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A view from Gary Cohen

You can always get what you want: a guide to effective brand and music partnerships

Music retains a great emotional pull, but how can brands best use it to tune in to shifts in consumer behaviour?



Gary Cohen
Added 4 hours ago

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“Music is a language that doesn’t speak in particular words. It speaks in emotions, and if it’s in the bones, it’s in the bones.”

Thought provoking words, as usual, from Keith Richards.

Of course, when The Rolling Stones first came to public attention in the early 1960s, the music business was a far easier world to navigate.

A few thousand albums were released each year and a small number of artists battled for access to radio, *NME*, *Top of the Pops* and the Top 40. Gatekeepers like record labels controlled the game. Success was defined by the charts.

Even back then, brands realised the power of alignment with music but it all was quite rudimentary – like this Brian Jones-written jingle for Rice Krispies...



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Today, The Stones navigate a very different industry. There are 100 million songs on Apple Music alone. Culture is dispersed. Everything competes for eyeballs and attention.

There has also been a power shift, with artists increasingly taking control of their own destiny, connecting directly with their audience over social media and running their own cottage businesses.

That shifting of control gives brands real potential to build authentic long-term partnerships with artists – via their management companies.

We’re already seeing some of the world’s biggest management businesses, such as Roc Nation, vastly expand their brand-related activities, and it’s on this model that we built Simpatico – taking brands straight to the heart of the artist team.

But despite all these changes one constant remains, and that’s Keith’s observation on how music connects emotionally.

So how can a brand articulate and capitalise on something as emotional and personal as music?

Here’s a few thoughts on how best to utilise the brand relationship with music.

1. Don’t shout, whisper – let the music be the hero. There’s no point paying an artist a fee and then smothering the content or event with heavy branding. Consumers are smart enough to know it’s brought to you by the brand. Let it breathe.
2. Authentic integration – find a natural and authentic way to integrate key brand messaging. If you’re a tech brand, how can we showcase the tech in activation? For fashion, can we ask the artist to create a bespoke edit or wear the label for festival slots and press features?

We worked with Sailor Jerry a few years ago and paired it with Frank Carter. Frank is a renowned tattoo artist, so we ended up creating a book of Sailor Jerry designs and in each city on the tour one fan won a bespoke tattoo from Frank.



3. Seek out value – bring the partnership to life across multiple channels. I’m constantly amazed at how often brands and agencies miss a trick in terms of adding incremental elements to a partnership. We recently worked on a campaign for Jameson with Fontaines DC. We were able to bring that campaign to life across a live show, with a global live stream, creating a trove of content for online, giving key media access to the band for PR, assets for competitions and POS.

4. Reach for the masses but speak to the individual – music is a highly personal passion point. Tailor your messaging to reflect the personal connection people have with the artist you’ve engaged. During lockdown fans got to see inside artists homes (their passions and pastimes, their families), stuff we very rarely got to see. And fans loved it. Brands should consider the human side of the artist and their personalities when creating content.

5. Think long term – it’s not advisable to work with an artist who’s aligned to multiple brands in the short term; nobody wins. Pick your potential partners carefully and develop organic and evolving relationships. Or take a bigger leap and commit to music as a key part of the brand DNA. O2 took that decision quite a few years ago – looking pretty wise now...

6. Try to align with an artist who’s in a touring or release cycle when the campaign goes live. Not a deal breaker but if I’m the brand investing with an artist doing so at a time when that artist is on TV, being played on radio, on billboards, playing festivals etc it’s obvious I’m going to get more bang for my buck.

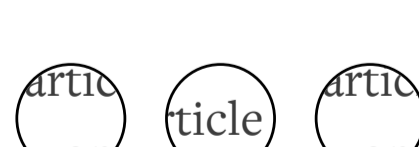
7. Be entertaining, be useful, be interesting – if you’ve engaged an artist, put time and effort into creating content the fans of that artist would really love to see, working directly with the artist on the creative ideas.

It will hugely affect the success of the campaign. If it’s engaging and interesting, fans will share on their own timelines and help you beat those pesky algorithms.

Gary Cohen is chief executive of Simpatico Music & Brand Partnerships.

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