

Culminating Experience

Reflective Paper



DISRUPCIÓN RECORDS



Berklee Valencia

Calen Mims

15 June 2019

Culminating Experience Reflective Paper

My experience as Product Manager for Disrupción Records

Summary

My experience with Disrupción Records as Product Manager was an adventure of a lifetime. Working as an independent record label supported by Berklee College of Music, comprised by a core team of seven individuals from five different countries, and working with 28 artists from around the globe for international exposure with distribution through the Orchard under Sony Music afforded so many opportunities that I could have never imagined. We built a catalogue of artists and spread them across three newly implemented imprints: EVLVE, Common Chord, and Disrupción; and the label continues to expand with new signings and new releases. Originally formed in 2013, this was the first year we, the label, worked with artists outside the Berklee College of Music program, participated in the Berklee College of Music Valencia Campus “Musaico” live music festival, and added a synchronisation department, Fusión. The label has amassed nearly 30,000 streams globally this year and collaborated with multiple student projects such as Women in Music and student run labels Red Wave Records, El Capitán Records, Strawberry Sounds Records, and Virgo Records.

Results

Ultimately declaring my culminating experience a resounding success, there were a number of ways the project did and did not align with my initial expectations. First off, I was not expecting to hold such a technical role as product manager and personally inputting all of the metadata through our distributor, the Orchard. This is not really my strong suit. I work best as more of a “big picture” type of individual with

a focus on client relations and team operations. I envisioned more of an experience involving making deals with clients, negotiating contracts, creating brand partnerships, raising capital for the label, keeping the team motivated and coming up with new and fresh ways to get the label to stand out amidst a big and tough industry, but this was not the case. Eventually, I was given the opportunity to try my hand at signing a new artist which I succeeded at, but there were many ideas I had for the label that I still plan on doing in the future, but was unable to accomplish through Disrupción because I was constantly constrained by and heavily involved in working with the distributor.

Focusing more on the positive, there were so many ways the culminating experience met and surpassed my expectations. I had the honor of working with an incredible group of unbelievably talented individuals from various backgrounds all striving to change the world through music, believing in the artists and in fostering and growing them, not viewing them as merely cash machines. There was an ethical aspect to the label that I admired, and everyone involved truly loved music. It was fascinating to learn about my fellow teammates and their experiences, their history, what inspires them, the kind of music they like. All incredible and interesting individuals with a shared excitement of being apart of something great.

I was afforded the good fortune of working directly with some of the artists as well, getting to watch them work in the studio and giving small inputs if they asked. I got to experience magic of making music and the joy of releasing the new music into the world. I was blessed to share the artist's happiness by dropping their long-awaited and precious track in the digital world that they had planned so long for, freeing their art to society, an audible symbol of their hard work and dedication, and at the end of it all, I got to be one of the first to congratulate them on a job well done.

It is truly fulfilling to be a part of this process, of creating something from nothing, of contributing culture to the human race through intellectual property. One can honestly say that there is nothing like it.

Process

There are multiple processes to address in the section: the selection, the label, and the individual. Initially, the selection of team was somewhat confusing in regards to the composition of the label expanding from three personnel to six. The previous team was only three personnel, and I was under the assumption it was going to remain the same this year. Receiving the nomination of product manager was an honor, but my true desire was for the actual label manager. Regardless, I was grateful to be a part of the incredible group of talented students chosen and it was a very important learning lesson and moment for me to develop, but it did take a moment for me to adjust my expectations in a different role. Additionally, amidst the Berklee environment that prides itself on being diverse and inclusive, I was surprised to find that I was the only male selected amongst the applicants. It is not a major issue, and I pride myself on maintaining utmost professionalism and an ability to work with anyone, but it was unexpected.

It took some time for a process to develop at the record label as a whole and individually, also. As a label, we were all relatively new to the scene and there was no specific direction or written process for the label to run on. In short, the mentality was grab it and run with it. Basically, one could break it down to “you two guys find and develop the music, you two promote it and market it through social media, and you make sure it gets uploaded properly.” The great part about this state is the freedom involved in completing your role, but strangely in the initial stages there was still a very narrow scope as far as staying in your role. One of the joys of being in an

independent label, especially the smaller ones, is that everyone has a job, yes, but everything is relatively flexible to make it work. One ends up using their skillset in every department for the benefit of the label and to succeed.

At the onset, Disrupción was very adamant on a “no cross-pollination policy”. As the product manager, I was only to deal with items pertaining to distribution (whatever those may be), and nothing else. A few times I offered a few potential artists that were interested in being signed, but they were quickly shut down by A&R because they did not find them first. Additionally, I offered to help to negotiate contracts with identified artists that were to be signed, but was firmly instructed to focus on managing the (at the time non-existent) product. Later on down the line, as everyone’s nerves calmed a bit and the team began forming closer ties, people began loosening up and sharing job responsibilities, but it did take some time. The most important takeaway is that we began functioning more efficiently once everyone started working together and playing off of each other’s strengths, helping on another when one would fall short. It was a beautiful moment when this started happening.

Individually, the majority of my process was learned by trial and error. I did as much research possible in dealing with the Orchard platform, but there was no real standard operating procedure written out, video tutorial or something of the sort outside of a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section. I made many simple mistakes that could have been prevented with some sort of instruction on how to use the platform.

Next step

There are two significant next steps that need to be accomplished in order to properly complete this experience: turnover successfully to the next team, and apply

the developed skillset and newly acquired knowledge after the program by starting my own label. It is imperative for the team to leave Disrupción Records better than we found it and set the new group for victory. We owe it to all the handwork that has been accomplished thus far after overcoming unfavourable odds, but most of all we owe it to the artists that have trusted us with their work. We must ensure they continue to prosper and get the recognition and financial returns that they deserve. It reflects poorly on Berklee College of Music Valencia campus, as well as student representatives of the Global Entertainment and Music Business program, but most of all as human beings pursuing what is good and right. Sure, we are a small student run independent record label, but the art is real and the artists we are working with are real people. We owe it to them.

Secondly, the next step for me is standing up my own independent record label. More to follow on this aspect, but the experiences gained through Disrupción and the skills developed, in combination with the network created through the program have honed my abilities and I can now say I know what it takes to start-up a successful label. There are infinite factors involved with sustaining the label and achieving longevity (as my advisor would inform me), but I feel that I have the foundation necessary for achieving a positive trajectory and completed the appropriate case studies available to not repeat common mistakes.

Contribution to the discipline and profession

There is a direct contribution from the culminating experience to the discipline and profession. Not only was I afforded the opportunity to work in the actual music industry under the fostering care of Berklee College of Music Valencia Campus and direction of an experienced industry professional, I will also be able to take these skills developed and experiences formed, and apply them directly in the industry.

Looking over job applications there are multiple product manager positions available that request prior experience and knowledge. I now have that experience and knowledge.

Impact on the student completing the work

My work with Disrupción Records has had a profound impact on me as an individual and ever bigger impact on my perspective on the music industry, ranging from technical skills such as uploading metadata with the Orchard ensuring every meticulous detail and file format is correct, as well emotional intelligence skills by working with people that I have never collaborated with before. Transitioning from my previous career in the United States Navy as an officer, there was a professionalism required at all times, but due to the combat roles and potential life-endangering situations, it was a traditionally male-dominant work environment and generally very brunt and to-the-point culture as a result. Being hand-selected by the program director to work in an absolutely different type of working environment that I was accustomed to ended up being the best thing that could have happened to me. Understanding how a different type of individual works, what drives them, what motivates them, what makes them succeed is an invaluable skill that will pay great dividends for my future career. There were times of great struggle, of course, and I would feel as if I did not fit in or was accepted, but these fears and doubts eventually subsided and were quickly overcome and I now feel fully capable through my experiences at Disrupción to work in any sort of environment and achieve positive and ethical results.

Other

Even before applying to Berklee College of Music's graduate program in Valencia, Spain I had long since desired to pursue a career centered upon or

tangential to music. Up until this time the music had always been on the side, a hobby, a means of enjoyment between my main priority, or as others have told me “real work”. Due to my career at the time as a naval officer and prior to committing to the Global Entertainment and Music Business program, my focus on music was the scraps of free time in between work or deployments or training cycles. It was not an ideal scenario and took much effort to overcome the exhaustion to play a show or rehearse a set or record in the studio after being out on mission for three weeks straight and working continual 18-20 hour days, but there was always something energizing about the music, the sound, the vibrations. It was something I always looked forward to and brought me much joy moving my very soul. Why then should I not follow this passion as my life’s work? I decided to take the leap and apply to Berklee.

After much contemplation and close examination on what exactly it was that I wanted to do in the music industry I decided that running my own independent record label would be the best fit, and my time at Berklee has re-emphasized and encouraged this idea. I had much experience in leadership, management, and operations from my previous job and these skills were directly transferable to the music industry, in fact a rarity. Amidst the chaotic channels of the entertainment sector that is the music industry, there is a greatest need for transparency and honesty, for those striving for good to usher in a new regime giving the artists the recognition they deserve. Looking back on my culminating experience, I now have the experiences, tools, network, and skills to join this movement.