
Sound Strategy
Your brand has standards.
Your sound doesn't.
That’s a risk.
End sound drift —
without becoming the sound police

Who This Is For

This report is for leaders responsible for how an organisation shows up in the world—brand, marketing, comms, CX, product, and experience.

If you're accountable for consistency—and tired of sound being the one area that keeps resetting—this is for you.

What You'll Get

In a few minutes, you'll get:

- A clear definition of sound drift (and why it keeps happening)
- The real root cause: governance, not creativity
- The compounding cost of unmanaged sound (time, money, risk, reputation)
- The predictable mistakes smart teams still make
- A practical model (SIGNAL) to stop drift fast and scale consistency

If It Resonates

If you recognise the pattern described here, you don't need a "music refresh." You need a simple governance reset—so teams can ship on-brand sound by default.

The Pattern

If you own how the brand shows up across touchpoints, you already know this: visuals and copy have standards. Sound usually doesn't.

So every campaign, event, product release, partnership, or regional request reopens the same loop: What track? What voice? What tone? Who decides? Is this "on brand"?

The loudest opinion wins, references get forwarded, agencies improvise—and you end up reviewing audio choices you never wanted to be the gatekeeper for. Not because you love policing, but because you can't risk the brand drifting in public.

This is how sound drift sneaks in. Not through one big mistake—but through dozens of small, inconsistent moments:

- hold music that feels off
- event walk-on tracks that don't match the brand promise
- UX sounds that feel generic
- videos that sound like three different companies depending on region, touchpoint, or vendor
- "silent gaps" where the organisation looks premium but sounds unfinished

The stakes aren't better music. The stakes are speed, consistency at scale, and shipping without restarting the debate.

Why Sound Drifts

Before we get into solutions, we need to challenge a few assumptions, especially: "higher priorities," "no time," and "too expensive."

Drift is not a creative problem. It's a decision problem: sound gets decided case by case—by taste, whoever's loudest, or whichever vendor is in the room. Without shared criteria, you get rushed choices, inconsistent execution, and constant re-approval loops.

Root cause

The real problem isn't that your organisation "doesn't have audio."
It's that sound operates like decoration—optional, opinion-led, and re-decided every time. Governance eliminates drift.

The compounding cost

When sound is unmanaged, the cost isn't just a few awkward meetings. It compounds:

- **Time loss:** Every launch triggers fresh debate, more stakeholders, more reviews, more rework. Approvals slow down because nobody has authority-backed rules.
- **Money loss:** You pay repeatedly for "new" solutions—new tracks, new edits, new vendors—because nothing is reusable or enforceable.
- **Operational risk:** Licensing and usage rights get messy fast. Compliance and accessibility gaps creep in. Vendor churn becomes normal.
- **Reputation damage:** The brand feels inconsistent across regions, channels, and moments. People can't quite explain why it feels less trustworthy—they just feel it.

- **Strategic risk:** While you treat sound like a recurring nuisance, competitors build distinctive audio memory that makes them easier to recognise and harder to ignore.

Now notice what this means: you pay the drift tax every week.

“Higher priorities” is exactly why sound governance matters: it removes launch friction across product, campaigns, service, and change.

And “too expensive” is usually a misread: drift already costs you in repeat production, rework, slowed approvals, and avoidable licensing risk. Governance turns that spend into reusable infrastructure.

MISCONCEPTION: “If we can just pick the right track (or brief agencies well), consistency will take care of itself.”

Reality: Systems don’t run on taste. They run on **criteria, defaults, decision rights, and adoption**.

Three Predictable Mistakes (And Why Smart Teams Still Lose)

Mistake #1: "We'll pick a sound once we know the campaign—strategy can come later."

It feels right because campaigns are concrete. Strategy can feel abstract. So teams wait until a deadline forces a decision.

Why it fails: It bakes reinvention into your workflow. Every launch restarts the conversation from zero—new references, new opinions, new stakeholders, new compromises. Even if each choice is "good," the collection of choices becomes incoherent.

Cost:
Emotional: you become the referee for taste arguments you shouldn't be in.
Financial: repeat spend on one-off work that can't be reused.
Operational: approvals stretch, launch timelines tighten, "good enough" wins too often.

Mistake #2: "If we deliver enough stems, tracks, and guidelines, teams will figure it out."

It mirrors what brands do visually: publish assets, publish rules, assume adoption.

Why it fails: A library without clear rules, defaults, and examples creates false confidence. Regions and agencies remix inconsistently and still label it "on brand," because nobody can easily prove otherwise. The problem isn't the lack of files—it's the lack of enforceable decision-making.

Cost:
You find issues late, forcing awkward corrections.
Rework piles up; asset production multiplies.
Recognition weakens because the "same brand" keeps sounding different.

Mistake #3: "If I don't review everything, the quality will drop."

It feels right because you're accountable—and you've seen what happens when people choose sound with no guardrails.

Why it fails: Reviewing everything turns you into the bottleneck. You end up doing endless QC instead of building the structure that prevents drift upstream.

Cost:
Time: you become the bottleneck.
Culture: teams avoid sound—or bypass it to move faster.
Adoption: governance starts to mean delay, not enablement.

What Winners Do Differently

Winning organisations don't "pick better tracks." They treat sound the same way mature brands treat visuals: **as a governed system.**

They build:

- A clear intent for what sound must do (and must never do) so decisions stop being subjective
- A reusable toolkit so teams stop reinventing and start recognising
- Simple guardrails and defaults so the right choice is the easy choice across regions and agencies
- Governance that scales so consistency becomes the default without you becoming the sound police
- A basic measurement story so sound stays funded and taken seriously

The payoff isn't nicer audio. It's control: faster shipping, fewer debates, fewer surprises—and coherence in the small moments where trust is won or lost.

Governance protects creativity from turning into drift.

The Solution: The SIGNAL System™

SIGNAL turns brand sound from ad-hoc “good taste” into an operating system—so you stop sound drift, ship faster, and get consistent execution that’s adopted by default.

SIGNAL runs in **six steps**. Most teams implement the first four to stop drift fast, then add Adapt and Leverage to keep the system relevant and provable over time.

Core insight

Most organisations treat sound like a one-off production choice—not a governed brand standard.

Drift doesn’t come from a lack of assets. It comes from missing rules and accountability: no shared criteria, no operating rhythm, and no one empowered to keep the signal coherent.

Proof: Case Study – Wiener Linien

Before SIGNAL, the public transport provider looked strong visually but sounded fragmented: different voices across touchpoints, inconsistent music choices, and many silent moments.

Internally, every campaign, announcement, app release, or event triggered debates about voice and music—slow approvals, exceptions, local decisions.

The core issue was governance: sound belonged to everyone, so it belonged to no one.

They involved all units early, locked key elements (voice approach, motifs, palette), defined decision rules and boundaries, and shipped a simple handoff pack (voice model + motif library + usage rules) so agencies and teams could execute without escalations.

The system unified voice and music across core customer journey touchpoints, eliminating “local improvisation” as the default.

Result: immediate speed improvements, default consistency, accelerated adoption, and a **13% improvement in customer satisfaction within one year.**

What makes this persuasive isn’t “we made good sounds.”
It’s that the organisation changed how decisions were made: from opinion to rules, from gatekeeping to adoption, from isolated assets to a governed system.

Trend Insight

Organisations are scaling faster than governance.

More touchpoints (apps, platform audio, social, events, spaces, phone, internal comms) and more creators (teams, agencies, regions) increase the chance of mixed signals.

Visuals are usually governed; sound often isn't—making the gap more visible in customer experience and trust.

What SIGNAL Installs

- **Strategize — Sonic North Star**: intent + criteria
- **Identify — Sonic Toolkit**: codify DNA into assets with defaults
- **Guide — Activation**: touchpoint formats, guardrails, "use/avoid" rules
- **Nurture — Governance**: decision rights, rhythm, handoffs
- **Adapt — Relevance**: monitor and tune as channels evolve
- **Leverage — Proof**: proof points, light measurement, scale winners

Recommendations

- Instead of starting every campaign with “what track should we use?”, set a **Sonic North Star** before you pick anything.
- Instead of building a huge library, define a **smart toolkit** with **defaults**.
- Instead of relying on long briefs, put simple **use-this / avoid-that** rules into the workstream.
- Instead of being the final approver for everything, install **decision rights + a lightweight review rhythm** that prevents drift upstream.
- Instead of treating sound as “too subjective to measure,” agree on **2–3 proof points** you can track and report.

Why This Is Safe to Implement

Hesitation is normal—because you’re not just “choosing sound.”
You’re changing how decisions get made across teams, agencies, and regions.

A governance-led system reduces risk by making sound easier to decide, easier to ship, and harder to mess up.

You’re not adding complexity.
You’re replacing invisible complexity (constant debate)
with visible simplicity (clear defaults and decision rights).

Two Futures

World A (Old beliefs)
Sound is decoration—picked late, argued over, causing anxiety, excessive review, rework, vendor churn, licensing surprises, and you as the bottleneck.

World B (New method)
Sound is governed—calm control, predictable launches, fewer reviews, faster shipping, cleaner handoffs, and you as the leader who scaled consistency without policing.

Cost of Inaction

Every initiative restarts debates and approvals.
The organisation leaks trust through mixed signals.
You become the permanent workaround and choke point.
You can’t defend the budget, so sound gets cut.
Competitors compound recognition while you keep resetting.

Taste makes assets. Systems make trust.

Invitation: 15-Minute Sonic Governance Fit Call

If you're done being the "sound police" and you want consistency that actually sticks, the next step is a **15-minute Sonic Governance Fit Call**.

In one short call, we'll confirm:

- where drift is entering (teams, vendors, regions, channels)
- what "minimum governance" would stop it fast
- whether a Sonic Governance Sprint is the right next step

No obligation. Just clarity on what's broken, what to fix first, and what "on-brand sound" would require—without adding headcount or complexity.

About the Author

Herwig Kusatz is the founder of **Sound Strategy**. He helps organisations treat sound as a governed standard—so they sound trustworthy, recognisable, and clear across every touchpoint.

Sound Strategy))) Trust You Can Hear


Make sound a standard.
Stop sound drift.
www.sound-strategy.com