

THE SONIC BRAND CHAMPION:

WHY HAVING A SONIC STRATEGY IS ESSENTIAL TO
THE STADIUM EXPERIENCE

SEASON 1 - EPISODE 1:
"WHAT IS SONIC BRANDING?"

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AN EXPOSITORY ESSAY SERIES
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Why Having a Sonic Strategy is Essential to the “Stadium Experience”

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Season 1 - Episode 1:

“What is SONIC BRANDING?”

****THE UNDERCARD****

What is Sonic Branding?

“Sonic Branding” (or Audio Branding, Sound Branding, Acoustic Branding) can be stated as the strategic use of music, sound, or voice within the framework of brand communications to create a consistent and authentic brand identity across all touchpoints.”¹

Let’s break it down.

Sonic branding is the process of discovering a brand’s “identity” or “DNA” through a series of briefings and translating the resulted discoveries into the foundation building blocks of a branded, tailor made audio strategy. For the clearest translation of a brand’s “DNA” into the Sonic form, the sonic branding professional is skilled in translating this analysis from concept into an official **Brand Sonic Guidelines**, or basically a brands “Playbook” for how to design, produce, and apply audio assets (content) within the context of a branded experience.

It is certainly backed by scientific research that says brands that have a sonic branding strategy are more prone to drive improvement in the coveted metric of customer loyalty and “Gen-Z” engagement, especially when the brand consistently works towards it’s “sound” to stay in-line with the essence, values, and evolving expectations of its customers.

Sonic Branding: The Objective

Every respectable company in the world strives for its customers to have a genuine love and loyalty to it and its products. It wants the customers that they have gained to stay forever while putting out an “aura” of attractiveness to the “casual” takers, eventually winning over their loyalty. To work towards achieving this status with consumers today, brands need to create a certain uniqueness to its identity and its product experience that speaks volumes to the desired personality and lifestyle of its targeted customer(s). With that said, the objective of sonic branding (especially in the Stadium Experience) should be to enable music’s natural ability to evoke emotion and attach strong identity associating qualities of the brand, reaching the hearts of both “loyal” and “casual” customers to perceive the brand favorably.

One of my favorite business books is called Lovemarks: the future beyond brands². The term “Lovemarks”, created by international business leader Kevin Roberts, upon which the book is based on is a very well thought out business concept where I would paraphrase the definition as; *a “Lovemark” is when a brand has made itself to be so “indispensable” in the lives of its customers, that they have the highest level of loyalty to the brand and/or its products that “goes beyond reason”*. It’s the last three words of that statement that are the most important. I wonder if Kevin Roberts would support my argument of saying that any team/brand that is fostering an environment around a well designed sonic presentation, is on its way to making a “lovemark” out of their most lucrative product, “the stadium experience”.

Branded Audio Assets

Branded Audio Assets are own-able (proprietary) original “audio content” (sonic logo, brand anthem, voice, original music) that is specifically created to be deployed within the brand “Eco-system” of products, events, and brand experiences. Brand Audio Assets are proven to create the most effective form of instant brand awareness / recognition across all of customer touchpoints and brand platforms. One of the greatest benefits of deploying original branded audio assets is “differentiation”. Sounds are everywhere all the time and you need something that does the work of instantly “cutting” through the clutter of the competition to be heard.

Here are the most common sonic branding audio assets that are making the most impact in business today...

The Sonic Logo

The most common form of Sonic Branding deployed by corporations have been the “Sonic Logo” or the “Sonic Signature” such as Netflix’s “Tah-Had”, McDonalds’ “Ba-da-ba-ba-ba, I’m Loving It” or NBC’s “3 chimes” that has been NBC’s “sonic signature” since created in the 1930s. (some sonic branding history: In 1950, NBC’s “3-chimes” sonic logo became the first “purely audio” trademark granted by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office). The Sonic Logo is designed to be an audio

¹ - Jackson, D. (2003). Sonic branding: An essential guide to the art and science of sonic branding. © Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

² - Roberts, K. (2005) Lovemarks: the future beyond brands. © Saatchi & Saatchi

signature that is short in length and flexible enough to be adapted into many iterations of different musical genres and production styles. A brand's "Sonic Logo" is the perfect compliment to the visual logo as it does the job of conveying the brand's values and personality while also being 'memorable' in the long-term, and an instant "attention grabber" in the short-term.

Branded Original Music

- The Brand Score is an original piece of music that brings together all the musical elements of the "sonic DNA" or "sonic language": instruments, voice, and ambient sounds. The brand score "is perhaps the most important piece of the sonic branding process because it will contain all the rational and emotional information required for future sonic branding work". Going back to the initial briefings, in order to determine a sonic translation of a brand's "DNA", it must be distilled all the way down to actual musical notes or (just like in popular song writing) a "key" that can be built upon for clear interpretation and most importantly, further iteration. As explained by Daniel Jackson in the book Sonic Branding, he states (the brand score) "will usually introduce a melody that is new, distinct, recognizable, ownable, and memorable for the brand". With that said, the brand score is not meant to be used as a deployable brand asset with any context to any touchpoints. The brand score is meant to be an internal brand asset, an expression of the brand's "sonic DNA" in its purest form.

Voice Branding

According to a February 2020 report by Statista, there are more than 3.25 Billion digital voice assistants in use worldwide, making voice one of the most ubiquitous technologies in the world. An estimated 55% of American homes expected to own at least one smart speaker by the end of 2022. And that's just in the home, not even mentioning all of the other industries that will benefit from the emergence voice branding.

The Sonic Branding industry as a whole has been on a steadily rising trajectory with special "Thanks" to the work done by the many "Sonic Champions" of the industry that continue to drive the necessary respect for the element of sound to be considered and recognized in a way that allows strategic sonic methods to be properly injected into brands, into product development and most importantly, the customer experience.

Some of the Major Benefits for using sound purposefully in business:

- ★ "The Great Differentiating Factor" in distinguishing one brand versus another. The major difference and competitive edge of one brand versus another can simply lean towards the brand with a sonic strategy versus the brands that do not.
- ★ Sound Establishes a brand presence in places you want to make an impact.
- ★ Sound enhances a story arc and assists in triggering emotional response.
- ★ Sound deepens personal engagement into product or experience.
- ★ Sound Strengthens awareness by improving brand recall.

What makes applying strategic sound to the sports industry unique from designing sonic branding strategies for businesses in other industries? The simple answer to that question is "The Home Game", or what has been coined the "stadium experience" as the sports entertainment industry's Premier Product that is marketed and sold in the form of ticket sales and season ticket licenses to a base of loyal sports consumers...

On Deck:

Season 1 - Episode 2:

Sonic Branding "The Stadium Experience" Vs. Other Corporate Industries

About The Author

Lee K. Merritts, Sonic Strategist (Curator, Music Producer/Content Creator, Live Production Audio Engineer, Jedi, 5x Champion) and former game day Music Director in the SF/Oakland Bay Area "scoring" the game days of professional and university sports events from 2003 to 2019. In 2007, Lee created GameDay Audio Operators Inc. as an independent business entity that staffed, executed, and designed in-venue audio content for a list of corporate clients. His previous partnerships included: San Francisco Giants, Golden State Warriors, Oakland Raiders, Oakland Athletics, and Stanford University Athletics.

- Founder/CEO LKM Sonic ExP Inc. - Consulting & Sonic Branding Studios

- The creator of “ScoreGameDay”, the methodology for strategic application of music for sports brands and sporting events. Innovator of the art & science of brand “musical fit” and execution of music within a sports entertainment environment intended to unify the elements of brand identity and customer experience.