Marketing and Self Promotion for Freelance Sound Engineers and Producers

Abstract

This paper discusses the utilisation of modern and traditional marketing methods for music artists, sound engineers and producers. These days, very few artists, sound engineers and producers are employed directly by record companies. Most work freelance and have to promote and market themselves. In this project, I worked with Edmund Ward, Managing Director of Egglab Media. We set up a company, Eggboy Productions, and offer a range of professional audio services and run a small specialist record label. We promoted these services using both traditional and modern marketing techniques, including viral marketing. At present we have designed and built a company website and carried out some professional audio work for a company in the Netherlands. We have also embarked on a number of projects, including the release of an album by the artist Eggboy, and promotion of that album via Facebook, Twitter, Jango Radio and others. This has already resulted in a fan base of over 5,000 people worldwide for Eggboy. Other projects include recording, mixing, production and mastering of music for some local musicians. The marketing is currently focused on more modern viral; techniques, utilising social networking sites and blogging tools.

Keywords

viral marketing, music
Introduction
The aim of this project is to carry out a case study that will create source material for teaching students of Audio and Music Technology at Anglia Ruskin University. The case study examines techniques for marketing and self-promotion for independent artists, sound engineers and producers.

Background
The subject of Audio and Music Technology is a multidisciplinary field encompassing aspects of acoustics, electronics, music, mathematics, computing, marketing, entrepreneurship, self-promotion and psychology, which bring a challenge for delivery of effective course content and engagement with all students. As a modern degree subject, it has not yet benefited from substantial analysis and research of learning and teaching strategies.

Direct employment of sound engineers and producers by the music industry has changed quite dramatically in the last 20 years. Sales of CDs and other physical media for music have fallen dramatically, and most sales (units shifted) are now made from downloads. Unfortunately, the total volume of sales has been in decline since 1999 and continues to shrink.

Sales in the US have fallen from $14.6 billion in 1999 to $10.1 billion in 2008. This is expected to shrink further to around $9.2 billion by 2013.

Music Downloads Increase, but Not Enough
In 2007, digital downloads surpassed physical media for the first time, in terms of units sold... but in terms of dollar value, digital still accounts for only a small portion of the total, which continues to decline.

Fig 1. Relative Sales of Physical Media and Downloads – New York Times, 26/11/2008

The reduction in profits for the music business has been accompanied by a decrease in the number of commercial studios and an increase in the number of small-scale independent and home studios. This has resulted in fewer jobs in the music industry for our graduates. The majority who work directly in music recording, engineering and production now do so freelance.

This project is of direct benefit to students in identifying and finding employment, and the student experience is enhanced by the use of novel case study material for teaching. At present, the path for graduates into the music business and advice on how to succeed as independent practitioners is addressed in an informal way. Students gain plenty of knowledge and experience in recording, mixing and producing music to a very high standard, but very little on how to promote and market those skills when they graduate. Traditional methods of gaining recognition and success in the established music industry have always been difficult, but even more so now, with the music industry in a state of rapid change and re
-orientation. This project provides a case study, which will demonstrate to students how they might be able to move forwards with their chosen career in a rapidly evolving environment.

The project shows the knowledge covered in lecture sessions being put into practice and allows students to evaluate different techniques and results. This approach also allows students to see their lecturer performing scholarly activity and inspires them to do the same.

**Aims and Objectives**

The fundamental aim of this project is to carry out a case study that will create source material for teaching students on the compulsory modules Final Studio Portfolio 1 and 2. This will examine techniques for marketing and self-promotion for independent artists, sound engineers and producers. A music production company will be set up and promoted using a combination of new Internet-based and more traditional marketing methods. Initial outlay will largely be on registration of the new company and design of the website.

The new Internet-based marketing techniques have become known as ‘viral marketing’.

Steve Jurvetson loosely defines viral marketing as:

‘network-enhanced word of mouth.’

Essentially, social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter are fed directly from blogs. If people connected with or following the company are somehow impressed by the messages, they are likely to share them with their friends or followers.

The aims will meet a number of specific objectives:

- To allow students to see and experience a case study of professional music promotion by independent artists, sound engineers and producers in a modern and up-to date context.
- To make an example case study, which can be used as a ‘best practice’ approach for students intending to work as independent artists, sound engineers and producers.
- To allow students to compare and evaluate established and novel marketing techniques and entrepreneurial skills in creative and music technology contexts.
- To allow students to understand and appreciate the importance of particular modern and more established marketing and self-promotion techniques.
- To develop rich source material which can be used in student recruitment and course marketing exercises.

**Aims of the New Company – Eggboy Productions**

The packages of work outlined in the proposal were re-assessed when the project commenced. It was decided to expand these because very few small audio companies can survive these days without offering a wide palette of services. In addition, it was decided that it is likely to be more profitable to address a substantial niche market currently largely overlooked by the mainstream music business: high quality recordings. At present, nearly all pop/rock/dance releases are highly compressed at the mastering stage. This is a result of the ‘loudness war’.

According to Earl Vickers:

‘…The resulting “loudness war” has been arguably the worst thing to happen to audio quality in decades, though few studies have been done.”

A highly compressed piece of music exhibits little dynamic variation and is uniformly loud and frequently distorted.

It was therefore decided that we should offer two distinct but related sets of services with the ‘watch-word’ being quality:

- Artist Services
- Professional Audio Services.
The packages of work identified as necessary were:

1. Setup of Eggboy Productions, to include:
   - registration of Eggboy Records label;
   - creation of an Eggboy Productions website complete with blogging tools and direct feeds to social networking sites;
   - launch event and associated publicity;
   - subsequent ongoing promotion including utilisation of viral marketing techniques;
   - research into methods employed by successful independent artists, sound engineers and producers.

2. Promotion of Eggboy Productions tunes, Eggboy Productions artists and Eggboy Productions professional audio services, to include:
   - promotion of Eggboy Productions artists tunes on Jango.com;
   - creation and promotion of Eggboy Productions artist tunes on a run of CDs and vinyl;
   - creation and promotion of videos and tunes and upload to YouTube;
   - organisation of live events;
   - promotion of tunes for sync licensing.

3. Analysis of market penetration using Google Analytics

**Methodology**
The proposed project methodology was to follow the approach for a small modern company in raising profile, penetrating the market and increasing client base. It was decided that it would offer the following range of artist and professional audio services:

- recording
- mixing
- re-mixing
- production
- mastering
- sound design
- composition
- vinyl and CD production
- voice-overs
- video production
- record label.

John and Edmund Ward can offer some of these services themselves. Any they can’t offer or are otherwise unable to take on will be sub-contracted to freelance associates.

It was decided to name the new production company Eggboy Productions. The company was simply registered by visiting Blue Sky Company Formations. The company was registered on 16 February 2011 and John Ward and Edmund Ward were named as directors.

Edmund Ward of Egglab Media Ltd and consultant Natalie Guinamard commenced designing and building the website. This is a fairly involved and time-consuming task.
Construction of Website

It was decided that the website must have the following features:

- ease of navigation;
- clear layout of services;
- an eye-catching look and feel that implies quality audio;
- compatible with all platforms;
- forwards compatible with forthcoming web developments.

Egglab Media recommended use of Wordpress\(^9\) website development software.

Wordpress has the following features:

- ‘drag and drop’ capabilities for site design and build;
- easy to use interface – requires very little web building experience;
- a wealth of predesigned templates;
- non-Flash animation tools and plug-ins (J-query);
- very small financial outlay – ideal for graduates and beginners with limited financial resources;
- scalability, e.g. to HTML 5 and further web innovations;
- full content management system capabilities, thereby allowing updates via a web browser from anywhere.

Designed and built by Nathalie Guinamard, working with Egglab Media Ltd, the site layout is the result of thorough analysis of competitor sites and the expectations of the chosen service sector. A survey of competitor sites\(^10\) was carried out and the design of the new Eggboy Productions website loosely based on successful models. The site domain is www.eggboy.com. It has been designed with ease of use and aesthetic appeal foremost in the design process.

The site went live at the end of July 2011. Nathalie and Egglab remained consultants throughout the remainder of the project.

Website Preview

The following screenshots show a few of the pages from the new site.
Fig 2. Eggboy Productions website – top half of home page

Fig 3. Eggboy Productions website – bottom half of home page. Includes Twitter feed, links to artist pages on Facebook and artist videos on YouTube
Fig 4. Eggboy Productions website – contact page. Includes ‘Quick Quote’

Fig 5. Eggboy Productions website – original music page. Also includes ‘Quick Quote’
Other Activities

Promotion on Jango.com

Tunes by the artist Eggboy have been promoted on Jango.com. Jango is an Internet radio station with around eight million users worldwide. The artist uploads tunes and then pays to have the tunes played to listeners. The plays can be targeted in a number of ways:

- at fans of other well-known artists, named as target artists;
- geographically;
- at specific age ranges of listeners.

An album and two singles by Eggboy have been promoted as a pilot for Eggboy Productions to see how many ‘fans’ can be obtained and if any sales can be generated from a number of Internet-based shops, including iTunes and Amazon. To date, around 5,200 fans have been acquired and some modest sales generated. Approximately £200 has been earned.
LinkedIn.com is a forum where professionals from all walks of life can meet and network. It shares the same social networking status as Facebook and Twitter and can be 'fed' from the Eggboy Productions blog. John Ward joined the Music and Audio Professionals group and has made a number of useful connections with industry professionals. The most active discussion has been about the loudness war. A lot of interest has been shown in the idea of a new record label dedicated to high quality recordings. A number of sound engineers have already agreed to work with Eggboy Productions.
Fig. 9. Discussion forum on LinkedIn – despair about the loudness war

Measuring Results

Ultimately, the success of the campaign will be measured by the ability to gain new clients and to deliver the company philosophy.

In addition to this, a Google Analytics account will be installed in order to measure:

- the amount of unique visitors to the site every day;
- traffic sources (i.e. is it a direct link to the site from typing the URL or has the visitor been referred by another site);
- keywords entered in Google;
- ‘bounce rate’ (number of people landing on the site that navigate straight off);
- trends over months of the year showing if the sites rankings are improving or deteriorating.
Discussion and Proposed Future Work

The website is nearly complete, but requires a few sections of text, an online shop and embedding of Google Analytics. It is intended that the site will go live by the end of July 2011 and Eggboy Productions will commence trading.

Marketing will initially take the form of blog entries, which will automatically feed social networking sites. The success of this campaign will be assessed using Google analytics as outlined above. In parallel with this, promotion on Jango.com will continue, along with other selected music sites. As the success of these Internet-based campaigns grow and work begins to flow in, it is anticipated more traditional marketing methods will also be adopted, e.g., engagement of a PR agent, runs of vinyl and CDs for sale, perhaps a launch party at a London venue.

The network of potential associates who are interested in being part of Eggboy Productions is expected to continue to grow. As stated above, there is considerable concern amongst industry professionals about the loudness war and many are looking for a way to escape it.

Conclusion

The principal aim of this project was to create a case study that would provide source material for teaching students. This has been accomplished and the specific objectives either fully achieved or in progress. The launch of the limited company is underway, all tools are in place to carry out the viral marketing and the success or otherwise of this approach will be compared with more traditional marketing methods when they are employed. The importance of marketing techniques is self-evident, but this will be highlighted in lectures in the academic year 2011-12. This will all add a new and important dimension to the delivery of Audio and Music Technology courses at Anglia Ruskin.

It is hoped that Eggboy Productions will become a profitable company and will continue to grow and develop.

This project has already been used within teaching in the modules Final Studio Portfolio 1 and 2. This academic year, the students were assigned optional tasks relating to the project. In the next academic year, the tasks will form a compulsory part of the portfolio modules.

It is hoped that progress with the new company can be reported at next year’s Anglia Ruskin Learning and Teaching conference.

Notes

5. There are many references to the loudness war online. See for example: http://www.turnmeup.org/, http://www.pleasurizemusic.com/node/1, http://dynamicrangeday.co.uk/
7. http://www.blueskyformations.co.uk
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11. http://www.jango.com/music/eggboy


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