Can you hear your brand?

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Audio Branding comes to Africa... Audio branding, also known as sound branding or sonic branding, is the use of sound to reinforce brand identity. Sound branding is increasingly becoming a vehicle for conveying a memorable message to consumers by taking advantage of the powerful memory sense of sound.

The audio logo is one of the tools of audio branding. An audio logo is a short, distinctive melody or other sequence of sound, usually positioned at the beginning or end of a commercial. It can be understood as the acoustic equivalent of a visual logo. Often a combination of both types of logo is used to enforce the recognition of a brand.

To understand why audio branding is so effective, the following is a little background about...

Your incredible ears

"Sound is a nutrient for the nervous system. Love your ears... they are much more important than you ever realized." - Prof. Dr. Alfred Tomatis

Humans are hard-wired audio-visualists. We live by our visual sense so much these days that we both underestimate and undervalue our most potent and primal sense: the sense of sound.

Hearing develops in a human foetus at just 12 weeks' gestation. Long before we physically have ears, we hear our mother's heartbeat through every cell. Hearing is the first sense we develop, and it is the last sense to dim when we die. We have no "deaf spot" because hearing is and always has been our primary warning sense, and because it is vital to our spatial awareness.

We have no "ear lids" because even while we are dreaming our sense of hearing is constantly scanning and analyzing the sounds around us.

We discern a great deal about any space in just a second or two from its acoustics. Even with our eyes closed we can perceive walls and other solid objects from the tiniest sonic reflections. Hearing and space are intimately and permanently connected in a potent perceptive process.

Additionally, our auditory range is 10 times greater than our visual range in terms of relative frequency. In terms of intensity, our aural range is 10 000 times greater than our visual range.

Our ears process information in a special way - there is a reason why our ears are so powerful and we have no "ear lids". Our ears control our eyes and serve to warn us of potential danger even if we are asleep. Ears are always "on" and gather far too much data for us to comprehend consciously. Most of that unfiltered data takes a "short cut" to reach the more primal parts of our brain and our emotional core.

Content received through the eyes can be broken down and comprehended much more easily. In addition, content received through the ears can "touch" you much more easily in its raw, unfiltered state.

For example: Visually, you can understand and appreciate a good presentation even if it utilises colours that do not "match". However, you may never completely understand or appreciate a good presentation in a space with terrible sound.

The way your brain processes sound leads to...

Your incredible memory for sound

Alzheimer's patients can recall and sing songs long after they've stopped recognising names and faces. There is growing evidence that listening to music can help stimulate seemingly lost memories and even help restore some cognitive function.

There's no single centre for music in the mind. The brain appears to be wired throughout for the music since it engages a wide variety of functions including listening, language and movement. You cannot "delete" music unless the brain is completely gone.

Listening to a song is like giving a small internal performance of that song and the brain is involved on many levels. This is why important information, such as the alphabet, is often taught to children by using songs.

With this knowledge in mind, let's move on to the...

Benefits of audio branding

Good sound is good business.

Various companies have shown that at least one clear path to people's hearts, minds and wallets is through their ears. Sound adds dimension; music adds emotion; melody creates memories. Practically speaking, silence is not an option. Either you create the context in which you communicate or the consumer will.

Since each brand has an identity and each brand has something to say, it is vital that you use all the tools available to you to convey your message. Ignoring sound for the brand, film, animation, logo or on-line presence is equivalent to unplugging the cord connecting your story to your customers.

Effective branding tells a story with sounds that reflect a product's function. It also reflects the brand's attitude. For example, an effective brand communication could be engineering the tone of a hairdryer so that the operating sound is pleasant.

As part of your overall brand toolkit, sound can help shape a potential client's perception of your brand. It can also potentially help you connect with the client on a deeper, more subconscious level. Sound is very effective on a subliminal level.

Companies that have not made a significant investment in audio branding are ignoring a tremendous marketing opportunity. Companies that establish their brands as media-rich experiences have a distinct advantage over their competitors.

Not only does sound enhance brand, it adds a more compelling level of sensory experience that keeps viewers "stuck" on a web site, or leads them to choose a particular product - such as a hairdryer with a pleasing sound. Audio branding can add meaning and emotionalise communication, which influences consumer judgment.

Retail environments, public places and physical spaces are increasingly more important in the relationship between consumers and brands. The higher-value opportunity for audio branding is not only in providing bleeps, blips and soundtracks for these experiences, but in the broader consultative role of experienced designer, director, producer, and curator for brand-based, audio-intensive experiences.

It's particularly important for international brands to use audio identifiers to overcome language barriers and create familiarity. Music is a very powerful tool for bringing people together and overcoming these barriers.

Who needs branding?

Branding is helpful for businesses and organisations that intend to actively interact with customers and have more than one place of contact.

For example: A family owned Italian restaurant does not need audio branding. However, a chain of Italian restaurants will benefit from unified call-hold audio and an audio logo or sonic branding on the website. Another option is to brand with a unique selection of pre-existing material, as opposed to original material. This is akin to creating a mixed-tape for the consumer experience. Such a model has been successfully used at Starbucks for example.

From a sound consulting perspective, it is possible to fine-tune the sound experience at each individual restaurant, so that each feels like an oasis where the customer can enjoy a pleasant dining experience.

More about audio consulting later...

Where can I brand? What can I brand?

Where?
In your shop, on your call-hold music, on-line, on TV, at trade shows, etc...

What can I brand?
ATMs, new media and devices with built-in audio delivery such as laptops, PDAs, phones, podcasts, audiobooks, etc...
Additionally, sound can improve the user experience by making tasks easier and more enjoyable.

Sound branding can be combined with other marketing tactics to convey organisational or product identity, enhance the consumer experience of a product or service, or extend an organisation's relationship with its audience.

The branded sound becomes the narrative underpinning the brand story. This includes the acoustic sound of your environment, even if there isn't any music playing at all. The acoustic sound of a space is an important section of branding, which mainly works with shaping existing environments.

This is...

Sound consulting

As many sounds lead to stress, sound consulting for most businesses is about lowering or controlling sound.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation released a study report in June 2004 showing that improving building design and reducing noise in hospitals can help boost healing. The study also showed that loud paging systems and beeping medical devices interfere with workers' satisfaction levels, reduce productivity and increase accidents.

Almost any business can benefit from sound absorbers. What follows are three examples of how you can improve or even brand your business by having a carefully designed sound.

1. You own a stylish, upscale jazz club. Your customers come for a drink and to socialise. They enjoy the live jazz, but they are not a concert audience.

From invisible sound absorbers, equaliser and compression settings for the band, to a volume related seating chart and knowing which customers have a higher tolerance to volumes, we can provide the information and tools to create a pleasant soundscape that embeds but does not interfere.

2. You run a large office with cubicles.
Did you know that loud, harsh noises, such as some ring tones, do the same to your concentration as a flashlight in the face? Your employees will be less effective and more exhausted if there is constant stress in their aural world.

With custom designed ring tones, better placement of phones and other noise sources, sound absorbers and a "noise etiquette" policy, your employees will relax and be more productive.

3. Your meeting room.
The sound of the room where you meet with clients should be as crisp and clear as your presentations.

You need a room that gently resonates with the speakers' voices, but does not cloud what is said by reverberation.

How do I start?

A sound consulting analysis of your business environment generally leads to quick improvement of the sound of your business space through relatively inexpensive fixes.

The core of audio branding is usually an audio logo. This is often combined with a soundscape - a landscape of sound. This material can and should be the core of all audio communication of the company. This is the new voice of your company.

Branding that relies purely on sound design, as opposed to melody, is very limited. A short musical motif can be transformed into any genre of music and stay fresh over many years. If this motif is embedded in sound design you have the best of both worlds.

Examples of effective use of sound

Bentley:
The sounds used inside the Bentley Continental GT reflect research about who drives a Bentley and how Bentley sees itself as a brand. Bentley is retaining the heritage of its brand through sound.

Zippo:
Zippo is a product that brands itself and comes closest to really owning a particular sound. The sound of a Zippo flipping open is an international, immediately identifiable sound. Whether intentional or purely by chance, the mechanism makes an

unmistakable sound.

French vs. German wine:
In 1998, Adrian North, David Hargreaves and Jennifer McKendrick ran a test in a British wine shop to determine the role of background music in purchase decisions. For a number of days they played French and German music in the shop, alternating between the two. It was found that on French-music days, the French wine outsold the German wine by a ratio of four to one. On German-music days, German wine outsold the French by a ratio of three to one.

The same team also discovered that customers are likely to tolerate longer wait times (both on the phone and in the real world), if and when the hold/background music is enjoyable and fits consumer expectations.

Alarms:
The military uses the voices of family members instead of alarm sounds in equipment, because we have become so accustomed to tuning out the sounds that are annoying or intrusive, yet will immediately tune into the voices of those we love.

Sleeping in the car - audio branding in its most basic and effective form:

The first sensory experience in life is of the sound and vibration of our mother's heartbeat and blood circulation. This symphony of sound patterns is deeply embedded in the subconscious for the rest of our lives. Any noise that mimics to the white noise of our mother's bloodstream helps us to relax, such as the sound of the ocean or a driving car. Babies can even fall asleep next to the roaring white noise of a hair dryer for exactly this reason.

Value and pricing

Brand-based audio assets are financial assets that grow in value - particularly when deployed as part of a full sonic identity system. Audio assets build recognition, awareness and preference of and for a brand, all of which translates into revenue.

The Intel or T - Mobile audio logos, for example, are priceless in their effect and will continue to grow in value with familiarity.

A good example of the value of good sound on a much smaller scale is your on-hold sound. It costs a lot of money to get people interested enough in your company to make that call. Your business relies on that customer's impression of you and if his first contact is via your on-hold sound, that sound is vital.

In this case, signal is more important than noise. Silence on-hold says nothing. Even worse, it can say that you don't care.

Revenue is lost whenever a customer hangs up - having the right music can ensure that your customer remains on-hold so that you can serve him. Retail stores incorporate music with a similar goal at their stores. Studies show that you can increase the length of a customer's stay at a retail store by 28% by playing music that is less familiar to that particular store's clientele, as opposed to music the customers may know.

Brand is everything in business. It should be protected and maintained with every investment decision to ensure it is sought after and valued for years to come. Brands that utilize music and sound consistently in their marketing today will be the next generation of iconic brands and enjoy increased loyalty and brand awareness.

If a visual logo is the face of a brand, an audio logo is its voice.

How can you audio brand your brand?

Lars Deutsch is represented in Africa by Dave East, well known South African advertising creative director. To hear what Deutsch can do for your brand with audio branding, to discuss an advertising sound track or a film score, contact Dave at

+27 (0) 82 889 995 /dave.east@eprotrading.co.za.

Audio branding in South Africa

"Think vuvuzela, think soccer. Imagine the cry of a fish eagle, a lion's roar or an elephant trumpeting and you're in the bush. Listen to the snap of an ice cold beer on a fiendishly hot day and that's our summer," says Dave East.

"Commercially there have been many examples of successful branding with music in South Africa. Who can forget "Good and Clean and Fresh" and "He's not heavy, he's my brother"?

"Our experiences and memories all feature audio expressions. Some good, some bad, all emotive. Just watch a Quentin Tarantino movie and you will hear just how important sound is to his visuals. So it is with brands.

"Can you really imagine the latest Allen Grey commercial without the wonderful 'Forever Young' sound track? Or the SABC 3 news without their unique signature tune? There are so many examples, you just have to listen.

"One more example of the power of sound. The SABC once did an amazing audio presentation as part of their marketing to the advertising industry. It was presented in pitch darkness, around the boma at a hotel just outside the Kruger Park. It was all sound and the visuals were in our own minds. One great, big, awesome audio branding experience," East concludes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lars Deutsch is experienced in writing and producing music and sound that works. Before Deutsch worked exclusively under his own name, he wrote and produced music for branding and jingle houses. You can find a short video of his current branding work at his website: [[www.larsdeutsch.net]]. Apart from his prolific film work, he is also the producer of the audio level of Business Nap - a project that features psychoacoustic effects and music that harmonise the heart rate, breathing rhythm and brain frequencies of the listener. The eleven published modules deal with relaxation and recharging during the lunch break for the second half of the office day, fear of flying, jetlag and procrastination. Deutsch is an experienced classical composer with performances of his work at the prestigious Salzburg Festival. He has an MA in classical composition, and extensive experience as a lecturer. He has studied psychology and psychoacoustics and reads voraciously about perception and communication through music and sound. Deutsch is currently a producer at Built To Last Music: [[www.builttolastmusic.com]]. His branding production crew includes marketing and visual branding experts, sound designers, sound engineers and other consultants.

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