

**Disrupción Records Marketing & PR Manager  
(Reflective Paper)**

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The following work is a reflection of the goals, results, and future steps of the Culminating Experience Project related to the position of the Marketing & PR Manager at Berklee's own independent record label Disrupción Records, for the academic year of 2018-2019.

## **Culminating Experience Project Summary**

Disrupción Record is an independent record label associated with Berklee College of Music in Valencia Spain. Its main characteristic is the rotating management formed by students of the Global Entertainment and Music Business master's program at the time. In other words, every year, Disrupción's team changes bringing a new group of students into the management positions in order to maintain it as a Culminating Experience. Every year, also, the division of responsibilities changes because there is no defined structure for the label just yet since it was established a few years ago and it is an ever changing project.

This year, the division of responsibilities included a Marketing & PR Manager whose responsibilities included but were not limited to assisting in the rebranding of the label, assisting the rest of the team with advertising and promotion, and planning and executing the release campaigns of the different projects signed by the A&R team.

At the same time, Disrupción being such a young label and having the particularity of being managed by different people every year had several key issues the team that took over this year wanted to tackle in order to guarantee the survival of the project and facilitate a smoother transition for the following teams. In this sense, everything that was done was documented in detail and all the projects taken were intentionally signed with the idea of revising them in the future and creating a network that could be useful for the label.

## **Expectations & Results**

It is important to divide the results in two separate areas in order to analyze the results and the level of satisfaction of the Marketing & PR Manager in comparison to the initial expectations.

### **A. Rebranding & Restructuring of the Label**

In regards to the topic of rebranding and restructuring, the goals set at the beginning of the year were completed successfully. The brand of Disrupción was highly associated with projects that were Jazz-based with no long-term goals or long live expectancies. At the same time, the internal perception of the label by Berklee was not as positive and many departments would refuse to work with the team initially which was a very big obstacle the marketing department wanted to tackle. The image of the label was definitely one of the priorities for this Culminating Project.

After spending a year working on the rebranding, the marketing department is actually very satisfied of the results. Thanks to the A&R team, the first couple of non-Berklee acts were signed this year allowing Disrupción to be taken seriously outside of the Berklee community. At the same time, with the right storyline, this was an aspect that allowed the team to sell Disrupción as a legitimate institution within the Berklee community and now students and other organizations on campus are willing to collaborate with the project.

A new logo, a new website, better social media management, higher quality signings, more promotional efforts, the participation at MUSAICO, the radio promotion, the Women in Music album, and others were the key to generate a new image for Disrupción.

However, not every goal was achieved in this regards. Many setbacks coming from issues with several releases and the distribution department and also some live performances and the

events departments brought up some complaints and questions from both the Berklee and the outside community that had to be managed by the PR side of the department. In this sense, the manager had to do some damage control and in occasion was sent as an emissary to handle situations with diplomacy in order to fix some issues.

Overall, the assessment of the evolution of the rebranding is quite positive, and although here is still some work to do and the following team should keep that in mind, there way has been paved for them. On the other hand, the restructuring of the label has undergone quite well, there are now four different “imprints” (more like categories) that allow departments to place artists in them in order to determine the level of involvement of each department. Disrupción being the umbrella imprint involves every department, EVLVE involves more the A&R and Marketing departments since there is a lot of artist development to be done, Common Chord involves distribution mostly since classical and jazz projects are the main objective of it, and finally Fusión which is the new sync platform involves some Marketing and mostly the newly established sync team.

Although the team is still trying to understand the internal workings of the restructuring, with time it will become easier to pick different team members for different tasks depending on the imprint in which the artist is placed in and this will ultimately help allocate the resources more efficiently.

## **B. Release Campaigns**

The other side of the responsibilities of the Marketing & PR Manager is planning and executing the release campaigns of the different project signed. This process had both its positives and its negatives as well as a learning curve for the manager. The more releases were

taken on, the more complex the campaigns became and the bigger the network became which allowed for the releases to have more outlets.

At the beginning, the release campaigns were basic and included social media calendars, blog submissions and word of mouth advertising using the personal networks of the team and the artists themselves, however, as time passed, the blog submissions tuned out to be positive and a reputation for Disrupción acts was built which made more blogs take on more of the releasees for features, reviews, and playlisting. At the same time, more media outlets such as radio started to take the label more seriously and it would be easier for artists to get interviews and airplay. Also some artists could use the leverage of having a label backing their release to get more gigs and shows for promotion.

Although the campaigns gave artists visibility and promotion, some of the projects licensed did way better than others in terms of streams and downloads. The artists who managed to breakthrough and have more streams for example, were artists that had released music previously and already had a “buzz” or somewhat of a fanbase that the campaigns could appeal to. For the artists that were releasing or re-releasing their first materials, the campaigns did not have that much impact if any at all because there was no audience to market to and creating an audience from scratch with the short time of the license and the extremely low monetary resources was a relatively impossible task.

Because of this, one of the biggest challenges was managing the expectations of every artist at the stage they were. The A&R team was helpful at times managing said expectations but for the most part, the messenger for the bad news was the marketing department. A pattern soon became clear, artists releasing their first materials expected the label to do most of the heavy lifting whereas the artists with more experience understood the limitations of the label and were

willing to push the project as much as needed and in the end, one can only work as hard as the artists.

### **C. Marketing & PR Manager Position**

Although the position and its responsibilities were clearly defined in the job description and are fairly separated in labels where the structure has been previously set, at Disrupción Records, due to its size and the specific team that took over this year, the Marketing & PR Manager saw the opportunity to assist on multiple teams including the A&R department at the very beginning and Fusión as soon as their structure was set. From doing management for artists without teams, to assisting in the redaction of contracts, and overseeing projects as project manager, to finding new artists to sign and new briefs for the sync department, the Marketing & PR position quickly went from just overseeing campaigns to having a hand on every department.

At the same time, to an extent, I was the only point of contact for artists since I am always involved in every team, however this created some friction with the A&R's who are supposed to be the first point of contact because artists tended to bypass their A&R's and immediately reach out to me when anything went wrong.

In terms of expectations, the position definitely delivered what was promised in regards to working with artists but it could have been out of need from the team or out of my personal over-achiever personality to reach over and get involved with so many parts of the label, however, I strongly believe that had this not happened the way it did, Disrupción wouldn't have had as many releases as it did this year.

## Next Steps

Although the Culminating Experience presentations and deliverables are due by mid-June, and in theory, all projects should be finished by then, Disrupción is the exception to this rule. Especially the Marketing & PR Manager's specific job. As per the contracts signed with some of the artists, there are releases that will keep on happening until August and on top of that, the transition for the next team will take place in November, making this the longest-running project at Berklee this year.

There are multiple next steps that the Marketing & PR Manager will have to take on. First, the preparation for the following release campaigns and the media reach out that it involves. Then, the compiling of all results of said campaigns as the transition approaches. Finally, the transition itself which will probably go beyond just handing down the materials and the contact book that was put together but will also require a fair bit of consultancy for whoever takes on the position next.

In regards to campaigns, Disrupción still has 3 singles to be released by Autumn Jones, 2 more singles to be released by RETROVYZOR an EP to be released by rosewood. and an EP to be release by Mayani Swave. Said campaigns are being prepared and will run smoothly through the summer as scheduled. However, in order for said campaigns to have a better chance at success, artists and their teams will need to be fully committed to take over some parts of the operation since the Disrupción team would be operating with a minimum of personnel.

The transition is being planned and several resources will be passed down to the next team in order for them to be able to start signing artists right away instead of having to worry about the restructuring of the label as a whole. This will be finished by August in order to hand it



to the academic advisor of the project for them to incorporate it into the job description to recruit the next manager.

## **Contribution to the Discipline**

There are very few successful independent record labels associated with colleges, universities, and other academic institutions related to music. Most of them run as semester-long projects to help students get record practicum experiences, some of them have a longer duration and are ultimately overseen by faculty and staff instead of students. Disrupción Records is one of the few if not the only one of its kind where students are not only recruited to work and get experience but they also have the freedom of creating the structure and running the show themselves without necessarily having more than just an advisor to oversee the progress.

In this sense, Disrupción allows fresh, young minds, to experiment with artist, campaigns, and projects freely because of the safe space provided by the words “student-run label”. Having this title allowed the team to reach out to a wide network of industry professionals to get mentorship and to show the innovative projects that were being developed inside, including the different imprints, especially Fusión, the MUSAICO-Disrupción collaboration, and multiple others.

The compilation of all reports from every department are a “how to” guide for independent labels and DIY artists trying to enter the industry. Everything from distribution, to A&R, label management, copyright, events, promotion, PR, marketing, publishing, management, and sync were covered in one way or another throughout this year and everyone at Disrupción has a different take and perspective on it. Having all of this documented and being able to refer back to these documents as a guide on how to or how not to do things is extremely valuable.

At the same time, Disrupción has the particularity of working on extremely low budget which has been both a constrain but also an opportunity to be creative and push boundaries to make things happen and get sponsorships and partnerships such as the one made through Mayani Swave's management company and the Ministry of Tourism of Dominican Republic to be able to fly him over to perform at MUSAICO. All of this again has been documented and people in our same situation are going to be able to refer to it and hopefully make better decisions and achieve the next level of success.

Beyond this, Disrupción has not only grown the network of Berklee by using it as an introductory card for projects but it has also allowed for recognition across the board in the international music industry. Speaking from the perspective of the Marketing & PR Manager, at different conference such as The Great Escape and MIDEM, there were multiple opportunities to present projects like Fusión at the International Sync Summit at MIDEM and various artists like RETROVYZOR who has been touring around Europe and Latin America carrying the Berklee flag.

## **Impact on the Student**

From a personal point of view, the impact that Disrupción has had on me as the Marketing & PR Manager (and more) has been invaluable. From the skills that I have gained to the network that I have grown and the future project that I have taken on thanks to the label.

Working in Disrupción not only allowed me to narrow down the scope of what I want my career to be in the music industry but it also helped me create connections with professionals in the industry that have served me well and I will keep for the rest of my career. Thanks to my job at the label, I have realized how much I really enjoy managing artists, since there were so many artists that we worked with that had no team backing them up, the A&R's and me took on the

responsibility of doing this for several artists and it was an experience that opened up my eyes to a new world of possibilities where I could be useful to artists in a different way than I had experienced before and that every success had so much work backing it up that the long-term goals are what I would like to focus on in my career. As a matter of fact, Disrupción's recent signing Autumn Jones has signed a management contract with two of us and we are now moving from her label representatives to her managers and we will continue working with her in the future.

Aside from this, and also thanks to my personality, I took over many responsibilities when I saw departments were lacking or they needed assistance. Because of this, I have been able to speak about my experience with a lot of different jobs and I have been able to reach out to people in the industry and have informed conversations and job offers from multiple sites who are looking for people with several years of experience in different departments.

Disrupción Records for me was more than just a student project to suffice the requirements of the Culminating Experience, it turned into a full-time year-long internship that I can now leverage as experience in the record business which added onto my masters has allowed me to present myself in a different way in the eyes of recruiters and interviewers.

## **Recommendations**

Finally, to close this reflection, it is necessary to revisit some of the issues this year's team faced in order for the next team to be aware of them and find quick solutions.

- In regards to signing artists, it is important to remember that creating the initial buzz for people's music needs to come organically, a fanbase cannot be created from scratch if the music is not there, if the quality of the music is not good enough and simply if there are no followers to capitalize on. Running campaigns without any support of fans is

extremely hard which is why, for an indie record label signing artists for such a short period of time, that buzz is essential.

- Now that Disrupción has a better image within Berklee, maybe the school will support the project just as much as they support other student-run projects. In this sense, do not hesitate to request budget and to advertise using the channels facilitated by the marketing department.
- There needs to be more connections between the Valencia and the Boston campus which is why the current team attempted to reach out to artists and other resources like the Boston radio station. However, from the marketing and the strategic stand point, it is essential that these channels are opened since there is a lot of talent in Boston that could work with Disrupción and they are the main connection the team has to the US.
- In regards to campaigns, always keep in mind the digital space which will turn out to be the best tool to reach out to international audiences, also the live events and the multiple “out of the box” type of campaigns which can be prepared in advance with the help of the artist team.
- Most importantly, the following teams need to understand that Disrupción is a commitment that will go beyond every other Culminating Experience as it is a record label that competes in the marketplace with other labels of all sizes. Because of this, there needs to be an open line of communication and a constant flow of information from all departments. The A&R team needs to communicate the creative direction to the Marketing team who needs to work jointly with the Distribution team which has a direct bridge with the A&R team as well. The label manager should be in constant communication with all departments and they should intervene as soon as they see a

problem that will delay releases or affect artists in any way. This advice comes from experience as the leadership in the label this year was not strong and the direction and goals were not set officially. This had a subsequent impact on the way every department operated, from the A&R not overseeing the projects, to the Distribution and Project management department not having control over the releases and deadlines to the Marketing team putting together campaigns last minute to comply with the lack of organization that the label had as a whole.