

Audio branding: heard any great businesses lately?

How does a business build a sonic identity for your brand? There is a well-understood visual language where text and colour can be used to evoke specific moods and drive us act, such as clicking a link to view more information about a product or service. How can audio enhance these messages?

For businesses, sound has become an increasingly important component of their branding. Audio can evoke thoughts and feelings that visual materials can't match. As we ride the wave of the podcasting revolution, developing a sonic strategy for your company is a commercial imperative you can't ignore.

The latest report from [*Amp*](#) speaks volumes about how critical audio has become for businesses, no matter their size. In markets congested with brands, ensuring your company's messages can be heard has become problematic. In the report, Pandora succinctly quotes Ogilvy Consulting: "For the first time, marketers will have no choice but to consider the audio characteristics of their brands."

Speaking to *Maddyness*, Laurence Minsky, associate professor at the School of Media Arts at Columbia College Chicago and co-author of *Audio Branding*, explains how vital an audio component to branding is today: "Developing an audio brand is urgent because the web has become searchable (without visuals) through the use of voice agents, which are increasing exponentially," he says. "Research indicates that multi-sensory brands are stronger than

simply visual brands. It's because the more you engage the senses, the more ways the brand will resonate with their prospects and customers."

Businesses and their brands actively create sonic identities as screenless purchasing via smart speakers is forecast to reach over \$40B in 2022, up from \$2B today across the US and the UK.

Voice shopping is also set to explode: *OC&C Strategy Consultants* predict voice shopping will grow to \$5B by 2022 from \$2B today in the UK, with 16% of consumers using voice to make a purchase. And according to *YouGov*, smart speaker ownership in the UK has now reached 29%. As this technology moves into the mainstream, these devices offer the perfect delivery channel for a business's audio branding and sonic messages.

Sound is just as important as images when brands want to communicate their marketing messages to specific audiences. Since the advent of synchronised sound in the early days of cinema, audiences have associated images with particular pieces of music and, later, sound effects.

We associate sound and music with our lives. Music has always been able to evoke strong emotional reactions. The ability of sound to evoke images and sometimes strong emotions in an audience has never been more relevant than it is today.

The sonic environments we move through every day have been developing for decades. We are constantly bombarded with marketing messages.

On average, you could be exposed to over 6,000 marketing messages per day.

With this level of interaction and a marketplace crowded with similar products and brands, one way to cut through the noise to reach a target audience is with additional sound.

The next battleground for consumer spending is audio. With sales of smart speakers continuing their explosive growth and the popularity of podcasts showing no sign of slowing, we have only just begun to explore the sonic landscape.

Audio branding

Sound plays a vital role in our lives. Images and sound have a symbiotic relationship. Brands have long understood the power that sound can have on their customers. Airing on Christmas Eve 1923, General Mills created the world's first singing advert, including a musical jingle.

Sonic logos have become synonymous with brands for decades. Playing 'Air on the G String' by Johann Sebastian Bach would instantly create images in your mind of a well-known tobacco brands in an audience of a certain age. British Airways effectively used Delibe's 'Flower Duet' from Lakme as their sonic trademark with great effect for several years.

Businesses have continued to develop a sonic identity that reinforces their brands, making them instantly recognisable. If you hear (but can't see) a TV advert from Intel, you instantly know which business is being shown on your TV set without even looking at it.

With the massive expansion of podcasting and the huge uptake of smart speakers using voice control, audio has been moving through a renaissance.

Today, well-known music artists are being commissioned by some of the world's biggest brands to create new audio components for their brands and products. Brian Eno famously designed the Intel chime. Recently, Jean-Michel Jarre has been working with HSBC bank to create what it calls its 'Universal Sound' consisting of seven tracks and a mnemonic jingle.

Creating your sound

The approach your business takes to create a sonic component for your brand should be approached with care. Laurence Minsky advises that an integrated approach to sonic branding is needed on the most basic level.

"Companies must make the distinction between audio branding and choosing music," he said. "Ideally, an audio brand should be a tailor-made sonic approach designed specifically and distinctively for your brand. It's not a simple logo, it's a system that's built for the long haul. It comprised unique composed music that conveys attractive information about your brand as well as product signals and spoken voice."

Michele Arnese, founder and CEO, Amp Sound Branding, thinks brands can exist without a visual component.

"The single question to frame the importance of audio branding is 'could you

currently be recognised if you can't be seen?', she said. "Even pre-COVID-19, consumers were flocking to 'brand invisible' environments, through their smart speakers and voice devices. Touchless and mobile interactions had already become key. The pandemic has only accelerated this.

"In many cases, brands are still treating rebranding or the creation of a brand as a purely visual exercise, exploring multiple touchpoints and use cases but often overlooking audio experiences, which is increasingly where consumers are. There's also an element of 'if you build it, they will come', so brands that don't have sonic strategies will fall even further behind those that do as consumers shift to voice."

Creating an audio brand should also be approached with an understanding of how the new audio component will be used. Marek Wrobel, head of media futures at Havas Media Group, warns that care should be taken when creating an audio strategy.

"I know of some brands that have worked with audio branding specialists, created their audio brand, released a press release accompanied with a beautiful video explaining the meaning behind it, and then it's nowhere to be found," says Marek.

"When I hear about a brand announcing the creation of audio branding, I like to check its latest ads or branded content or visit its website, and often leave disappointed. This shows that while audio branding has its (well-deserved) moment, it cannot be a box-ticking exercise and requires buy-in and input from across many areas of the business, as only then it can be effectively activated and drive value for a business."

The power of distinctive audio

A brand that recently developed a sonic identity is Mastercard. Raja Rajamannar, chief marketing and communications officer, Mastercard, said:

"Sound adds a powerful new dimension to our brand identity and a critical component to how people recognise Mastercard today and in the future.

"We set out an ambitious goal to produce the Mastercard melody in a way that's distinct and authentic, yet adaptable globally and across genres. It is important that our sonic brand not only reinforces our presence, but also resonates seamlessly around the world."

The result is a distinct and memorable melody with adaptations across genres and cultures, making it locally relevant while maintaining a consistent global

brand voice. In addition, the use of varying instruments and tempos help to deliver the Mastercard melody in several unique styles such as operatic, cinematic, and playful, as well as several regional interpretations.

Amp Sound Branding's Michele Arnese concluded: "The future of audio branding sees an integrated sonic branding that requires a truly multi-dimensional sonic expression of the brand, or, as we call it at Amp, 'Sonic DNA'.

"Audio must run throughout every touchpoint of a brand, instantly recalling positive associations within the consumer to make a difference. Things like immersive audio, which has not yet been seized by brand marketing leaders, will also come to the front. Using 360-degree audio brands will be able to truly bring their brand to life."

2021 is the year sonic branding enters the mainstream. Audio should not replace your business' existing branding collateral, but enhance these materials with a new dimension. Consumers are increasingly using voice to connect with brands. Delivering an engaging new audio element to the brands they covet should be top of every companies' agendas as they navigate the post-COVID-19 commercial landscape.

Article by DAVID HOWELL