



5 Key Tips to Developing an Artist Brand.

It's Not Just a Logo: An Honest Look into the Branding of an Independent / Developing Act.

Let's face it, it's never been easier to be an artist.

In this market, accessibility to learn how to create music is widely available to anyone with a fair bit of time and a Wi-Fi connection. With that accessibility has come an influx of artists, bands, producers, duos, and all-around creators, all of whom are creating music worthy of connection to a specific audience. This saturation creates issues for acts who are trying to develop sustainable careers, the most prominent question being: "In this sea of new music and artists, how do I stand out?"

Enter branding.

Musician branding is the process of creating a unique identity for yourself as an artist (your point of difference). It involves developing a consistent visual and sonic identity that distinguishes you from other musicians. Your brand should reflect your personality, values, and the type of music you create. Following that, your brand dictates the processes, platforms, and connection points you create with your intended audience. A very common mistake independent / developing acts make when it comes to their artist brand is thinking that it purely comes down to their press images, logo, and Instagram aesthetic. These are quite often the artists that feel hard-done-by when their music does not connect to their intended audience.

"Artist branding and narrative development is something we consistently come back to in almost all of our conversations with independent and developing acts. This whole idea that your Instagram aesthetic, your press images, and a few other things are all-encompassing of an artist brand is an utter oversight from an act who is trying to develop a meaningful career out of their art. It's so much more than just a logo."

- Anthony Agostino (Head of Digital Strategy and Artist/Label Services at Cartel Australia)

Below, we have detailed 5 key tips to developing an artist project in this market. Artists should consistently return to these points to ensure that every part of their development aligns with:

1. Their art form.
2. How they want to communicate that art.

NOTE: *It is important to note that the artist you are now will NOT be the artist you are in 5 years' time. Your sound, your visual aesthetic, and your overall point of difference should continue to develop as you develop as an artist.*

1. What Is Your Story & Point of Difference?

The first step in musician branding is to define your brand identity and point of difference. This involves creating a brand story that reflects who you are as an artist.

Your brand story should include:

- Your mission statement.
- Your values.
- Your intentions.

The three points listed above all amplify the artist's point of difference between themselves and the thousands of other artists releasing and performing similar music. Artists who understand their point of difference can more clearly articulate their art to potential audiences and elicit discovery through a more emotive connection. According to a Spiralytics report shared in April 2023, "Seven in ten customers are likely to recommend a product or service based on their emotional connection. Customers love it when they feel like the brand gets to know them and understands them in the process." Developing a sustainable artist project is no different.

2. What Is Your Sonic Identity?

It's pretty straightforward that without music there isn't an artist project to begin with.

Matched with an artist's point of difference, a creator's sonic identity is vital to generating an emotive connection and potential discovery with fans. Your sonic identity includes your music, voice, and sound effects. It should reflect your brand identity and be consistent across all platforms.

When developing your sonic identity, consider:

- Your genre.
- Your production style.
- Your vocal style.
- Your sound effects.

Delving deeper, a sonic identity will assist in informing an artist's creative process, who they collaborate with, and overall project creation from start to end.

3. Who Is Your Listener? (Target Audience)

Quite often, an artist's project is a reflection of the creator's personality. Artists pour their experiences, interests, and hobbies into a boiling pot that helps develop the project overall. A good starting point to understanding a niche audience actually comes back to the artist understanding their own behavior. A target audience often reflects similar interests, hobbies, and behaviors as the artist developing the brand.

Consider the following:

- What do you want to see/hear more of?
- How do you operate on social media platforms and digital streaming platforms?
- How do you discover artists?

4. What Is Your Visual Identity?

As stated above, visual aesthetic is something that artists assume is all it takes to develop a meaningful brand, therefore focus on it quite heavily. We recommend that all artists go back to their point of differentiation and sonic identity to assist in really understanding what their visual identity is. Following that, it is important for the artist to understand their target audience. By doing so, the artist can craft a visual identity that their listener wants to buy into.

Things to consider in developing a visual identity:

- Your typography
- Your brand colors
- Your imagery
- Your design style

5. How Do You Meaningfully Communicate? (What Is Your Listener's Journey to Discovery?)

Real fans are the backbone of any artist's journey. They are the individuals who not only listen to your music but do so repeatedly, invest their time and money in attending your shows, and proudly sport your merchandise. They provide you with the essential support to fund your creative endeavors and sustain your career. In other words, real fans are not just passive consumers but emotionally invested allies in your artistic journey.

How do they become emotionally invested? By buying into a brand.

An audience member does not care about an artist's stream count, radio plays, or the number of sold-out shows. They care about how the music makes them feel or how engaging with an artist project makes them feel like they're a part of something bigger.

During the creative process, artists need not focus on their audience (nor should they). Their music is a reflection of their thoughts, inspiration, and creativity. However, when communicating their music and brand with the intention of building a lasting career, it is paramount for artists to cater to an audience likely to resonate with their work.

To do this effectively, consider the following:

- Identify what digital and social platforms your target audience uses.
- Understand how your audience utilizes these platforms for music discovery.
- Come up with a specific process that is measurable and actionable across multiple releases.

For instance, in AU/NZ, 89% of people consuming music prefer Spotify, and 45% of artist discovery on Spotify globally comes from algorithmic playlists (Daily Mixes, Release Radar, etc.). You have valuable insights into where your audience resides and how they discover music.

Creating a seamless process that caters to your specific audience at every touchpoint is paramount for artist development in 2024 and beyond. It's not just about creating music; it's about creating connections, fostering engagement, and ultimately building a sustainable and rewarding music career.