

# SOUNDS LIKE BRANDING

**THE BOOK:  
NOW IN  
ENGLISH!**

**JAKOB LUSENSKY**

SAMPLE

ALBUM 4  
HOW IT WORKS:  
A strategic  
approach to  
music

“Music was cited as the medium people would least like to live without (before Internet and TV).”

Millward Brown  
BrandAmp Study

## ***A spring evening at Chez Jeanette in Paris***

*It's a warm, spring evening in Paris. I'm with friends and acquaintances at the bar "Chez Jeanette", eating, drinking – essentially doing what the French do best. The host, a Swedish architect, opens up a discussion about the similarities between architecture and music. We exchange our personal experiences and theories as we explore the subject into the wee hours of the morning. Of all the things said that night, one quote from the writer and philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe really struck me: "Architecture is frozen music."*

*Music is very personal, subject to individual tastes and how we see ourselves and the world. All these factors are why music packs such emotional punch. Unfortunately, most business don't treat it with the care and thought it deserves. The examples are everywhere. A bartender, more skilled in mixing cocktails than music, selects the music for the entire establishment. Advertising creatives often choose music for commercials based upon what happens to be on their iPods. Marketing managers often decide which artists to partner with their brand. Don't get me wrong. I'm sure these people all have exquisite musical taste. Nevertheless, music branding deserves specialised attention, and a level of professionalism to live up to its potential.*

*Just as an architect requires sketches, floor plans and a theoretical basis for construction, a music branding programme requires some ground rules as well. It's critical to set personal tastes aside and put on the architect's hat, to think of music and sound as building blocks in the overall communications objectives of your brand. Whatever type of music branding programme you choose, always let the insights about the target group and your objectives drive your decisions. Remember, it's not about you. It's about them.*

## Track 12: Marketing strategically through music

As a result of today's highly saturated marketplace, along with the shift from the "Four Ps" to the "Four Es", a growing number of brands are making a concerted effort to make music a top priority. They know they can no longer afford to treat music in an ad-hoc fashion or as merely a tactical element. Music has finally taken its place centre stage as a serious branding element.

Ten years ago, the question facing marketers was what music to use in a TV or radio commercial. Today the focus is how a brand sounds and how artists and music can help a company achieve its communications goals. Of course, what these goals are vary greatly from company to company, whether it's reaching a younger audience, creating a more distinct brand identity or reaching out to customers on new social media platforms. Regardless of specifics, a well-executed music strategy should strengthen brand equity and loyalty. Referring to Aaker's model, it's easy to see the value of music branding in all four areas.



How music creates brand equity connected to Aaker's model

\* **Music as a way to create brand awareness**

A music strategy helps create brand awareness and attention by involving the customer in a conversation about the music or the artist the brand is associated with.

\* **Music as a way to create the right brand associations**

All positive and negative associations linked to a brand affect its perception. Working with music and artists strategically can help to create the “right” associations around the brand.

\* **Music as a way to enhance the experience of quality**

A customer’s overall perception of a brand is based on experience, performance, customer service and more. Partnering with the right artist and music can increase the target group’s perception of quality surrounding the brand.

\* **Music as a way to build brand loyalty**

Loyal customers mean reduced marketing costs because they buy again. A music strategy can help the brand to create strong emotional bonds with customers they won’t want to break.

## **The music stairway**

The most important question for a brand is not whether to use music, but rather how the music should be used. The four-step “Music Stairway” I developed with my Heartbeats International team illustrates the most beneficial way for brands to strategically work with music. You can see it here: [www.soundlikebranding.com/musicstairway](http://www.soundlikebranding.com/musicstairway)

Most brands today find themselves at *Step One*. This step is characterised by the *unconscious* use of music. Essentially this is an ad hoc, make-it-up-as-you-go approach. (For example, staff

or employees randomly choosing in-store music.) The result is a schizophrenic sonic experience that only sends mixed branding signals to customers.

*Step Two* is characterised by a *conscious* usage of music. At this point, brands have developed their own music identity through a defined sound with carefully chosen values. Often they have a sound logo or theme song. At *Step Two*, music has evolved into a branding element and strategic tool.

Moving up to *Step Three*, a brand becomes even more actively involved in music. This commitment often takes form in music-oriented marketing campaigns (e.g., “buy and get” promotions) and/or artist partnerships. Heineken’s “Green Room Sessions”, a live, club concept presenting cutting edge artists and DJs, is a good example this level of music involvement.

The *Fourth* and final step on the music stairway requires “owning” a *strategic platform* in music culture. To “own” a platform means a brand has a full-fledged and credible position in the culture of music. The Red Bull Music Academy is a good example. The energy drink company created a music academy that meets once a year for two weeks. Famous DJs, producers and journalists from around the world gather for a one-of-a-kind musical summit. Sixty lucky entrants are selected from thousands of submissions to attend the Red Bull Music Academy and take part in workshops on everything from songwriting to music engineering to music journalism.

In doing so, the Red Bull brand has established a credible cultural platform their target audience wants to be part of and one that generates massive PR coverage every year. However, these successes didn’t happen overnight. Red Bull started the Red Bull Music Academy back in 1998, a testament to their consistency, continuity and patience.

## **Three strategies for working with music**

Since music branding is a relatively new idea, you simply won't find as many tried and true models as in traditional marketing. The good news is, once you look at the hundreds of music branding initiatives to date, a few successful strategies begin to emerge.

### **1. Association Strategy**

*Association Strategy* involves a brand becoming an ambassador for a particular style of music. Often this is the most natural way for a brand to become part of the target audience's lifestyle and culture.

A good example is "TAG Records", a music initiative for the Procter & Gamble's "TAG" brand of body spray and skin products. Intent on making inroads with an urban, African American audience, TAG decided to collaborate with Def Jam Recordings, one of the most influential record labels in hip-hop, R&B and soul. TAG agreed to promote Def Jam artists and use them in commercials, in-store promotions, live events and other marketing activities. In return, TAG became part of the target group's culture and lifestyle in a (street) credible way.

### **2. Artist Alliances**

In *Artist Alliances*, the brand is directly associating itself with the artist's image and the values they represent. Often, this marketing arrangement lasts for a predetermined time with an agreement that the brand can freely market itself within the music artist's platforms such as on their website, at concerts and during PR events. The partnership can also involve the artist agreeing to appear in more traditional brand marketing channels (i.e. TV commercials, print and radio). It's also common for the company and the artist to establish a common communications platform, such as a specific website to promote the current marketing campaign.

Examples of artist alliances are everywhere. Hewlett-Packard with Gwen Stefani, Swarovski with R&B artist Rihanna and British mobile phone company O2 with Prince are just a few notable examples. In 2007, Giorgio Armani chose Beyoncé to become the official face of its Armani Diamonds perfume. As part of the deal, Beyoncé performed her own version of the Marilyn Monroe classic, "Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend" in television commercials, giving Armani's new scent a feeling of glamour and elegant good taste.

As mentioned earlier, one of the most successful artist alliances ever was the one between Bacardi rum and dance act Groove Armada. Bacardi had previously used music in advertising, but mainly through sponsorship of club events and DJ gigs. To really make an impact in the highly competitive alcohol market, Bacardi did something no brand had ever done before.

They signed a band.

In March 2008, the BBC reported that one of the world's most famous dance acts, Groove Armada, left their record label EMI to sign a contract with Bacardi. The news rocked the music world, causing an avalanche of free press around the world. The estimated media value to Bacardi? Around \$15 million.

The Groove Armada-Bacardi partnership required the act to do live concerts, record radio shows, make appearances and do interviews on behalf of the brand. Most important, Groove Armada agreed to record music exclusively for the Bacardi brand. In essence, Bacardi had become a record label. Not to sell records per se, but to use music to get their target market's attention and create positive brand associations.



**The result of Bacardi's music strategy (according to company research):**

- ✳ **One in three respondents said the collaboration made them feel more positive about the brand.**
- ✳ **Seventy-seven per cent of customers rated the partnership as either "good" or "excellent".**
- ✳ **Total media coverage valued at approximately \$15 million.**
- ✳ **Press generated in newspapers and other media like *The Wall Street Journal*, Channel 4 News, *Marketing Week* and BBC Radio One.**

### **3. Exploration**

In an *Exploration* music initiative, the brand acts as a guide to introduce their customers to new musical and artistic experiences. The brand uses its market resources to establish platforms where customers can find new music from upcoming, or lesser known, artists. A brand can also use its existing communications platforms like television advertising, its website or events to introduce these artists to a wider audience.

A good example of this is "Ramp Music", a concept Duracell used to recharge customer interest in Scandinavia. Target group analysis suggested that music was very important to Duracell's target audience. Further research revealed that up-and-coming music acts lacked the marketing support needed to break through and reach new audiences. So Duracell had an idea. They decided to hold a talent contest on their site where musicians could post their songs. Whichever artist got the most online votes would receive one

million Swedish kroner (\$150,000 USD) in grants through Duracell's marketing channels, and appear in Duracell's advertising.

The results were impressive. Not only did Duracell help aspiring artists, but they also generated new interest from their core target and garnered favourable media buzz. What's more, their investment was relatively modest since the advertising media had to be bought by the company anyway.

Another similar initiative recently occurred for PepsiCo's Mountain Dew soda. The cola company established "Green Label Sound", a music platform and record label designed to promote new artists through digital releases, events and concerts. The Green Label Sound platform currently stretches over all social media platforms, like Vimeo, YouTube and Twitter, as well as its own dedicated website.

## **Hennessy Cognac**

Hennessy, one of the world's most celebrated cognac brands, also has a tradition of working closely with music and artists. Its wildly successful "Hennessy Artistry" global music campaign gives customers a taste of different musical genres they might not otherwise hear.

In 2009, Hennessy enlisted the help of hip-hop impresarios Common and The Roots to headline its Hennessy Artistry US tour. Collaborations with iconic music artists like Kanye West, LL Cool J and up-and-comers like Ne-Yo have helped Hennessy make inroads with a hip, urban youth market. A far cry from the traditional and rather stuffy, cognac-drinking demographic of the past.

It must be working. At the time of writing, Hennessy is scheduling its fifth annual instalment of its acclaimed Hennessy Artistry series. Not one to rest on their laurels, the cognac brand recently launched its "Hennessy Black – DJ Mixmasters" music initiative. Look for it at a swanky club near you.

**Sounds Like Branding is published by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc (A&C Black Publishers Ltd) in the UK on the 18th of July. The book will also be released in South Korea by Acorn.**

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