



BRANDS AND MUSIC ALIGN

The growing convergence of music and brands in China has huge potential, says Matthew Carlton

A rising number of brands in China are moving into the music space in an attempt to connect with the nation's vast legion of young people. From Cartier to Coca-Cola, and Nokia to Visa, it is becoming an increasingly congested space and one where achieving cut-through, especially among a notoriously fickle and often cynical demographic, is getting tougher.

Yet this won't perturb advertisers from leveraging music in their communications, as it is unquestionably a key passion-point for youngsters, arguably more so than sport or other entertainment forms.

Music-centred campaigns are growing in sophistication. The old model of getting the hottest new act to pose prettily next to product X appears, for some brands anyway, to be on the wane. This is especially relevant as a growing number of Chinese youngsters appear in to be eschewing manufactured pop in favour of rock — recent figures suggest there are 20,000 active bands in China today, the live concert/music festival industry is growing at 28 per cent annually and one million guitars were sold in 2008.

Such stats have clearly influenced Pepsi's latest music-focused initiative. The self-styled 'Choice of a new generation' famously used to sign up the world's biggest stars to back its wares, but it is now taking a different ap-

proach in China, adopting the growing marcomms trend towards a simultaneous mass and niche strategy.

On the mass side, Pepsi's 'Battle of the Bands' *Pop Idol*-style show, running on the Zhejiang Satellite TV network, should ensure huge brand awareness across the country. At the same time its recently-launched QMusic venture — which according to its head Tony Yapp, will see it "become more than a brand and a sponsor, but as a platform for China's hottest up-and-coming bands" — should display a niche side with initial small live events for emerging bands, creating intimate branded experiences for those in attendance.

This initiative certainly has the blessing of Jasper Donat, co-founder and executive director of Branded and founder of Music Matters, Asia's only annual conference dedicated to the business of music: "What Pepsi is doing by creating a label is fantastic to see. It's been waiting to happen for years and now finally someone is investing in talent," he says.



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Jasper Donat, Branded

Donat believes that advertisers in China are at last opening up to using music as an effective way to reach a young demographic, but that some still need a shove in the right direction.

"There is a massive opportunity for advertisers to get behind music in a much deeper way," he adds. "Every brand seems to have a pop star endorsing it. This is the norm but a lot still don't use it as a platform and integrate their artists into everything. Music campaigns have got to be integrated and 360-degree. If you are going to spend big money on artist endorsement, then go one stage further and ensure you're also integrating online options and live play into the mix."

One brand with music firmly at the epicentre of its marketing is Converse. Music arguably takes an even greater level of pertinence for Converse in China, where it doesn't have such close sporting associations as in other markets. The brand set out its stall during the 2008 Beijing Olympics, which coincided with its 100th anniversary, by bravely shunning the over-saturated Olympic marketing bandwagon. Instead it sought to establish the brand as iconic among the Chinese music scene where focus was on alternative music and lifestyle — where fashion and music go hand in hand.

The brand successfully followed this with an integrated drive documenting the journey of two Chinese rock bands across the country. Fans could experi-

ence the bands' lives on the road by watching exclusive content on popular video sharing sites, thus providing a unique touch point for the brand to reach them through music.

Not all brands are getting it right though. Budweiser's recent music sponsorship strategy, for example, has attracted criticism with accusations of it simply adding its logo to concerts and providing little more than branded tents at festivals for music lovers. This was magnified by its sponsorship of the 'Emperor' concert series, which featured Taiwanese popstar David Tao, who has endorsed by a multitude of brands over recent years, including Ford, Sprite, Honda, and Hennessy, becoming the 'Liu Xiang of pop' in terms of over-exposure, which means it has been hard for Budweiser to get any penetration through this deal.

In fact, festivals and live concerts are a growing opportunity for advertisers to connect with Chinese youth. Once frowned upon by the authorities, they are becoming more accepted and becoming simultaneously mainstream yet more diversified, resulting in a real growth area offering opportunities for brands on mass and niche scales.

The positive news is that some brands are already utilising the opportunity. "More and more brands are getting involved with festivals," says Donat. "And are not just adding their logos to them but are getting creatively entwined with the experience."