

Music: the universal language

Issued by [Dentsu](#)

1 Aug 2019

DAN SA's Rona van Wyk discusses how her team used music to market Russian Bear Vodka to an ultra-cool urban crowd.



Advertising first started using entertainment during the late 19th century. Ever since, music has played a prominent role in entertaining various target audiences.

This entertainment medium works incredibly well in marketing – not only because it transcends cultures and demographics, but also because it has the ability to create different moods, tell stories without words and help us to escape daily life.

Thanks to a number of successful marketing campaigns, many of the world's best-known brands are now associated with different genres of music. Think whisky and sophisticated jazz tunes, and luxury vehicles travelling down winding roads with Beethoven symphonies in the background.

Creating powerful commercials with the perfect tunes or beats can assist in differentiating brands. But there's more: music can also sit at the heart of the big communications idea.

A case in point: #Iamnext campaign

[DAN South Africa's](#) #Iamnext campaign for [Russian Bear Vodka](#) was based on research that showed that the young, urban target audience resides in South Africa's townships, often with very few opportunities available to them. The insight was that they needed a platform or stage to showcase their rap talent, with research indicating that hip-hop was their best-loved genre.

As part of the campaign, Russian Bear Vodka invited aspiring rappers to recordings. But, instead of asking them to come to us at a few selected venues in cities, we hit the road and went to where they were. Our mobile recording truck was kitted out with a sound booth and top-notch recording gear, and we had a producer and famous artist on board.

Over a couple of weeks, the team visited 50 venues in townships throughout South Africa to record the artists in their own neighbourhoods. Recording sessions could be booked online, and the purchase of a bottle of Russian Bear Vodka secured your entry.

Aspiring producers were asked to send their backing tracks upfront, and the audience was able to vote online for their favourite tracks. The top five tracks were consequently used for the recordings.

Throughout the campaign, the wider target audience voted online for their favourite rappers, resulting in 12 finalists. The winner received a record deal for one album in collaboration with a well-known South African hip-hop artist. The prize also included a music video produced by [MTV Base](#).

Omni-channel approach drives reach

To drive reach for the campaign, the team briefed MTV Base to film content at the recordings and activations at six of the bigger venues. Short-format videos were distributed on air on MTV Base, on their social platforms and on Russian Bear's digital platforms.

Social media and paid digital ads directed the target audience to the #Iamnext page, where they could listen to the finalists' tracks, vote on a weekly basis and follow the location of the recording truck.

On-the-ground entertainment at the 50 activation venues included performances by a South African hip-hop artist and aspiring rappers on stage, with an MTV Base DJ acting as MC.

Meeting the needs of the target audience

With the #Iamnext campaign, Russian Bear Vodka became an enabler that met the needs of the audience in their own environment. Reach and engagement were created among the broader target audience through relevant mass channels and by associating the brand with a music genre the audience already loved.

The highly successful campaign proved that music can be used in innovative and tactical ways to market a brand. However, to use the age-old entertainment medium successfully, the campaign must be rooted in solid insights so that it touches the hearts (and pockets) of the target audience.

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