

Berklee College of Music

Dreaming in Third Person: Reflective Paper

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of
Master of Arts in Global Entertainment and Music Business**

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Project Summary

While I knew that my CE was going to be at the very least a simulation of a realistic business plan for a venture, with strong leanings towards creating a hybrid venue some time in the future, it was only when I took both the Creative Entrepreneurship and the Music Marketing classes that I was inspired to combine my skills in an immediately applicable business venture by being the value provider to artists who are daunted by the industry. I would say my capacity to interpret problems and limitations and see them through an entrepreneurial, problem-solving and value-giving lens strongly coincided with my personal growth path: it was the latest adventure in a stage of my life where I yearned to strengthen the faculties of both my left and right brain. In theory, this balance would bring the most productive version of myself, being able to function simultaneously through organizational, social, creative, technical and leadership skills.

I was steadily participating in the music community around Berklee as an artist photographer and content creator in late 2017, when it came to me that artist branding and positioning was fundamentally the application of the understanding of audience psychology, which was a very interesting topic for me. Inspired strongly by Tim Ferrone's empathetic approach to decoding and curating the artist's brand, I then went further realizing I could create content expressing that brand, that character and identity in an ongoing narrative or for a marketing and release campaign. This idea of

digital storytelling had to be encapsulated in a realistic business plan, with eclectic pricing schemes. Early on I did not seek to limit Dreaming in Third Person. But the realistic capacity to create content for two to three artists campaigns at a time, or for smaller gigs which were quick cash and simultaneously helped to build the catalogue, and to simultaneously apply my knowledge in the role of a consultant and business developer of the artists' career were the main points to prove. I wanted to help indie artists, I knew that, but I also knew that meant they wouldn't necessarily have much to pay always. That could be a challenge, I considered, but guerilla content development with high quality was what I had always done, and it in that sense, I concluded that it would be sustainable if I paid my own two early employees hourly.

There were some necessary difficulties on the road to ownership, some intentionally pursued to learn rapidly, as I believe in the potential fertility of conflict for germinating insights. Going above and beyond was not necessarily always met with that response, which I feel is often the manager's lament. However, testing the concept with artists of different kinds over the year brought a flurry of insights in the creative, technical and business realms, it helped me streamline the business model of the company. I was also able to get deeper into the idea of building an episodic webseries of Dreaming in Third Person where certain appropriate artists could appear long term or briefly, where it would perform the function of cross marketing between the audiences of artists, and a multidimensional way to rapidly brand the artist's personality.

Now I am designing sponsorship decks so as to approach fashion brands and other brands relevant to each artist I am working with, because as a combined force of a content creating marketing company and an artist, the brands get bang for their buck. If a long term relationship were to be worked out, I am realizing much of the financing could be done through sponsorships alone, thereby further removing away the limitation of an artists' vision to engage their audience. What they dream could be done, as long as there was a subtle shout out to the sponsors!

Expectations and Results

I also wanted to work with acts that I didn't necessarily connect with, so as to be able to apply myself purely from a craft point of view as well. This would allow me to learn best from potential conflict or lack of creative chemistry: if D3P could survive this, it would be a robust experience and proof of concept. A particular pitch and a budget negotiation early on with an artist and her manager come to mind. The manager was undiplomatic and tactless despite my contribution to the project thus far (3+ weeks) and offering very reasonable prices, and I wondered if the very giving and informal tone of the company was taken advantage of for personal reasons. Weeks after a handshake agreement on 1000\$ worth of assets, the teenager's mother's disapproval of her daughter spending too much time in promotional work cleaved a hefty 450\$ worth of content off of the menu 'a la carte', in this case, the main music video which

featured her best song and single which was chosen upon my recommendation. The whole marketing plan hinged on the publicity of this video which was meant to catapult this song into the zeitgeist and position her most effectively, however without the video all we had was promotional photos, concept art and behind the scenes material, all generally better for halo content than a music video. The prices were really low, but without a package deal it didn't necessarily make good business sense to spent time on, nor was it a faithful effort that could be evaluated for growth. I had already invested a lot of time in this artist, however educating that might have been, and the idea that a teenager would undoubtedly be restricted by her parents meant that a sizeable client base would be somewhat steered by the same dynamic. Early I was also burdened with the responsibility of pitching to parents overseas and convincing them their money would be well spent, although those have often gone smoothly so far.

Part of this experience left me with a bittersweet taste, and further confirmed why I had to formalize and pace different stages of the relationship with an artist in a way that made practical business sense. Sometimes I needed a contract, which I started learning to construct, with several iterations, but it needed to be smoothly talked about. Expectations and the value of my time set early on. Time was valuable yet it needed to be balanced with the need to follow the spontaneity of conversations with artists. It also made me consider whether I should narrow my vision as soon as possible and work with artists I truly believe in, that maybe the ethos of the company

had its own rules now and wouldn't entirely allow working outside of. I am leaning towards the idea of respecting it.

By June I was able to build a moderately strong portfolio of digital assets and helped several artists and continue to, but with the difficulty of working on multiple artist campaigns full time during the course of the degree year, I am yet to hit an artist's record out of the ballpark. For starters I did not always execute a full marketing plan, due to time and knowledge constraints, although I am working on some inspiring ones currently, including Eli Raybon's comical universe. Sometimes I spent more time on a project than I should have for the value it generated, and this would not be constraint by the finances of the artist alone, who would be providing value through other means. I was still estimating my worth, and once pitched higher for a short term gig from an acquaintance rather than a friend, after doing many small favors for artists, in an effort to respect my own time.

There are some promising ones I am working on as I type this reflection paper, and I feel more equipped than ever to engage with those thoroughly. Artists in my vicinity have approached me to help in their campaigns, and while this is only because of word of mouth in a music school, it might not be a bad start. Dreaming in Third Person as an expression of all the services I can provide artists turned out to be personally a project of growth, of learning leadership, ownership, responsibility, social, technical and organizational skills. I informally hired two of my friends part-time early on, with

experience in photography, PR and the music industry, defining roles for production manager and creative partner and they have been brilliant co-workers who always had my back. Without resorting to any overt form of leadership, I sought to find my authentic voice expressing why I thought the work we did was important. The entrepreneurial personality is maturing as we speak, and I know for sure that running something of my own is likely to prove most satisfying for me. We have open empathetic conversations at Dreaming in Third Person, and they have helped me through my lows, and still continue to work for me. I am thoroughly inspired to carry on this work forward simultaneously while building more experience in marketing and campaign management, which might one day very realistically allow me to do this full time.

Process

The fundamental purpose of the company is “culture creation” and “digital storytelling”, which amounts to providing marketing, branding and content creation services for artists in an emotive engaging way, and as a brand is necessarily depicted as ambiguous so as not to limit the possible roles that Dreaming in Third Person could play. This made perfect sense for release campaigns or upcoming tours at first, but they were of the larger projects I attempted. My process evolved over time as well, getting especially streamlined when building a better relationship with my employees

and working several projects with them. It wasn't in the original design of D3P to work in the marketing of festivals and independent music conferences, but this function was a strong fit for D3P to take up as potential clients, if not simply for the credibility of Dreaming in Third Person, the networking opportunities offered by the proximity to the team behind the scenes and the artists. By being able to play different roles for different artists, I am exploring pricing beyond tiers and into dynamic pricing models, with different rates for rapid content creation and communications at an event to weekly rates for hours spent on consulting and providing content creation for an artist.

I find myself scouting often for talented musicians whose dreams I would realize I might be able to propel, almost like the traditional A&R rep except for serving very different interests. I deem audience perception of a new brand to be a fascinating but surreal subject, and in all faithfulness to compose a perfect context for a pitch, am drawn to stretching out our early interactions with the artist if possible over time, in order to build trust and self-value and position myself as an artist as well to the client. I would look for potential clients who would work well with Dreaming in Third Person's ethos, who were at least willing to be social media savvy (unless they wanted me to completely manage their digital channels) and believed in the idea of cultivating superfans.

By June I was able to build a moderately strong portfolio of digital assets, with several videos, concept photoshoots, content examples and an array of artists, digital channel management at major events like the EU DIY Conference by CD Baby and working at Primavera Sounds up my belt, which now gave me a range of my own intellectual property with which I could much more comfortably position myself. The work would inevitably speak for itself, and until both the artist and me can be convinced that we have the potential to be an aesthetic fit, merely landing a client could be more work than it is worth.

Next steps

Through the third semester I took both classes as I deemed it very relevant to my company's further growth, digital marketing and social media management, and branding, sponsorship and advertising. Flirting with the idea of building sponsorship opportunities for my clients, this put things in perspective and made me realize it could be a very realistic opportunity to finance some of our more ambitious projects. As a combined force of content creation, we were strongly positioned to generate credibility for fashion brands amongst others.

I am planning to intern this fall in a marketing and communications position for the Mad Cool Festival both as an opportunity to network and to procure a future position

in Marketing and Channel Management. This will hone my skills to ultimately be able to be the Creative Director of Dreaming in Third Person as a full-time job.

Apart from the universe building experiment which I am very excited about, there are some other artist projects that have been long in discussion that are coming to a culmination. After building more confidence in an elaborate digital marketing strategy through class, I will be more equipped to take on remote projects where I can assess what is required and suggest content for, and build a marketing campaign through innovative ideas juxtaposed with what is available. I feel like this profile building and release campaign management will be a service always required for artists, and as long as I am positioned in a city with enough potential clientele.

Contribution to the discipline and profession

Dreaming in Third Person was created recognizing the increasing relevance of an artist's narrative and subculture for engaging, expanding and retaining their audience, while placing it in the context of a creative and practical marketing campaign. D3P is essentially a marketing boutique for independent musicians : D3P acts as a one-stop resource for everything, from helping with artistic branding and marketing campaigns all the way to content creation, depending on the client's needs. The more involved a

client is with D3P, the more time artists can focus on doing what they do best, rather than having to negotiate several key skills, significant time and expensive resources to nurture their careers. D3P's ideal value proposition would be long-term involvement and creative collaboration with the artist/act, and playing the role of a creative co-director of the artist's ongoing narrative.

Dreaming in Third Person offers significant package deals for indie artists looking to break into the industry and find their audience, promote during a release or tour or towards an overhaul and rebranding campaign aimed to expand their audience, as well as established artists seeking to enrich and develop their business and branding strategies as well.

With an eye on the big picture, D3P not only plans campaigns and builds detailed marketing plans for the independent artist's release, but actually specializes in extremely cost-effective creation and production of that brand-promoting content in that plan, including music videos, photography, press kits, content writing, microfilms, web design communicating the artistic brand holistically and thus forms a complete package solution for the artist at a nominal cost and strain compared to a typically chaotic independent marketing effort. D3P members include professionals from across the global music industry, who understand and possess many perspectives of the landscape and audience psychology, supported by the latest in data analytics and digital marketing.

D3P aims to work with talented and authentic artists they appreciate personally and artistically, and support thoroughly with culture and content creation based on the collaborative vision mustered with the artist. Dreaming in Third Person believes people love stories, aims to serve indie artists, and passionately expresses the stories around beautiful art that deserves to be told; so that the audience may engage in a multidimensional experience with the artist's music over the vehicle of audiovisuals and the latest digital marketing practices.

D3P is a small, independent and international digital marketing company, but is also a production house, specializing in creating the content it markets, thus forming a complete package solution for artists. D3P is inclined towards a very hands-on approach to planning a marketing campaign and then through specialized content creation, projecting the artist's dynamic brand to his target demographic, and as such is the only company of this kind that both creates content and markets that content at affordable rates for the independent artist. Combined we form *a strong position to approach brands given the capacity to provide credibility to the brands*. D3P also indirectly promotes the artist through its own storytelling endeavor on popular social media platforms. D3P establishes strong relationships with its artist clients through brainstorming and working together offers cross-promotional traffic and creative networking opportunities.

It is the age of short videos and the attention economy, and deeply engaging and expanding audiences requires both good content and clever strategy. The digital marketing landscape has broadened and there are many platforms, and creating and distributing music has never been easier, but that really intensifies the competitive landscape. Other artists have well defined teams, labels, resources, agents, managers who work on behalf of the artist. How does one get heard?

Nearly obsessive thinking about the capacities of this company also made me develop the idea of an episodic webseries for which I had written several sketches for over the previous few years, a universe with an ongoing narrative where artists could be rapidly featured to be positioned best in a dramatic or comedic context.

Impact on the student completing the work

In November 2017, it all came together in an epiphanous moment, the idea of an externalization of all my skills through the legitimizing funnel of a brand that felt right more than anything material I could remember creating. I first nurtured it as an artist branding company, when it was really dealing with the area of artist positioning, making the artist both be authentic and curated. I knew in time with enough skills I would fully purpose it having a digital marketing wing as well. It had my design, my creative quirks, my idiosyncrasies and yet it could survive as a value giving function in the physical world. I hurled myself in the deep end of the pool and took on projects by

pitching to some artists I liked and some I didn't, with very little of a portfolio at first. The first climb would be uphill, having nothing much more than several photos as proof of concept till date, but going through that was absolutely necessary and validated the company for me when it still had insignificant experience from the surface. This required some sheer selling, and I legitimately wanted to offer more than buzzwords to satisfy a client, yet I realized many didn't fully know what they were getting into. They were unaware of the intricacies of marketing alone, let alone thinking of data analytics and audience psychology objectively. I was in a position of trust, authority, and position to overdeliver not clearly defined expectations. Yet I was able to offer a lot of advice to the artists who worked with me whether it was part of the package or not.

The long term goal of D3P is to nurture an indie-spirited cultural movement : The idea that passionate and talented independent creators and complementary professionals can build something together that rivals the resources and artistry of major labels and remain a force to be reckoned with. The next step is to develop my marketing skills further and sharpen my understanding of audience psychology through more marketing gigs, so that I may realistically develop the skills for a few years to do the work of Dreaming in Third Person potentially full-time and with few more employees. There is also a plan brewing to release music within D3P's resident universe building project.

