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How mute brands can find their voice

A majority of businesses fail to recognize the importance of audio branding. Why that is a mistake - and how working with audio elements can make brands become memorable

In the 1980s, jingles were still an institution in branding: Poignant slogans, wrapped in melodic jingles such as that of the retailer Otto or the hair care manufacturer Gard - melodies that are still stuck in the memory of many consumers. A few years later, the short audio logos went out of vogue. Nowadays, audio is a rather neglected aspect in corporate branding strategies.

Most German and many international brands are mute: They lack a clearly defined audio identity. Which is surprising, considering that audio branding has grown into a discipline of its own - one that goes far beyond the traditional "jingle production." The exponentially growing digital world now features such an immense bandwidth of audio touch points that businesses can pick from a universe of options of how they want to be represented sonically.

Audio branding allows brands to speak with their own voice, become memorable, and influence buying behavior.

Fundamental question: How does my brand sound?

Visual and verbal branding are the building blocks of most businesses' advertising strategies. Brand managers pursue them in a disciplined and highly professional way. That includes the creation of entire brand worlds, the development of brand values and brand visuals. The colors, the logo and the brand environment are clearly defined and can be adapted for all media, and they can often boast a high recognition value. At the same time, however, the potential of audio branding is completely underestimated. 80 percent of all brands disappear once consumers close their eyes.

There are a number of reasons for that. Companies often

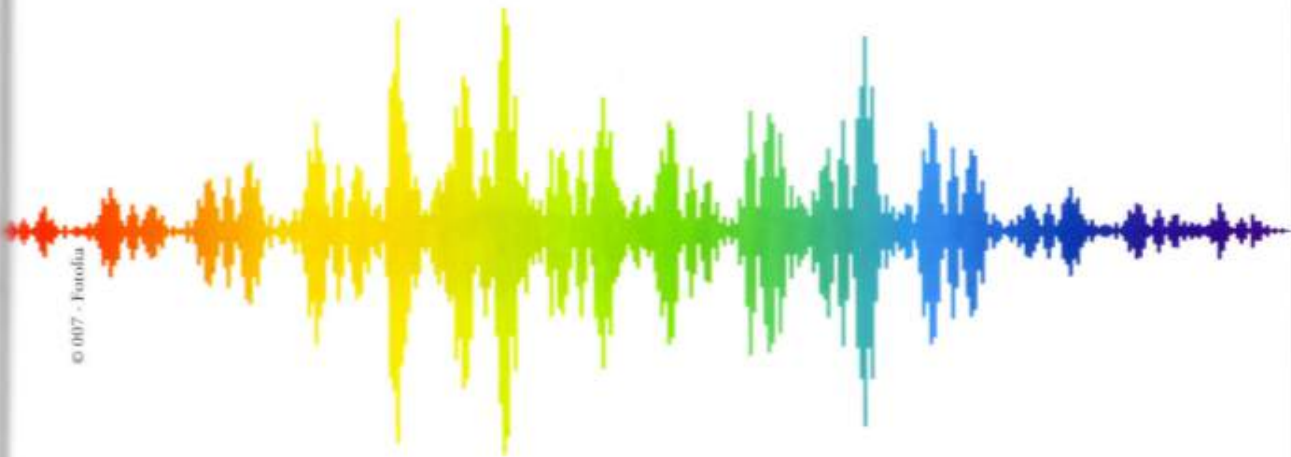
simply lack the relevant expertise and hand over their audio branding strategy to decision-makers who lack the necessary training. Consequently, decisions around audio turn into a last-minute, intuitive and campaign-specific affair that fails to have a lasting effect. Audio is treated as a tactic tool, not a strategy. "How exactly does my brand sound?" - that initial, fundamental question is rarely asked.

Ritter Sport, a pioneer of audio branding

A company renowned for its strong marketing, the chocolate manufacturer Ritter Sport had a comprehensive audio branding strategy developed for its 100 year anniversary in 2012. The goal was to make the brand sonically recognizable throughout all channels. A previously conducted analysis had shown that the brand hadn't been speaking with the same unique voice everywhere: The sound of a bite out of the chocolate was different in the spots of every country, for example. Through the implementation of an audio branding process, the chaos subsided. A strategic brand analysis cleared the way for the development of brand themes with embedded mnemonics as well as product sound tool kits and an audio style guide. Clearly defined guidelines now determine how the different audio elements are used at all consumer audio touch points. Today, Ritter Sport owns flexible, consistent and recognizable audio assets that can be used and adapted for years to come. The music selection for new TV ads fol-

"While 41% of consumers rate sound as a key element of brand communication, only 12% of marketing budgets are devoted to it."

Source: Study by Martin Lindstrom and Millward Brown, In: Brand Sense. How to Build Powerful Brands Through Touch, Taste, Smell, Sight and Sound (Lindstrom, 2005).



Audio branding helps brands find their own voice - resulting in a lasting and trust-building effect

lows the audio style guide, offering precise directives for the use of sound elements. Each of the brand's products has its own, unique sound. Expensive licensing costs are a thing of the past.

Audio branding as a financial asset

According to the inventor of Intel's famous audio logo, Walter Werzowa, the brand Intel used to have a recognition value of only 8% with its consumers before the jingle was implemented. Just eighteen months later, that number had risen to 85%. Continuously successful brands treat their audio identity as a financial asset and include it in their balance sheet.

Brands that are memorable to their consumers can have a trust-building effect that increases the brand's value on the stock market. On an international scale, the brands that commit to their audio branding strategy perform better than those that don't: Coca-Cola is an audio brand, Pepsi isn't. McDonald's has an audio logo, Burger King doesn't. Businesses that invest in strategic audio branding instead of wasting money on licensing expensive music tracks can expect a long-term increase of their return on investment (ROI).

Scientific analyses are at the heart of audio branding

While it is common practice for businesses to make decisions in relation to music, scoring and sound purely based on intuition, the discipline audio branding follows a scientific approach. As a first step, the audience's response to the brand's historical sonic representation is analyzed. What follows is the actual development of the brand's "audio DNA", its sonic genotype. The brand's history, its core values and the people who have shaped the brand identity over the years are as important in defining the "audio DNA" as

the brand's entire marketing strategy, its target audience, and its competitive environment.

The results of this process are tested through market research. With the help of mood boards that represent the brand values sonically, the brand's audio profile is developed. Every sound a brand makes at every touch point with the consumer has to be based on its "audio DNA": Here's exactly what the brand sounds like.

Sonic memory influences buying behavior

A very important aspect is also the congruency between audio and visual branding. The psychologists Dr. Daniel J. Hargreaves and Dr. Adrian C. North discovered that brands with music that matches their identity are 96% more likely to be recognized than brands that pay no mind to it.

One of neuroscience's most important findings for the advertising industry is that consumers reach their buying decisions on a largely subconscious level. By making use of their sonic memory, brands can achieve a change of behavior in their customers. Brands cannot afford to sound arbitrary anymore.

Uli Reese



Uli Reese is President of iV2, an agency specializing in audio branding, with offices in Frankfurt and Nashville. iV2 has developed audio identities for Ritter Sport, Ehrmann, Purina One, and many others. Previously, Reese taught at the department of Arts and Music at the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg.