

**WHITEPAPER
AUDIO BRANDING**

AUDIO BRANDING GUIDE

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Abstract

Hearing it everywhere - Audio has become more and more important for effective marketing use and brand appearance. In the future, an auditory unique selling point for the recognition of the brand is going to be a decisive component for success. So far so good. But what is the meaning behind terminology like Audio Branding or Brand Sound? What needs to be considered, how long does a development process take, what already exists, what is in need and where do you even start? This White Paper is to be understood as a guideline and describes

the most important steps on development of a Brand Sound. It shows what potential Audio Branding has for brands, how different sounding brand elements are composed, what a good briefing of audio branding agencies needs to contain, and how the process works from idea generation to implementation. One thing is for sure: Brand Sound has become an indispensable dimension of Customer Experience as we know it. And maybe clients don't hear the strategy itself, but they hear the difference to having no strategy.

From Audio to Branding

Audio has always been the central medium for human communication and thus a premise for culture and society. Myths, epics and entire religions were at first communicated orally before they were written down. The very first communication device was a drum - better known as the "talking drum". This form of audio communication was so efficient, that the musical instrument became prohibited during the slave trade in America and the Caribbean. The Slaves have been using the drums as some form of code language.

'Where language fades, the music starts' - said E. T. A. Hoffmann someday. Before language, sound already existed. The theory of nonverbal communication suggests that the prehistoric man - before language was around yet - used melodic sounds to express his emotions to his fellows.

Wo die Sprache aufhört, fängt die Musik an. (E. T. A. Hoffmann)

The hearing centre in the human brain is directly connected to the hippocampus and to its connected reward system. Here, associations are getting tied to emotions. It interprets whether new information is important to us or not. By the release of dopamine, positive aural impressions can get close to sensations like food or sex. The highest density of nerve cells in the human body lies inside the inner ear, but in contrast to other sensory perceptions, hearing happens inside the oldest part of the brain and barely needs to pass through any neuronal layers. That makes

sound faster and has above all a direct impact on the subconsciousness. So exactly there, where brands want to be perceived. That makes audio in advertisement and brand communication substantially important. In 1903, the first brand song 'Under the Anheuser Bush' was launched for the same-sounding beer brand Anheuser Busch. From 1923 onwards, the NBC music broadcast 'The Clicquot Eskimos' was sponsored by the beverage company Clicquot Club Company. Key element of the broadcast was a Banjo-orchestra under the same name playing the 'Clicquot Fox Trot March' at the beginning of each show. The march was considered the first 'trademark overture' ever. In an NBC-publication, it says:

*'The value of this from an advertising standpoint can hardly be overestimated. [...] This musical preface and epilogue are 'head-line' and 'signature' to the Clicquot Club Company's air advertisement.'*¹

In 1926, the first jingle for the breakfast cereal brand 'Wheaties' was sung and broadcasted live at the radio station. The A cappella group "Wheaties Quartet" sung the 40-second jingle every week for three years. It was shown that in the regions affected by the broadcast, significantly more cereals were sold. Consequently, they launched the Wheaties-Jingle on a national scale, which ultimately saved the company from a sales slump. In 1929 the 'NBC Chimes' were broadcasted internationally as the first digital signature ever.

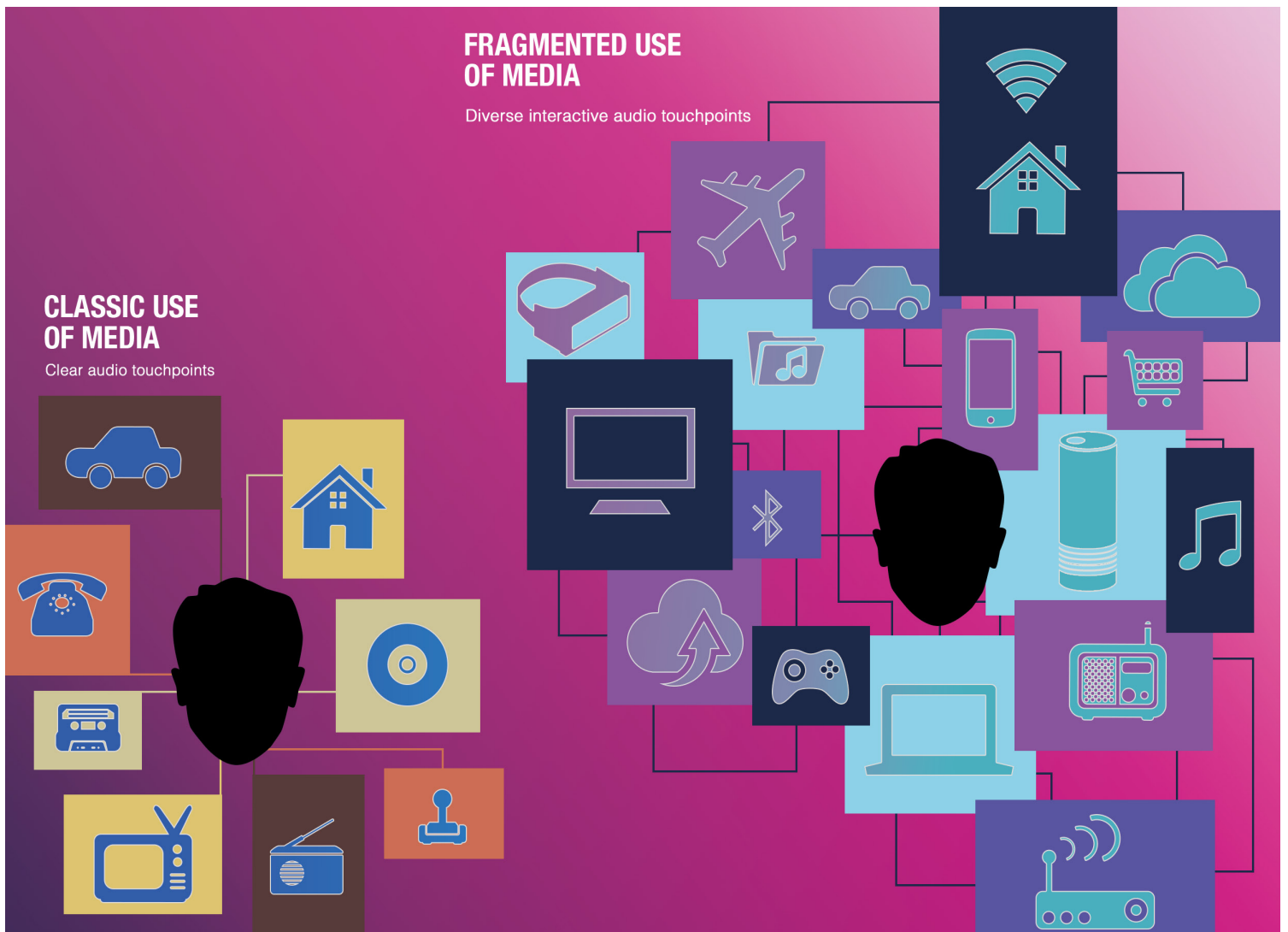
During the second half of the last century, ads of a rather naive nature - containing rhymed songs and sung jingles - transferred to strategically planned advertisement with occasionally excellent use of

¹ National Broadcasting Company (1929): Making Pep and Sparkle Typify a Ginger Ale.

music. Such as the cooperation between Pepsi and Michael Jackson in the '80s, which set a new standard.

And 'Deutsche Telekom' in 1999, when they announced the new millennium with their unmistakable sound logo. In the following years, the number of audio touchpoints in brand communication exploded as a result of digitization, which lead to new opportunities for audio applications. A small circle of audio branding experts was found. In 2009, 'Audio Branding Academy' was found with the aim to professionalise the audio branding economy. After ten years, alongside international congresses, publications, best cases and award shows, audio branding has established itself as a must-have in the modern brand management.

Illustration: Increase of audio touchpoints



The Potential of Audio Branding

For a modern brand management in the digital era of parallel media usage brand sound is not optional anymore, but has become a mandatory dimension of customer experience. The capability of audio branding is summarized as follows:

Better reaching of target groups

*Surpassing communication barriers (e.g. Second Screen)
Creating new brand contact points (e.g. Podcast)
Use of new media (e.g. Smart Speaker)*

Increased efficiency in communication

*Establishment of a consistent brand identity
Connection of product experience to brand communication
Optimization of brand recall
Increase of brand value*

Differentiate brand experience

*Creation of unique communication characteristics
Establishment of an aural sender signature*

Improvement of customer loyalty

*Extension of a multi-sensual product experience
Reinforcement of emotional brand appearance
Strengthening implicit brand awareness*

Where, when and how humans are communicating with brands is changing. Brand communication will become more interactive, individual and especially more focused on listening. It is taking over the most important form of communication the human has: Listening and speaking. New developments, such as digital voice assistant systems, catalyse the revolution.

Only thoughtfully designed acoustic brands can remain in this totally new kind of a pit fight.

You cannot get to an audible brand identity by generically spoken text. Only those brands are well-prepared, that own a clearly defined brand sound backed by strategy and have a comprehensive amount of sound assets.

More than a Logo

Brand sound is the audible dimension of a brand identity. Like the visual brand design, the brand sound can be a compilation of multiple and diverse - yet audible - brand elements.

Sound Logo

The most popular element is the so-called 'Sound Logo', which is used, like the visual counterpart, as a sender signature. A good sound logo represents the brand in condensed form and triggers the listener's expected associations within 0.5 to 3 seconds. You can work with many elements: Melody, rhythm, sounds, voice, language and so on. One of the most renowned sound logos is still the one from 'Deutsche Telekom' from 1999.

Jingles

Jingles are the predecessors of sound logos, so to speak. They were meant to be melodically recognized, longer than sound logos and often have singing elements with memorable rhymes. 'Häri-bo macht Kinder froh, und Erwachsene ebenso' knows and sings every German child and will remember for the rest of their lives. In modern brand communication, jingles are not used anymore all that often. That has multiple reasons, for example the constant shortening of advertising formats with its more compact messages.

But at radio stations they are still the main component of the auditory wrapping - the so-called Station ID.

Brand Music

Brand music can be used for the communication of more complex emotional concepts and generation of moods. In the past, a single piece of music was mostly used as a brand song or brand anthem to cover a longer timeline. But now, modern brand sound concepts rely more on a brand music library that consists of several pieces of music composed specifically for the brand. The uptime of brand music is now much shorter than it was before. Reasons for this are for example the replaceability in digital media and the overall faster spinning world. Brand music concepts, who rely on a bigger pool of musical pieces, own more flexibility and thus are more sustainable. Like the pictorial language of a brand, single pieces of music can convey different brand values or be intended for specific purposes.

Brand Voice

Whereas the brand signature in visual design carries the visual brand message, the 'Brand Voice' carries the aural brand message. Unlike the writing in visual branding, the human voice is by far one of the most emotional elements in brand sound. Once derived from the brand personality and mobilised as a brand instrument, the brand voice can create a direct, emotional and - above all - authentic connection between brand and human. Nothing alike can reveal a person's emotional state more clearly than his own voice. Nothing alike can move us more than the voices of others. Thus, brand voice is particularly important for language assistance. In the future, the brand voice will become even more essential for a customer relationship.

Sound logo, brand music and brand voice resemble the basics of a brand sound. Due to these developments in the past years, more special brand sounds assets are being added constantly. In digital media design, at the edge between human and machine, a new universe of product and functional sounds emerges. The more coherent and consistent all brand sound assets are developed, the stronger the brand.

Road to the first Briefing



Audio branding begins with the development of a brand sound and then continues to the ongoing management of the application and further development, as musical taste and ideas of sound aesthetics change over time.

That means, that if a brand exists, the work on its sound must endure. A modern understanding of audio branding does not function in terms of static concepts, but rather in flexible design corridors of an agile brand sound. Instead of a constant repetition of annoying earwigs, it is important to work out what makes the brand sound unique and proprietary. It's more about principles of design than about compositions. These should be manifested in an easily accessible brand sound guideline to support users and developers pursuing their daily work.

Brand sound is derived and developed directly from the brand identity. It doesn't need to be invented but needs to be figured out - a process that basically corresponds to classic coaching methods and should therefore be accompanied by external consultants. Specialized audio branding agencies offer not only advice but also creation, production and support during implementation. Before initiating the search for a suitable agency, the project must be prepared accordingly. It should be ensured that all relevant stakeholders are involved as early as possible and that budget and time are planned realistically. When planning the budget, it should be kept in mind

that, in addition to agency fees, licenses for the usage rights will fall due.

The development of a first brand sound may take between 3 to 6 months. More complex brand sound developments may easily take over a year. Brand development is teamwork and at the same time a top priority. The managing directors always take responsibility and have last say.

After familiarization with the topic, it is important to write a briefing that is as accurate as possible. Then the search for a suitable audio branding agency can begin. The Audio Branding Society offers an exclusive database of the best agencies worldwide at www.audio-branding-society.org.

The admission criteria for a membership in the Audio Branding Society are strict and it's meant exclusively for applicants with proven expertise.

The Audio Branding Process



classic audio branding process consists of the four phases analysis, conception, production and implementation. Followed by the ongoing fifth phase of maintenance and management of the brand sound.

Analyse

During the analysis, all relevant information concerning the brand and its environment is collected and evaluated to its relevance for the brand sound. This includes the history, the status quo and any already existing concepts for future brand development. How aware and purposeful is the association with sound in brand communication? What are the requirements for a robust brand sound concept and which challenges need to be mastered? The result is a targeting system and a catalogue of requirements with key performance indicators (KPI) that are defined and measured as precisely as possible.

For the development of a brand sound strategy following questions arise:

1. What can be heard of the brand already and how can this be evaluated in terms of function, aesthetics and brand conformity?
2. How do the competitors sound?
3. What are the target groups and which sociocultural listening habits and associations exist?
4. How do new technologies influence the auditory customer journey and what does it mean for the potential of the brand?
5. How can brand sound create additional value beyond classic brand communication? For example, as a functional sound in product design?
6. How are the current processes and conditions when it comes to licensing, production and application of music, language and sound design? How can these processes be optimized?

Conception

Whenever and only when the relevant goals, requirements, framework parameters and performance indicators are known, the conception of the brand sound can begin. Based on the results from the analysis, the sound identity as aural dimension of the brand core is being developed. What should be expressed in terms of sound, which audio assets (sound logo, brand music, brand voice etc.) are required and how should the brand sound be treated? First moods (audio samples) make the sound concepts audible and offer a room for discussion. Here, pragmatic strategy and artistic creation are mutually dependent. From the conception phase emerges the creative briefing to produce the individual sound assets; each of which can fulfil different applied functions.

Production

The actual production of the individual brand sound assets takes up a relatively small part of work. With a well-worked-out creative briefing, the first layouts can be produced, with all people responsible coordinated and in one or two feedback rounds finalized.

Implementation

Even the best brand sound concept remains unheard if it is not implemented consistently. First, all necessary usage rights must be secured and, if necessary, a listening trademark registration must be completed. The new audio assets together with guidelines must be made accessible for all areas of application. For larger companies or complex brand sound concepts, user training (employees, agencies, production houses, etc.) is a good extra next to the internal communication on brand sound. When implementing the brand sound in brand communication on the market, the timing for the rollout needs to be chosen

unique
brand-compliant
precise recognisable
flexible systemic scaleable
user-friendly proprietary protectable efficient

Illustration: Brand sound criteria

strategically. This could be for example a new image campaign, the introduction of a new product or the implementation of a new communication tool (e.g. an Alexa skill).

Maintenance and Management

After the brand sound has been implemented, it must be continuously maintained and managed. Practical problems must be systematically recorded, solved and documented for further development.

A new brand sound needs enough time to be grasped by the target groups. Ideally, the previously defined KPI should be checked regularly with the help of market research. A performance indicator that has seen little to no attention until now is the Return On Investment. Next to increasing brand value and sales, it also includes cost savings in brand communication. A well-run brand sound management can for example reduce coordination efforts, shorten production times or minimize license costs.

Takeaways

Audio communication is the primary form of human communication and thus is of great importance for the perception and emotional power of the brand. The possibilities for the application of audio in brand communication are increasing dramatically. With the appearance of voice assistance, brand communication becomes more interactive and especially more auditory. In the future it will be even more important for a brand which kind of voice it speaks. However, this is not going to happen in empty space, but in designable soundscapes. Brand sound becomes an indispensable dimension of customer experience. Audio branding is not a one-time project, but an ongoing task of brand management. Addressing brands still without a sound strategy of their own: Now is the time to act.

Audio Branding Cases

So much for theory, but how does audio branding sound in practice? Under the following links are some examples that have won prizes at the International Sound Awards in recent years.

www.international-sound-awards.com/knowledge/overview-case-submission/

www.international-sound-awards.com/winners-isa2018/

www.international-sound-awards.com/winners-2019/

But of course, there are many more examples that can be heard every day on the radio or on smart devices. Let yourself be inspired and find the right sound for your brand - it pays off.



Dr. Cornelius Ringe

Author: Cornelius Ringe studied business administration at the University of Augsburg with a major in advertising psychology and gained his PhD at the institute for Music and Media Science at the Humboldt University in Berlin. As a guest lecturer, he introduced the subject of Audio Branding at the Humboldt University in Berlin and the Popakademie Baden-Württemberg. He is the initiator of the Audio Branding Academy, which organizes the International Sound Awards and established the Audio Branding Society. Cornelius Ringe is managing partner of the sound agency WESOUND as well as author and editor of specialist publications.

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