2024 SMB REPORT

# **Emotional Soundscapes**

Leveraging sonic storytelling to connect brand promises with customer emotions



### **INTRODUCTION**

The rise in digital advertising during the last ten years has greatly increased the number of advertisements to which the average consumer is exposed each day. According to *Siteefy*, that number is 10,000.<sup>1</sup> Studies indicate that of the aforementioned 10,000 messages, consumers are aware of only 100 of them. And of those, only a handful truly leave a lasting impression.

There is, however, a brand messaging amplifier that has unsurpassed ability to reach, engage, and ignite consumers: sound. Contrary to what many believe, sound plays a much bigger role in advertising than just filling silence.

Sound is an integral part of the brand story—or at least it should be.

Sound is most effective when it's part of a consistent brand story delivered across all consumer touchpoints. In fact, neuroscientists have long held that there is no better way to heighten a brand's message and customer experience than through music and sound. That's because music and sound are scientifically linked to memory. As a result, the most effective and efficient way to make a brand highly memorable is to pair it with sound and music that fits the brand. Interestingly, though, very few advertisements feature custom advertising music or a unique sonic brand identifier—two basic building blocks of sonic brand storytelling.

Research into the power of sound in brand messaging has been impressive:

- Sonic brand cues are almost 9x more likely to deliver a high-performing ad.<sup>2</sup>
- Brands with music that matches their brand identity are 96% more likely to be recalled than those with non-fit music or no music at all.<sup>3</sup>
- Consumers are 24% more likely to buy a product when it's associated with music they recall, like, and understand.<sup>4</sup>

For optimal results, a sonic brand storytelling strategy should be developed around the brand—one that delivers a memorable, highly engaging customer experience that connects with customer emotions. The result is a whole new level of brand recognition and differentiation.

Combined with research that suggests that every \$1 invested in customer experience brings \$100 in return<sup>5</sup>—for an ROI of 9,900%7—an investment in sonic brand storytelling becomes less of a "want" and more of a "must have" in every marketer's toolkit.

According to Statista, ad spend in the audio advertising market is projected to reach US \$6.5 billion in 2024.

Brands with music that fits the brand identity are

96%

more likely to be recalled than those with non-fit music.<sup>3</sup>

1 https://tinyurl.com/yc6cvhwk 2 https://tinyurl.com/49ddpmjt 3 https://tinyurl.com/49ddpmjt 4.https://tinyurl.com/52t56ycj 5 https://tinyurl.com/bdhd374



### THE ROLE SOUND PLAYS IN CONSUMER BRAND PERCEPTION

Everything we perceive with our ears affects every other perception and conscious thought we have. Sound gets in so fast that it modifies all other input and sets the stage for it, according to neuroscientist Seth Horowitz.<sup>1</sup> That's why the sound you pair with brand visuals and messaging is a much bigger deal than you may have ever thought it was. If you're using cookie-cutter, stock sounds and music, you're killing your ability to tell your brand story in a truly unique way that makes it enduringly memorable and credible.

Sonic brand storytelling uses custom-designed sonic assets that echo the brand's voice, values, tone, and personality. It amplifies brand messaging and helps achieve a deeper level of brand differentiation.

What makes this an imperative for brands is that sound is proven to drive human emotions. It's a powerful way to create a more memorable, enduring brand story capable of delivering an experience that feels personal to customers.

And here's why this really matters: The marketing communications paradigm has shifted in recent years. Today, consumers are king. Therefore, every interaction they have with a brand needs to *sound* like that brand and must set the tone for what it feels like to *own* the brand, whether it's a luxury vehicle or a bag of potato chips. The sounds used in brand messaging must communicate differentiation in a way that convinces consumers that the brand's promises and value are aligned with their expectations.

Communicating with consumers isn't about opening up a monologue about a brand—it's about opening a *dialogue* with them because, for better or for worse, consumers are in control. Therefore, sonic branding and sonic brand storytelling strategies must center around the *consumers'* perception of the brand—the image they have of the brand. And all sound and music used in brand messaging must create a customer experience like no other.

Sonic branding and sonic brand storytelling bring meaning and continuity to brand messaging so that what a consumer hears in relation to a brand always *sounds* like the brand. The goal is to leverage the opportunity to make every customer touchpoint a relationship builder that ignites positive customer emotions.

Research conducted by Advertising Week confirms that sound has immense influence over the way people think, feel, and behave. That influence carries over into consumers' interactions on social media, which itself has made an unprecedented impact on consumer behavior, with audio and culture as the drivers. Social media has clearly solidified the "sound-on" paradigm, and we've only just begun to see brands authentically Customers who have an emotional connection with a brand have a **3x higher** lifetime value.3

97%

of brand managers believe that music can strengthen their brand.<sup>2</sup>

2



2 https://tinyurl.com/27vz8ucr

1 Seth Horowitz, Author of The Universal Sense: How Hearing Shapes the Mind

3 https://www.brandingmag.com/daniel-todaro/how-brands-create-an-emotional-connection-with-their-customers/

leverage their sonic identities in this context. As creators generate increasingly topical, authentic, and culturally relevant content for their audiences, the savviest brands are expanding their sonic toolboxes on social and are operating more like the creators who have dominated the social landscape.

With nearly half of all Americans on TikTok, it's clear that social and digital isn't a trend it's the most important place in which brands can make themselves visible now and well into the future, especially if they want to deepen their emotional connections with younger consumers.

However, it doesn't end there. The internet, mobile devices, apps, and technologies like Visa's "Tap and Pay" have increased the number of touchpoints consumers interact with on a daily basis. As a result, the use of sound across the full spectrum of touchpoints is rapidly taking center stage in marketing, advertising, and brand communications for B2B brands as much as for B2C brands.

B2B brands and those in the manufacturing, technology and education sectors are also leveraging the power of sound to influence consumers. For example, both The American Museum of Natural History and The Franklin Institute have emerged with major, soundled exhibitions designed to attract young adults and families. You can expect to hear about more sonic transformations of spaces as venues work to capture public attention and build appeal with next-gen audiences.

Last but not least, consumers' growing preference for technologies like voice search on their smartphones and voice-activated technologies such as Google Home and Amazon's Alexa have prioritized the "marriage" between brands and sound, with an emphasis on distinctiveness for differentiation.

### SOUND INFLUENCES MOOD AND BRAND PERCEPTION

Sound affects mood, enhances memory, triggers emotional response, and has an impact on buying behavior. Used consistently in brand communications, sound can:

- Inspire a positive emotional connection with the brand
- Grab consumer attention, even without visual cues
- Drive customer action
- Increase brand loyalty
- Create enduring brand differentiation
- Build consumer trust in the brand

are 27% more likely to drive significant business effects than non-musical

efforts.1

Musical ad

campaigns

"Half the storytelling ability is sound."

~ Joe Herrington Principal Media Designer for Walt Disney Imagineering

1 Binet, Mullensiefen & Edwards, Admap (2013)



But that's not all. From creating moving messages to sending out calls-of-action, music and sound have the ability to dramatically change the way in which consumers experience brand advertising.

Sound is a powerful vehicle for consumer behavior and perception. In fact, according to neuroscientist Seth Horowitz, we humans hear anywhere from 20 to 100 times faster than we see, so that everything we you perceive with our ears colors every other perception we have—and, therefore, every conscious thought we have. Sound gets in so fast that it modifies all the other input and sets the stage for it."<sup>2</sup>

Horowitz says only sound can do that because the brain's auditory circuitry is less widely distributed than the visual system. "The circuitry for vision makes the map of the New York subway look simple whereas sound signals don't have as far to travel in the brain. And sound gets routed quickly to parts of the brain that deal with very basic functions— pre-cortical areas that are not part of the wiring for conscious thinking. These are places where emotions are generated," he says.

Emotions, are, in Horowitz's words, "evolutionary fast responses — things you don't have to think about."<sup>3</sup> In other words, emotions are rapid delivery systems in the brain.

Music and sound also have the power to convey meaning to help create narratives, including narratives about brands. You can change the storyline of brand messaging simply by changing the musical score.

But the musical score must be tailored to the brand. And it must be scalable and adaptable for application in a wide variety of settings. In other words, brand sound must be easily revised to appeal to global demographic and psychographic audiences, yet at the same time must be instantly recognizable, no matter who hears it and no matter where they are when they hear it.

For example, if you listen to a commercial in another country and don't understand a single word, but you hear "dum, da da da dum," you'll know in an instant that the commercial was for a computer—and that "Intel is inside." That sonic identifier, over time, becomes synonymous with the brand so that it becomes the audio expression of the brand's values, attributes, and personality.

From phone on hold to trade shows to annual company conventions to internal communications, custom-branded sound into which the sonic identity has been infused, forms the foundation of sonic brand storytelling, which creates powerful and meaningful emotional connections between the brand, its customers *and* its stakeholders.

Consumers are

## 46%

more likely to choose your brand over the competition if you associate recognizable sound with it.<sup>1</sup>

"Brands must consider sound as a core component of their brand architecture." ~ Max De Lucia The Branding Journal

1 https://www.smallbizdaily.com/sound-support-your-small-business-brand/ 2 https://tinyurl.com/26hf6h8y 3 https://tinyurl.com/26hf6h8y



#### THE 10-POINT APPROACH TO SONIC BRANDING

Creating sonic identities and matching sound with visuals and messaging must be a deliberate, strategic process. We recommend a **10-point approach**:

- 1. **Research and understand cultures.** Research the cultures and ethnicities your brand's sonic identity needs to bridge. Understand their music, instruments, rhythms, and tonalities.
- 2. Identify universal elements. Look for musical elements that transcend cultural boundaries and can be universally appreciated (i.e. rhythms, simple melodies, or natural sounds). These elements should become the basis of your brand's sonic identity so it will resonate with diverse audiences.
- 3. **Consult cultural experts.** Reach out to cultural experts or consultants who can provide insights into various cultures to help ensure that your sonic identity is respectful and inclusive.
- 4. **Collaborate with diverse sonic branding producers.** Retain a sonic branding agency whose sonic brand producers and sonic brand storytelling experts come from different backgrounds. Collaborative efforts among such a team can ensure that your brand's sonic identity will resonate with a wide range of audiences.
- 5. Blend traditional and contemporary elements. Retain a sonic branding agency whose producers are experienced at blending traditional musical elements with modern sounds and production techniques. This fusion enables the creation of sonic elements that feel both authentic and contemporary, appealing to diverse audiences while honoring cultural roots.
- 6. **Test and iterate.** Test different iterations of your sonic identity with diverse focus groups to gather feedback. Iterate based on the feedback received.
- 7. Aim for emotional resonance. Focus on evoking universal emotions through your sonic identity, such as joy, nostalgia, or inspiration. Emotions have a powerful cross-cultural appeal that helps create a connection with audiences regardless of their background.
- 8. Ensure flexibility and adaptability. Your brand's sonic identity should be adaptable to appeal to a variety of audiences as you consider penetrating additional market segments.
- 9. Legal and Ethical Considerations. Ensure that your sonic identity complies with copyright laws and respects the intellectual property of cultural elements used. Additionally, consider the ethical implications of your sonic choices to avoid unintentional offense or controversy.
- 10. Long-Term Engagement. Establish a long-term strategy for maintaining and evolving your sonic identity over time. Continuously engage with diverse communities and gather feedback to ensure that your sonic identity remains relevant and inclusive.



~ The Sonic Brandmasters ChromeOrange Media

"Sound gives you sensory input that is not limited by field of vision."

~ Seth Horowitz Author of The Universal Sense: How Hearing Shapes the Mind



#### DIFFERENTIATION THROUGH SONIC BRAND EXPERIENCES

According to *The CMO Club*, nearly **75**% of CMOs cite short-term company commercial growth as their most pressing priority, above longer-term goals.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, *Harvard Business Review* reports that branding is one of the top concerns of CEOs and CMOs, who are under immense pressure to drive sustainable outcomes.<sup>2</sup> As a result, smart companies are investing more than ever in branding initiatives, particularly online. But with most B2B and B2C brands using virtually the same branding tools, executives are seeing less advantage as a result of their efforts—if they're realizing any advantage at all. The focus should shift to sound as an integral part of the customer experience.

A deeper understanding of how consumers are affected by music is important for anyone who leads a business where the experience offered is becoming a main differentiating factor, especially when you stop to consider that 71% of consumers expect companies to deliver personalized brand interactions, and 76% become frustrated when that doesn't happen.<sup>1</sup>

With our increasingly sound-enabled media environment, the strategic use of sound can play an important role in delivering a consistent experience that feels personal to customers. According to market intelligence expert Stacey Lynn Schulman, when a consumer hears a signature sound, their brain creates an image, puts the sound in context, and makes it *very personal*.<sup>2</sup> That personal experience plants the roots of brand preference and loyalty.

That's unsuprising, as sound resonates with customers as per their perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, preferences, expectations, and, of course, emotions. Therefore, creating an emotional tie to a brand though sonic-enabled customer experiences is aligned with the kind of personalization today's consumers demand. Sound is, after all, a deeply individual experience—the very definition of personalization. And that makes personalization and connection through sound a much easier win.

Sonic identity can be a valuable tool for creating enduring brand differentiation, as well. By engaging with sound, brands have the opportunity to build upon the relationship of trust they have with customers and connect on a closer, more **human** level. Even in the B2B sector, the heart of a company is its **people**, including those who make organizational buying decisions. They are, after all, **human**, subject to human expectations, preferences, and emotions.

A sonic branding campaign that strategically and consistently uses the brand's unique sonic assets across all customer touchpoints has the ability to influence consumer behavior throughout the stages of the buyer decision-making and purchasing processes. Those touchpoints exist in both B<sub>2</sub>C and B<sub>2</sub>B settings.



73% of consumers say experience is a deciding factor when making purchasing decisions.

~ Zippia 25 Must-Know Customer Experience Statistics [2023]

> "Hearing's share in brand building is **41%**"

~ Martin Lindstrom Brand Sense: Sensory Secrets Behind the Stuff We Buy Just as brand messaging and visual brand expressions are infused at each touchpoint, sonic brand expressions must also be applied across the full gamut of customer touchpoints for a total consumer sensory brand experience.

But it's not a just a musical sting, sound effect, or catchy jingle that brands need. Rather, what they need is a sound-driven emotional connection with customers—with **no visuals**. It's similar to the way a single image or word can evoke customer emotion, just much more powerful and intense because sound lives longer in human memory than do visuals or words on a page or screen. That's why sound builds brand equity and brand loyalty.

That's the real power of sonic branding and sonic brand storytelling.

#### SOUND IMPACTS CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND ATTENTION

While music and sound have the power to evoke emotion, it and can also change consumer behavior. With its melody, tempo, pitch, rhythm, volume, and lyrics, music is one of the most powerful stimulating components in advertising. Yet, its power is often underestimated by corporate and advertising executives that exclude it from their business strategies. For over four decades, a variety of experiments have been conducted that have led to the conclusion that music has a significant influence on consumer behavior. Besides its entertainment function, music psychologically impacts consumers by tapping into their emotions, memories, associations, lifestyle, mood, and culture.

Music grabs attention through auditory senses and communicates context for visual imaging. It can also serve as audio aid to increase recall and memorability of product information.

Josh Rabinowitz, advertising music expert and part-time music professor at the New School told the Music & Advertising Conference in 2010, **"Science has proven we can filter out images. Music tends to stick; that's how we learned the ABCs."**<sup>2</sup>

With the rise of advanced technology and "device attention economy," more brands have started to realize that a chosen audio track could determine whether or not a consumer would enjoy the audio experience of a commercial, event, video or social media story until the very end, stop paying attention in the middle, or worse, get irritated by it.

While most sonic branding agencies are skilled at developing a four- or five-note audio moniker to serve as sonic brand identity, precious few are led by experts in marketing, advertising, branding, content strategy, brand messaging, consumer behavior, and business strategy. This comprehensive gamut of expertise is equally as important as music and audio expertise in the development of sonic brands and sonic brand storytelling that result in a high level of continued consumer engagement.



The right sound and music can spark a

**39%** increase in repeat

business.

32-41% of consumers say they react "negatively" or "very negatively"

to silence.<sup>3</sup>

1 https://tinyurl.com/4ftwybr4 2 https://tinyurl.com/bdk3xatz 3 https://tinyurl.com/3fehwhdv Why is this so important? Because visuals alone don't get consumers' lasting attention. Today's average consumer moves very quickly, scrolling between apps, social channels, and websites—all within just a few seconds. Much of the time, they switch between devices, as well, or use them simultaneously. Therefore, ad campaigns, no matter how good, have a hard time getting and keeping consumer attention. Only one in five consumers remembers a brand after seeing an ad, according to Lumen Research. In fact, Lumen's attention data consistently shows that only 30% of viewable ads are actually seen.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the budget for the other 70% of ads that are not seen is **wasted**.

And what about silence? A startling 32-41% of consumers say they react "negatively" or "very negatively" to silence.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE GOAL: INTEGRATED SONIC BRAND EXPERIENCE CAMPAIGN

It is important to scrutinize all potential sonic touchpoints to ensure that the sonic brand is congruous with the overall image of the company and the brand, and that all brand assets--sonic, visual and textual—form one coherent brand voice. Product noises, videos, the messages people hear when they're on hold on telephone systems and the voice and music used for interactive voice response (IVR) call answering systems—even the heard when customers visit your office or store should be carefully selected. Internal communications—employee touchpoints—should also be populated with the sonic brand.

There may even be certain sounds customers already equate with a brand. For automobile manufacturers, every part of every vehicle makes a sound, from the doors opening and closing to seat belt engagement and disengagement to seat adjustment to the opening and closing of the glove compartment, every sound needs to be considered as part of the brand's overall soundscape and should be woven into all brand advertising music.

The same holds true for other products, as well—everything from sofa beds to potato chips to shampoo. Combining a sonic brand identity and custom "fit" music with sounds that customers already equate with a brand is the sonic equivalent of a print ad that combines a visual logo with a fit image and a compelling narrative. Put the right sonic presentation together with the right visual expression, and you've got a highly-engaging and effective integrated brand experience campaign.

Relying on existing music, or, worse yet, cookie-cutter "stock music" as a shortcut way of including audio in a branding strategy might work short-term in an ad campaign, but it won't create any long-term emotional connection or identifiability for a brand. Failure to implement a consistent audio strategy equates to the forfeiture of the ability to build upon emotional connections made with customers and to evolve the customer experience over time.



screen is audio. We're seeing that start to evolve as a key strategic thought process for brands and agencies."

"The fourth

~John Trimble, CRO at Pandora, on how brands need to rethink their audio strategy

Emotionally connected customers account for

37% of revenue and spend twice as much annually.

The New Science of Customer Emotions Harvard Business Review

1 https://tinyurl.com/yc7m2ttx 2 https://tinyurl.com/3fehwhdv Some brands are taking it a step further. A few years ago, a *Brandingmag* article declared, "Take a look at M&M's new 'Bite Sized Beats' campaign, a brand initiative where users are encouraged to create a piece of music using the 3rd-party platform Incredibox for a chance to be featured in an M&M's commercial. Users choose which musical loops they want to use and build their own song. This is an innovative way to tap into people's love for music creation and stimulate audience engagement, while developing anticipation for the advertisement. Bite Size Beats is a clear consideration for the changing user landscape by putting the brand in the user's hands." <sup>1</sup>

Nintendo is another brand that understands the value of signature brand sound. They began planting the roots of an audio user experience back when they created the Super Mario Brother's "coin" sound. Nintendo's audio DNA, which is deeply intertwined within their console navigation's sonic experiences, has been deployed very consistently over time. When the Wii was introduced in 2006, Nintendo presented its first console, designed as a home entertainment system, and with it came a fresh update of bubbly, sine wave-based menu music and sounds that felt new and yet authentically Nintendo.

This aesthetic has deep roots in early Nintendo games, having been primarily composed by Kazumi Totaka, who has worked on main-entry console titles for Nintendo since 1992. What's so effective about the Nintendo sound is "the consistency across home entertainment systems, handheld consoles, and now even their first foray into mobile with Mario Run (2016).

While it has evolved, the same textures established in the original Wii menu can be heard in the menus for the 3DS, the Wii U, the Nintendo Switch, and even the recent modernization of the Nintendo Super SNES Classic. Thus, interacting with a Nintendo product feels familiar to anyone who has experienced any of their other products over the decades. This may explain why Nintendo has some of the most loyal fans in all of gaming. Nintento's sonic strategy is the perfect example of thinking beyond just an isolated sonic logo, product sound, or any piece of advertising music, whether it be custom, existing or stock.

And here's why it matters: The individual audio elements can no longer be put in hierarchical order because each one on its own no longer has the power to fuel customer brand perception and experience. They must be used in conjunction with one another—like parts of a well-oiled machine. And they must be viewed as component parts of the brand's audio infrastructure, where the user experience—surrounded by the complete soundscape—is the emphasis, and the sonic logo, music, and other ambient sounds are members of the brand's audio family.

"Cookie cutters are for baking, not for branding." ~David Brier

Best-selling author of Brand Intervention

"In sonic brand storytelling, we have to find the sweet spot the bridge between brand narratives and the desired customer emotion. That's where demand takes root." ~Susan Gaide

Chief Brand Strategist, ChromeOrange Media

1 https://tinyurl.com/5n7at697



#### WHAT IF YOU'RE NOT A LARGE, ESTABLISHED JUMBO BRAND?

Brands at all levels can benefit from sonic branding and sonic brand storytelling. At the most basic level, sound is another tool in the arsenal of brand assets. Just as fonts, colors and graphic elements are selected for brand communications, sounds that support the brand should become the first building blocks in the brand's audio infrastructure.

The important thing for smaller brands to understand is where sound can play a part in amplifying, extending and personalizing the customer experience. Brand managers should begin by identifying moments along the buyer's journey where sound can have the greatest impact:

- Cues designed to acknowledge a completed purchase transaction (such as what is heard when a purchase transaction is completed via Visa's "Tap and Pay")
- Sound that drives a response (like a tone that tells a buyer to remove their credit card from a magnetic card reader)
- In- app sounds
- Cues that guide or drive a retail or entertainment experience
- Cues that standardize the start of any form of content

It takes only 0.146 seconds for a human being to hear and interpret a sound.<sup>1</sup> This makes sound a direct avenue to a customer's emotions and can lead to increased brand recognition and recall. Watch our explainer video below to see how this works:



" People are completely plugged in while commuting to work...or just walking down the street...which presents an opportunity for your brand to stand out with sound."

~**Juliette Ferraro**, Thomasnet

"People will skip ads but they won't skip experiences." ~Melissa Barnes



1 https://t.ly/DMAXD

#### **CONCLUSION**

By tapping into the power of sound, marketers can transcend language barriers and connect with audiences on a deeper, subconscious level. That's why marketing is becoming more audible, necessitating proprietary brand sound in order to stand out in a sea of competitors. The strongest brands offer a sonic-enabled sensory connection that enhances consumer trust and personalizes their experience with the brand.

A study conducted by Forrester Research revealed that every \$1 invested in user experience brings \$100 in return.<sup>1</sup> That's an impressive return on investment! And when you stop to consider that 72% of customers say they'll tell 6 other people about their good experience with a brand,<sup>2</sup> investing in sonic branding and a sonic brand strategy is a sound investment for *all* brands—B2C and B2B. Clearly, then, the next big memorable customer experience campaign might just *sound* more memorable than it looks.

1 https://tinyurl.com/mwdxz9wk 2 https://tinyurl.com/4h37h8wm

Ready to increase the value of your brand by differentiating it in a meaningful way that ignites customer emotions?

#### Schedule a complimentary consultation with our Sonic Brandmasters.

ChromeOrange Media is New York's premier sonic branding agency dedicated to empowering small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) to thrive alongside industry giants. We specialize in the strategic use of sound to tell truly unique, memorable brand stories that resonate deeply, powerfully and meaningfully with audiences and ignite their emotions at every stage of the buying journey. Discover how we can elevate your SMB brand to new heights of competitiveness through sonic brand storytelling.

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"Close to 79% of people recognize brands by their sound." ~ Mindcog