

## **Brands and bands start to sing the same tune**

*Leah McGrath Goodman*

While working on an advertising campaign for Coca-Cola two years ago, Andy Medd, partner at London marketing firm Mother, received an unexpected phone call in the middle of the night.

It was Jack White, of the acclaimed rock duo, the White Stripes.

"One minute I am falling asleep in front of the television and the next Jack is on, playing his guitar and singing down the telephone line from some far-off, brilliantly rock-and-roll hotel," Mr Medd says.

Such conversations are increasingly part of the ad man's job description, he says. Once strange bedfellows, corporations and rock stars are increasingly acting as co-conspirators, cementing what used to be loose partnerships with lasting tie-ups that help maximise visibility and profit.

The trend has been boosted by the proliferation of television channels, independent film houses and internet "rich media" (with streaming graphics and sound), all of which are constantly on the hunt for unique music.

On any given day, musicologist Rosarie O'Sullivan might be listening to dozens of music tracks to go with an advertisement, then securing legal rights for the song she selects - a service for which Brandamp, the London company where she works, charges clients £500 (\$750).

"I'll usually start out with a story board or a brief that identifies a route of creativity or a topic and then go on what I can only call a musical journey, picking out tracks to be sent to a client's creative team for approval," she says.

Instead of representing either brands or bands, Ms O'Sullivan says she is an intermediary for both as head of synchronisation for the company, a joint venture between advertising behemoth WPP and Universal Music Group, the world's biggest record company.

Since late 2006, Brandamp has offered a range of matchmaking services for companies and artists eager to gain greater exposure, whether through localised marketing campaigns or global concert, sponsorship.

Such "synchronisation" departments began springing up only in the past decade as the marketing arms of record companies, notes Lori Lambert, senior vice-president of strategic alliances for New York's Universal Republic Records, a division of Universal Group. But they have fast gained sway.

"Traditionally, brands just used stock music or musical composers to create songs for commercials," she says. Those writers are struggling now, supplanted by alliances between retailers such as Gap and artists such as Lenny Kravitz.

In the past, artists and bands were often branded as "sell-outs" when they allowed their songs to be used for marketing, so few wanted to do it, says Monte Lipman, president and chief executive of Universal Republic.

That changed with the rise in popularity of hip-hop and R&B acts, which happily embraced brands, labels, sampling, name-dropping and alliances of all kinds. "Now the theory is that, while the music always comes first, there's nothing wrong with getting out there and selling it, too," he says.

Universal Republic runs an entire branch devoted to marketing music and even sets up exclusive showcases of its bands for prospective commercial clients, Ms Lambert says. The right song can increase brand awareness for companies while for bands, a corporate gig can mean the difference between their record going unnoticed - or going platinum.

Consumers hardly object. According to a study last year by London consultancies Entertainment Media Research and Soundlounge, about 88 per cent of respondents said they did not mind bands and brands mingling for commercial purposes.

Price tags on customised deals between the two run the gamut from strict trade-offs - where bands offer their music just for the added exposure - to multimillion-dollar pay-outs for top names such as Led Zeppelin or Madonna, says Giulio Brunini, chief executive of Brandamp.

"We have a sense of which artists are more flexible than others about working with commercial clients," he says. "But some genres such as rock and punk can get tricky."

For example, protests cropped up on music blogs when Jack White wrote his song for Coca-Cola in 2006. But the Rolling Stones, who have pursued similar arrangements, have had few problems.

"The Rolling Stones have always been transparent about the fact that they're in it for the money, the girls and the drugs, so really they can do what they like - and often have done, with beer brands and credit cards," says Paul McGuinness, manager for U2, which once rejected a proposal to do a \$25m. ad campaign with Jeep but allowed its hit song, "Vertigo", to be used to promote the edgier iPod.

There is no shortage of offers from new artists, says Mother art director Kim Gehrig. "I get about 10 e-mails a day with people offering to send in emerging artists to write songs for us on spec. A door has definitely been opened."

Bands and brands are now making some of their biggest strides in the gaming industry, Ms O'Sullivan says. One of the music-marketing success stories of the year was Take-Two Interactive's video game, "Grand Theft Auto IV", which packed its soundtrack with 214 songs - the most ever to be released in a single game - and won acclaim from Billboard magazine for being one of the best places to discover music.

One of the game's most popular downloads, Bob Seger's "Her Strut", is racking up enough sales to cause Mr Seger, initially reluctant to put his work online, to consider adding more, says Ivan Pavlovich, GTA's soundtrack supervisor. "These songs represent the entire history of music but a lot of them have never been available digitally before."

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