

Cosmic Roots Collective

Promotion Campaign for Album “Virtues”

SITUATION ANALYSIS

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I: PROJECT OVERVIEW

My Full Sail University Public Relations Master of Arts Final Capstone Project will be an in-depth analysis of a promotional campaign for the Orlando, Florida-based music group the Cosmic Roots Collective in support of their recently released album entitled “Virtues.” This is an appropriate brand for a Final Project because: it is one I have easy access to, knowing the members very well, as well as being one myself; it is part of a field for which public relations plays a prominent and critical role, entertainment; and this group recently released new music for which it conducted a very limited marketing campaign, so there is opportunity for additional promotion despite the recording in questions having already been released (Ostrow, 2012).

A project of this nature will be an excellent way to utilize the various skills and applications of the knowledge gained throughout the Public Relations Master of Arts degree in that it involves telling a compelling story through various written, visual, and audio media; the use of relevant social media channels, an effective social media strategy, and the ability to measure the outcomes of this strategy through various analytics tools such as Google Analytics will play a key role; and it will relate to the other topics covered in the degree program, including legal matters pertaining to copyright, online marketing and consumer research, relationships with various media, the role of carefully planned and executed public relations events, and the importance of managing a brand’s reputation.

II: ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

The Cosmic Roots Collective is an Orlando, Florida-based music group consisting of three members: Wheeler Newman (guitar, lead vocals), Ronnie Brannan (bass, keyboards, vocals), and Paul Mauceri (drums, vocals). These three core members have been playing together

for the previous four years in and around Orlando and Central Florida at various venues. Its purpose/objective is to write, record, and perform original musical compositions and to further its brand/reputation among local/regional and, ultimately, national music scenes. This involves rehearsing new material to prepare for live performance and, ultimately, recording, and using social media to spread the message about their band's brand and connect with an audience that will be sympathetic towards and appreciative of its particular sound and style of music. The majority of its music is composed by guitarist/singer Wheeler Newman, with occasional input from Ronnie Brannan and Paul Mauceri.

Being a very small independent organization with limited resources, financial and other, it has a loose management/governance structure. As previously stated, the original music is mostly composed by Newman and then developed by the additional members, but all promotional and marketing efforts are shared equally by all three members, including upkeep of its social media pages (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). However, it should be noted that Newman, who has ventured into Information Technologies (IT) as a career path since the group's inception, has also taken a lead role in their website's development and maintenance.

The group's relevant publics include fans of local independent music, mainly in the greater Orlando area, since they have had limited opportunity to perform outside of Orlando, and particularly those who have an allegiance to the style(s) and genres represented by their sound, which can be characterized as "psychedelic progressive pop." However, given the ease of disseminating recorded music in the digital age, it can be assumed that the group's relevant publics can be music fans based anywhere throughout the world with reliable internet access and an interest in discovering new independent music.

The only sources of funding currently available to the group are the very limited proceeds from its live performances and any disposable income from the members' "day jobs," i.e., their current employment that provides them with their livelihoods.

Similar organizations who are in direct/indirect competition with Cosmic Roots Collective are the myriad numbers of musical groups in and around Orlando, Central Florida, the Southwestern region of the United States, the United States, and, ultimately, the world. Ever since the explosion of popular music in the early to middle 1960's, with "ground zero" essentially being The Beatles' performance on the Ed Sullivan Show in February 1964, there has been an overwhelming proliferation of musical groups who have aspired to similar levels of artistic, creative, and commercial achievement (Tomasky, 2014). As a result, as with just about any medium, but especially in music, more and more acts are competing for attention with only a relatively small handful ever really achieving any notoriety beyond their immediate locales, if even that.

The advent of the internet and digital technology have irrevocably changed the music industry in that groups like Cosmic Roots Collective can self-produce a recording with a modicum of equipment and technical ability (Guarino, 2009). In addition, with the rise of the mp3 and other digital file formats and the internet becoming the number one distribution as well as marketing channel, smaller lesser known music groups have the means available to plan and execute a full-scale marketing campaign to promote their music (Schroeder, 2009). For example, platforms like YouTube have enabled stars like Justin Bieber to be "discovered" (Adib, 2009). There is also a vast worldwide network of independent blogs that specialize in featuring independent "unsigned" artists. In essence, the playing field has been leveled but the flip side is there are more groups than ever before all vying for the same recognition and acknowledgement

in an increasingly busy and noisy online world. This reality has made it imperative that independent music groups be as savvy as possible with social media and be strategic in their messaging to somehow set their band's brand apart in this ever-increasingly crowded space. The PR campaign for this Final Project will have this as its primary goal.

III. Communications Analysis

The Cosmic Roots Collective's image is one of a talented group of men whose age range spans early 30s to mid-40s that plays a unique hybrid of styles within the "alternative rock" music genre and which fills a particular niche within the eclectic Orlando local music scene. Its reputation is one of respect amongst its peers but it is not very well-known outside its immediate circle.

Approximately two months ago, the group self-released a full-length album entitled "Virtues," for which it conducted a limited PR campaign consisting of a press release and an outreach to several music blogs that specialize in reviewing and promoting independent music within the styles and genres the group's sound represents. A small handful responded and agreed to write a small feature about the album, praising its (pun intended) virtues.

The communication channels currently being used are email and social media, including Facebook (639 followers), Twitter (70 followers), Instagram (230 followers), and YouTube (5 subscribers). The messages being communicated consist of favorable reviews of the aforementioned release and announcements about upcoming live performances. The messages received are for the most part very positive; those who engage and reply to posted announcements tend to encompass a very small limited circle of peers, friends, and family. This type of reception bodes well for future communications efforts the group undertakes, as they try to extend their reach beyond their immediate locale. A PR campaign will need to entail a well-

planned and executed social media strategy that is more consistent and engaging, utilizes a variety of content, and whose goal is to reach beyond their limited audience to the audience of their audience and so on and so forth.

IV: Current Situation

Since its inception four years ago, the Cosmic Roots Collective has established itself as a welcomed addition to an increasingly vibrant and eclectic local Orlando music scene and garnered respect amongst its peers. The group started off playing “covers,” i.e., songs by other artists, in its early days before working up a repertoire of mostly Newman original compositions. They also made a significant stylistic shift about three years ago, going from a more roots-based country rock sound to their current edgier hybrid of psychedelic, grunge, pop, and progressive rock. This has resulted in exposure to a wider swath of local groups who have in turn shown their support and offered them opportunities to perform with them on shared bills.

The key opportunity/problem this PR effort/campaign must address is how to create greater awareness of a recording by a relatively unknown music group with very limited resources, including financial and human, in an extremely competitive space and how to stand out amongst the crowd by focusing on what makes them unique. Additional opportunities include leveraging social media to promote the group’s brand and creating consistently relevant, unique, and engaging content to entice its current small group of followers to engage with them and help promote greater band/brand awareness. So, in essence, the central issue with this campaign will be generating greater awareness of a small independent music group with limited resources that is based in a small relatively tight-knit local music scene and their recently released album both within their locale, region, and, ideally, beyond in an already very crowded space.

The client ultimately wants the organization to become better known within its musical milieu and for its album to generate more impressions and overall feedback, obviously preferably positive. The role of public relations in this campaign will be crafting and delivering a consistent branding message across multiple channels, especially social media, and to create content in a variety of mediums – written, audio, visual, etc. – that will help in this effort.

Some of the issues that will need to be contended with include determining how to convey the brand in a unique and engaging way given the fierce competition within the field, the time and energy required to create and deliver content that represents the brand in a consistent manner, and the group members' accessibility/availability to participate. As a result of these factors, the campaign will require effective strategizing and time management on the part of the public relations leader as well as all active participants, and any and all previously established goals may need to be reassessed and revised accordingly.

V. PRELIMINARY IDENTIFICATION OF TARGET PUBLICS

Preliminary group of target publics relevant to the campaign comprise fans and supporters of local music in and around the Greater Orlando area and whose demographics, based upon observations at local performances, would most likely be a majority of Caucasian males between the ages of 22 and 35, aka “millennials,” from a largely middle class socioeconomic background. However, this can certainly extend well beyond age 35 and also include females and other ethnic groups (Lamere, 2014). As previously stated, due to the ease of online promotion this can also easily go well beyond the group's immediate geographic location into regions of the United States where there is a strong audience for the style of music performed by Cosmic Roots Collective, including the Northeast and California (Hogan, 2014).

The psychographics of these target publics include: most being either full-time students or employees; tending to enjoy social outings including going to see live music at local venues and festivals; identifying with an “alternative” lifestyle in terms of their fashion sensibilities and tending to shop at clothing stores like Urban Outfitters as well as local thrift shops; leaning more towards the left/liberal end of the political spectrum; hobbies including creative endeavors like painting and drawing and watching films; spending ample amounts of time on the internet and being adept at utilizing social media; and they possibly smoke and drink alcohol, activities that tend to go along with watching live music (Bray, R, 2015).

These publics would, hence, view the Cosmic Roots Collective as a group that embodies their principles and ideals in terms of their presentation, style, and worldview and would be sympathetic towards its mission to create music that challenges, entertains, and draws from a variety of subgenres within the rock medium. As a result, the messaging of this PR campaign will need to speak to the beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and sentiments of its targeted publics and perhaps also embody a certain political and/or social leaning in relation to current events and the overall national mood.

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