



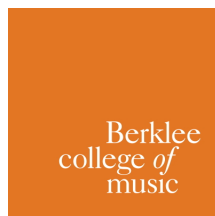
IT FWD

# Culminating Experience Reflective Report

Chris Wade

2014 Master's Candidate for  
Global Entertainment & Music Business

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Valencia Campus

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## **Summary of the Project Completed**

For my Culminating Experience (CE), I chose to create a formal business plan for an idea that I developed during the course of the school year. The project was rooted in creating a business that supplemented the lack of music education in schools and the increasing costs of private music lessons. Based on that foreseen need, I worked with a team of classmates to design an innovative business model for a non-profit organization that paired Artists and Brands together to provide Children with free music lessons. The name of the project and the pending company is Play It FWD. The name is derived from the act of extending the tradition of music education as a form of charity with the intent to keep music culture advancing in a positive direction.

The way the business model works, Children will be taught music lessons by top-level music Artists through engaging video content that lives on a proprietary website. The costs of running the non-profit, including developing this content, will be supported by monetary funding from Brands in exchange for their assets (products, logos, etc.) being integrated into the content. The premise of this business model is to create what is in effect a “Triple Win”, where all parties involved gain something of value from being associated with the Play It FWD platform. Artists are able to establish deeper connections with their fans (most likely parents) and gain exposure to and relevance with a younger base (the children). Brands can leverage Play It FWD as a cause marketing initiative and show increased relevance to their core consumers and decision makers (parents) by providing additional value to the lives of them and their kids. Children are the major winners within our model

because they have the opportunity to learn about music through a unique, high quality experience at no cost to their parents.

The focus of my CE was to research and develop a functional approach to the Artist / Brand partnerships that would need to take place in order for the business model to work properly. In my proposal, I sought out to find a partnership method that is consistent *and* sustainable in pairing Artists and Brands together in an effective way. Therefore, my contribution to the Play It FWD business plan was centered on developing a functional partnership system that connects Artists & Brands in a manner that can be successfully replicated, as well as provide greater value to society in the process.

### **Process**

The first step in working on this project was to develop a team. As a part of a module in the Emerging Entertainment Business Models class during our first semester, I was required to pitch a business idea to my fellow classmates with the intent of enticing two of them to work on the project with me. I presented the initial idea I had for Play It FWD and selected Ankie Titulaer and Maxwell Wright as my team members to work on this project for the course of the first semester. During the second semester, in the Entrepreneurship and Innovation class, we added two additional team members in Gabrielle Banks and Manuel Delgado.

This was a critical component to being able to start and complete the business plan for Play It FWD. As the project leader, it was necessary for me to initially build a team of people that had different skill sets from those that I have. I chose Ankie and Max in particular because of their respective backgrounds in Music Education and Performing Arts & Creative Development, in addition to their passion for working with Children. As a team of three, we applied the same thinking to selecting new team members to ensure that we were enhancing the effectiveness of the group while maintaining a positive interpersonal dynamic. Gabrielle provided us with insight and knowledge to Music Licensing and Video Production and Manny had a strong Legal background and a keen sense of Operational Management

Throughout the courses that were taken during both semesters of the program, I, along with my teammates, applied various learnings and analyzing tools from our coursework to critique and reassess our thinking about the business model with the intention of making it as comprehensive and thoughtful as possible. We leveraged various modeling techniques, such as the Canvas and RIVE models, to assess our project's interaction of resources. We used marketing analyses such as Porter's 5 Forces and SWOT to gain a clearer picture of the competitive landscape of the Online Music Education industry. We also had to take in consideration various types financial analysis to project the investment needed for our start up and the operating capital required for our first year of business. The confluence of our academic studies and our personal research worked together for us to collectively provide input into further developing the Play It FWD business model.

We conducted quantitative consumer research, focusing on parents in the United States, which was led by Ankie Titulaer. I, on the other hand, spearheaded the qualitative research that was necessary to better refine our approach to Artist / Brand partnerships. Given my background in this area, I contacted some colleagues that either currently work or formerly were involved in brand marketing and artist management.

Below are the profiles of the interviewees:

**Donae Burston** – *Regional Marketing Director / Moet Hennessy USA*

**Kwesi Fraser** – *Former Heineken Brand Manager & Account Director for Alloy Access (Marketing Agency for Heineken)*

**Jamal Henderson** – *Senior Brand Manager / PepsiCo*

**Paul Levatino** – *Former Manager for Erykah Badu*

**Jeannah Ho** – *Former Assistant Manager for Scooter Braun (SB Projects/Justin Bieber) & General Manager for Erving Wonder Mgmt (Now part of Atom Factory)*

I held 90-minute interviews with each of these individuals and I asked them specific questions about what they look for in a partnership, what makes some partnerships work better than others and the process in which it takes to form a partnership.

Through these conversations with experts in their respective fields, I gained invaluable insight into the needs of both Artists and Brands and developed a greater understanding of where the critical intersection points are when considering pairing any Artist and Brand together.

Out of this research, I was able to take my key learnings and develop a partnership strategy that was effective and turnkey for the potential Artist and Brand stakeholders in Play It FWD. The method detailed in the Play It FWD business plan is derived directly from the direction and insight of these industry professionals and my own knowledge from previous work experience in the entertainment field.

The final and most important step was to synthesize all of our data and research to develop a comprehensive business plan, detailing how we intended to bring Play It FWD to life and take it to market. This was a very collaborative process where each team member had a select set of responsibilities and deliverables. We would share our findings and our work and then decide as team as to what should be included in the end product, with me having final say over the outcome. This process ultimately proved to be effective and fruitful, resulting in a thorough, first version business plan.

## **Results**

In particular to the focus of my CE, I learned that, contrary to what I initially thought, there is no one simplistic partnership model that works for every Artist and Brand. Artists and Brands have their own individual identity, culture, fan base and set of values. As a result, it is highly improbable that you can pair one Artist and Brand together the same way you can another set. There is a small possibility that this type of method could be developed but it would take more time than our

coursework allowed and would most likely prove to not be an efficient use of time to explore – as that time could be spent on building *actual* partnerships.

When considering Artist / Brand partnerships, you must make each situation beneficial for both parties and create an equal sharing of brand equities. The most important element, as noted to me by all of the interviewees, is to make a process that is easy with as little heavy lifting on their end as possible. Therefore, the approach that I have developed for Play It FWD is completely customized. In our model, we conduct the due diligence to target and match Artists and Brands together to create unique experiences through our content that are organic to the consumer and mutually advantageous for both the Artist and the Brand.

On a larger scale, the results of developing this business plan have been extremely positive and promising. From the onset this idea has grabbed the attention and interest of many people within and outside of the Berklee network. This was something that I always used as a barometer to let me know if the concept of the idea was connecting with people the right way – and I still do. My teammates and I have developed some great relationships as a result of this project and we believe we have a strong base of people that can help us carry it forward to the next phase of development.

We competed in two pitch competitions during the school year, each at the end of the semesters. We came in 2<sup>nd</sup> place during the competition at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup>



semester and we unanimously won the Venture Day competition during the Spring semester. I make mention of this because after losing the first pitch competition after months of a lot of hard work, I vowed to myself and my team that we would win the next competition in the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester. Through this series of experiences our team bonded and we strove in unison to ensure that we all came out successful on Venture Day.

This level of teamwork was something that was not always easy to accomplish, especially at first because we had to learn each other's strengths, weaknesses and work styles – which might have been the biggest challenge we faced as a group and me as a leader. We chose to put the work and our goals first and our egos aside to be able to communicate with one another and gain each other's trust in the process. I believe this was a valuable learning lesson for all of us, but personally it was very imperative because it required me to delegate, monitor the work being done and still have the long-term vision in mind at the same time. I cannot say that this was always easy, but it did teach me how to better use the strengths of my team and communicate with people in the way they needed on an individual level for the greater good of everyone involved.

By and large, I accomplished everything - personally and with the team - that I wanted to within the time I had to work on the Play It FWD project during the academic year. The only disappointment I can mention is learning the reality of the time and investment needed to build a quality beta or minimal viable product (MVP)

for the business. This is something that I envisioned and thought was realistic within my timeline, but the costs of building a proof of concept at the level we desired within the given time frame proved to be more than we could take on as a team. The benefit of this is that I now know how much it will take to develop an MVP and therefore have the ability to prepare the team and position us to take on that task in the near future.

### **Next Steps**

The long-term plan for Play It FWD is to develop it into a sustainable business that has a global reach and a revolutionary impact on Music Education. Although that is a grand mission I along with a group of my teammates have chosen to continue to work on this business idea and develop it into an operating business in 2015. We are currently in the process of developing a detailed timeline of action steps and milestones that we want to achieve through the 2014 calendar year.

Our first goal is to continue to do deeper market and consumer research and better assess the costs of developing a beta or MVP for the Play It FWD platform. From that point we want to revise our business plan and make it more presentable and digestible for potential investors and other interested parties.

We also have to continue to create our content strategy and determine exactly how our content will work to educate Children while incorporating Artist and Brands.

Once we have a solid direction on this and a beta of our platform, we intend to test

our product on a sample of our target consumers – Children between 8-12 years old – and take those learnings to make the necessary revisions to the content approach and functionality of the platform.

Moreover, on a basic level, we have to secure key business elements such as a business license, trademarks, domain names, etc. as well as file for status as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

After we have hit these milestones we want to send signals to the market that we intend on launching in the near future while simultaneously seeking out funding either via philanthropic equity, government grants and/or an accelerator/incubator program.

### **Contribution to the Discipline and Profession**

My contribution to the disciplines of Music Education and Brand Partnerships is analyzing better ways to do both and working to find effective solutions that can help a greater number of people. I took my knowledge and experience from those two industries and paired them in a manner that has the potential to exponentially impact both. It is common knowledge that Music Education is lacking in many schools in America and around the world. By working on a new method to deliver quality Music Education to children, it is my hope that we can get more people with the adequate resources involved to reinvigorate the Music Education process and make a lasting, positive impression on children's lives on a high level.

I believe that working on this project will also help pave the way for me to continue to develop new ideas and approaches to leveraging Artists (and potentially other celebrities) and Brands to stimulate progressive social change on a large scale. This is something that I intend to do going forward as a part of my entrepreneurial career.

### **Impact on the Student Completing the Work**

The personal impact on this project was tremendous for me. I came to Berklee Valencia primarily because I wanted to evolve into a successful entrepreneur. The Global Entertainment & Music Business Program's emphasis on entrepreneurship was what really made me seriously consider leaving my corporate job to further my education. With that being said, I have learned an immense amount of information and gained skill sets that I possibly would have not been afforded to acquire by my own devices. Moreover, the international relationships and network I have begun to foster has opened me up to new ways of approaching business, as well as greater opportunities in the future.

Going deeper than just career aspirations, I would say what has impacted me most from working on this project in particular is having a greater understanding of the inequities in the world. From conducting research on non-profits and economic figures across the globe, I also came across information that opened my eyes up to the many injustices that large groups of people deal with on a day-to-day basis. Many of these issues we are aware of on a surface level from things we might hear

about or see in the news. However, when I looked at the data and saw the impact that the lack of certain essentials, such as lack of clean water and food, basic education needs, limited access to computers or even electricity, has on the lives countless people on a daily basis, I began to look at the world differently. I now see a great need for considerable amounts of work to be done in these areas to help people live better lives.

This type of information coupled with the constant thinking of how to create a positive movement around something I care so much about in Music Education, really allowed me to find a clearer vision for my purpose. Prior to coming to Berklee, I was career driven and money motivated (*not* money hungry), but I focused a large majority of my energy on what I could do for myself. Many of the teachings I received and my personal readings during the time I have worked on this project exposed me to the realization that I can have a bigger influence on the world other than myself and my immediate circle. Even more so, I now have the belief that it is a part of my *responsibility* to use my gifts and intellect to help aid and transform the lives of other people and provide them with greater opportunities to enhance their quality of life. I have learned through this process that you gain more by working to help others than you do by solely working to help benefit yourself. One of my favorites quotes states:

*“A good man fights for himself and his. A great man fights for everyone else”*

*- Philip DeFranco*

It has been through this experience of working on Play It FWD and putting the interest and well being of others first, that I have chosen to not only be good, but to be great and work at making incremental change.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would like to thank, first and foremost, the faculty and staff at Berklee Valencia for their continuous support during my Master's program; without them this experience would not have been possible. I also want give a special thank you to my Program Director, Dr. Emilien Moyon, my CE Advisor, Ferran Coto, and my two Jury Members, Patrice Rushen and Troy Brown. Their expert guidance and feedback helped shape and mold my CE to its greatest potential. Thank you for lending your time and energy to the development of this project.

I would also like to thank my fellow teammates on the Play It FWD project, Ankie Titulaer, Maxwell Wright, Gabrielle Banks and Manuel Delgado. Their hard work, dedication and contributions to this project were integral to the success that we have had thus far. I also want to share my appreciation for them choosing to work with me and trusting me as their leader. They have helped me grow and develop in many ways that they may not even know.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank my parents, family and close friends for their love, support and ongoing encouragement during my time studying abroad in Valencia. They have truly served as my source of motivation to continue my

education and excel within the GEMB Program. I am forever grateful for all that you have done during my time in graduate school.

Overall, I am very thankful for my Master's experience at Berklee Valencia. I have grown as a businessman and, more importantly, as a person. I achieved and gained the things that I was desirous of when I first arrived and I can honestly say that I am a much better person for it. This will always be a moment in time that I can look back on and consider it to be a major turning point in my life's path.