

Berklee College of Music – Valencia Campus
Master of Arts in Global Entertainment & Music Business
Class of 2014



21 and Unsigned:
A Study on How to Launch the Career of a Recording Artist

Samuel J. PISANO

JURY

Research Advisor

Benjamin COSTANTINI
Program Faculty
Conference Manager, Reed Midem

Members

Gwendolyn ALSTON
Program Faculty
Co-founder/President, Moca Media SL

Emilien MOYON
Program Director
Curator, TedxBerkleeValencia

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Part 1: The Guide to Modern A&R	6
Chapter 1: What is Modern A&R?	6
Chapter 2: Interviews with Industry Executives	7
Part 2: Case Study: The Wallace Project	13
Chapter 3: Getting Started	14
Chapter 4: Building and Online & Social Media Presence	16
Chapter 5: Creating Content	19
Part 3: Results	21
Chapter 6: Content Feedback	22
Chapter 7: Online & Social Media Data	24
Conclusion	30

Introduction

A&R, or Artists and Repertoire, is widely considered one of the most attractive departments at a music company. Historically, these were the gatekeepers: the individuals responsible for signing and developing new talent for a label. These roles were very scarce.

John Hammond is considered to be one of the most important A&R executives in 20th century popular music. After spending the early part of his career as a record producer, Hammond expanded his efforts from a more traditional role inside the studio to perform the duties now associated with talent scouts. By selecting the right songs and He was influential the careers of many notable artists such as Count Basie, Bob Dylan, Billie Holiday, Robert Johnson and Bruce Springsteen. In addition to signing these acts to the label, Hammond played a role in finding the right material for these individuals to record.¹

Hammond also accomplished things in music from a cultural standpoint. Inspired by the music of African Americans, he had committed much of his time and efforts to working in



John Hammond Pictured with Aretha Franklin in 1959

the jazz, blues and spiritual genres.² A man born from privilege, the heir to a New York family fortune, Hammond was determined to help mend race relations in the United States at the time. He helped create opportunities for artists, such as Aretha Franklin, to have very successful pop careers. Although Hammond cannot be fully crediting for “discovering” this roster of talented musicians, he was influential in integrating black singers and instrumentalists into society by being very hands on in regards to their artist development.³

¹ From George Howard, “Getting Signed!: An Insider’s Guide to the Record Industry”

² From Dunstan Prial, “The Producer: John Hammond & the Soul of American Music

³ From Lee Mergner, “The Producer: John Hammond & the Soul of American Music

Since Hammond left his mark in the profession, the role of A&R has evolved over the latter half of the twentieth century. In this time period, many great music executives have made contributions that have helped change the music industry forever:

Berry Gordy Jr.

Much like John Hammond, Berry Gordy Jr. was at the forefront of the movement to integrate the popular music scene in the United States. He was known as a prominent black citizen in Detroit as his father had created many opportunities for black people through the automobile industry there. Gordy Jr. reinvested some profits and founded Motown Records. He is considered one of the “original A&R record executives” for his contributions, with a career spanning more than six decades. His successful acts include Marvin Gaye, The Temptations, The Jackson Five and many more huge acts of the era.⁴



Clive Davis



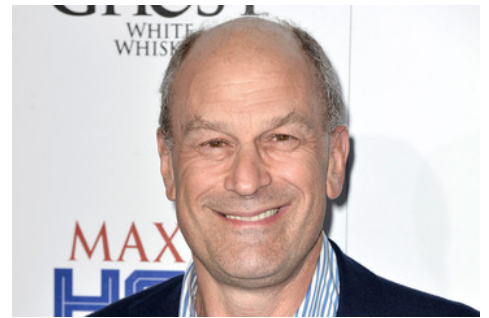
Clive Davis was the president of five different major record labels: Columbia Records, Arista Records, RCA Records, J Records, and Sony Music after the merger with BMG. He has signed superstar talents like Kelly Clarkson, Whitney Houston, Alicia Keys, and Barry Manilow. Clive Davis is also a member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and has won five Grammy Awards.⁵

⁴ From Steve Kurutz, “Berry Gordy Jr. Artist Biography”

⁵ From Steve Kurutz, “Clive Davis Artist Biography”

Barry Weis

Barry Weiss, founder and former CEO of Jive Records, built the most powerful, influential and long lasting record label in history signing dozens of notable acts in the hip hop, R&B, and pop music scenes, including A Tribe Called Quest, KRS-One, Too Short, R. Kelly, Aaliyah, Brittany Spears, N'Sync and the Backstreet Boys. ⁶



Antonio "LA" Reid



LA Reid is one of the most successful A&R executives in the modern era of the music industry. He has spent a long career in large roles as the CEO of Island Def Jam Music Group and Epic Records. He has signed some of today's biggest stars like Usher, Kanye West, Rihanna, and many others. ⁷

While traditionally, the most prominent A&R executives were musicians, usually composers, arrangers, producers, and songwriters, top A&R's today are rarely known for their musical talents and abilities. American composer Richard Niles had the following quote about the state of the profession:

When the multinational conglomerates took over and brought all the independent record labels, the record labels were no longer owned by music loving entrepreneurs. You don't have guys like [American music producer] Jerry Wexler running record companies now. What you've got now is huge multinational companies where most of their A&R staff are businessmen. They're people who look at music from the standpoint of marketing, not from the standpoint of music and talent. They will say, "Go out and get me anything that's popular now." ⁸

⁶ From Dan Charnas, "The 25 Best A&R's in Hip-Hop History"

⁷ From Bill Lamb, "LA Reid Artist Biography"

⁸ From Kimbal Bouwman Interview with Richard Niles

Part One: The Guide to Modern A&R

Chapter One - What is Modern A&R?

Although it is safe to assume that a decline in music sales in recent years has contributed to a decrease in the number of musicians fulfilling these roles, several changes to the music industry over the past few decades have impacted the art of A&R.

Advances in music technology have removed the barriers to entry for musicians. In previous eras of the music industry, artists heavily depended on labels to cover recording costs in studios with high-end equipment. Today's musician, however, can invest in a relatively inexpensive home recording setup and still achieve a comparable sound quality. Additionally, companies like Tunecore and CD Baby provide distribution services to independent artists so that their music can be put in places like iTunes, Amazon, Spotify, and Google Play - all at an affordable cost.

As a result, up-and-coming artists no longer pursue a record deal by waiting outside a label office to try to hand their demo to an A&R executive. A&R representatives and scouts are also not spending much of their time sifting through boxes of CD's from hopeful bands and singers. Because artists have a much easier time making their music visible, the A&R's job when seeking talent includes paying attention to the activity online.

Because of the access to the Internet, many people can create blogs, websites, or other mediums to consume and discuss music directly online with their peers. Popular bloggers and "tastemakers" have influence on what is trendy. Many A&R's today take note of the large audience these groups can reach and are able to determine which types of artists or style of music is relevant in the community.

In short, a good A&R executive understands that with respect to budgets and current commercial trends, it is important to seek out and try to sign and develop talent that has the ability to reach an audience with their recordings, live performance, and online engagement.

Chapter Two – Interviews with Industry Executives

To receive more qualitative content for my research, I interviewed five current music industry executives. Each of the following professionals participated in a brief phone interview or an email correspondence with certain questions I posed about how the A&R role is performed today.

February 3, 2014

Interview with Pete Ganbarg– Executive Vice President / Head of A&R at Atlantic Records

SP: What are some things that Atlantic Records has been doing to be successful and a leader in recorded music today?

PG: We are constantly searching for the best talent to sign and develop at our label. We've had some success with Bruno [Mars] obviously and now he's performing the Super Bowl. It all comes down to our commitment as a team to help an artist reach his or her potential.



SP: What are you looking for in the types of artists that you sign to Atlantic?

PG: Hard workers. People that don't feel a sense of entitlement. Our goal is to work with a roster of the most motivated and talented artists possible, regardless of genre.

SP: I'm an aspiring A&R and artist manager. Do you have any advice on how to get into this profession today?

PG: Get an internship is the obvious way. Most companies hire from within. Otherwise, don't wait around for someone to tell you to be an A&R, start doing it and managing an artist now so that we will come to you.

April 25, 2014

Interview with Sean Goulding-Booking Agent at The Agency Group - London, UK

SP: How did you get started in the industry?

SG: I was a drummer at Berklee College of Music in Boston. I played a lot of gigs and met a lot of people because of it. Then I started looking for jobs and interned at a booking agency before realizing it was something that I enjoyed.



SP: How does A&R play into your role as a booking agent?

SG: It seems like everyone at a label, an agency, or a publisher has to at least be familiar with A&R. It is the one department that everyone can point fingers at if the record doesn't sell. At my company, I am developing my skills in A&R because it helps make decisions the types of artists we represent.

SP: What are some things that you listen for when you critique a demo?

SG: I pay attention to song structure, lyrics, and production. There are some A&R's that can hear a song and see its potential even if the recording is rough. I try to listen for potential and assess what kind of success we can have with an artist and whether or not we want to represent them at the time.

May 23, 2014

Interview with Aaron Husband – Director of A&R for Mach 1 Entertainment

SP: What are your main responsibilities in your day-to-day role as Director of A&R?

AH: Well, my main responsibilities here at Mach 1 is the Director of A&R. The other A&R's answer to me and I send the material they send me on to the next guy if I believe it is what we are looking for. I speak with high up managers, music executives, major artists, labels, etc. on a daily basis. I also go out and find talent to sign to the company. My life is pretty much busy every single day!



SP: Would you mind sharing whom a few of your recent clients are?

AH: I don't manage anyone at all. I solely seek talent and find what sounds good and unique. My boss, Eddie Galan, manages some really great talent. They are O.K.I.M., Paige Thomas, Nick Tangorra, Meg Delacy, and Kiersey Clemons. I would suggest for you to go and look them up when you have time!

SP: Many consider A&R to be an art form. What are some key things that make a great A&R?

AH: The main keys to being a great A&R are being able to work with anyone, networking skills, and being able to speak with high-ranking people in the music industry. Make some amazing connections and have great researching skills to add everything else.

SP: What are some key things that you listen for when you are doing song critiques?

AH: The few things that I look for in a record are great production, vocals, and most importantly if the songwriting makes sense. You can always have amazing vocals but if the song doesn't make sense then what are we really listening to? Production is a huge part because it brings the whole song together. Top-notch songwriting, production, mixing, and vocals will grab my attention very fast.

SP: I understand that you have experience in social media marketing. Does this play into your role as an A&R at all and how much does an artist's online activity affect a signing?

AH: Yes, social media is a huge part in finding music and talent. I don't just have people submit to me - I go out and find the next talent. An artist has to be very active on all social media sites to be found and create a buzz or fan base. Social media is one of the huge tools that are making artists rich nowadays.

SP: Data analytics has become an important aspect of the music industry (i.e. the strategic partnership between Warner Music and Shazaam, Spotify's deal with Next Big Sound, etc.). How relevant is data analysis in your decisions to sign/manage artist?

AH: Yes, I believe so because A&R's love to see how artists are doing number-wise. People want solid proof of how an artist is doing: how much they are selling, who is buying, where are they buying the music, and how consistent they are. So in the end, it is a huge tool for potentially signing an artist.

SP: Lastly, do you have any advice for aspiring artists in today's era of the music industry?

AH: Here are a few things:

- Just be yourself and never act like someone else.
- Never spam anyone with your work. First, build a relationship with that person and talk to them. Then sending your material to them won't be a problem.
- Don't underachieve.
- Don't assume someone is downing how good you are just because they are criticizing your material. They are there to help.
- Lastly, build your brand and never sell yourself short!

June 10, 2014

Interview with Ryan Leslie – Producer, CEO/Founder of Next Selection Lifestyle Group

SP: First off, thanks for doing this interview. I've been a fan of your music for a while.

RL: Yeah, it says here [in my Renegade directory] that you've been rockin' with me since '10. Appreciate it, no problem.

SP: So, I'm an aspiring A&R and artist manager. What are some tools and skills you think that someone like me needs to survive in this industry?



RL: Well, first of all you've gotta be very self-motivated. It's a hard business and no one is really going to pick you up if you fall. You've got to be willing to grind it out through hard times and keep working towards your goal.

Today is a lot different from even ten years ago. Of course, so many people are trying to make it in music, so you want to have an advantage. It's good that you're in school. To be successful you need to be good at more than one thing. Having knowledge of management, marketing, how to run software like Pro Tools or Logic X, or even Photoshop, Final Cut – being skilled in several areas allow you to create more opportunities for yourself and for whoever you represent.

SP: What do you think an artist needs to get started on his or her career?

RL: A clear understanding of what they want to achieve. You've got to have the talent of course, but being realistic of what you can accomplish in a year and setting goals to achieve certain things is important.

Also, be a professional. Today's artists have to treat themselves as a business. Get a website up and running, take care of your Twitter, your YouTube, and most importantly, know you're rights. That's why I'm independent now because there are so many opportunities you can create for yourself if you stay informed.

SP: Do you have any other advice for people aspiring to be an A&R or manager?

RL: For aspiring A&R's, managers – just get out there and do it. The best way to get experience in your field is to dive in. We're all entrepreneurs in this industry. Don't be afraid to take risks.

June 11, 2014

Interview with Kristy Warren – Administrative Assistant & A&R for Lyric House Publishing

SP: What are your main responsibilities in your day-to-day role at Lyric House Publishing?

KW: A lot my job requires providing administrative support to our President and founder, Jessica Cole. In terms of A&R, I listen to demos that we receive via email and take note of songs or artists that I think we may be interested in following up with.



SP: What are some things that you listen for when you critique a demo?

KW: Production. It used to be that A&R's didn't mind listening to a low quality recording because they thought they might be able to hear a "diamond in the rough." Nowadays, it's cheap to get a microphone, plug in to your computer, and get a pretty good sound. Your demo will be tossed out if it's not at least semi-decent.

In terms of the actual song, I listen for a couple things. Vocals, for one, because it gives us an idea of what we can do with a track. Having a story-telling element is maybe the most important because if you have a song people can relate to it will sell.

SP: If you were managing an artist and trying to launch their career, what do you think is most important today from an A&R standpoint?

KW: The music! Great music is great music. Before an artist even thinks about [having] a career, it is important that he or she has a good musical product if they want any sort of longevity in this business.

SP: What is your advice for the artists trying to enter the business today?

KW: Remember that it's not all about selling records anymore. Touring is a very big part of an artist's income, as well as publishing. Being that I work for an independent publisher, I know first hand that it is very possible to make a living and earn revenue through publishing as opportunities with film, commercials, video games, etc. are all options. Of course, as I said before, it all comes down to the music.

Part Two: The Wallace Project

A&R is an acquired skill, and like any craft, one needs to practice and perfect the art in order to be good at it. Berklee Valencia visiting artist and A&R specialist Sean C (Sean Cane) stated that "If you want to be an A&R, be an A&R NOW. Don't wait for someone else to hire you and make you do the job." After completing many hours of independent research through articles, books, videos, and the scheduled interviews, I was very eager to put my knowledge to the test. This resulted in what I have called "The Wallace Project."

Wallace is an American R&B singer from Beaufort, North Carolina. He cites Ne-Yo and John Legend as two of his major influences, claiming that the "sense of poetic romance in their lyrics" is something that he really enjoys but thinks has been missing in contemporary R&B/urban pop records. My relationship with this artist is unique for the simple reason that – he's me! I am 21 years old, and surprisingly to me at least, unsigned.

All joking aside, I know plenty of people older than me that have serious aspirations to make it in music. I will always have a love for being a creator, but I find it very rewarding to be able to sign and develop talent, helping aspiring artists achieve their dreams. Fortunately, a future in A&R provides the opportunity to balance career development with my passion for writing records and producing.

Although I like to think I have a very diverse palate of musical tastes, I particularly enjoy R&B, pop and hip hop songs. Because I would primarily like to complete A&R work for urban artists, I realized that developing the brand of Wallace would be the perfect opportunity to gain experience working with this profile musician. Since I am the artist, I have more flexibility to frequently use trial and error while learning on the job. Acting as both an A&R and the personal manager of Wallace, I soon realized that there were several things that I needed to research further in terms of the marketing, promotion, and overall branding of the artist. My goal from this project was to better understand the needs of an artist in today's era of the music industry and use this knowledge to perform at a higher level when I enter the workforce.

Chapter Three – Getting Started

Selecting a Name

One of the first and most important decisions an artist or a group will make is choosing a name. For about two years, I have been using Wallace as my stage persona because it is my last name on my original birth certificate. Although the name has no real importance in regards to my personal life growing up, it is still a part of my past and serves as a barrier between Wallace and the real me.

Despite having a name, I had not previously conducted a name search to confirm its availability. I spent some time on websites such as “www.artistdirect.com” and “www.bandreg.com.” I also used the U.S. Government agency site “www.uspto.gov.” Fortunately, I did not find any other registered artists or entities using the name “Wallace” as a mononym like me.

Market Research

After exploring major R&B and urban pop artists that have had recent and sustained success, I identified two main markets that Wallace should enter: the United States and the United Kingdom. Singers such as Ne-Yo, Usher, John Legend, Trey Songz, and Robin Thicke have had considerable accomplishments in both the charts and radio of these locations. The competition in the U.S. is challenging because around five to six acts dominate the male R&B scene. Numerous other singers trickle in and out of the charts, but there are only a handful of artists that have consistent longevity. In the U.K., these same top artists typically have success because of the common English language, but there is potential to compete there with a thriving U.K. independent music scene.

The market for commercial R&B music is a younger demographic, ranging from 18-34 years of age. This benefits Wallace as an artist because he is in this age range and therefore can create relevant subject matter. However, with album sales at an all-time low, R&B is one of the genres that is being most affected. For example, soul singer Alicia Keys and her Sony promotional team ran a large campaign to promote her 2012 album *Girl on Fire*.

Despite their efforts, Keys has sold approximately 669,000 copies to date. When her 2007 record *As I Am* hit the shelves, Keys sold 742,000 units in the first week. In reality, the R&B music scene is a singles market. This is typical in the U.S., but I would argue that the decline in success for the genre is related to the lack of a focused target audience, with many promotional teams hoping to simply appeal widely to a domestic fan base while hoping that singles will reach international charts.

The chart below is a list I compiled of the current five most successful male R&B artists. While they have seen commercial success, their numbers like those of Keys's are considerably lower than their own previous works. Overall, the R&B genre sold around 55 million albums in 2012, which was just over a 4 percent decrease from the previous year.⁹

Artist Name	Usher	Ne-Yo	Trey Songz	John Legend	Robin Thicke
Album Title (Year)	Looking 4 Myself (2012)	R.E.D (2012)	Chapter V (2012)	Love in the Future (2013)	Blurred Lines (2013)
US Billboard Hot 200 Peak	1	4	1	4	1
Units Sold (U.S.)	438,000	502,000	448,400	238,000	633,000
Lead Single Title	Climax	Lazy Love	Heart Attack	Who do We Think We Are	Blurred Lines
US Billboard Hot 100 Peak	81	29	35	N/A	1
Units Sold (U.S.)	31,000	29,500	500,000	22,000	6,498,000
Album Tour Revenue	\$4.7 million	N/A	\$2.1 million	N/A	N/A

These observations support a well-known fact in the music industry: albums sales are on the decline. With this knowledge in regards to R&B music, however, I understand the limitations that an unknown independent singer such as Wallace faces. Rather than focusing on selling music, the strategy for Wallace is to really push the singles towards an audience and slowly begin to develop a fan base.

Based on my target audience of young R&B music listeners ranging from 18 to 34 years of age, my marketing efforts will be aimed towards creating a visibility in this demographic. The more prominent artists I have mentioned such as Usher and Ne-Yo have strong followings. My intent is in part to promote my work to these fans, as those two artists are two of my biggest influences musically.

⁹ From RIAA.com

Chapter 4: Building and Online & Social Media Presence

As several of my interviewees mentioned, having a strong social media presence is imperative for artists in this era of the music industry. As an independent musician (and full-time graduate student), Wallace is very limited in his financial resources. Fortunately, launching a website or managing certain social media platforms is relatively inexpensive or even free. Having a strong digital following can be beneficial when working with venues for booking gigs, as well as contacting promoters or music publicists. Most importantly, it is critical to my goal of developing a loyal fan base. To support this objective, I developed a strategic online marketing strategy for Wallace.

Wallace's Online Marketing Strategy

Introduction:

With the emergence of the Internet and various social media platforms, the music market has become heavily saturated over the past decade with music and other entertainment content. The urban pop/R&B genre is particularly crowded with aspiring singers, rappers and instrumentalists on websites such as YouTube, SoundCloud, ReverbNation, BandCamp, DattPiff, HotNewHipHop, Spotify, and many others. In order to create a competitive advantage for Wallace, there is a need to develop a strategic online marketing plan designed to help consumers discover his brand.

Goal:

The primary goal of this online marketing strategy is to build and develop the artist brand of Wallace. The various tools and strategies to be utilized will help create and monitor an active fan base, while strengthening the engagement of his current audience. While increasing Facebook likes, Twitter followers, and YouTube subscriptions is of importance, the priority is to establish a core following that enjoys his products and will continue to support Wallace as a musician in the future.

Strategies:

Keyword Phrases:

In order to attract potential consumers that are using a search engine, three keywords phrases have been selected: "R&B artists 2014," " male R&B singers," "new urban artists." These phrases were chosen from a list of fifteen potential keywords that describe what the core product of the Wallace brand is: an upcoming male urban/R&B singer. The actual name "Wallace" was not included in the keyword choices because it is more than likely that music listeners doing searches will not be familiar with the name in association with the artist. Instead, phrases that were somewhat common but not overly used were selected, with the prospect that they were specific enough to yield results, but not be overly competing with other more popular sites.

Search Engine Optimization:

Having developed keywords, the next step is to incorporate all websites and social media platforms associated with Wallace so that they may come up in searches. Wallace has an artist page that serves as the central location for all of his music, videos, news, and other content. The page is also supplemented by his social media platforms as well. Completing this aspect of website optimization makes it possible to collect and analyze relevant data such as traffic, leads, new visitors vs. returning visitors, what links and sections viewers click, etc. In addition, these analytics will be useful to with advertising, as it can show how many resources must be expended in order to attract a new consumer.

Social Media:

The major challenge of Wallace's online marketing strategy will be to effectively manage his social media. As mentioned previously, the priority is to develop a quality fan base for Wallace that actively engages with his posts and enjoys his music product. While there are numerous social media platforms Wallace can be on, the focus at this point in his career will be on the following: Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

1. Facebook:

Using Facebook was a priority for this strategic plan because of the large number of users on the platform. With over 1.3 billion users, Facebook is still the most used

platform and can be a great opportunity to develop a fan base. The social media world has gotten very noisy in the past few years. As a result, targeting a specific audience is a necessity as well. Facebook analytics helped identify that the current demographic of Wallace's fans is about a 40-60 split between males and females. This does not come as a surprise, as women typically are a large percentage of the audience of a male R&B singer. However, the analytics interface will be very important in helping increase the Wallace fan base. The various paid advertising campaigns running will target mainly young adult women, ages 18-26, in urban areas where Wallace's genre is popular and sustaining success.

2. Twitter:

Having a Twitter is also a priority for the online marketing with Wallace because it is a highly used platform that serves as a more direct method for the singer to interact with his fans. His number of followers has continued to grow, and this increase has mainly included other singers, rappers, producers, bloggers, and A&R's. Aside from efforts to promote music and video content, Twitter will mainly be used to establish connections with other music industry people around the world and be a bit more informal in conversation.

3. YouTube:

The final social media platform, YouTube, was an obvious choice to promote music and videos online. However, since YouTube passed the 1 billion user milestone in 2013, it is safe to assume that Wallace will be fighting for the attention of potential new fans will millions of other unsigned and independent musicians of various genres. Like his website, the YouTube page of Wallace will utilize keyword optimization to yield results in searches. There is a lot of potential to share content with viewers, but it will be important to target the same demographic (18-26 year old women that like R&B music) for there to be a chance for success.

Chapter Five – Creating Content

While developing the framework for Wallace’s social media and website, I began compiling music, photo and video content that aligned with the envisioned brand of the artist. Using the studio facilities at Berklee Valencia, several songs demo tracks were recorded. The results were a mixture of new and old but unreleased solo material. Nine songs were completed, but after putting the “A&R hat” back on, I realized that just three tracks fit the direction of the artist: “Never Too Late,” “As Soon As I’m Home,” and “The Way You Are.” These songs were selected as material to be released because of their presence of a story telling element. Many expert A&R’s have stated, and I concur, that this aspect is very important to connect with an audience, specifically in the R&B genre. The character of Wallace is meant to portray a genuine and affectionate charmer who is not afraid to express his feelings lyrically. These songs help achieve that purpose.

Shortly after finishing the solo tracks, I met Trevy Kiy, a fellow candidate for the M.A. in Global Entertainment & Music Business degree. Kiy, originally from San Diego, CA, received an undergraduate degree in songwriting from Berklee College of Music in Boston before enrolling in the Valencia program. A talented rapper performing by the name of Pappagiorgio, he is heavily influenced by West Coast hip-hop. Kiy approached me about working on a few songs together. After discovering that we had great chemistry in the studio, the idea of completing a collaboration project quickly surfaced.

Compared to Wallace, Pappagiorgio was extremely edgy. His lyrical content skillfully balances comedy and clever punch lines, despite its explicit content. We knew immediately that a joint album would have to emphasize the major differences between our respective artist characters. The concept of the project “Sex, Love & Alcohol” was soon established. Pappagiorgio, provides the raw, “in your face” attitude and sexual content, while Wallace continued to depict a smoother, more loving character. Both artists represented ‘Alcohol’ as they exemplify a young, fun-seeking demographic of men enjoying their early twenties.

I served as the lead A&R for the project, as creating an album with another musician requires more careful attention to the art. Lyrically, I wanted to be sure that all content would make sense for the brands of both artists. Kiy and I came to realize that to complete the album successfully, his occasional vulgarity had to be limited to an extent, but Wallace also needed to provide some more edge to meet Pappagiorgio in the middle.

Kiy and I were responsible for all of the writing for the project. We handled most of the production as well. For one track entitled "I Wanna," we enlisted Houston based producer and Music Technology & Innovation student Sean Ruiz for the beat development. Ruiz, known by his producer name 5ean000, was able to help deliver an important track that offered a different sound than what Kiy and me could offer. With the addition of this song, we reached a total of eight tracks that made the final cut of the album.

At the completion of "Sex, Love & Alcohol," Wallace had a total of eleven songs in his catalog that were available to attract new fans. Kiy participated in the shooting of several promotional and music videos to support the album. With content and a plan in place for releasing it, my marketing abilities and social media skills would soon be put to the test.

Part Three: Results

There are two methods in which I sought results of this project: qualitative feedback from the music and video content, as well as quantitative data on my success online and via social media. This section details the responses I received so that I could gauge the overall success of this experiment.

One of the most difficult challenges in completing the Wallace Project was finding a way to separate my online activity from the “noise” in social media. For example, Facebook exceeded one billion users in 2013, which equates to nearly 3.7 billion likes, comments and shares daily. 400 million tweets are sent on Twitter everyday – or 146 billion tweets a year.¹⁰ With every effort on my end, I was fighting for attention with countless other people across the globe.

While working on Wallace’s profile, it was especially more challenging than anticipated to establish and build a fanbase. There are literally millions of other unsigned and independent artists that are trying to get their music heard as well. Bandcamp, the digital promotion and distribution service I utilized, claims to have over 1.4 million albums and 10.7 million tracks in its catalog. ReverbNation, a popular alternative within the urban genres has more than 3.4 million artists as users – *excluding* labels, venues, and industry professionals that also have profiles within the service.

Having any type of success in this type of campaign requires much patience and consistency. The following is a compilation of the results from my work throughout this culminating experience.

¹⁰ From Ian Michiels, Principal Analyst at Gleanster Research

Chapter Six – Content Feedback

On April 7, 2014, Berklee Valencia hosted Sean Cane (Sean C) and Young Guru on campus. These two men have many notable production credits that include Jay-Z, Mobb Deep, Big Pun, Dead Prez, and various other big names in the hip-hop and urban music scene. The duo took submissions for an A&R critique session that was held during their first day of their lectures. I submitted a track from our album: Shower. Originally a tune written by Trevy Kiy during his time at Berklee Boston as a songwriting major, we were very intrigued at the opportunity to get feedback from these individuals. Here is a transcription of their comments after a critical listen:

Young Guru:

First off, let me start with the positives. I always like to start with positive feedback. The beat is good. The production is nice and it is compositionally well put together. One thing that came to mind for me, however, was that you could be a little bit more implicit with your lyricism. I often use the example of the song “Let’s Get It On” by Marvin Gaye. As a child, I grew up hearing that song, but you don’t really notice that it’s about sex until you are old enough to understand what he’s saying. I just think that for you as an artist, it would benefit you to think about being more purposeful in how you say certain things, as the artists like Marvin are the ones that can create legacies and make records that will be around forever.



Sean C:

I agree. I think the music was really good. Now, there were some areas that you [Wallace] were a little pitchy, so you need to watch that and really pay attention to the vocals to get them just right. To echo Guru, I think the same goes for the rap lyrics. There are much more subtle ways to get what you want across.

Sean C and Young Guru's comments were appreciated. After speaking with Trevy, we would make the case that his Pappagiorgio character is meant to be an explicit, controversial, Vegas-roaming individual that would have used certain language intentionally. The critiques about Wallace, however, were well received, as I would want for him to be more of a "charmer" and poetic singer and lyricist if his brand were to be continued after this experiment. I think that this style reflects me as a person as well, but it was a lot of fun to step outside of my comfort zone and bring a different edge than I have before musically, especially when you glance at my solo catalog. Still, the responses to the album seemed to yield mixed reviews. Here are some anonymous quotes from friends, family, and the small group of fans that I did reach:

"I appreciate the straight forwardness and probably how a lot of people thinks and feel I'm sure. It's a fun album. Who doesn't want sex, love, and alcohol?"

"Wow. Shower...when I heard it I was like REALLY? This can't be Sammy."

"I like the album but it's really weird to hear you cursing and saying explicit things! It's great and all in fun just a bit shocking."

"Sammy – great work man. I remember all the times we talked about your music and I am extremely happy for you and proud of you! Never stop living out your dream!"

"This has got like an R. Kelly and Snoop vibe. Y'all sound great."

"This is a whole lot different than that boy I knew in gospel choir!"

"Who produced Jail Bod? That song is a smash!"

"You have all the talent and potential in the world! Great production – your lyrics and mixing have come a long ways! Keep focusing, working hard, and the sky is the limit."

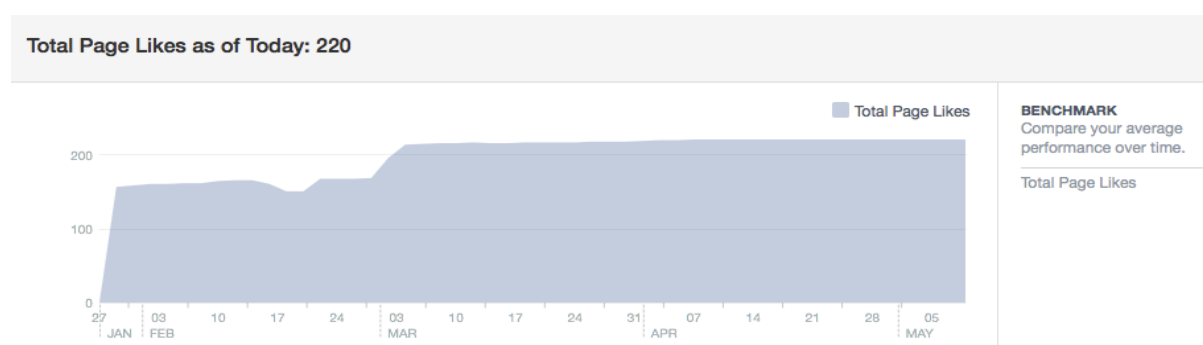
Chapter Seven - Online & Social Media Data

Facebook

A Musician/Band Facebook page was the first platform that was launched for Wallace. As mentioned in my online marketing strategy, it did not seem wise to neglect this social media site as it has the largest amount of users to date. The goal for this platform, as well as for all of my social media activity, was to focus more on *quality* rather than quantity. I prefer a small, active, engaged fanbase that likes and shares the content of Wallace than a large, apathetic one.



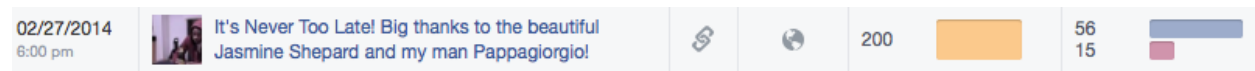
That being said, Wallace's success on Facebook was still very minimal, yielding very mixed results. From late January through February, I witnessed a steady increase in page likes, capping off around 180. All of these likes were organic, as I relied on self-promotion and the help of friends and family sharing the page. With each post, I could see from the administrative panel that it would reach nearly *all* of my page fans and over 75% of them liked, engaged, clicked, or commented on it. However, once the growth began to plateau, I began a series of paid advertising campaigns to help my page reach people beyond those that know me.



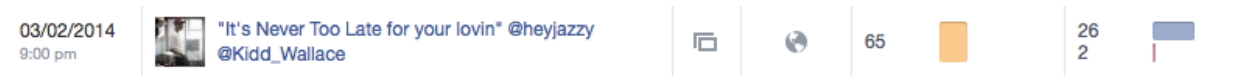
The decision to use Facebook advertising to increase my fan base ironically is what crippled the success of my artist page. As you can see above in the chart pictured, I did see a

steady growth of page likes, pushing my totals to over 200. I ran three campaigns to three different cities: Atlanta, New York, and Los Angeles, all areas with larger, urban populations. Specifically targeting women that “like R&B music,” and were listed as “18-26 years old,” I was pleased to see a few new fans trickle in over the span of five weeks. However, my page engagement activity significantly declined once I started the paid campaigns.

On February 27th, I released a music video for my single “Never Too Late.” I posted it and organically reached 200 people just a few hours after sharing it.



Just three days later, I posted a picture from the video to continue promoting it. I anticipated a smaller amount of people reacting and clicking on it this time. However, this post didn’t even come close to half of the audience I had previously received.



I have several examples of similar occurrences on the Wallace page. I experimented with different days, times, and types of post content, but could not get anywhere close to the engagement I received from my most successful post. Oddly enough, a YouTube video put out by a user named Veritasium was released. It’s title? “Facebook Fraud”

The speaker essentially claimed that when you pay for Facebook advertisements, it has serious potential for more harm than good. He theorized that when advertisements are broadcasted, the new likes and clicks to pages are coming from “click farms,” companies across the globe that pay employees to click on advertisements and pages, creating fake fans.

The video also explains that Facebook made an effort to purge their site of all of the fake profiles they detected. Most notably, Justin Bieber, Rihanna, Shakira, and Akon all saw drops of around 100,000 likes each on their pages!¹¹

¹¹ From Kirsten Acuna, “The 7 Celebrities With the Most Fake Followers on Facebook

When these fake fans do not engage with your posts, the posts fail to spread to more people. While I am usually not much of a conspiracy theorist, there was direct evidence of something like this occurring for the Wallace artist page. I called several friends and said, “hey, like my posts!” It turned out that nearly all of them had never seen my advertising efforts despite being frequently online. This news, and my inability to be effective on Facebook deterred me from wanting to continue the artist page much further. I would conclude that if managing an artist, I would have to really assess the necessity of having a Facebook profile.

Twitter

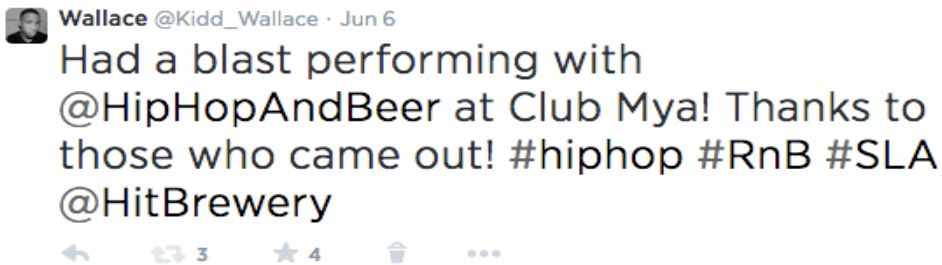


Twitter turned out to be the most successful platform for Wallace. Although a count of 92 followers was not as significant as the quantity on Facebook, I learned a lot about the “language” of Twitter from this project.

As I consider managing an artist in the future, I see a great opportunity to develop a network online through Twitter. Of course, having a fanbase is important. I would like for Wallace to have reached around 1000 followers by the end of this campaign. However, there were several users that

favorited, retweeted, or replied to posts. Some of these people include fellow aspiring artists, music producers, bloggers, and simply fans of R&B music. While I continue to release music and other content, I have made a few “friends” that are paying attention to my work and could potentially share it. These relationships came from me engaging with them as well, as giving to others online (i.e. retweeting, favoriting) is a great way to earn respect.

As much as I would like to be successful online, it is the offline activity of Wallace that had the ability impact his growth and fan base. After a June 6th performance at Club Mya with Pappagiorgio, I posted the following tweet:

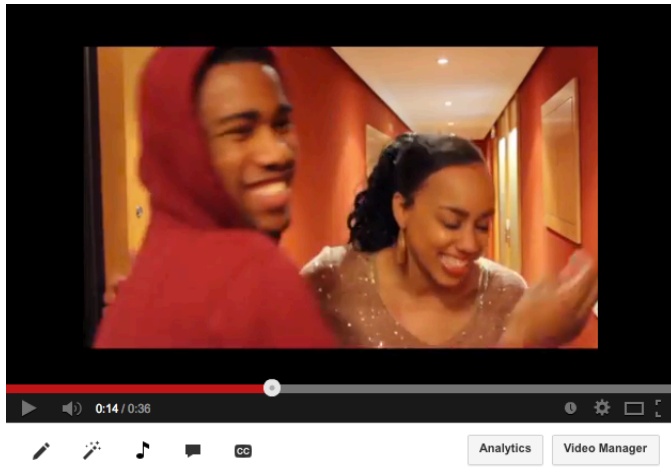


The tweet seems to only have a little bit of engagement, but three new followers came from it, which I presume were a few people I met at the show.

I also think that a common rule to use on any social media platform is to post more photo content than simply texts. I tweeted various pictures of me performing or in the studio and received a great response. Overall, Twitter needs consistent use to be most effective. On future campaigns, I will need to schedule tweets weekly using a management software like Hootsuite so that the profile I am promoting constantly has a “voice” amongst the social media noise.

YouTube

YouTube served as the central location for all video content I created for the Wallace Project. This included two full music videos, and five teasers and promotional videos. After making a 30 second channel introductory video as well, I planned to use the YouTube ‘Fan Finder’ advertisement tool. This free service allows your videos to be played as advertisements in areas that you can target and among YouTube subscribers that have similar tastes in terms of the content they consume on the platform. The challenge with this is that in order to utilize it, you must have 1000 subscribers on your page so that it can try to define your target audience.

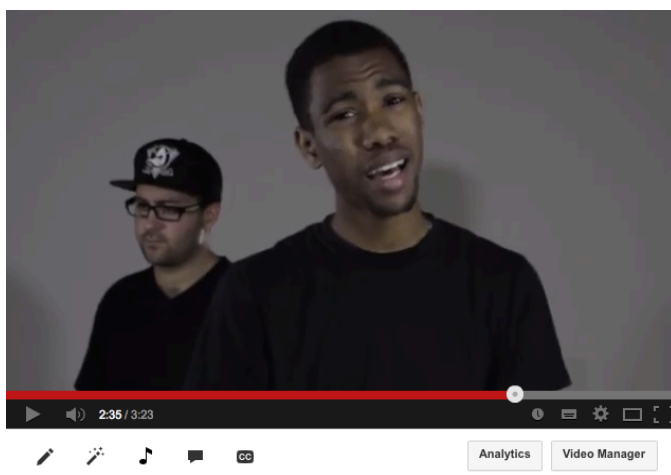


Wallace YouTube Channel Promo

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-84WRLywgQ&list=UUdAk0RPu1alwcaG6RSgWSw>

Having spent most of my efforts on Facebook and Twitter, I did not see any significant growth in my number of YouTube subscribers. However, this does not deter me from very actively promoting the channel of an artist in the future, as I see great value in having at least a modest presence on YouTube.

Trevy and I followed up the most popular song on our album, “Jail Bod” with a music video. We actually spent two full days shooting it and I spent an additional day to edit it, but it is by far my favorite production between the two of us.



Pappagiorgio & Wallace - Jail Bod

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v0FPDWcoLzQ&index=1&list=UUdAk0RPu1alwcaG6RSgWSw>

The video for “Never Too Late” was my most successful video to date. Although YouTube’s video counter gets stopped at ‘301+’ at times, Trevy Kiy and I promoted this video well as it is a heartfelt, personal song, and in my opinion the best rap verse he has delivered with me, despite it being one of my solo tracks.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2bjZbNijEg&index=7&list=UUdAk0RPu1alwcaG6RSgWSw>

Overall, the video content that was created to support our music content was received positively. We were fortunate to gain the skills over the course of the year to make this possible.

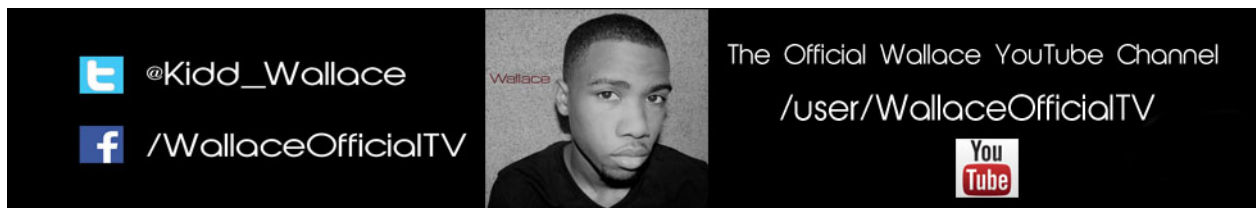
Conclusion

Jumpstarting a career isn't as easy as it seems. There are many more tools that music executives have today that can be beneficial to A&R and artist management, but that does not mean that there is no strategy behind a campaign. Since artists like Soulja Boy, Justin Bieber, Charice Pompengo, and Cody Simpson have been discovered on YouTube, literally millions of hopeful musicians have created accounts on the platform and many others, hoping to be noticed. A big problem today is that this high volume of online users has crowded the amateur music market.

In the future when working with independent artists, my biggest challenge will be to help separate them from this large mass. Sure, an artist like Wallace can have a Facebook, a Twitter, a YouTube, or any other social media account. But when developing an online and social media strategy, there must be a full-time commitment to managing the profiles. That means, more consistent tweets, posts, etc. Even still, however, this does not guarantee success. Careful attention to demographics that work for the artist is required. I tried to target entire cities such as Atlanta. Maybe in the future, it may be better to start even smaller - work locally and branch out.

I also think that more live performance opportunities would benefit an artist like Wallace. Despite playing three concerts, I was at the disadvantage of being based in Valencia, Spain for this graduate program, when my target market was in the United States. I would recommend that an artist place a high emphasis on local performances to gain a following offline, which may in turn support the efforts online via social media. As my interviewees and numerous other music executives have said, however, it comes down to the quality of the music. Great music is great music, and if an artist has a good product, there is an audience for it somewhere.

In conclusion, there were several learning outcomes and achievements that I have to be proud of. Throughout the course of this study, I was able to create music, photo and video content, begin building a fan base, develop a brand, and enhance my marketing, promotion, and distribution skills. I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to gain experience working with an urban recording artist in a controlled setting as well. Although I had some setbacks throughout this process, I hope that this research helps other aspiring A&R's and managers learn a few things that can help them as they try to get an artist's career off the ground. While Wallace may be "21 and Unsigned," hopefully there is a brighter future for the musicians that I will represent in years to come.



Bibliography

- Acuna, Kirsten. "The 7 Celebrities With The Most Fake Followers On Facebook." Business Insider. Business Insider, Inc, 30 Sept. 2012. Web.
<<http://www.businessinsider.com/celebrities-with-the-most-fake-facebook-likes-2012-9?op=1>>.
- "Bandcamp Empowers Artists." Artists. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 June 2014.
<<http://bandcamp.com/artists>>.
- Bouwman, Kimbel. "Interview with Richard Niles." Hitquarters.com. N.p., 23 Apr. 2007. Web.<http://www.hitquarters.com/index.php3?page=interview/2007/April23_0_0_2.html#ixzz35liAnUaN>.
- Charnas, Dan. "The 25 Best A&Rs in Hip-Hop History." Complex.com. N.p., n.d. Web.
<<http://www.complex.com/music/2013/02/the-25-greatest-hip-hop-ars-ever/>>.
- "Facebook Fraud." YouTube. YouTube, 10 Feb. 2014. Web.
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVfHeWTKjag>>.
- Howard, George, and Jonathan Feist. Getting Signed!: An Insider's Guide to the Record Industry. Boston, MA: Berklee, 2004. Print.
- Kurutz, Steve. "About Clive Davis." MTV Artists. N.p., n.d. Web.
<<http://www.mtv.com/artists/clive-davis/biography/>>.
- Kurutz, Steve. "Berry Gordy, Jr. | Biography." AllMusic. N.p., n.d. Web.
<<http://www.allmusic.com/artist/berry-gordy-jr-mn0000047893/biography>>.

Mergner, Lee. "Jazz Reviews: The Producer: John Hammond & the Soul of American Music –

By Lee Mergner - Jazz Articles." Jazztimes.com. July-Aug. 2008. Web.

<<http://jazztimes.com/articles/17179-the-producer-john-hammond-the-soul-of-american-music-dunstan-prial>>.

Michiels, Ian. "Cutting Through the Noise on Social Media." Cutting Through the Noise on

Social Media. ClaraBridge Blogs - Gleanster Research, 22 Jan. 2014. Web.

<<http://clarabridge.com/2014/01/1612/>>.

Prial, Dunstan. The Producer: John Hammond and the Soul of American Music. New York:

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006. Print.

"ReverbNation Promotion – Buy ReverbNation Plays and Fans." Reverbnation.com.

Web. <<http://reverbnation.com/>>.