

## Acoustic Brand Management

### Increasing the acoustic perception of brands

In order to make companies and brands 'audible' in increasingly competitive markets, strategies, which take note of the whole appearance and leverage the company to the desired image, are needed. Consistent acoustic brand management leads to differentiation, better recognition and higher emotional bonding and therefore to a better brand experience.

#### Emotional Effects of Music

Since there were market places, traders have sometimes very loudly been offering their goods. Attention was stimulated and potential buyers were attracted by melodies and rhymes. The influence of music on the whole economy was shown by Zullow (1991), who examined the lyrics of the 40 best-selling songs (of the American Top 40) from the years 1955 to 1989, judging them by their optimistic or pessimistic content. The captured fluctuation of depressive content in pop songs over these years proved as indication for people's belief in economics. This suspiciousness or rather trust of the customers could predict the economic development of the next one or two years! This does not seem particularly astonishing if we consider that the messages of music are transported by the million in radio and TV. In the long term, messages memorized in this manner can influence our thinking and our decision-making. Zullow's study thus shows how serious the impact of music can be.

Music in business is usually associated with television commercials and music in salesrooms because here it has been used for decades. In advertisements, sound is used to support the content and communicate it more effectively.

In salesrooms it serves as protection of the costumers' privacy, where the feeling of being overheard can be eliminated by music. Furthermore, emotional stimuli such as music induce a higher asset value and a positive evaluation of the environment, which, if combined with a suitable presentation of the content, can result in an increase of turnover (Gröppel-Klein 2002). It was proved a long time, that the sound level (Smith/Curnow 1966) and the tempo (Milliman 1982) of the music influence the time spent in salesrooms by customers. Through the examples above we can detect a high influence – in a positive and negative sense – of music on human behavior and show that the usage of music should not be decided by chance.

#### Visual and Acoustic Company Image

*Corporate audio (CA)* is the acoustic identity of a company, which is part of the corporate identity. All acoustic elements and creations that are used by an organization are to be taken into account. *Acoustic brand management*, in turn, is the structured process of identifying, developing and supporting a coherent acoustic identity for brands and organizations.

Until today, corporate identity is mainly defined by visual brand elements and few companies

have developed their separate sound identity. The potentials of acoustic brand management have therefore been disregarded.

Over the last few years, however, acoustic appearance has been gaining in importance because of the improved perception of its benefits and possibilities of technology that are virtually demanding it. In those lines of business where the competition does not yet have a separate acoustic identity, a further differentiation can be easily accomplished by acoustic branding.

#### Strategy

The notion of acoustic positioning of a company includes the identification of identity features and their integration and coordination into a consistent concept. For this, complementary methods, that take the general appearance of the brand or organization into consideration, have to be used in order to construct a well heard and remembered identity. A credible

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acoustic identity conforms to the total sensual perception (visual, olfactory, haptic, gustativ) of the brand's identity. As for all other brand characteristics, not only costumers but all people coming into contact with the brand, such as employees and their relatives, suppliers, partners, competition, authorities and the media, are the target audience. The goal is to generate a profiled and distinguishable sound perception in the mind of all stakeholders. Some companies use the high profile of pop stars in their acoustic appearance. This strategy is to be recommended only if the organization and the celebrity stand for the same values. An argument against this strategic approach is that stars can be contracted by competitors or other brands, thus losing their value. This problem also needs to be considered in connection with the licensing of musical creations.

Ideally, the acoustic identity is created for the umbrella brand and then adapted for sub brands. Yet, because of corporate policies it can be desirable that individual product brands have their unique appearance.

### Acoustic Brand Elements

The essence of an acoustic brand is the audio logo. This very short acoustic logo should be used in all applications relevant to the company (see figure 1). Similarly to other brand elements, an audio logo should have the following characteristics: autonomy, memorability (often through melody), adaptability for different media and international usage. Further specific audio-elements of importance are corporate voice, theme and ambience.

The corporate voice is the voice, which speaks for the company. It should be adjusted, like the other brand elements, to the brand's personality and then continuously used in all points of contact. Here, the parameters of gender, pitch of voice and style of

speech have to be taken into consideration. As mentioned above, the question of whether prominent synchronization voices or celebrities are the right choice for the autonomy of the brand should be discussed critically.

The acoustic brand theme is another basic element which should communicate the main ideas through the melody and its harmonies. It can then be modulated for different applications.

The brand ambience is a combination of sounds, tones or natural noises that emotionalize the audience and therefore strengthens the perception of the corporate identity. The ambience is an imitation of natural environments and uses discreet sounds, which do not draw too much attention to themselves. In combination with a well-designed audio logo and a fitting corporate voice, the ambience is a very important yet unobtrusive characteristic of the corporate audio design.

With these basic audio elements further acoustic brand elements such as a brand hymn can be easily developed.

It is possible to translate brand values into music and sound and should therefore not be left to chance. In order to get the best results possible, psychological facts about music should to be taken into account.

Application areas for the corporate audio branding, including touching points with customers, have to be defined. These can derive from deliberate needs, competition, existing pieces of music and the product or service portfolio.

### Development

Audio elements have to be developed in the course of a profound discussion about the corporate values using as a basis the missionary and visionary statements, the positioning, the history of the brand and the appearance of the competition. A

modular approach is shown in figure 2. This begins with an audience analysis, where the actual use and the respective target group depend on one another. All five music parameters, namely timbre, rhythm, melody, harmony and dynamic of the audio elements have to be taken into account in the sound design.

The adequate moods and musical parameters are developed and adjusted to the corporate values. The resulting acoustic briefing is handed over to the composer or composing team.

A systematic development of the audio logo seems to make sense. Once the decision makers have chosen a particular audio logo, other smaller audio elements can be easily created.

### Support

An audio guide that defines how, where and when audio elements should be used is of great value for the application of the new audio assets within the corporation. The guide defines consistent usages, competences and responsibilities. To check the consequent implementation of the guide, audio tracking can be used. Audio tracking is used to control whether all regulations of the audio guide are maintained. Consequently, the audio guide can be readjusted and new potential applications can be identified.

### Applications

As already discussed, individual audio applications are elicited in the identification phase together with the decision makers. Nevertheless, a list of frequent applications for companies follows: Above the line (Movies, TV and radio), hand-outs (media like CD's, DVD's or USB-sticks acoustically enhanced by information on the company), ambience (presentations, image clips, events, salesrooms,

exhibitions, telephone systems and waiting lounges), interactive (web sites, games, products, software, ring tones, guidance systems, multi-media solutions).

### Mutations

For brand extension, the basic acoustic elements can be adapted for the respective target group.

For brand alliances and co-branding, where brands occur in partnerships, acoustic identity has a great impact on the recognition of the own brand. A good example is Intel, with its successful strategy of playing their short audio logo in TV commercials produced with leading computer producers.

### Benefits

The successful transformation of corporate values into the auditory domain achieves a stronger identification of the shareholders with the brand. Consistent acoustic brand management differentiates the brand (acoustically) from its competition, achieves a faster recognition and an emotional charge, which again results in a faster brand conditioning and therefore enhances advertising and media effectiveness. All these factors, which amount from acoustic brand management, lead to a higher brand value.

### Literature:

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