

COLUMNS

What rock 'n' roll can teach us about mobile and social marketing

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By [Vanessa Horwell](#)

I was watching the Grammys a couple of months ago, and as I sat through the usual clumsy award show mash-up of acts, I could not help but think that the more important event took place earlier that day.

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It was not nearly as famous or well publicized, but it spoke more directly to the future of music and marketing than the Grammys ever could.

The event I am referring to was “The Social Media Rock Stars Summit — Music and Mobile: Beyond the Ringtone.”

American ideal

Billed by the Recording Academy as a “milestone conversation,” the Summit featured

celebs and luminaries from both the music and social media industries exploring the relationship between music and mobile beyond the well-established and somewhat over ringtones and individual track download.

Adam Lambert and Chamillionaire took the stage to discuss how mobile devices have altered the way consumers interact with music, how artists can connect with fans through mobile apps and social media and how the music industry can embrace the new mobile world.

It turns out we can learn more from these stars than how to apply eyeliner and sport bling.

In all seriousness, savvy musicians have been climbing all over mobile to advance their careers and connect with their fans, proving that mobile marketing is not just for the retail industry.

If rock stars can market themselves via mobile, then so can other entities.

The moral of the story – and what I took away from the Social Media Summit – is that even if you do not have the publicity machinery enjoyed by recording artists, you can still apply some 21st-century rock star principles to engage audiences and keep them up to date with what is happening.

You do not have to trash a suite at the Chateau Marmont to generate mobile buzz.

Mobile making beautiful music

Progressive musicians are no longer waiting around for their record labels – assuming they have one – to promote them.

Instead, they have taken the mobile reins and are doing it themselves. And like them, we should not assume that our clients are going to take the initiative to get the mobile ball rolling. We have to push them along.

Integrating mobile with social

We also should not assume that digital media is all about the music or the message.

In this age of total information, fans hunger for more than just the tunes and an occasional interview. They want to go far behind the scenes and get to know their favorite artists on a deeper, more personal level.

Singer Adam Lambert of American Idol fame tweets many of his stray thoughts and musings on show business, as do many artists. This unique take on entertainment from someone behind the curtain binds him even more strongly to his fans.

But even though Twitter is perhaps the most mobile-friendly of the social media platforms, the consensus is that Tweeting is just the tip of the iceberg.

The mobile medium – the most intimate of all communications channels – holds much more in store in terms of reaching and connecting with audiences.

In late 2008, a company contacted me with a great idea: an IVR/mobile campaign where

fans could "speak" with their favorite artists in real time. It featured rich media interaction, and had several well-known artists signed on to participate, but it never got off the ground.

I think the concept was too ahead of its time then, but not now.

Audiences want to be connected with and they want you to make them feel wanted and important, in the moment, wherever they are.

Musicians and other personalities, especially those that spoke at the Social Media Summit, recognize this and are leveraging the platforms currently available to them to do exactly that.

Brand love

For instance, hip-hop artist Chamillionaire regularly uses his Twitter feed to chat with fans directly.

Talk about binding: a straight one-on-one dialogue is about as connected as a musician can get with followers without hanging out with them backstage after the show.

Chamillionaire goes the Lambert route one better with frequent postings on his Facebook page that are, by no means, limited to music and entertainment.

An avid basketball fan, the rapper solicited his fans' opinions about various aspects of the recent NBA all-star game.

The potential of mobile and social media for artists also extends to content such as songs and video to serve the same goal of engagement.

After all, what fan of a musician or filmmaker or poet or painter would not want "in" on the latest scoop or session with their hero, or hear an early version of a new song picked out on an acoustic guitar?

Most smartphones have at least good video and audio recording capability, and artists and fans alike are increasingly exploiting this capability.

Put the action in interaction

The results can be quite sophisticated.

Late last year, musician/comedian Reggie Watts produced, recorded and sang a tune on the fly when interviewed for a radio show.

Creating two looping vocal rhythm tracks on his iPhone, he improvised a set of lyrics to layer on top of that, and the result sounded just as good as something written in advance and recorded in a professional studio.

Although Mr. Watts did his "Pancake Song" only for a spur-of-the-moment live broadcast, he could have also easily uploaded the result to any of his online or mobile venues for the consumption of his fans.

Again, this helps personalize – not to mention, promote – the artist. Fans are getting something very special and unique by connecting to them via this chosen medium. If Mr. Watts can do it, so can almost anyone else.

Some artists have even gone so far as to include their audience in the creative process.

Now that is the ultimate in social networking for entertainment – connecting to the point where fans or friends participate in the art.

A British musical duo named “Rob And Kal” has been posting raw mixes of their songs on a project Web site called Mubla 2.0.

Listeners are invited to post comments on how the tunes can be modified and improved. The group actually absorbs some of these suggestions and tailors the songs accordingly.

The feedback goes both ways, with Rob frequently chiming in on the chat streams to respond to the suggestions.

Do not overdose

At the same time, we do need to put some limits on the wonderfully unlimited possibilities of mobile and digital media.

For all his avid Twittering, Mr. Lambert also cautioned about overload. We live in a fully digitized society, putting us at risk at becoming too wrapped up in technology – even more than we already are.

This disconnect makes it increasingly difficult to simply enjoy a moment or an experience without having to tweet or record it and broadcast it to the world instantly.

While these channels are powerful, simple and very effective ways of reaching our audience or customers, perhaps that is the biggest lesson we can learn from these musical makers: make good use of the power of mobile and social marketing, but do not pull a Spinal Tap and crank it up to 11.

Rather, use it efficiently, cleverly and effectively. There is an audience out there that wants to hear from your brand.

Now go get 'em all, you rock stars!

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