



# CHROMEORANGE MEDIA

## 2020 REPORT



# SONIC BOOM

The use  
of audio  
expressions  
to deliver  
enduring  
brand UX

A white paper from the **ChromeOrange Media** sonic brand UX design team.

## BRANDING AND ADVERTISING STATISTICS

According to PPC Protect, the average consumer is now estimated to encounter 6,000 to 10,000 ads every single day.<sup>1</sup> During the last decade, a huge rise in digital advertising has had a direct impact on how many advertisements the average person is exposed to in a given day. Studies estimate that of the aforementioned 5000+ messages, consumers are only aware of about 100 of them, and of those, only a handful truly make an impression on them. There is, however, a communication tool that has the ability to reach and engage target audiences like no other: **sound**.

When you stop to think about it, what better way is there to heighten a brand's message and experience than to incorporate music and sound in it? Sound and music are scientifically linked to memory, so the most effective and efficient way to make your brand memorable is to pair it with appropriate sound and music. But, interesting, very few advertisements incorporate *custom* advertising music, or, more importantly, a unique **sonic brand identifier**.

According to a 2017 article on Campaignlive.com, "Brands with music that fit their brand identity are 96% more likely to be recalled than those with non-fit music or no music at all." Moreover, "Respondents are 24% more likely to buy a product with music that they recall, like, and understand."

Better yet, develop a sonic strategy around your brand—with the user experience in mind—and use it consistently and constantly as part of an audio and sound strategy—and watch your brand popularity rise.

## SONIC BRANDING

Some marketers believe that sonic branding has become passé. Such is not the case, and nor should it be. However, sonic branding alone cannot catapult your brand to the pinnacle of market share gains. Ideally, sonic brands are best implemented as part of a **unified sonic strategy** that supports the user experience with the brand. The use of sound and audio by brands has expanded well past advertising—it now centers around the consumer ("user") experience. It's the reason why Audi has recorded every sound that emanates from every one of their vehicles. They infuse those sounds in all consumer "touchpoints," thereby transforming those touchpoints into **user experiences**.

Companies like Audi understand that a marketing communications paradigm shift has occurred in recent years, and that, clearly, the consumer is king. Every user interaction with a brand should *sound* like that brand and should set the tone for what it feels like to own the brand, whether it's a luxury vehicle or a bag of potato chips.

Audio—including **sonic identifiers** ("logos")—should work together in perfect synchronicity to create brand differentiation **and** an **interactive user experience**. Communicating with consumers isn't about opening up a monologue about your brand, it's about opening a dialogue with consumers. And, for better or for worse, consumers

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MediaVillage estimates audio marketing expenditure in the U.S. to exceed

**\$20 billion**  
in 2020

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Brands with music that fit their brand identity are

**96%**

more likely to be recalled than those with non-fit music

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<sup>1</sup> Carr, S. (2020). How Many Ads Do We See A Day In 2020? Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/y29mm3xm>



are in control. Sonic branding strategies must be centered not around a brand's perception of themselves, but rather around the **user's** perception of the brand. Audio—including **sonic logos**—must create memorable, interactive experiences with consumers.

A **sonic brand** (a/k/a audio brand, audio logo, sonic logo) employs audio cues—referred to as audio logos—to reinforce brand identity and trigger immediate brand recall. It's the brand experience starting point, not the ultimate destination.

Similar to visual identity, **sonic branding** uses specific characteristics that, when combined, make up the whole audio brand identity. The three parts that make up an audio brand are **voice** (or instrument), **music**, and **ambient sounds**. These three elements make up the entire human auditory experience.

Sonic branding brings meaning and continuity to your messaging so that what a consumer hears in relation to your brand always **sounds** like your brand. It gives your brand the opportunity to make every touchpoint a relationship builder and create brand association with specific values.

But sonic branding is not new. **Sonic branding** and its cousin, the “jingle,” have been part of marketing and advertising since before the dawn of television. While the prevalence of jingles has declined over the years and is increasingly being replaced by the use of pre-recorded music (with or without modified lyrics to fit the brand), sonic branding has grown in terms of its use and its application across consumer **touchpoints**. The internet, mobile devices and technologies like “tap and pay” have increased the number of touchpoints for every brand—all of the places in which consumers interact with a brand. As such, the use of sound—sonic branding in particular—across all touchpoints has increased in importance.

Moreover, consumers' growing preference for technologies like voice search on their smartphones and voice-activated technologies such as Google Home and Amazon's Alexa have put a new importance on the “marriage” between brands and sound, with the emphasis being on distinctiveness for differentiation.

## THE POWER OF AUDITORY

Sound affects mood, triggers emotional response, and has an impact on buying behavior. A **sonic brand** can:

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

But memory is just one of the many benefits music and sound have to offer. From creating moving messages to sending out calls-of-action, music has the ability to dramatically change the way in which consumers **experience** an advertisement.

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# 97%

of brand managers believe that music can strengthen their brand

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# 51%

of consumers said they were more likely to consider the brand after exposure to the **brand's** sonic anthem

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## PERCEPTION

Sound is a powerful vehicle for behavior and perception. Auditory neural pathways are less complex than their visual counterpart, which means people react to sound **10 to 100 times faster** than sight. Whether it's the sound of a snake or the wind in the grass, your ears will know it before your eyes do.

Research has shown that music can affect our behavior, our purchases—even our perception of flavor, scent, and texture. Music and sound also have the power to convey meaning to help us create a narrative, including narratives about products. We can change the storyline of something simply by changing the musical score. But the musical score should be tailored to the brand and custom-composed and scalable for application in a wide variety of settings. From phone on hold to trade shows to annual company conventions to internal communications, custom-branded sound, into which the sonic logo has been infused, has the power to create powerful and meaningful emotional connections with consumers **and** stakeholders.

Sound can also provide sonic "instructions" or important signals. E-mail indications and successful transaction sounds (think "tap and pay") are perfect examples. Used in this way, ambient sound can improve email, website, ecommerce, and bricks-and-mortar **user experiences**.

## THE RIGHT SOUND MATTERS

**Sonic branding** is not, however, a process whereby a composer arbitrarily assigns notes as a brand's sonic identifier. Careful attention must be paid to ensure that the short mnemonic (ideally three to five notes) matches the personality and mood of the brand and serves to sonically tell the brand's story.

Moreover, the mnemonic must be capable of transcending geographic—and, therefore, cultural—divides. As such, the right notes and the right sound of those notes matters. Mastercard learned that when their original audio brand lacked appeal in certain countries. They ultimately developed one core melody with 20 different variations. In time, they expect to have over 200 variations.

Mastercard uses a **multi-touchpoint sonic brand strategy**: First, the audio logo is featured in their ads for television and online channels. Second, the melody is offered as a ringtone for consumers to download and use. Third, it is a brief sound that users hear as a payment confirmation when they conduct a purchase transaction.

## STORYTELLING, EMOTION AND GLOBAL APPEAL

The key to motivating a consumer to buy is to connect the brand to their **emotions**. Music and sound are instinctively ingrained in our minds from birth. Without our knowing it, sound influences us every day. A well-designed **sonic brand identity** helps project a brand's image. It immediately tells an audience who you are and what you stand for, which makes it one of the most powerful **brand storytelling** tools.

The most incredible part of sonic branding is that audio logos are universally recognizable. For example, if you listen to a radio commercial in another country and

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In a recent study,

**43%**

of consumers had a more positive impression of a brand after exposure to the **brand's** sonic anthem.

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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."

Sound can make your brand as powerful as its visual logo and packaging. It's the audio expression of your brand's values, attributes, and personality. And, it's scalable: It can become the thematic basis for custom advertising music or a "jingle" associated with your brand for a consistent, congruous **sonic branding campaign**.

## RELEVANCE OF SONIC BRANDING: B2C AND B2B MARKETS

- Urban consumers are now exposed to more than **5,000 advertising messages** and brand exposures per day.
- Based on a study conducted by Leicester University, UK in 2008, companies that match their brand to music are **96% more likely** to be remembered.
- According to The Sounds Like Branding™ report, a study conducted by Heartbeats International in the latter part of the last decade, **97% of brand managers** at top global brands think music can strengthen their brands.
- The right sound/music, consistently utilized across the most important brand touchpoints can effectively improve the **brand's image** and reinforce the desired brand values in both **B2C and B2B** environments.

According to Harvard Business Review, branding is one of the top concerns of CEOs and CMOs, and smart firms are investing as much as ever on branding initiatives—even online. But with most B2B and B2C organizations using virtually the same branding tools, they're seeing less advantage as a result of their efforts—if they're realizing any advantage at all. A deeper understanding of how consumers are affected by music is important for anyone who runs a business where the experience offered is becoming a main differentiating factor. There has been one powerful branding tool that has been generally overlooked—or perhaps undervalued—by most marketers: **sound**. With our increasingly sound-enabled media environment, the strategic use of sound can play an important role in positively differentiating a product or service, enhancing recall, creating preference, building trust, and even increasing sales.

The right music can hoist a B2B brand out of the shadows and propel it to the top of the league. In particular, the use of sound, music and sonic identities is beginning to emerge in the pharmaceutical, healthcare and technology sectors where there lies an opportunity to use sound to not only grow a brand, but to also solidify the trust that people have in the company and its brands.

Sonic identity can be a valuable tool for distinguishing a company/brand, both to their industry sector and to the public. By engaging with sound, B2B brands and industrial marketers have the opportunity to build upon the relationship of trust they have with customers and connect on a closer, more human level. After all, at the heart of any B2B company are people—including the people who make buying decisions on behalf of the organization.

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Consumers  
are

**46%**

more likely to  
choose your  
brand over the  
competition  
if you  
associate  
recognizable  
sound  
with it.

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Music  
makes  
almost

**4**

out of

**10**

stay longer  
in a  
business  
in a public  
place.

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A **sonic branding campaign** strategically and consistently uses your brand's unique audio identifier across all brand touchpoints—all the places or points of contact where a customer interacts with a brand. It can be thought of—and is referred to in the sonic branding field—as the brand's "audio DNA." Touchpoints have the ability to influence consumer behavior, all throughout the five stages of the buyer purchasing decision-making process: Problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and action, and post-purchase behavior. Touchpoints exist in both B2B and B2C settings.

**Sonic branding** revolves around the creation of an entire auditory "language" for the brand based on its essence, values, promise, personality and consumer experience — a language that gets expressed across all touchpoints—website, blog, apps, trade shows, television and radio, retail, purchase transactions, and even the product itself. Just as the text and visual brand expression is infused at each touchpoint, the sonic expressions must also be applied across all touchpoints for a total consumer sensory experience with the brand. Bringing a consistent sound to all of the brand's marketing communications in the same way a graphic logo creates a consistent visual makes logical marketing sense.

But it's not a just a musical sting, sound effect, or catchy jingle that brands need—rather, what they need is an instant emotional connection with the consumer, with no visuals. Just as with a single image, a single sound or a group of sounds can evoke an emotion. In doing so, music builds **brand equity** and promotes consumer **brand loyalty**. That's the real power of sonic branding.

While music and sound have the power to evoke emotion, can they actually change consumer behavior? The answer is **YES**. A survey conducted by Heartbeats International found that appreciated music makes almost 4 out of 10 stay longer in a business in a public place. Further, 31% of all people return, 21% recommend the business to others, and 14% buy more. In other words, music can positively impact a company's bottom line.

Want to reach the Millennial and Gen-Z demographics? According to Heartbeat International's study, 50% of 16-24-year-old shoppers stay longer when music they like is played in-store. And, perhaps even more importantly, 39% said that hearing music they like would make them revisit a business. So... music has the ability to induce an almost 40% increase in the lifeblood of every company: **repeat business**. That's the kind of **return on investment** that no company can afford to ignore.

By contrast, the wrong music or sound—particularly music and sound that is irritating—makes 44% of 16-24- year-olds leave a business. What's more, after they leave, **38% won't come back**. This means that companies must work with a sonic branding agency that can produce sound and music that will fit the brand and keep consumers engaged. Branding expertise is equally important as music and audio expertise in the development of sonic brands and advertising music that results in that continued engagement.

Visuals alone won't get consumers' attention. Only 12% of supposedly "viewable" ads are actually noticed by consumers, according to Lumen Research.<sup>2</sup> And what about silence? A startling 32-41% say they would react "negatively" or "very negatively" to silence.

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The right  
sound and  
music can  
spark a

**39%**

increase  
in repeat  
business

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<sup>2</sup> WARC (2018). Anatomy of effectiveness. Retrieved from <https://tinurl.com/vx#75fw5>



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 your customers already equate with your 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.

The same holds true for other products, as well—everything from sofabeds to potato chips to shampoo. Combining a sonic logo and custom “fit” music with sounds that customers already equate with your 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, “stock music” as a shortcut method of including audio in a branding strategy may work, short-term, in an ad campaign, but it won't create any long-term emotional connection or identifiability for a brand. Failure to instantiate a consistent audio strategy equates to the forfeiture of the ability to build upon emotional connections made with users and to evolve the user experience over time.

Some brands are taking it a step further. In an October 2017 article, *Brandingmag* talked about how “Some brands are opening their eyes to active users and getting wise to the audio experience of their brand. 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>3</sup>

The article went on to point out that “Nintendo began planting the roots of an audio user experience back when they created the Super Mario Brother's “coin” sound. Nintendo's audio DNA is deeply intertwined within their console navigation sound experiences and has been deployed very consistently. 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.”<sup>3</sup>

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

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**“The fourth screen is audio.**

**We're seeing that start to evolve as a key strategic thought process for brands and agencies.”**

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

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**“People will skip ads, but they won't skip experiences”**

~Melissa Barnes,  
Head of Global Brands at Twitter

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Wii menu can be heard in the menus for the 3DS, the Wii U, the Nintendo Switch, and even the recent modernization of the Super Nintendo the SNES Classic. Interacting with a Nintendo product will feel 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.”<sup>3</sup>

This is the power of thinking beyond just an isolated sonic logo, product sound, or any piece of advertising music, whether it be custom, existing or stock. These individual audio elements can no longer be put in hierarchical order because each one on its own no longer has the power to fuel brand perception and experience. They must be used in conjunction with one another—like parts of a well-oiled machine. They must be viewed as component parts of the brand's **audio infrastructure**, where the **user experience**—surrounded by the complete **audioscape**—is the emphasis, and the sonic logo, music, and other ambient sounds are members of the brand's **audio “family.”**

If sonic branding means creating a sonic logo or a brand theme and sporadically placing it in ads, then sonic branding is indeed dead. Brand audio can no longer be a series of stagnant, myopic assets because now, more than ever, users are coming to expect a **multi-sensory experience** that they, in essence, control. Brands that want to engage with the active users of tomorrow look toward the **UX** of audio. As *Brandingmag* points out, it's not about making your brand louder. It's about scoring your brand like a *Star Wars* movie.

And, then there's the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. As “contactless commerce” is the buzzword of the moment for omnichannel marketers, touchless audio access to online functionality is on the rise. The pandemic is also expanding the brand gap because, in environment where brands are hurting, consumers fall back to brands that speak to them more deeply and reduce risk.<sup>4</sup>

If entrepreneurs and innovators need some good examples of audio branding and UX to get motivated, they need look no further than the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau—the convention and tourism marketing organization for the city of Atlanta. In 2013, they set out to develop an **audio strategy** that would give Atlanta a competitive edge over other cities vying for visitors. They created Atlanta's audio DNA—a sonic style guide for the brand—that incorporates everything from choral voices and drumline beats to jazz and blues elements and hip hop. From there they produced music scores specific to a series of videos, each targeted to different regional or international markets.

While it is hard to attribute Atlanta's tourism growth directly to that sonic strategy, by 2018, Atlanta was generating 56 million annual visitors and \$16 billion in tourism spending. In 2013, prior to the implementation of their new sonic strategy, those figures clocked in at 45 million and \$2.8 billion, respectively. So, it is arguable that there is a clear line to be drawn between the implementation of the sonic strategy and the increase in tourism in Atlanta.

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“We have entered into the earbud era. People are completely plugged in while commuting to work, sipping on their favorite coffee, or just walking down the street. This means that there are millions of people listening, which presents an opportunity for your company to stand out with sound.”

~Juliette Ferraro, Thomasnet<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Garcia, D. (2017). Sonic Branding Is Dead, Enter the Audio User Experience. Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/yb5uyplz>

<sup>4</sup> Dietz, A. (2020). Marketing Next – the rising sound of innovation marketing. Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/yxsrz5gz>

<sup>5</sup> Ferraro, J. (2018). Branding with Sound and Music. Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/yynwx7h>





## BUILDING THE BRAND AUDIO USER EXPERIENCE

So, what if you're not a large city or an established jumbo brand? Brands at all levels can benefit from sonic branding and a sonic strategy. At the most basic level, audio is another tool in the arsenal of brand assets. Just as fonts, colors and graphic treatments are selected for brand communications, sounds that support the brand can also be implemented as the first building block in the brand's audio infrastructure.

The important thing for smaller brands is to understand where sound can play a part in amplifying and extending the **user experience**. Begin by identifying moments along the buyer's journey where sound can have the greatest impact. Applications can include cues designed to acknowledge a completed purchase transaction (such as what is heard when a purchase transaction is completed via "tap and pay"), drive a response (like a tone that tells a buyer to remove their credit card from a magnetic card reader), full product integration like apps, cues that guide or drive a retail/entertainment experience, or cues that standardize the start of any form of content.

Investing in audio branding and a sonic strategy for innovation marketing is a sound investment. In fact, Spiralytics has found that every \$1 invested in user experience brings \$100 in return. That's an impressive return on investment. And, since 72% of customers will tell six other people about their good user experience with your brand,<sup>6</sup> there is no better time than **now** to include an audio user experience in **your** brand marketing.

Moreover, marketing competition is becoming more audible, so all brands need a proprietary sound in order to stand out. The strongest brands offer a sensory connection that enhances trust, yet only a handful of companies have an instantly-recognizable sound connected to their brands. Considering that there are around 45,000 large companies listed on the stock market, and most own 5 to 10 brands, that's about 225,000 to 450,000 brands that have a long way to go before they build their sonic brand equity.

Companies routinely use logos, colors, and other imagery as standard markers of their brand identity. But humans perceive sound faster than they see, taste, smell or touch. In fact, in terms of intensity, the human aural range is 10,000 times greater than is the human visual range. This physiological reality means that the next big memorable campaign might **sound** more memorable than it looks.

<sup>6</sup> Wardini, J. (2020). Powerful UX Statistics to Change How You View User Experience. Retrieved from <https://www.spiralytics.com/blog/powerful-ux-statistics/>

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**"Music  
is the  
shorthand  
of  
emotion."**

~Leo Tolstoy

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**Ready to take the next step to increase the value of your brand?  
Call us to find out how we can help.**

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Headquartered in New York, **ChromeOrange Media** is a sonic brand UX design firm, with an emphasis on sonic branding, audio UX strategy, and brand messaging.

You can find us on the web at [www.chromeorangemedia.com](http://www.chromeorangemedia.com).

