

Meg McCluskey - Reflection Paper

Culminating Experience Project Summary

When I set out as Director of Marketing for Disrupción Records for the 2019-2020 academic year, the road ahead was filled with both opportunities and challenges, including some that were entirely unforeseen.

For the first time ever, the label was incorporated into the official record practicum within Berklee's curriculum, and the student base comprising the staff rose to 2.5x the previous year. With an increased work force and enhanced support from the college, it was our moment to determine the new direction for the label. At the same time, the gap in label operations between academic years as well as the surprising turn of the COVID-19 pandemic posed some inherent challenges.

Throughout the year, I worked with the larger Disrupción team to rise to the challenge, by managing all of the marketing efforts within the label, including the branding and marketing of the label itself, as well as supporting the marketing campaigns and projects of its teams and artists.

Process: Plan of Action

My role as Director of Marketing was always positioned to work across multiple divisions of the label by supervising and managing the branding and marketing activities at label, imprint, and artist levels. This involved a constant evaluation of priorities to determine the greatest needs for

the label at any given moment, which was particularly important as our reality evolved throughout the year.

The process began with a focus on label-wide initiatives, including label branding and brand management, website development, event marketing and community engagement, and digital strategy and social campaigns. It then transitioned into support for the imprints as they confirmed their artist signings and began to work on their marketing strategy. I mapped out the branding and marketing areas of focus with some key questions, provided resources to the imprints, and collaborated through hands-on meetings and consultations. Finally, when Disrupción transitioned to a label services model after the pandemic hit, my priorities shifted to more direct artist support to accommodate the branding and marketing needs of our new label services artists.

The impact of the pandemic was pretty significant across all levels. The entire label was quickly forced into remote engagement in an entirely digital environment, requiring us to embrace a new style of virtual collaboration among the team. Given the new circumstances, we faced cancellations of events, shoots, and in-person activities, and had to find new ways to move forward with marketing plans. When it came time to provide resources to the imprints, I adapted my artist branding and marketing presentation to contain relevant information for marketing approaches during the lockdown to help them figure out a new direction for their artist marketing strategy. And lastly, the transition to a label services model created a need for my direct involvement with artists, requiring shifts in roles and responsibilities across the team.

Results: Expectations vs. Reality

Although the Director of Marketing role was a leadership position with varying objectives across label, imprint, and artist levels, I had always envisioned my CE work to be centered on presenting new and innovative marketing content and approaches for music artists launching their careers. I was particularly interested in exploring emerging trends and technologies for content creation and promotion, including VR and 360-degree video production.

Perhaps the biggest divide between expectations and results arose from the cancellation of my 360-degree music video project, something I had considered to be a cornerstone of my Culminating Experience project and time at Berklee. I had planned to incorporate into my CE a 360-degree music video created in collaboration with Disrupción artists and in support of the United Nations Sustainability Development Goals. For several months, running concurrently with my duties as Director of Marketing, I dove into the pre-production phase of this passion project, which included securing grant funding, gathering resources, assembling a team, scouting locations, researching production techniques, selecting equipment, finding artist collaborators, starting the compositional process, exploring partnerships with local organizations, and garnering support from Berklee staff and students.

It was pretty devastating to not be able to complete the project in the timeframe as planned due to new restrictions on in-person events. However, the silver lining is that this cancellation enabled me to dedicate more time and energy towards supporting Disrupción's label services artists, which was a demand that arose from unpredictable circumstances. Although the 360 project has yet to come to light, I was still able to get hands-on experience developing new and engaging

content for a set of diverse artists. At the same time, I was able to continue supporting the label and imprints through a particularly difficult transition period.

Next Steps

As the new GEMB cohort prepares to take over operations of the label, the Class of 2020 executive team has already initiated plans for transition. So far we've organized a transition meeting with the newly-selected Label Manager and Director of Marketing to facilitate hand off and sharing of progress and advice, as well as an interest meeting to recruit volunteers and share information about ongoing initiatives. While I'm still based in Valencia, I also plan to continue to help with ongoing Disrupción marketing activities however I can, with continued collaboration and transition meetings with the new Director of Marketing. Personally, I also hope to pursue some ongoing projects started this past year, with the next phase entailing the launch of the Disrupción podcast, as well as finally getting a 360 project off the ground.

Contribution to the Discipline

This year marked major strides for the Disrupción brand, leaving a lasting impact on the Berklee community. Despite the challenges of a global pandemic, we were able to successfully continue the label's operations with a remote model that incorporated some key marketing activities such as a social campaign and live streaming digital event. We also developed a more defined brand with improved clarity and positioning for the label as a whole, which can be passed down to future generations of Disrupción Records in years to come.

Through my efforts working directly with artists, I also utilized a novel approach with the branding questionnaire, which presented a new tool for an artist to sit down and evaluate themselves from a branding perspective. The hope is that this tool can be used in the future to help artists see themselves more clearly, define their uniqueness, and operate with a better understanding of their brands. For the artists I worked with, the branding and marketing approaches hopefully created a lasting impact by helping them develop their identity and produce strong content to stand out in their respective markets and genres. In addition, the resources I developed for social media brainstorming and scheduling will hopefully help future artists with their content, marketing, and release strategies.

Impact on the Student

Serving as Director of Marketing for Disrupción Records during this year has been an integral part of my Berklee experience. Working with the label has allowed me further insight into the operations of an independent record label, and I am fortunate to have played a role in determining its brand identity and direction. As an executive, I was able to develop my leadership skills by heading up the marketing department, providing support and resources to the larger team, and collaborating with executives and imprint team members along the way. I also deepened my own knowledge of branding and marketing principles, both for organizations and artists. My hands-on experience working with artists has resulted in a plethora of portfolio materials and helped me understand and apply social media strategies based on what I learned in my digital marketing and branding classes. As a result of this experience, I was able to further define my areas of interest around marketing, media, and content, and I feel better positioned to pursue future professional opportunities related to these fields. I am proud of the work that the

label has accomplished this year and am excited to see what is next for Disrupción Records.

Through my involvement with the label, I am so grateful I've had the opportunity to establish myself as an innovative, passionate, and forward-thinking marketer, which will undoubtedly serve me well in my long-term career.