



# BRANDS GO POP

---

The music revolution in branded communications

# INTRODUCTION

While over a decade of disruption has decimated traditional revenue models for music artists, it's amplified their personal power and, in turn, served up new means of making money.

As marketing noise increases, so too does the appetite of brands for working with recording talent as an effective means of rising above the din. Musicians can cut-through and connect with consumers on two fronts – with both their creative product and the fame that comes with it – making them doubly appealing as potential commercial partners.

This year, Cannes Lions launches Lions Entertainment – a two-day specialist event within the Festival week which will explore those partnerships because, increasingly, they're at the forefront of unskippable creativity – the kind that is moving away from 'branded content' and becoming 'branded culture'.

Ahead of the Festival, we brought together a group of key players in this space to discuss the issues and opportunities.

**Steve Ackerman (SA)**, Managing Director, Somethin' Else; **Fred Bolza (FB)**, VP Strategy, Sony Entertainment; **Julz Baldwin (JB)**, Deputy Head of Music, Most Radicalist Black Sheep Music and **Pete Beeney (PB)**, Global Agency Lead, Spotify joined us to talk about what's striking a chord with fans and where the industry is missing a beat.

# SELLING OUT HAS BECOME SELLING IN

In the not too distant past, affiliations between artists and brands tended to be transactional – paid endorsements, sponsorship of events, or straightforward ‘sync’ (licensing a piece of music for use in commercial media) – which didn’t always sit comfortably with purist audiences. But the working relationship has matured in a way it largely hasn’t with other celebrities (like athletes or even actors) and a more sophisticated, engaging creative output is now expected, and embraced, by a new generation of fans.

**JB:** “Five or ten years ago (the strategy) was, ‘let’s make a campaign and put some music on it, let’s try and get the single to number one, maybe let’s do a little bit of cross-promotional activity off the back of it’. Now it’s very much, ‘let’s make music the centre of the campaign.’”

**FB:** “We’re moving to an always-on, conversational way of engaging people. That’s quite a tectonic shift which moves us into a place where the thing that cuts through is culture. You will hear agencies talking about how they need to transcend advertising and make culture...we’re making culture in the music industry, it’s

what artists do. Throw into that mix social media, everyone always-on, the very nature of what is a piece of content and how it becomes entertainment and how it connects and engages with a fan and binds them together, and that opens up a whole new series of possibilities.”

While money still talks in these partnerships, the relationship now also relies on a value exchange. Because artists have direct access to their committed, passionate fans, and brands can offer extensive inroads into new markets and untapped demographics, the dynamic has changed. The result is more collaborative endeavours that deliver genuine mutual benefit, and far greater acceptance by audiences.

**FB:** “When Jay Z speaks to Samsung, it’s a brand speaking to a brand, and they need each other’s equity, not each other’s products. If we can find ways in which their equities, as opposed to their tactical objectives, come together, then you have the opportunity to make culture.”

---

“When Jay Z speaks to Samsung, it’s a brand speaking to a brand, and they need each other’s equity, not each other’s products. If we can find ways in which their equities, as opposed to their tactical objectives, come together, then you have the opportunity to make culture.”

---

**FRED BOLZA**

VP Strategy, Sony  
Entertainment

# NOT EVERYONE IS WORKING IN HARMONY

The days of being 'cool by association' are gone. The credibility of musicians can no longer be instantly conferred on a brand by placing a product on or around them, and such efforts are instantly dismissed by marketing-savvy fans. Misfires typically occur when brands prioritise their needs or 'bolt-on' a band to their marketing strategy, rather than integrating them.

**SA:** "Putting a brand at the heart of the music conversation – that's where clients sometimes go wrong. They're not authentic...the audience can spot that fakeness, and in the end that does a disservice to the brand."

The engagement between brands and music is a delicate balance of the strategic, commercial, creative and cultural values of both parties. The most successful campaigns have a clear purpose and understand the needs of all stakeholders, but are ultimately audience-centric.

**SA:** "It goes back to starting with the audience and coming from the viewpoint of what they want and what we can create that would appeal to them, as opposed to the objectives of the brand or artist, which are not always the same thing as what the audience will embrace."

**FB:** "It's about understanding what might work for [the audience] and then making sure that that is also relevant to brand and band. Because it's in the intersection of those three things that you get something relevant."

---

“Putting a brand at the heart of the music conversation – that’s where clients sometimes go wrong. They’re not authentic... the audience can spot that fakeness, and in the end that does a disservice to the brand.”

---

**STEVE ACKERMAN**

Managing Director,  
Somethin’ Else



# FINDING THE RIGHT FIT AND MEASURING IT

While the output of successful partnerships is art, what increasingly drives them is science.

In the past, relationships were forged largely based on gut instinct or personal preference. But the by-product of platform proliferation is a wealth of meaningful data allowing bands and brands to make informed decisions before getting into bed with each other and helping ensure alignment and audience relevance.

**JB:** “Clients are taking on board the value of stats that come from places like Spotify and Shazam, looking at those in terms of the audience that they’re trying to get to and which acts they can bring on board to target them most effectively.”

**PB:** “When you try to solicit an opinion, often times it comes with a lot of baggage. What someone says they’re into will often be quite divergent from what they’re really into, but the actual consumption behaviour tells a much more accurate story. If you’re using that information to craft messages and to work out where the best fit is... you’re working from something that’s a lot truer.”

Technology is also helping increase effectiveness and measurability. The social media engagement of a fan-base can amplify a campaign and make its success quantifiable, but only if brands are prepared to accept an element of unpredictability.

**SA:** “If you create a campaign that the artist really loves, you get all that extra value of them getting behind it through their own social media channels. Which throws up a lot of extra opportunities, but also potentially a lot of scary moments for the client because there could be things that are out of their control.”

# WHAT THE FUTURE SOUNDS LIKE

Sponsorship of the music industry has been estimated to have grown by 23% since 2010 in the US alone . But while partnerships are increasing in popularity for the reasons outlined above, there's plenty of room for development.

**SA:** "Some great work is being done, but there's a huge opportunity for brands to be much more sophisticated in the way they use music, and to take a more audience-focussed approach to the way that they build campaigns and the way that they align themselves with artists."

The consensus is that, overall, the industry still treats the role of music as a postscript.

**PB:** "It's being underrepresented – it's often an afterthought... The responsibility is on [the industry's] shoulders to take it more seriously and to have a far longer-term horizon on the work that they want to do instead of it being from campaign to campaign. If music is being listened to far more often than it used to, because technology has allowed that to happen, then we need to be taking it far more

seriously than we have done in the past because the consumers that we're trying to reach are."

Helping to point the way forward in this regard is a new award launched in tandem with Lions Entertainment this year. The Entertainment Lions for Music celebrate examples of recording artists or platforms being innovatively leveraged to communicate with consumers – recognition of creative excellence in brand/band collaborations and acknowledgement of the architects behind it.

**FB:** "It's a chance for us to advocate for music... It's an opportunity for us to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with other creative industries that are much better at celebrating their creativity. We celebrate our artist's creativity, but actually we've got some brilliant people that work around them, so the ability to raise our game by working in a different league is very valuable to us."



---

“Some great work is being done, but there’s a huge opportunity for brands to be much more sophisticated in the way they use music, and to take a more audience-focussed approach to the way that they build campaigns and the way that they align themselves with artists.”

---

**STEVE ACKERMAN**

Managing Director,  
Somethin’ Else



To see the roundtable discussion in full, watch **'Brands Go Pop: The Music Revolution in Branded Communications'** on the **Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity** YouTube channel.

**Lions Entertainment  
23-34 June, Cannes, France**

Dedicated to 'Unskippable creativity', Lions Entertainment will debut this June, lifting the lid on the art of turning content into culture. It will take a 360-degree look at the branded entertainment sphere, bringing together:

- The brands doing it best
- The agencies creating it
- The platforms spreading it
- The celebrities bringing it to life.

More information on what to expect can be found at:

**[www.canneslions.com/lions\\_entertainment](http://www.canneslions.com/lions_entertainment)**

---

i Brands and Bands: The Value Exchange, Frukt, pg 5.  
 ii When Brands Meet Bands: the mutual benefits of music partnerships, The Guardian, 14 October 2015.  
 iii Ibid