

Analysis:

Music's retail therapy

Mandy Saven, Editor of the Global Innovation Reports at GDR Creative Intelligence, highlights how brands can utilise music as a strategic tool within retail and hospitality environments.

The idea of using music to create atmosphere and reinforce brand image in retail and hospitality is nothing new. In most retail spaces, it's a given that some kind of background soundscape – designed to pepper the consciousness of consumers as they traverse through the space – will be playing. And if artfully curated, this ambient music can be a revelation in itself.

The potential exists, however, to take the medium beyond 'mood-creator' and integrate it fully into the physical experience. In this way, smart brands and retailers can utilise sound to actively enhance visual merchandising and point of purchase solutions, convey product attributes and strengthen consumer engagement. And, indeed, many brands are dipping an experimental toe into the water. Some are opting for subtle, refined interpretations that gently enhance the offer, while others are embracing bold, confident schemes that thrust the music feature into the limelight.

Interactive connections

A low-key merchandising initiative was recently trialled by fashion brand Tommy Hilfiger. The brand developed a series of 'My Denim, My Music' audio merchandising units and installed them temporarily within Hilfiger stores across Europe. The initiative demonstrated not only how music can bring a product to life in-store but also how it can help to differentiate one product from another seemingly similar one.

The project saw Hilfiger launch five soundtracks in conjunction with five new styles of jeans. In the brand's stores the trousers were affixed with pre-programmed RFID sticker tags, which could be swiped against an audio cassette-shaped speaker unit to play the tune that corresponded with that particular garment. Each jean style was allocated a different music genre, such as hip-hop for baggy jeans and indie rock for skinny fit. The tracks, created by music producers Skinner Bros, were not made commercially available – making the in-store experience a 'must do' for their fans. Besides creating an entertaining experience, the interactive units reinforced the fashion brand's longstanding commitment to fusing fashion with music and promoting upcoming talent.

Another well-conceived integration of music into a point of purchase solution – this time in the beauty sector – is the Harajuku Lovers Roadshow booth. The concept, aimed primarily at the teenage market, was designed by creative agency, The Attic Room to promote singer Gwen Stefani's Harajuku Lovers perfume range in the UK. The branded karaoke booth recently toured ten department stores across Britain as part of a promotional campaign. Visitors to the booth were able to record a video of themselves singing along to a Gwen Stefani track, which could then be posted to a dedicated micro-site.

Participants could also upload the video and

photos taken inside the space to their mobile phones using Bluetooth technology and then post them on social networking pages. The booth was installed alongside display units retailing the fragrance, which came in five different bottles – each adorned with an animé-style character that is synonymous with the brand. The Harajuku experience was successful because it facilitated fun and interaction, brought the product to life and also, cleverly, used music to seamlessly connect physical retailing with digital and social media platforms in a well-integrated multi-channel campaign.

My Denim, My Music

Interior Design: Lignova - Brand Retail & Marketing
Interactive Design: de-construct, Technology: Kin Design,
Photography: Kin Design





Le Nez de Courvoisier

Design: The Fletcher Project, Photography: The Fletcher Project



iida Calling

Design: Projector, Photography: Projector



Harajuku Lovers

Design: The Attic Room, Photography: Lucinda Marland

Extra sensory perception

Aiming to appeal to a more mature consumer through sound, cognac brand Courvoisier created a sophisticated, pared down point of sale solution for Paris's Charles de Gaulle airport. The concept – which was temporarily installed in the space – used music to block out the cluttered, high traffic surroundings and help consumers experience its product offering in a highly sensory manner. To arouse the sense of smell, the unit featured three aroma flutes containing three different scents found in Courvoisier beverages – crème brûlée, candied orange and iris flower – which could be enjoyed while listening on headphones to an audio recording of detailed ingredient descriptions or one of seven ambient melodies. The melodies were composed by French composer Laurent Assoulen to encapsulate and enhance the scents found in Courvoisier's key products. Visitors could, of course, also taste-test the cognac, while they enjoyed the 'cocooned' audio experience. After its initial success at Charles de Gaulle, the brand is now looking into rolling out the concept within other European travel retail environments.

Taking the level of consumer engagement and use of digital technologies one step further, Japanese telecoms operator KDDI launched its mobile phone brand iida earlier this year through a promotional campaign called 'iida calling'. The campaign combined physical pop-up booths and online components that were linked together through a sophisticated music application. 'Ringtone recording' booths were set up at branded launch events across Japan, where participants could create personal ringtones for their mobile phones. This was achieved by making a recording of their singing voice and using a music generator system to mix it with a pre-recorded track by Japanese musician Towa Tei. The unique tune could be saved and stored on the user's handset, and each recording was assigned a QR code that enabled it to be posted onto the 'iida calling' campaign website or on personal blogs.

Participants at the events were given printouts of their musical QR codes, designed to look like gift certificates, and completed tracks were played over the venues' speaker systems. For those who couldn't visit the physical space, recordings could be made on the campaign website, which received 2M visits within two weeks of the promotion's launch. Incidentally, iida's first phone model, the G9, has outsold all other KDDI models on a week-by-week basis.

Le Studio SFR

Design: Interbrand, Photography: Mikaël Lafontan & Olivier Seignette



Sonic installations

The mobile telecoms sector has shown creativity and consumer understanding in using music as a key tool in product development and in marketing and communications strategies. A nod should also be given in the direction of French telecom brand SFR's innovative flagship store Le Studio SFR, in Paris, which was designed around the brand's 'vision of music'. Designed by Interbrand, the store's pièce de résistance – a fine example of slick and imaginative retail design – are its 'sonic showers'. These futuristic stalactite-like installations – set within an acoustic bubble – enable customers to sample and download over a million tunes and ringtones from the brand's music catalogue. Once customers have had their musical fill, they can head to the in-store ticket sales office and nab themselves an entry to a local gig, or even a free in-store concert by an emerging artist. These concerts can accommodate up to 200 revellers.

Extending this idea of brand as 'music host', beer brand Heineken's first concept store, called Heineken The City, features a large zone dedicated to the medium. The space, which is located in Amsterdam, retails over 600 beers from around the world and an exclusive fashion collection designed especially for the brand. It also features an events and tickets office and a fully equipped recording studio where visitors can express their musical creativity. Called the Refreshing Sounds Studio, the venue features regular DJ workshops, in-store performances and provides visitors with the chance to record their own track. Here they can also purchase new music releases and enter competitions to win a 'master class' recording session with a famous music producer. Budding musicians can also sign up for the 'Your Heineken Nights' programme, which includes concerts held in the Heineken Music Hall in Amsterdam. These initiatives help Heineken to position itself as

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Heineken in the City
Design: Tjep



a patron of music, and thereby win the hearts and minds of music fans around the world.

The hospitality sector has risen equally to the challenge of incorporating music into its offerings and we are seeing many innovative applications take form. SLOWLY by Da Dolce is an excellent example. Located in Langham Place Mall in Hong Kong, the SLOWLY concept encourages patrons to slow their pace and take time to enjoy books, music, culinary delicacies and creative conversation. Devised as a theme for the Asian flagship store of the gelato brand Da Dolce, the first SLOWLY venue offers an organic café and a lounge-style art and design bookshop.

The venue also houses an independent radio station radio dada, which broadcasts through the Internet and can also be accessed through speakers on the café tables. Recorded and produced live in the small on-site studio, radio dada is the city's first creative-oriented, alternative, online broadcasting station. Run by a diverse team – its members include an advertising creative, a musician, a film director, a stage performer and a graffiti artist. Radio dada offers two distinct channels: Urban, for music and information on up-and-coming artists in the city; and Creative, providing a round-table forum for discussions on design, advertising, books and film.

Creative culture

A pioneering concept in music and hospitality has been developed by Blue Frog in India, with an interactive music facility and entertainment venue that aims to break new ground in the creation, production and distribution of music. Located in Mumbai, the concept incorporates four services. For composers and musicians, Blue Frog Production offers a platform to record music. Full support and advice is given to encourage clients to develop their skills and talents as well as providing a production infrastructure. Facilities include meeting rooms, Internet access and a growing digital library of original music for professional or personal use. Designed by musicians for musicians, the space offers four state-of-the-art recording studios, bringing together technology and user comfort.

The second area of activity is a record label, Blue Frog Records, which signs emerging music talent and promotes the artist internationally. To compliment the music production side, the Blue Frog Club – a visually stunning venue – hosts live acts six nights a week. A large stage area is surrounded by a restaurant and bar, with diners seated in tiered cylindrical booths, partitioned by a ribbon of acrylic resin that can be backlit with different colours to suit different moods or themes. The staggered seating system gives excellent views of the central stage, and advanced acoustics and lighting enhance all performances.

Finally, the Ace Hotel Chain is a brand that has firmly hitched its star to music, using it to target a 'professional creative' audience, and has fluidly embedded music into its core offering. As they enter the hotel, guests are invited to download a series of music compilations guest-edited by bands and DJs. Select guest bedrooms are equipped with DJ turntables and a vinyl record selection compiled by music retailer Other Music, while others feature customised Gibson guitars. Lucky guests will also find blank music sheets in their rooms, ready for use if the mood strikes. In a fun twist, guests can also personalise their rooms by hanging their own pictures – music-themed or otherwise – on the slatted walls.



Ace hotel
Design: Neverstop,
Photography: Doug Lyle Thompson & John Johnson

Be bold with in-store innovation

There is, then, ample evidence of music being incorporated into the product offering in a highly creative way. However, there is still a mass of undeveloped potential for bold brands that want to get involved. Many brands are playing it too safe: they are happy enough to experiment with music and artistic partnerships for their marcoms strategies but are gun-shy when it comes to implementing a music strategy in-store. Of course, there are the trailblazers who treat music as an active consumer engagement tool – April77 jeans with its April77Records spin-off is one example – but so far we have only seen the tip of the iceberg.

Wouldn't it be fantastic if a fashion brand installed directional speakers into fitting rooms to enable patrons to customise their shopping experience? Even better if the experience worked with motion-sensor technology through simply waving a hand across the corner of the mirror. Or, what if banks or supermarkets offered free Bluetooth downloads to customers waiting in long queues? This isn't such a radical thought. For years, Umpqua bank in the US has been hosting in-store gigs to promote local artists. This kind of enthusiasm and lateral thinking would surely surprise and delight savvy consumers on multiple levels. Brands and retailers who want to cut through the clutter should consider bringing music not only into their marcoms but also into their on-site strategies. Bold applications are likely to yield strong results.

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With all the attention on innovation across digital and social media functionality, it's exciting to see that brands are investing directly in tangible on-the-ground music experiences in-store for consumers. That clever music ad, contagious viral or interactive web destination needs to follow through when it comes to

eventual footfall. Getting customers switched on to your brand through music means they expect to be consistently engaged via music throughout the process – from connecting with your brand, to walking away with a purchase.

There are innumerable shop floor activation routes available, as the many examples

outlined here are testament to. However, with consumers bereft of time – and brands keen to keep a flow of new consumers through their doors – these concepts need to work as a viable asset, with measurable results, as opposed to merely an esthetic addition to the visual merchandiser's handbook.