. He announced on January 1, 2017 with a short video that he would be releasing new music the next Friday. In the days leading up, he routinely posted teaser photos and videos hinting at the title and contents of the album. Within days after releasing the new songs, "Castle on the Hill" and "Shape of You," both were #1 and #2 respectively in the UK and US, showing that his strategic social media activity truly built excitement that led to results.

While Sheeran's story was mainly about just music, DJ Khaled is an example of someone that used social media to promote his personality and grow his brand. Khaled began his career as a radio DJ. Collaborating with artists such as Snoop Dogg and Rick Ross allowed him to access their audiences and establish a fanbase of his own. However, in 2013, DJ Khaled began using his Snapchat and Instagram account to attract even more of an audience. Khaled frequently posts humorous photos and videos of himself explaining his "keys," or paths to success and happiness. These have become viral across the internet; most young Americans' minds will go directly to Khaled when someone even mentions the phrase "major key." This social media trend was somewhat of a ploy to garner attention leading up to his 2016



album, conveniently entitled *Major Key*. The album debuted at number one on the US Billboard 200, became Khaled's first number one album, and he now has a larger following than ever before.

Whether you are an artist, a record label, or an organization like CMA that promotes music, being active on social media is instrumental in promoting your brand, establishing a relationship with fans, driving traffic, and generating leads.

Streaming Platforms

As the industry has shifted from physical music (CD's and vinyl) to streaming, anyone who wants their music to be heard must ensure that they are keeping up with the times and making their product available on the most popular platforms. Services such as Apple Music and Spotify have millions of users signing up daily. According to Jacki McEwen, co-owner and managing director at Eclipse Public Relations, "the online music sphere has become a platform for brands wanting to connect with individuals that they would otherwise have not been targeting." This has extended beyond just the music industry; all types of businesses have begun creating playlists that encompass their brand's "personality" in hopes of reaching new consumers and strengthening their relationship with existing ones.

Heidi Browning, Senior Vice President of Pandora's Strategic Solutions, outlines four main benefits of music streaming in an article written in *The Drum*:

- **Engagement:** Customers can use music streaming to create personalized experiences by curating their own playlists. Millennials reportedly spend an average of 25 hours per week streaming music, so brands need to be "in tune with the streaming market" to best reach them.
- **Attention:** While most marketers focus on what people can see with their eyes, they are failing to acknowledge that we are living in the "earbud generation." Now-a-days, what people hear is commanding even more attention than what people see; even though people try to comprehend everything they can see at once, the brain can only process one auditory message at a time. Thus, music has a special, unique ability to "cut through the clutter."
- **Context:** Streaming gives brands a way to reach consumers without disrupting their day-to-day. Instead of a cold phone call or email that can be more of a burden than anything else, creating a playlist that aligns with a brand is a subtle integration with a daily activity in the lives of millions of people: listening to music.
- **Resonance:** According to Nielsen Catalina Solutions, "audio is the most effective channel in creating a return on investment." Streaming platforms give brands a way to communicate with a generation that is constantly listening to music in a way that Browning calls "emotionally and contextually relevant."

At CMA, I was tasked with regularly updating our fan-facing playlists on Spotify and Apple Music, including our "Discover New Country" playlist and our "This Week's Top 20" playlist. I was given the freedom to update these playlists as frequently as I saw fit with whatever songs I chose. I noticed from the beginning that the more frequently I would perform updates, more fans would follow the playlists. Although CMA only has two televised events per year, staying on top of these playlists was crucial to keeping fans engaged year-round. As McEwen

wrote “The digital era of music is constantly growing and expanding. It’s impossible to think of what could be next but, in 10 years’ time, we could be listening to music in unexpected new ways. In order for brands to stay relevant, they need to embrace what these platforms have to offer. They are the now of media and the now of marketing.”

Pay-Per-Click (PPC)

PPC, or paid search, is a fundamental aspect of digital marketing and one that you probably see in action every day, though you may not even realize it. Have you ever wondered why some sites get to show up on the first page of Google search results while others aren't until page 10? That's all due to PCC. PPC is a method of increasing traffic to a website by paying for your site to show up on the top of a search engine results page (SERP). The name stems from the fact that you only pay each time your ad is clicked. While the most popular type of PCC is Google Ads, you can also use PPC on Facebook (paid ads), YouTube (sponsored videos), Twitter (promoted Tweets), and LinkedIn (sponsored messages). The reason PPC is so useful is because you can choose for your ads to appear only when specific terms are searched, making it incredibly easy to target very specific audiences.



In order to decide if a PPC campaign is right for you, you must conduct a cost-benefit analysis. Consider you have to pay Google \$1 each time your ad is clicked and a visitor is sent to your website. If the majority of visitors clicked out of your site within the first few seconds (something you can measure on Google Analytics), this option wouldn't be worth it for you. However, if each click results in a \$100 sale of albums and merchandise, you would walk away with a large profit margin.

In terms of getting your music heard as an artist by people you don't have a direct connection with, PPC can be extremely useful. You can choose to target ads ad audiences within specific ages, geographic locations, family status, among other factors. While PPC is not the best option for everyone and audiences can still be grown the old-fashioned way without the purchase of ads, it is a quick, easy, and relatively inexpensive way to get new eyes on your website that you'd otherwise be competing for.

SEO

Like PPC, SEO is another method of getting your site to the top of search results. However, you don't pay for SEO. SEO is done “naturally” by optimizing the content, format, and other aspects of your website to the way that search engines “prefer” it, so to speak. This process may involve adding or removing content, using HTML, adding title and keyword metadata, and much more. It is important in SEO to ensure that there are no broken links within your site and everything is running smoothly with reasonable load times.

SEO may also involve optimizing websites for certain devices. For example, in May 2015, Google reported that mobile search had surpassed desktop search. Now, many companies choose to optimize their sites for mobile viewership.

In general, SEO promotes good digital marketing by rewarding websites that function best. Sites with unique, engaging content that are user-friendly and well-constructed will receive optimal placement in search engine results. Additionally, SEO encourages sites with credibility; if your site is being linked to or shared on other sites, that will boost your SEO as well.

Conclusion

Though this article only touches upon five areas of digital marketing, there are numerous others. In order to avoid spreading your resources too thin or oversaturating your audience by attempting to take on all of them, it is important that you weigh the potential benefits of each to decide what might have the largest return on investment. While digital marketing can seem like a large, intimidating realm to dive into, make sure to view it as an opportunity rather than a threat. Companies in the music business have never before had so many ways of reaching new audiences. From word of mouth all the way to social media, video streaming, and email marketing, the opportunities are almost endless. Those who effectively take advantage of the opportunities the internet provides will thrive and undoubtedly comprise the future major players of the industry.