Centaurify: solving music's fan engagement problem with a web3 solution

Max Lunn spoke to Martin Bjercke and David Rootwelt-Norberg, the two founders of Centaurify about how they aim to address the low revenues, lack of context and limited connection between fans and artists in the age of music streaming.

Music streaming services have delivered a great service for their listeners. For an annual fee of less than a dozen records, we can stream and download the entire world's back catalogue. We're also becoming increasingly aware, however, that artists don't get such a good deal. A million streams earns around $4000 for an artist on Spotify.

And although it's good value, anyone that streams music is familiar with the experience of putting together a playlist of individual songs about which we don't know the first thing. The biggest names still command cultish followings but gone are the days when legions of fans plastered their walls with band posters. We listen to music we've often discovered algorithmically, grouped together based on 'vibes'.

This lack of context and fans' limited connection to the music they consume is one of the issues the _web3 music company Centaurify_ is aiming to change:

they want to offer fans a direct and genuine connection to the artists they listen to, and; an opportunity for artists to brand-build. As a result of streaming, artists have had to look beyond album sales to rely on performances, merch and brand partnerships for revenue.

"I hate it when people buy low quality artist t-shirts", is what Martin Bjercke cofounder and creative director of Centaurify tells me however. As a DJ and producer with more than a billion streams to his name, as well as a being coach on The Voice Norway from 2017 to 2019, Martin is more alive than most to the concerns of artists trying to build a brand in 2023.

Add Martin's creative partner and cofounder David Rootwelt-Norberg into the mix, who has a background in fashion and music, and you have the two people driving this Oslo-based outfit forward. Having met at a Universal Music Group summer party and collaborated on a couple of things, the pandemic brought them closer together as they tried to think about how to get a better deal for artists and fans amidst a collapse in IRL events. They both had an interest in blockchain technologies, and David credited the increased free time he had thanks to Covid as a learning opportunity. Martin's interest came from closer to home: his brother, Bjørn Kienholz Bjercke, goes by the moniker Mr Bitcoin Norway – and is a blockchain enthusiast who helped bring down One Coin (i.e, the Crytpo Queen's fraudulent blockchain-less crypto company).

Martin and David tell me Centaurify works on the 'thousand fans theory', of which the central tenet is that an artist only needs a thousand hard-core fans to sustain their music career. By providing these (ideally HNW) top one thousand fans with Centaurify created blockchain-based digital content, merchandise collectibles and VIP events/memberships, the company hopes to provide a much needed revenue stream for artists (they tell me 98% of artists on Spotify make less than $50K annually). To do this, they have their own web3 creator studio where they can help artist's create any kind of digital content of their choosing that will appeal to their fans.

Generally these digital assets will be linked to the launch of an artist's music launch, but they can take any form. Notably, the NFTs benefit both fan and artist; Centaurify's drop coinciding with the release of Eurovision 2023's Swedish winner Loreen's 'Tatoo' wil (to quote Centaurify) "evolve over time, and level up as the song grows in popularity. If Loreen wins this year's Eurovision Song Contest, one lucky holder will be chosen at random to receive two tickets to Eurovision 2024". Somebody must be looking forward to Eurovision 2024.

I ask Martin what he thinks the most crucial part of a fan engagement strategy is given his own career, and how this is being incorporated into Centaurify's offering. "Dedication: it's about building that trust between the artist and the

fan. And also knowing exactly who to target. One of the things I'm using for my own brand is building exclusive membership clubs, in the style of House of Koko". He explains the digital asset equivalent could unlock a host of benefits, such as early access and discounted bookings, and maybe even zoom hangouts. The unfiltered, direct access is what he thinks appeals.

This all makes sense – as long as the top thousand fans genuinely have an appetite for these. One thing I'm keen to ask is why this needs to be a web3 project; limited fan engagement and a lack of revenue are certainly worthy problems but why involve the blockchain – especially when fans may be put off by recent events such as FTX's collapse and SEC's suing of Binance and Coinbase?

Martin and David start by saying that Centaurify will be compatible with web2: they're not interested in creating a sealed-off zone that exclusively appeals to web3 traders, but want to engage with the broad spectrum of fans. They also point out that their collaboration with Universal Music Group helps to bring the kind of industry approval that helps convince fans that may be on the fence. But really they say it's about the technology: David points out that everything can be pre-programmed onto a smart contract, and its decentralised nature makes people that much more likely to invest. He also thinks utility is important, and gives the example of a festival they are organising in South East Asia. Tier 1 guests receive their ticket as an NFT, and through this they cab gamify their attendance: the more events they attend and scan their ticket, the more rewards they're entitled to.

To end we discuss their next move. They tell me Centaurify is coming to open up shop in London, which they see as the logical next step given the city's prominence in the music industry – as well as the fact some of their core team are Londoners.

Martin Bjercke and David Rootwelt-Norberg are the cofounders of _Centaurify._

Article by MAX LUNN