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Major Record Labels: Pertinent Forces Driving the Success of Country Music Artists

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i. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to generate original research about the key functions and critical decisions major record labels make to warrant success with signed artists. All research was intended for the country music format, but findings may not be strictly limited to one genre of music. The study will examine pertinent creative and analytic choices made during an artist's musical career. It will answer questions such as, "*What does a record label look for when selecting a new artist to sign?*" and, "*What steps does a record label take after signing an artist to help the artist gain positive exposure?*" These questions, along with others, have been addressed through secondary and primary research. All findings have been compiled into a logically ordered report, as outlined on the previous page. An accompanying magazine mock-up, titled *theBeat*, highlights these findings as an aesthetically focused supplement.

The goal of this report is to satisfy the necessary requirements of "HNRS 4990: The Honors Project". HNRS 4990 is the capstone course for Bowling Green State University's Honors Program. Completion of the class is dependent upon the completion of the Honors Project. The Honors Project is meant to demonstrate a student's culmination of learning throughout the undergraduate experience. It must generate original scholarship, make interdisciplinary connections, and provide a justification of any theories/methodologies used. The interdisciplinary connections made must incorporate both a student's main discipline of study, along with another field of study. Each student's final project is unique to his or her interests and major. The foundation of this specific report will be based on marketing and general business (within the country

music industry). Other incorporated fields include music and design. This combination of fields, with topics capital in the College of Business, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the College of Technology, has produced an entirely novel Honors Project.

Both *theBeat*, and this report, have high importance. This report demonstrates my business understanding gained from my major in Marketing, whereas *theBeat* showcases the skills I have gained through my minor studies in Visual Communications Technology. Both incorporate my personal interests in music, and tie-in many other learning experiences I have had during my time at Bowling Green State University. Both academic and work experiences have influenced this report. During my junior year I spent eight months interning for a major label in Nashville, Warner Music Nashville. That work experience was useful to gain insight about major labels and the Nashville community. Interviews and articles from my time there are integrated into this project.

The report and magazine give insight from seasoned top professionals in the country music industry. It offers opinions from successful industry leaders as to why artists **must** be more than just “good” to make it. It poses and answers the question of what differentiates the “good” from the “great”. Current popular country artists will be referenced as a comparison, in efforts of providing a thorough examination of what traits many successful artists possess. The various departments of a typical major record label are a key focus of the report. The purpose and key functions of these departments will be outlined, as they all play a critical role in developing an artist’s career.

A heavy emphasis will be placed on the functions of various departments within a major record label. Their roles are essential to the success of an artist in the marketplace. Another emphasized focus is Nashville. Nashville is home to the bustling country music industry, and the location where most major country labels and musicians reside. I will conduct research through the examination of prominent decisions made by music industry professionals within a major record label.

Please note all sources have been identified in this report. This same content was condensed and used in *theBeat*. All sourcing for *theBeat* should be found in this report.

ii. THE PROCESS OF SIGNING AN ARTIST TO A LABEL

a. HOW MUSIC ACTS ARE NOTICED

In the Nashville community, some of the most prominent labels are Sony Music Nashville, Capitol Nashville, Warner Music Nashville, and Universal Nashville. Each of these labels functions with the help of multiple departments within the organization. All of these record labels receive an overwhelming amount of music every day. The A&R department, short for Artists and Repertoire, is the first place new music goes. They are the employees that undertake the mission of sorting through, and listening to, all incoming music. Although each record label's policies of music submission are different, most of them attain music through similar means. They receive mp3's in their email, CDs in their mailboxes, and people tracking them down to share thoughts on a musical act.

An A&R employee's job can be absolutely exhausting, just considering the sheer mass and continuity of incoming music. From an artist's perspective, it can be equally exhausting trying to get the A&R staff to listen to his or her music. What grabs the A&R staff's attention?

Let's start off with ways that music can make its way to an A&R department:

Unsolicited Delivery

It is a rare circumstance that an A&R person inserts a randomly unsolicited CD into their record player, falls in love with the sound, and immediately seeks the artist out to propose a deal. In fact, this basically never happens. The chances of such a chain of

events taking place is possible, but rare. Some record labels don't even accept unsolicited mail. If a record label accepts unsolicited music submissions, any person can submit music, regardless of industry connections or musical history. Unsolicited demos do not even have to be professionally recorded (however, that does not hurt). The music may or may not get listened to, depending on a label's specific philosophies about unsolicited music. Some labels may block all unsolicited mail, or some may block only international submissions. Others may accept any and all incoming submissions.

There is a lesser chance of an artist getting signed through sending unsolicited material to a major label. The A&R team already gets a lot of music. Unsolicited packages tend to be home to many unfamiliar names, no professional contacts, or experience. While there is always the "you never know" mentality accompanying unsolicited packages, the amount of exceptional submissions to not-so-exceptional submissions tends to be a poor ratio.

At Warner Music Nashville unsolicited material is accepted. Every day interns check the mail, open up the unsolicited submissions, and listen. Submissions range from someone pitching a song or someone trying to become an artist. Either way, the name of the person, the song he or she sent, and any other contact information is recorded in a log and saved. The likelihood of a record label moving forward with an unsolicited demo is not as likely as if an artist or writer had a publishing deal, an agent, or a manager. That's why it's helpful for an artist to have a manager or agent who already has connections within the industry. It can make it a lot easier to get the music heard.

In comparison, Sony Music Nashville will not accept any unsolicited material.¹ As stated in their artist and song submission policy, unsolicited mail will never be listened to. Likewise, any unsolicited songs sent through e-mail will be unread and deleted.

Other major labels have similar approaches, like Capitol Nashville. From their artist and song submission policy, Capitol Nashville directly states,

We are unable to accept unsolicited demos or music that we haven't asked for from you directly. Typically, the material we select from for our artists is found by our talent scouts, given to us by a publishing company, or provided by other established contacts including producers and songwriters. However, we encourage you to keep performing and recording.²

The obvious, yet not always explicitly stated, response from most record labels is to find a liaison between the artist and the label. Make a connection between the two somehow. The connection could be an artist manager, producer, agent, a friend of a record rep, or someone else who knows bodies within the music industry that have the propensity to launch an artist's career. This leads to another type of way to get music to an A&R staff.

Referrals

¹ "Artist & Song Submission Policy." *The Official Sony Nashville Site*. Sony Nashville, n.d. Web. 05 Jan. 2013. <<http://www.sonymusicnashville.com/artist-song-submission-policy>>.

² "Capitol Nashville." *Capitol Nashville FAQ*. Capitol Nashville, n.d. Web. 05 Jan. 2013.

New talent is most often discovered and followed through referrals. Reputable sources that suggest artists to A&R reps are more likely to get heard than those without reliable backing. Human nature is to trust in that which we know. A person is naturally more inclined to check out a recommendation of a movie or album if they hear it from a friend. It basically works the same way in the music industry. A&R will listen when someone they trust really believes in new talent. These “someones” are most often artist managers, song pitchers, and talent agents.

Talent agencies seek artists, develop them into what they want, and promote them like crazy. They host showcases featuring the artists they represent. Two of the biggest talent agencies in country music are William Morris Entertainment (WME) and Creative Artists Agency (CAA). The showcases bring out A&R reps from all different labels, and people curious in what hot new talent is out there. Folks come out to the showcases, listen, and follow an artist. It may be several months, years, or maybe even never before an artist with a talent agency gets signed to a label. Many labels may choose to just follow an artist for a while before they make a decision. Given WME and CAA long-standing, positive track record with finding successful artists, they still serve as a trustworthy source for A&R reps.

In a Music News interview, Sony’s VP of A&R at Sony Music Nashville had a conversation on the way he discovers music. When asked what are the chances of getting heard through cold calls, e-mails, or showcases from people the A&R staff hasn’t met, he commented, “I’ve been doing A&R for almost 10 years and I’d say we’ve signed maybe

one act that just came in off the street. It's all word of mouth. We all know everyone in town. It still comes from the publishers, the producers, and managers. They are all constantly shopping the artist."³ His comment further endorses the importance of developing and maintaining respectable connections within the industry.

In the same interview Melissa Spillman, Manager of A&R at Capitol Records Nashville, commented, "Personal relationships are still paramount. Publishers who have a presence on Music Row and songwriters and artists who make themselves known, those are the best ways to get music heard."³

b. WHAT LABEL IS LOOKING FOR

Each major label may be looking for something slightly different, but the universal pleaser is talent. Novelty, originality, and raw talent are central. Scott Borchetta, founder and CEO of Big Machine Label Group stated, "Give me that artist that has something to say that I haven't heard before—where you haven't heard anybody say 'I love you' this way before."⁴ This applies to both an artist and songs.

In an article from *theBeat*, I illustrate a day in the A&R office:

It's four o'clock on a Thursday. Typical loud, thumping beats and melodies have been replaced with the calm, sullen hums of office lights. Everyone seems to be fixated within his or her work, a steady and focused concentration. In

³ Rudder, Randy. "Generations: A&R Executives Jim Catino, Bonnie Garner and Melissa Spillman." *Music News Atlanta*. N.p., 18 May 2011. Web. 08 Oct. 2012. <http://music.yahoo.com/blogs/our-country/scott-borchetta-taylor-tim-martina-band-perry-personalized-005314825.html>

⁴ Willman, Chris. "Borchetta on Music." *Yahoo! Music*. Yahoo, 13 June 2012. Web. 08 Dec. 2012.

my wing of the hallway, a very important meeting is about to take place in a few minutes. Weeks of preparation and tough decision-making have led up to this meeting. The A&R staff and CEO of Warner Music Nashville are meeting with A&R's senior vice president, Scott Hendricks. They are to discuss which songs are going to be pitched to Blake Shelton for his upcoming album. Of the thousands of song submissions WMN receives each week, the A&R staff will choose just sixteen songs today. Whether or not those songs get cut is up to Blake.

As five of the most important people in the company sit in Scott's closed-off office, I enter and feel lucky enough to be able to sit in. Scott sits behind his desk, as the others sit in chairs that outline the perimeter of his room. I chose the empty seat, and begin to observe what is taking place.

Cris Lacy, Vice President of A&R, tosses Hendricks a CD. It is her turn to share the songs she has collected. The CD is filled with handpicked songs she has chosen for Blake to cut. Hendricks pops the CD into a disc player and sits back. He has the final say in all big decisions. Occasionally Lacy instructs him to "skip to #4" or "listen to the great bridge and chorus of #7", but mostly, the music speaks for itself. When a song begins to play, we all remain silent. Drifting into our own personal place, some close their eyes or stare into the distance. A boot taps along to the beat, fingers dance on an armchair, and a head bobs in a rhythmic motion. I begin to envision the possibility of Shelton singing this song.

I imagine him and the reaction of his fans as he reaches his hand out to them while singing this song. I can almost see a tear fall from an eager fan's eye. I see a man shout the words at the loudest decibel he is capable of. A woman his senior feels as though she is about to faint and...

Suddenly, the music stops.

"Nope, I don't like it," Hendricks remarks. "Alright, go to number 9," Lacy responds. And just like that it's on to the next one. And the room turns quiet again, and all that matters in that moment is the song that's playing. And what has just taken place is proof of a beautiful balance. There is no useless bickering, or hard feelings. This small team has an unstated understanding of one another. The way they operate is a delicate balance of mutual understanding. Everyone feels a song differently, but when one is right, they all seem to know. Eyes widen and smiles open up. And occasionally, if that simultaneous love for a song isn't there, and someone still really believes in the song he or she pitched, (s)he will defend it, giving reasoning as to why it's deserving. In the end, through the many decisions it takes to get there, they will decide on sixteen songs to pitch to Blake.

Observing this meeting was a true testament to the involved A&R process.

While Warner Music Nashville's creative A&R process has been a first-hand observation to me, I wasn't sure if all major labels operated in the same manner. Are

other teams using similar methods and what is their take on the creative process? I was on the pursuit to dig a little deeper.

Current chairman for Warner Brothers Records and former Senior VP of A&R for Reprise Records, Rob Cavallo had a few words to say about A&R in a Taxi interview. When asked about finding and making good music with a team, he stated, “You want to make sure nobody feels that they should be embarrassed or ashamed to throw out any kind of an idea. The truth is you have to throw out ideas and mix it up to go forward creatively. You have to not be afraid to be naked and just let it go.”⁵ Cavallo’s words repeatedly prove themselves true.

Revenue is the necessity of all surviving businesses. The music business is centered in the fast-paced entertainment industry, offering a very limited amount of safety nets. Finance, sales, and marketing departments can estimate figures as to how much revenue new artists will generate. However, the way the public chooses to react to the artist is never perfectly predictable. Whether an artist becomes the “next big thing” or another one-hit wonder is ultimately up to the public. That’s a daunting investment for any company, and a pertinent reason why the A&R team is vital. They provide consistent creative assurance. They are the team that picks and produces the music that the rest of the company divisions will later work with (whether that be promoting, marketing, merchandise, etc.). They are the backbone of the musical creativity.

⁵ Scoppa, Bud. "TAXI A&R Interview: Rob Cavallo, Reprise Records." *TAXI A&R Interview: Rob Cavallo, Reprise Records*. TAXI, n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.taxi.com/music-business-faq/ar/cavallo.html>>.

iii. POWERS THAT PUSH TOWARD STARDOM AFTER SIGN

A. PROMOTION

The world of promotion is a fast-moving, constant race to the top. The promotion team is responsible for getting artist(s) current singles played on radio. This hard-working team is especially pertinent in country music since the country music format still heavily relies on radio. The success of an artist at radio can often determine their overall success in the marketplace.

One common thread in the promotion world is the use of charts. Charts can include a mixture of publications: Most rank the popularity and time-relative movement of current singles in a specific format. A couple popular publications that issue charts are Mediabase and Billboard. These charts expose the amount of adds and plays a single receives.⁶ They also expose the amount of weeks a single has been out, whether it is rising or falling in popularity, and other information that is useful to a promo team. These telling numbers serve as indicators that help determine a single's current and future positioning. The promotion sphere thrives on numbers, facts, and current information. It requires finding out what stations are playing which songs and how often.

Smaller radio stations can report to radio magazines what they are playing, and at what frequency. Some of these smaller stations are non-reporting, and chose not to report what they're playing to any type of publication.⁶ They don't have to, but it can help put together a bigger picture of what is being played across the country.

⁶ Farrish, Bryan. "Radio Airplay 101 - BDS / Mediabase / Soundscan." *Bryan Farrish Radio Promotion*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Oct. 2012. <<http://www.radio-media.com/song-album/articles/airplay26.html>>.

Generally, a label cares more about bigger radio stations. The “big” radio stations cover densely populated geographic areas and have a wider radius of broadcasting. The promotion team usually cares more about the bigger stations because the large stations reach more listeners. Consequently, these bigger stations tend to have a larger impact on the industry as a whole. The large stations do not usually have the choice of whether or not they can report.⁶ Big commercial stations are automatically monitored.

A breakdown of these popular charts may offer more insight about what exactly a promotion team monitors, why, and how it determines their next actions. Two of the most popular charts are Mediabase and Billboard. A more detailed description of each is listed below:

MEDIABASE

Mediabase, a division of Premiere Radio Networks (under the Clear Channel Communications umbrella), is a tool that is widely used in the music industry. These charts are based on the activity of over 1,800 radio stations and over 175 radio markets in both the United States and Canada.⁷ Mediabase, commonly abbreviated “MB”, gives insight as to what’s singles are most popular in a specific genre based on current airplay. The activity of these stations is monitored 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, by actual

⁷ "Mediabase Explained." *Mediabase Explained*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Nov. 2012. <<http://everything.explained.at/Mediabase/>>.

people.⁸ Human beings listen to stations and report what the station is playing. This information is then collected from all over the country and the chart is created. Each chart features real-time information about radio airplay, which songs are playing most frequently and what songs are predicted to keep rising (or falling) on the chart. Mediabase covers over 25 radio formats, from country to hip-hop to nearly every popular genre in between.⁹

While not every radio station reports what they are playing, the stations that do will be the ones that influence the charts. These stations add to the overall accuracy of the chart. Mediabase then compiles these data records and forms “the chart” that becomes public.⁵

Reporting radio stations subscribe to Mediabase's monitoring service through network connections. The Mediabase network consists of more than 1,800 radio affiliates. Other people who use and rely on these charts, like record company and entertainment executives, subscribe on a cash basis.⁹ While some record labels may try and contact non-reporting stations to play their artists' singles, it is the reporting radio stations that are typically the targeted stations. It is because it's these stations that directly affect the charts that the industry uses as a whole. They typically have larger listenership as well.⁹

⁸ "Mediabase and USA TODAY Form Unprecedented Partnership." *PR Newswire*. United Business Media, n.d. Web. 30 Oct. 2012. <<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/mediabase-and-usa-today-form-unprecedented-partnership-57529897.html>>.

⁹ "Radio Formats." *RadioStationWorld*. Global Radio Station Directory, 2012. Web. 30 Nov. 2012. <http://radiostationworld.com/directory/radio_formats>.

People all across the industry who see a name in print are also the ones who are agents, managers, promoters, DJs, retail buyers, and other types of industry professionals that have the ability to heighten an artist's career. One could almost relate MB as a type of publicity. If an artist, let's say Luke Bryan as an example, is consistently at the #1 spot on the MB charts with his last 3 singles, people will notice. People begin to recognize his name, know his popularity, and want to become involved with the uprising star.

Information on these charts not only help the promotion staff at the record label, but they also offer guidance to radio programmers. Radio programmers can access Mediabase charts and determine what songs to play on their show. The chart could be considered a guideline for programmers. By seeing what is most popular, and most played across the country, programmers can develop their show to appease to the masses. While some programmers are independent and program their programs themselves, others allow a syndicated show to take over at some point. A syndicated show is simply a program that is pre-produced from a larger center, sent out to other stations via satellite, and those stations can air that show on their station. Larger syndicated shows include After Midnite with Blair Garner, Country Top 40 with Bob Kingsley, American Country Countdown with Don Bowman, and many others.³

BILLBOARD

Billboard is an international publication that shares current news, themes, and trends about the music industry.¹⁰ They cover all genres of music. Billboard also publishes their own exclusive charts that many people in the industry follow. Their most popular charts are released each week: The complete Hot 100, Billboard 200 chart, the top half of the current chart catalog, and the top 10 of historical charts. Billboard states that Billboard Charts are “calculated using custom formulas collecting sales, streaming, and radio play”.¹¹ Other charts include Top Digital Albums, Top Ringtones, On-Demand Songs, Latin Songs, Christian Songs, Independent Albums, and many more. Billboard charts are some of the most widely used charts in the entire industry.

Billboard differs from Mediabase in the respect that Billboard’s country chart ranks singles by audience impressions.¹² They get the audience impression numbers through a research company called Nielsen Broadcast Data Systems, or BDS. To get the numbers, BDS targets prominent radio stations across the United States. Then they gather a sample of typical listeners and monitor what their listening patterns are throughout the day. After attaining that, BDS calculates how many listeners each station has and multiplies that by how many spins a single is getting (or the number of times a specific single is played in a day). They also take into consideration that if a song gets played at noon it will probably have more listeners than a song playing at 3am. This is all factored into their mathematic system by assigning weights. After attaining numbers on the most popular song by each

¹⁰ "About Billboard Magazine." *Billboard*. Billboard, 2012. Web. 01 Dec. 2012. <<http://www.billboard.com/footer/biz>>.

¹¹ "Music Charts." *Billboard*. Billboard, n.d. Web. 06 Dec. 2012. <<http://www.billboard.com/charts>>.

¹² "Charts FAQ." *Country Chart Talk*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Dec. 2012. <<http://countrycharttalk.com/charts-faq/>>.

station, BDS sums up all of the numbers to get a national view of what's popular. Summing all of these numbers associated with specific audiences across the country in relation to their listeners is the "audience impression". It is those final numbers that Billboard uses to create their charts, one of the most accurate and reliable in the industry.

B. MERCHANDISING/STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS/E-COMMERCE

The Recording Industry of America, RIAA, releases annual figures that show the decline or growth of sales in the industry. RIAA represents nearly all United States music distributors. They record what type of music product is being sold and in what quantity. The industry as a whole has seen a decline in physical music sales. This includes CDs, vinyl, DVDs, and more. RIAA statistics show a nearly \$6 million decrease in CD sales from 1995 to 2011.¹³ To view these statistics in more detail see the chart shown in Figure 1 of Appendix A and the table shown in Figure 2 of Appendix A.

To help replenish revenue lost from the decline in physical music sales, artists can sell merchandise. This can be anything from a coffee mug, t-shirt, hat, or any other conceivable good that would fit with an artist's image. There are two types of merchandising: tour merchandising and retail merchandising.¹⁴ Tour merchandising includes any merchandise sold at a concert or show. Retail merchandising is everything else: online goods, fan club products, mail order goods, or products sold at retail stores.

¹³ "RIAA Year-End Shipment Statistics." *Recording Industry of America*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Jan. 2013. <<http://www.riaa.com/chartindex.php>>.

¹⁴ Passman, Donald S. "Merchandising." *All You Need to Know About the Music Business*. 7th ed. Vol. 1. New York: Free, 2009. 375-88. Print.

Historically, tour merchandising has been more profitable for artists. Fans are enthused by a show they just saw, and want a souvenir. However, retail merchandising is also critical to help further promote and familiarize the public with an artist. Living in the Digital Age makes it easier to reach an audience with a wide demographic, regardless of the exact physical location.

Another resource to sell and distribute products is electronic commerce, most often referred to as “e-commerce”. E-commerce includes all products bought and sold over electronic systems, like the Internet. In recent years, e-commerce has played an increasingly large role in the success of a business. Through the Internet, consumers have the option to purchase products with the click of a button.

The U.S. Census Bureau released research on the third quarterly retail e-commerce sales. The research sampled over 12,500 businesses using e-commerce, and assigned weights to each business based on their respective sales figures (to serve as representative samples for the entire United States e-commerce businesses). Findings revealed that an estimated \$57 billion was racked up in e-commerce during the 3rd quarter, a 3.7 percent increase from 2nd quarter sales.¹⁵ That’s just in the United States alone! Taking and fulfilling orders in other countries also expands the opportunities for sales.

As technology expands, so do opportunities for sales. Online sales are not limited to just computer desktop interactions. E-commerce can also incorporate mobile commerce,

¹⁵ "Monthly & Annual Retail Trade." *3rd Quarter 2012 E-Commerce Retail Sales*. United States Census Bureau, 14 Nov. 2012. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.census.gov/retail/>>.

also known as “m-commerce”. M-commerce includes all sales transactions that are executed through a mobile device. Products like the tablet or smartphone are key in this market. National Public Radio, NPR, reported 2012 to be “the year of mobile commerce”.¹⁶ M-commerce accounted for \$25 billion worth of consumer purchases in 2012. This puts m-commerce at 11% of total e-commerce sales. Notorious digital media and Internet marketing research company, eMarketer, expects 2012 sales of \$25 billion to grow upwards of \$86.9 billion by 2016. They reported the tablet to be the biggest driver of sales.¹⁷ It makes sense as one considers the ease of buying online, especially mobile. Now consumers can buy a shirt in less than 30 seconds when they’re standing in line, sitting in a dull meeting, or passing time at the doctor.

Selling artist merchandise helps generate sales in more ways than one. Not only does the artist typically receive a percentage of the gross sales, they also gain recognition from consistently being in the presence of the public eye. It is a simple concept that drives business. The more people see/hear/experience someone, the more familiar they become with that person. So selling merchandise at shows, in stores, through the mail, online, and in any other imaginable place will help an artist become familiar to the public. The most successful, internationally recognized super stars seem to capitalize on these opportunities. Taylor Swift, the only female to have two albums sell more than 1 million copies in the first week, has taken advantage of many merchandising opportunities. Swift

¹⁶ Sydell, Laura. "'M-Commerce' On The Rise As More Consumers Use Mobile Devices To Shop." *NPR*. NPR, 10 Jan. 2013. Web. 20 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.npr.org/2013/01/10/169077543/m-commerce-on-the-rise-as-more-consumers-use-mobile-devices-to-shop>>.

¹⁷ Peoples, Glenn. "Defining The Tablet in Mobile Commerce." *Billboardbiz*. Billboard, 24 Jan. 2013. Web. 20 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.billboard.com/biz/articles/news/1526294/defining-the-tablet-in-mobile-commerce>>.

has partnered with Walgreens, Papa Johns, and Keds for the release of her latest album “Red”.¹⁸ Keds is selling limited edition red shoes for her new album. Walgreens is selling her album in stores. Papa Johns allows customers to order Swift’s new album with the purchase of a pizza, all of which can be delivered to your door. Although seemingly unconventional, it is these types of promotional merchandising ideas and strategic partnerships that push an artist’s sales to new heights.

C. PUBLICITY

The role of the publicity department is to increase positive exposure for artists through a variety of media. They are typically involved in launching campaigns and monitoring the press mentions of artists.¹⁹ They attract attention and create hype. The critical eye of publicity/public relation employees reviews everything from photo shoots and television appearances, to radio interviews and press releases.²⁰ Press releases announce important release dates, appearances, personal statements, and more to the media. All of the previously mentioned outlets help publicity create an image for an artist, grow that image, and maintain the public intrigue connected to that image.

Major record labels typically handle publicity in one of two ways. They can either outsource publicity services from independent firms, or they can utilize their own publicity department (if they have one). Sometimes, a hybrid of these two is used. Bob

¹⁸ Moody, NEKESA. "Red' Album Sales Hit 1.2 Million For Taylor Swift." *Huffington Post*. N.p., 31 Oct. 2012. Web. 21 Nov. 2012. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/31/red-album-sales_n_2048723.html?utm_hp_ref=entertainment>.

¹⁹ "Director of Publicity." *Articles RSS*. Get In Media, n.d. Web. 10 Feb. 2013. <<http://getinmedia.com/careers/director-publicity>>.

²⁰ Pettigrew, Jim. "The Hunt for Exposure." *The Billboard Guide to Music Publicity*. New York: Billboard, 1989. 7-15. Print.

Merlis, owner of Los Angeles publicity firm Merlis For Hire, has worked in publicity at a label and then created his own publicity firm.²¹ In an interview with Artisthouse Music, he mentioned the advantages and disadvantages of both. The benefit of outsourcing is the specialized services of the independent publicity firm and the reduction of workload for the in-house publicity department (if applicable). The disadvantage of outsourcing is the additional cost.

Another increasingly prevalent source for artists to gain exposure is through social media. Social media platforms help instill a better presence in the marketplace for all artists. These platforms serve as an easy way to connect and interact with the public. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram all help stimulate public awareness of an artist. In a recent survey by Forbes, 100 CMOs were questioned as to how social media impacts awareness and loyalty.²² Over half of the CMOs who responded represented companies bringing in annual revenue streams over \$1 billion. The vast majority of these CMOs agreed social media impacts brand awareness, brand loyalty, and sales. When handled correctly, they all agreed these would be impacted positively. Publicity can help drive ideas and campaigns through these platforms, further exposing the artist to the public eye.

²¹ "Working with Record Label Publicity Departments." *Working with Record Label Publicity Departments - ArtistshouseMusic*. Artist House Music, n.d. Web. 10 Feb. 2013.

²² Olenski, Steve. "Three Of Four CMOs Say Social Media Impacts Sales." *Forbes*. Forbes Magazine, 21 Aug. 2012. Web. 20 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/marketshare/2012/08/21/three-of-four-cmos-say-social-media-impacts-sales/>>.

D. MARKETING, SALES, AND BRAND MANAGEMENT

Marketing, sales, and brand management all play a critical role in the success of an artist's career. To gain a better understanding of this department, I did some first-hand research by scheduling an interview with the now General Manager of Warner Music Group, Peter Strickland. At the time of this interview he was the Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing, and he oversaw the Brand Management department. Many of the questions and conversation are centered on that position, but the industry as a whole and different decision making processes are also outlined. View the full interview on pages 14-21 of *theBeat*.

iv. CONCLUSION

Talent is an inherent part of becoming a successful artist: this is a trait A&R people look for when discovering a new artist to develop. An artist must be talented at his or her craft (whether that is singing, playing guitar, or something else). An artist must also have a passion and be dedication to what (s)he does. If an artist signs with a major label, then the various departments within the label begin working to launch the artist's career. Gaining media exposure, radio airplay, and distributing music is made a lot easier with the help of a major record label. The record labels already have established connections in the industry and have many staffs working towards a similar goal: gaining positive exposure for an artist and sustaining the path for a long-term career.

Record labels thrive on creativity. Research statistics and sales numbers help determine a clearer view of the marketplace, but many choices ultimately come down

to an instinctive feeling. Notions and “gut” play a large role in making decisions. Creative tactics can push an artist’s career to the next level. The music business is fast-paced and constantly changing, but the need for creativity never leaves.

As the United States culture and other world cultures change, so do the strategies for artist exposure. Increasingly popular social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook are outlets for artists to gain exposure. Sales on tablets and mobile devices increase the important to seek opportunities for m-sales. E-commerce is also a huge way to increase artist revenue through selling merchandise online.

An artist who wants to break into the music industry today must be prepared. He or she must be prepared to dedicate time to his or her skill. He or she must also be prepared to have an “image”, and work hard to maintain that creative vision. A record label’s staff will work the creative vision tirelessly. This staff includes the promotion department, marketing, A&R, merchandising, partnerships, and others. They each have different working roles, but all are essential to the success of an artist in the marketplace.

v. JUSTIFICATION OF THEORY

The Honors Project requires all students to provide a justification of their theory by explaining why certain methods were chosen for their projects. I have a multitude of reasons for why I chose the methods I did, and why I picked the two mediums which to communicate my message. They both impacted the overall statement I wanted for my project.

The Honors Project typically takes one of three forms: research-based, applied, or creative. My project is a hybrid of all three. I wanted my project to serve as something that represented my undergraduate years at Bowling Green State University. I strategically chose to base my project around the music industry, with a focus on record labels, because of my experience interning with a major record label in Nashville, Tennessee. That experience helped me realize what I want to do as a career. I hope to work at a major record label in marketing, brand management, A&R, or promotions.

My project was leverage for me to secure interviews and conversation with executives in the company. The interview with Peter Strickland was an hour-long conversation that gave me real insight in the field. Although it was a research-based interview, it was also an applied type of research. The key concepts he shared with me were transferrable to my everyday work as an intern. This is also knowledge I can carry with me if I make my way into the industry again as a professional.

Timing was also very important with this project. I chose to complete both HNRS:4880 and HNRS:4990 in the same semester to take advantage of the resources I had during my temporary stay Nashville. I was able to access industry reserved statistics like the RIAA annual sales figures. If I had questions or was not sure where to take the project, I had mentors and other friends working in the industry that could provide guidance.

I chose to create a formal report because I believe it represents a business medium. This report was a similar structure used in with other projects in previous business courses like “Business Communications” and “Introduction to Marketing”.

Formal reports and structure is important to communication in business. However, I knew I wanted to also do something more creative. I have taken several hours worth of coursework in print design and visual communications. As a marketing major I realize the importance of getting a message across to an audience. How the message gets to the audience is just as important as the message itself. That is why I decided to create *theBeat*. I wanted to showcase my print design skills and create a more impactful visual for readers. The music industry is a very creative field, and a formal report did not seem to fully suit the audience for those in the music industry. *theBeat* compliments this report as a creative piece to structured content. Just like the music industry, both business and creativity are indispensable.

B. APPENDICES

Appendix A

FIGURE 1 – RIAA Chart Data

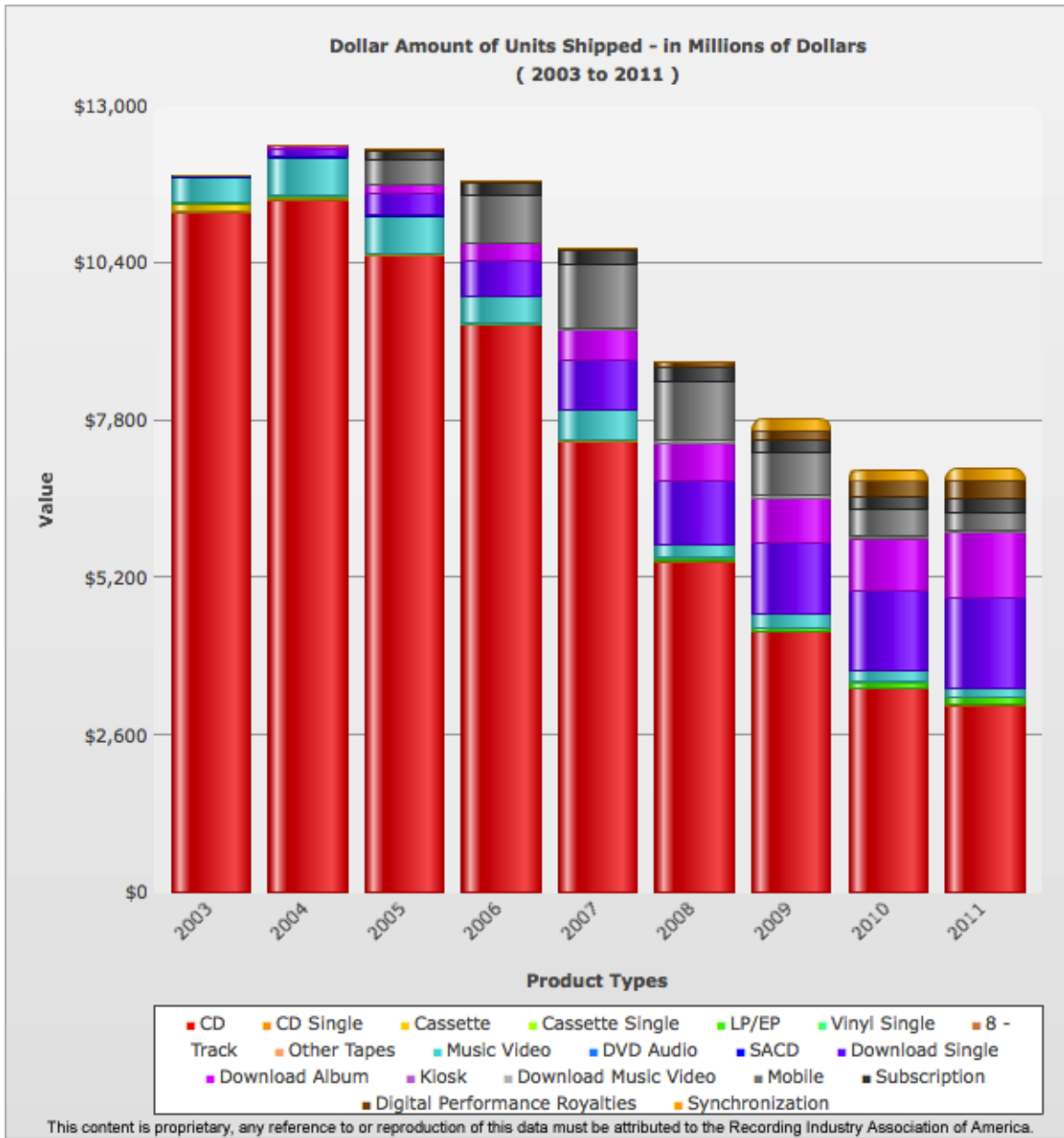


FIGURE 2 – RIAA Table Data – Industry Sales (in millions)

Current View	All Data by Units			All Data by Value			All Data by Value Adjusted For Inflation																
	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
CD	2587.7	3451.6	4337.7	5326.5	6511.4	8464.5	9377.4	9934.7	9915.1	11416.0	12816.3	13214.5	12909.4	12044.1	11232.9	11446.5	10520.2	9372.6	7452.3	5471.3	4318.8	3389.4	3100.7
CD Single	0.0	6.0	35.1	45.1	45.8	56.1	110.9	184.1	272.7	213.2	222.4	142.7	79.4	19.6	36.0	15.0	10.9	7.7	12.2	3.5	3.1	2.9	3.5
Cassette	3345.8	3472.4	3019.6	3116.3	2915.8	2976.4	2303.6	1905.3	1522.7	1419.9	1061.6	626.0	363.4	209.8	108.1	23.7	13.1	3.7	3.0	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
Cassette Single	194.6	257.9	230.4	298.8	298.5	274.9	236.3	189.3	133.5	94.4	48.0	4.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
LP/EP	220.3	86.5	29.4	13.5	10.6	17.8	25.1	36.8	33.3	34.0	31.8	27.7	27.4	20.5	21.7	19.3	14.2	15.7	22.9	56.7	63.8	88.9	119.4
Vinyl Single	116.4	94.4	63.9	66.4	51.2	47.2	46.7	47.5	35.6	25.7	27.9	26.3	31.4	24.9	21.5	19.9	13.2	9.9	4.0	2.9	2.5	2.3	4.6
8 - Track	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other Tapes	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Music Video	115.4	172.3	118.1	157.4	213.3	231.1	220.3	236.1	323.9	508.0	376.7	281.9	329.2	288.4	399.9	607.2	602.2	451.1	484.9	227.3	209.6	177.6	151.0
DVD Audio	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.0	8.5	8.0	6.5	11.2	2.4	2.8	1.2	1.6	0.9	0.3	
SACD	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	26.3	16.6	10.0	5.5	3.6	3.1	2.4	1.7	1.5
Download Single	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	138.0	363.3	580.6	811.0	1032.2	1172.0	1317.4	1492.7
Download Album	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	45.5	135.7	275.9	497.4	635.3	744.3	872.4	1091.4
Kiosk	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	1.9	2.6	2.6	6.3	6.4	3.3
Download Music Video	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.7	19.7	28.2	41.3	40.9	36.6	32.4
Mobile	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	421.6	773.8	1055.8	977.1	702.8	448.0	277.4
Subscription	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	149.2	206.2	234.0	221.4	206.2	212.4	241.0
Digital Performance Royalties	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.9	20.4	32.8	36.2	100.0	155.5	249.2	292.0
Synchronization	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	201.2	188.7	196.5
Totals	6580.2	7541.1	7834.2	9024.0	10046.6	12068.0	12320.3	12533.8	12236.8	13711.2	14584.7	14323.7	13746.2	12615.8	11854.4	12345.1	12289.9	11759.5	10650.9	8776.8	7631.0	6994.8	7007.7