

sandbox

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MUSIC MARKETING FOR THE DIGITAL ERA

music:)ally

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**FLASH
IN THE
PAN**

**MERCHANDISING
AND SWIFT SALES**

**PART II
MERCHANDISING
SPECIAL**

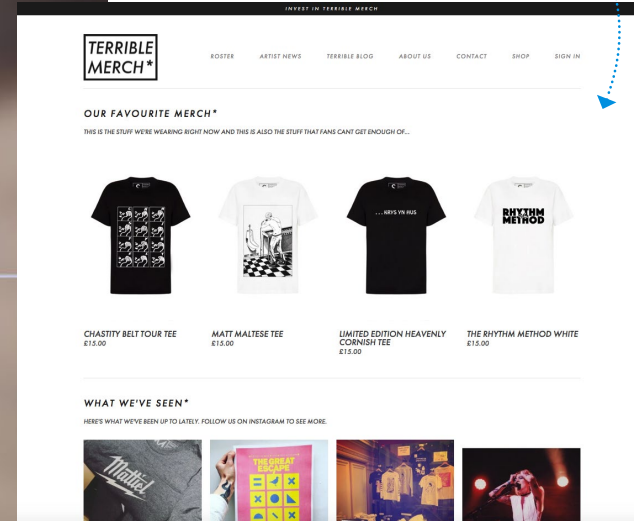
FLASH IN THE PAN

MERCHANDISING AND SWIFT SALES

In the second part of **sandbox**'s merchandise special, we talk to some of the companies shaking up the world of music merchandising to discover how the music industry can use new digital tools to increase merchandise sales today.

Make the most of technology

"Merch is one of the last parts of the music industry that has remained un-innovated and static in the digital age," says Tersha Willis, co-founder of **Terrible Merch**. "That's mostly because merchandising companies are still making money doing it the old-fashioned way and there's a bit of an 'if ain't broke...' attitude towards merch generally."



Novelty, she adds, of the kind that has seen Kiss produce coffins, the **Kiss Kasket**, and Rammstein hawk dildos, is probably not the way forward. But relevance is. And one way to increase the relevance of your merchandise offer is to make the most of current technology.

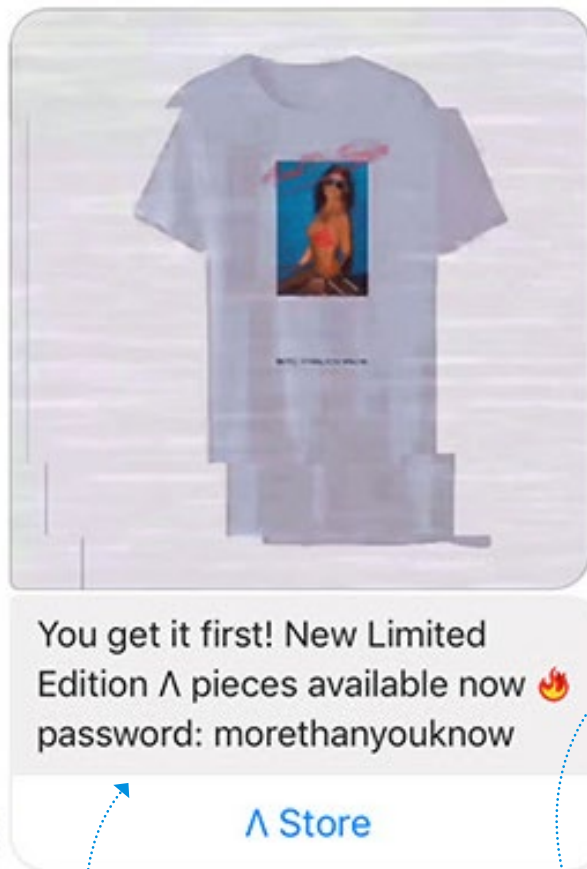


"All of our artists, no matter how small, are able to take card and phone payments on the road – and this also allows us to monitor stock levels and we are then able to re-stock them long before it's a same-day-delivery charge and rush-re-print charge," says Willis. "We monitor stock, we monitor sales – and we also know which grassroots venues sell more merch and on what nights of the week. We know what items sell well in which cities and we know how much merch a band will need on the road. We're currently building an app so that bands and managers can see and know this too."

Kevin Douch, founder of indie record label Big Scary Monsters says that apps like **AtVenu** are useful for bands to monitor their stock flow while on the road. "It isn't sexy or particularly rock 'n' roll," he admits, "but if it means the difference between turning up to a venue missing key items or not, it's essential".



Willis says that the technology currently used by ticketing companies could also help to improve merchandise sales. "We think artists should be looking at selling merch at the ticketing stage for delivery at show," she explains. "New-generation ticketing companies actually have the technology to do this, but they are so heavily focused on the user experience of



an app that they seem to neglect the idea of the actual fan experience at the show and after the show."

Bots are another platform that the merchandise industry should look to exploit further, taking advantage of the feeling personalised attention they engender in fans. Sean Hill of Axwell & Ingrosso's management company, ATM Artists, told **music:ally** last year that their company had sold over £10,000 of limited-edition merchandise via a **Facebook** Messenger Bot in just a couple of months. The Bot Platform, who created the Axwell &

Ingrosso bot for ATM, claimed the same bot had an impressive 21% click-through rate on average.

Use data to understand your audience

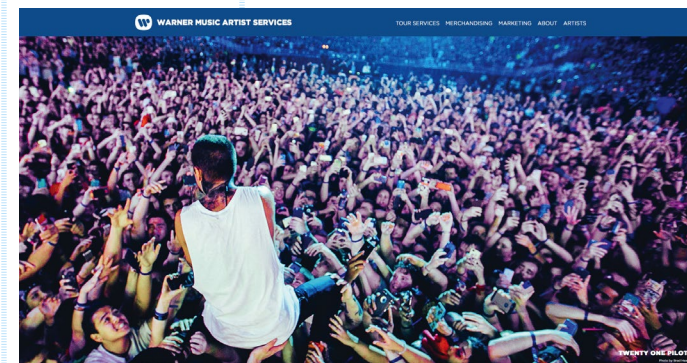
Both the live music and the recorded music businesses have long realised the power of data in understanding their markets. But the merchandise business lags somewhat behind in this, a situation that Neil Cocker, MD of music merchandise specialist **Dizzyjam**, finds frustrating.

"If you started thinking smartly about data and getting access to data, that is where you can start to make smart decisions," he says.



One of the problems, Cocker explains, is that smaller bands may not sell enough merchandise to be able to analyse their sales in any meaningful way. But larger bands – or, indeed, merchandise specialists like **Dizzyjam** – can generate enough data points to come to practical conclusions.

Dizzyjam recently looked at the question of T-shirt size, using the data from 15,000 D2C sales worldwide. It found that approximately 15% of all men's/unisex band T-shirts sold in the US are XXL, double the percentage found in Europe – a very useful stat for bands about to embark on a US tour. Cocker explains that data analysis in merchandise can tell you about gender splits, size preferences and how musical genre affects shoppers' tastes; so a funk



band from Portsmouth, say, would know what kind of merchandise to stock up on for their German tour. Of course, it helps in this if bands have retained the rights to online merchandise sales and therefore own their data.

Matt Young, EVP of **Warner Music Artist Services**, says that data "plays a huge role in how we approach each individual artist's integrated branding campaign". "For example, last year when we launched

Melanie Martinez's **Cry Baby Perfume Milk**. We utilised fan data from our email list and e-commerce customer list and partnered with Spotify, YouTube and Alternative Press for insights on how best to drive awareness and reach fans," he explains.

Personalisation is key

Identification has long been a driver for merchandise sales and this is one of the reasons why personalisation is so important in the field. By buying a T-shirt from a particular tour, you are identifying yourself not just as a fan of the band but also as a fan of the band on that tour, at that specific moment in time.

Direct-to-garment is a modern printing technique that uses specialised ink jet technology and print-on-demand – deploying digital technology to print goods only when ordered – and it has both helped greatly in terms of personalisation, allowing bands to create small merchandise runs without large overheads.

"We see a lot of T-shirts dedicated to specific events," Music Glue's Gabrielle Nicot-Berenger said at AIM's 2017 Indie-Con conference in London. "With print-on-demand, you can create your T-shirt without any cost: create designs specific to a gig in Manchester, in Brighton [...] Fans start buying the ones they can connect with."

Willis, meanwhile, believes that merchandise "has become a way for fans to mark the occasion of attending a show or concert" after the demise of the ticket stub. Frank Ocean, for example, has shown himself an innovator in this field, printing T-shirts on the road with

a specific design for every show. "But even then," Willis says, "his T-shirts are still printed on shoddy blanks and there's definitely lots of room for doing it better and innovating even more, especially when you're at that level."

Personalisation can also extend to bundles you offer. "Customisable merch is important because no two fans are the same," says Warner's Young. "We do a lot of tiered bundles – everything from a basic record/T-shirt offer to a full-fledged VIP behind-the-scenes experience."

Scarcity sells

Personalisation may go hand-in-hand with scarcity in the world of merchandise – but limited doesn't necessarily have to mean personalised. Sparklestreet founder Gary McClarnan, whose clients include DJ/producer **Mr Scruff**, says items of merchandise "are really useful when they are scarce or part of a uniform".

"We tend to do things that people want to show off that they have got, or limit the number of them so that only a number of them can acquire that version," he says. "It is simple scarcity and quality – trying to be a little artisanal."

Mr Scruff, for example, has sold everything from tea pots to umbrellas during his lengthy career and produces exclusive posters for every venue he plays, using new technology to produce high-quality prints at reasonable prices. These offers work, McClarnan explains, not just because they are limited, but because they fit with the character of Scruff himself. "We try and stay within the character of the band," he says.



"With Scruff, jigsaws fitted because of the cartoon nature of his graphics."

Musicians should also think about merchandise that works in the moment, taking advantage of passing trends, be they GIFs or TV moments. "If you can turn out merch straight after something happens on Game Of Thrones, that is pretty much bank," says Patrick Ross, Director of Digital Strategy at **music:)ally**. In this, speed is pivotal.

Simon Scott, co-founder of Push Entertainment, told the **sandbox SUMMIT**

in New York recently that his company created a commemorative T-shirt to mark a client passing 3m YouTube subscribers, with the process of concept to sale taking just four hours. "The two things we have learned are that it is about scale and it is about speed," said Scott. "When you are reacting to something and hoping to turn that into money, you have got to be really quick."

Think like a brand

Musicians can be understandably reticent to think of their work as a brand. But music marketing strategist Tyler Allen argues that they can learn a lot from the way brands balance new products with more "standard" merchandise.

"Think about [merchandise] like a big brand's commercial campaign," he writes on the SonicBids blog. "Let's take fast food chain Wendy's for example. It'll run a commercial promoting its brand-new Asiago Ranch Club sandwich but it'll also have a standard commercial promoting Wendy's as a brand; not necessarily plugging a new sandwich, but just promoting the values Wendy's has and why you should enjoy the food. You should be like Wendy's, guys. Have material that's evergreen and can be sold year-round but also have your Asiago Ranch Club: that unique product that's hot at the moment and needs to be pushed."

music:)ally Head of Training and Development, Wesley T. A'Harrah, says that bands can learn a lot from the way companies license their products out. "Learning how to license a band's image for merch so that other clothing companies, for example, can exploit that

is pretty much untouched in the music industry," he says.

Re-imagine merchandise

Bands, on the whole, still think of merchandise as branded physical goods – and this may be limiting their business. Cocker believes they need to think laterally. **"For some people, merch is not so much about owning something but about having a unique experience,"** he says.

"Some higher-end acts sell unique experiences, like meeting the band and being in the Golden Circle." Many acts will have offered this kind of personalised experience during crowdfunding campaigns, but there is no reason why they couldn't be sold as "experience packs" on a more general basis.

Bands should also feel bold about using members' special talents to create unique merchandise items – if your drummer likes to knit, then why not have them create some extra special hand-made scarves? – or tapping into their fans' artistic abilities.

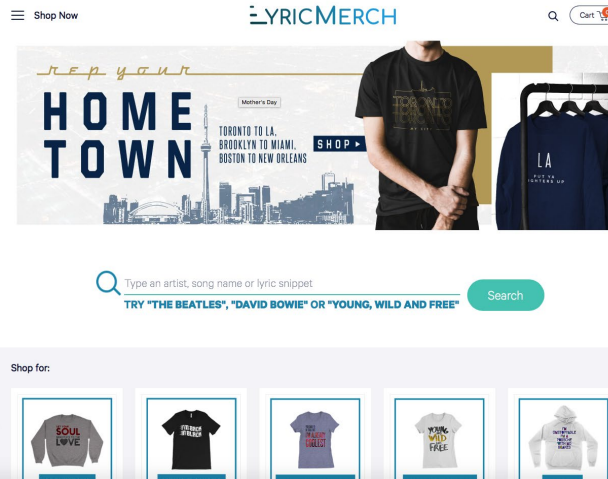
Young told the NY:LON conference in London earlier this year that Twenty One Pilots had used the work of devoted fans to create artwork and even merchandise. "They have an art director on-staff who curates the stuff that fans bring in. They have a collection of 15 fans around the world who were generating Twenty One Pilots artwork," he said.

Equally, musicians should look at apps and games as part of their evolving merchandise offer, as Young explains. "We're constantly experimenting and evolving our offerings, so we have

many examples of innovative music merchandising – such as the Wiz Khalifa app that changed the game on what merchandise companies do for their clients," he explains.

"**Wiz Khalifa's Weed Farm** is a free gaming app we launched last April that

has since been downloaded over 6m times, with over 1.5m monthly users a year later." Young argues that the game "checks all the boxes in the new world where our goals are to drive brand loyalty, engage fans and expand revenue opportunities for our clients".



Consider lyrics

music:ally's A'Harrah says that song lyrics are an often underexploited resource for music merchandise. **LyricMerch**, a consumer-facing lyrics service which launched in November 2017 out of lyric licensing company LyricFind, is one company trying to address this. LyricMerch provides on-demand and custom-designed lyric merchandise, while paying rightsholders royalties for the use of their works.

"We see this as a win-win for songwriters and artists and for fans who love their lyrics," LyricFind CEO Darryl Ballantyne said in a statement. "LyricMerch also expands the income possibilities for lyrics rightsholders, helping them make the most of an asset that is growing in significance in the digital era."

As a consumer-facing company, LyricMerch typically sells directly to consumers. But Ballantyne believes his company can also provide a valuable service for small- and mid-sized artists. "Someone like Taylor Swift is not going to have much added value from LyricMerch," he told FYI Music News. "But a lesser-known artist who is marketing to a smaller fanbase and doesn't know how well something is going to sell can't take that risk of printing up hundreds or thousands of a particular product to get a reasonable unit rate. Then they'd have to deal with all the shipping, fulfilment and production too. We can take a ton of hassle off their hands, remove all the risk, and have them make just as much money per item as if they were doing it themselves because of the efficiency of our system. :)

TOOLS **FAN BITS**



“Who spends \$140,000 on a CryptoKitty?” asked a querulous *New York Times* earlier this month in the latest media coverage of blockchain-powered, cat-collecting game CryptoKitties.

Built on top of the Ethereum network, the game launched in the autumn of 2017 as a way for people to buy, sell and even breed virtual cats. And yes, someone has paid the equivalent of \$140k in the ether cryptocurrency for one of them.

The game’s developer raised \$12m of venture funding in March to continue working on CryptoKitties, having already sparked intense interest in the idea of ‘crypto collectibles’ and a first wave of imitators like CryptoPunks.

Which brings us to Fan Bits, which is an attempt to take the magic dust of CryptoKitties and make it a platform for a range of creators to make and sell their own crypto collectibles.

“As a completely self-service tool, Fan Bits is designed for content creators of all types: digital artists, photographers, graphic designers, streamers and anyone else that wants to create crypto collectibles for their

audience,” explained Rare Bits, the San Francisco-based startup behind Fan Bits. You can include musicians in that.

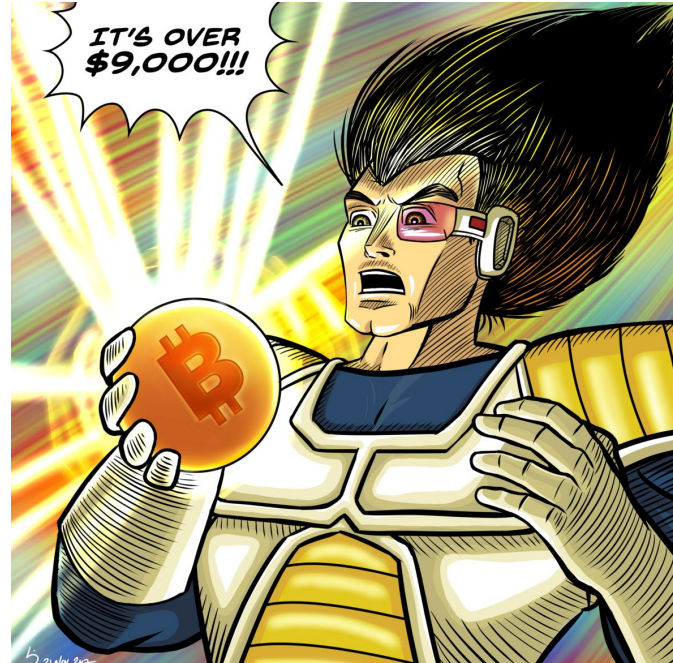
Until now, crypto collectibles required high-level technical development work, but Rare Bits wants to help anyone create these digital assets in a matter of minutes.

Content provided by creators can be uploaded and tokenised instantly, preparing their crypto collectibles for trading online. After each sale, the creator is paid in ether – plus they get a cut each and every time their creations are later traded between fans.

At the moment, Fan Bits collectibles can only be in the form of images – but videos and, perhaps most interestingly for musicians, audio will be supported in the near future too.

This is where the industry should be pricking up its ears: assets that are tokenised and uploaded as crypto collectibles are, by definition, digitally scarce. In the long term, that can help to create more value for the tokenised item.

Rare Bits has created a dashboard for creators to have more insights into how their collectibles are selling, as well as to



view information on who’s buying them.

Each creator constructs a profile where they sell their collectibles: a profile that is made to be shared and grown, adding a community aspect to it, where fans can follow their Fan Bits profiles as a creator.

One reasonable view of something like Fan Bits is to steer well clear until it has proved itself to be more than just crypto vapourware. Particularly for artists with a profile, the risks of being involved in something that could be seen as milking fans of (crypto) cash with little real value exchanged should be considered.

Another view, however, might be that if the barriers to entry are as low as Rare Bits



claims they are, why not experiment? By which we don’t mean shove any old artwork up as a JPG and expect to make a shedload of money.

What might an interesting artist-focused crypto collectible be, especially if and when video and audio are part of the picture as well as static images? Early experimentation with a platform like Fan Bits could provide some useful lessons on that score, whether this or some other platform turns out to be the one that becomes popular in the future.

The jury is certainly out on whether the future will see music marketers supporting their release campaigns with exclusive (and scarce) tokenised items that can be traded fan-to-fan.

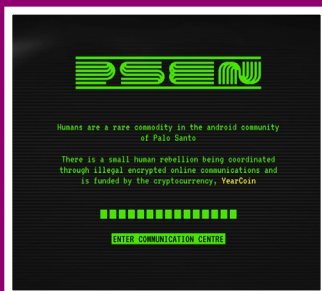
sandbox thinks there is potential in this model, so even if labels and artists prefer to remain hands off for now, understanding what games like CryptoKitties and CryptoPunks are and how they work, as well as following the progress of platforms like Fan Bits, is a useful line of research to pursue. :)

CAMPAIGNS

The latest projects from the digital marketing arena

YEARS & YEARS OFFER FANS & FANS SOME COINS & COINS

It seems like every digital startup is seeking alternative funding by going the ICO (initial coin offering) route, using cryptocurrency rather than the more traditional stock flotation course to raise capital.



When something is being spoofed on Silicon Valley – Pied Piper just went galumphing into the ICO world in the most recent series – then you know something is up.

Not quite satirising this (fool's) gold rush, British pop band Years & Years are weaving the idea of the ICO into the narrative around the build-up to the release of their second album, Palo Santo, on 6th July. In brief, the motif around the album is that the world has collapsed into a near-future dystopia – something that has already been set up via their own social media accounts and a Facebook Messenger bot – and the humans have to rise up against the machines to try and take back control of the world.

Still with us? Good. So, this is where YearCoins come in and they will play a role in the humans fighting back against their despotic mechanical overlords.

"There is a small human rebellion being coordinated through illegal encrypted online communications and is funded by the cryptocurrency, YearCoin," explains the **dedicated microsite** for this part of the campaign. Fans have to "mine" YearCoins

through assorted actions like playing tracks/pre-saving the album/following the band on Spotify, watching videos (which are embedded from Vevo), sharing content (via encrypted messages) with other fans or friends on social media and adding the chat bot to their account.

"The more coin you mine the longer msg you can encrypt save enough and become a free human with an official palo santo id card," explains the site.

Obviously these YearCoins are not actual cryptocurrency and so they can't be used to order questionable products from the darknet. Rather they sit as points to be collected and for fans to try and earn enough to get a personalised Palo Santo ID card which will yield "special surprises" for holders as the campaign progresses.

"We wanted a superfan initiative that borrowed the themes of cryptocurrency, but was ultimately a bit of fun for fans," a spokesperson from label Polydor told Sandbox. "We get some interesting data capture from this – pre-save, follow-on Messenger – as well as it tying in perfectly with the futuristic themes of Palo Santo."

It is, even at the earliest stages, a fun campaign that is aimed squarely at the superfans and trying to find ways to engage them in the long run up to the album which is still several weeks off.

HYSTOURIA: DEF LEPPARD'S LONG TAIL GETS FLICKED ON INTERACTIVE CONCERT MAP



Having been digital holdouts for years, Def Leppard have taken to online with gusto in recent months.

At the start of this year, they ended their digital deadlock with Universal Music over contractual issues and made their entire catalogue available for downloading and streaming.

They were in the very fortunate position of not needing financially to take the first digital deal offered to them and so waited until it made sense – albeit years after pretty much everyone else. "We weren't hurting," lead singer Joe Elliott told us in January by way of explaining why they took their time. "We were out on the road selling more tickets in the last five years than we sold in the Eighties. We were doing great [...] We still have a very good business model when it comes to anything that is nothing to do with the back catalogue – if we want."

And talking of touring, it is live where their next digital dalliance is happening – in part to promote the anniversary tour

around 1987's blockbusting Hysteria album but also to drive up their total streams. The **Def Leppard Tour Book** is an interactive online map that links to a user's Spotify account (something that was unimaginable even half a year ago). Each city on the world tour contains a song from their vast catalogue, where clicking on the related plectrum on the map and listening to the full song will unlock an "exclusive digital laminate and photo from the band."

You can only click on a city once the tour has been there and you also must listen to at least 30 seconds of the linked track in order to claim the digital plectrum – which is, by sheer coincidence, the minimum amount of play time needed on Spotify to qualify for a royalty micropayment.

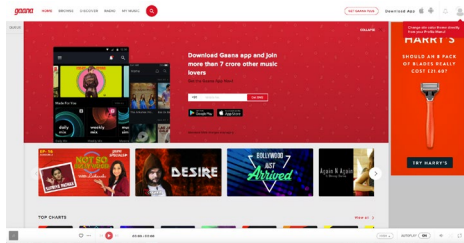
Fans are encouraged to keep collecting them as the tour progresses and we presume there is some incentive to collect them all, possibly with prizes for the most dedicated collectors. But as a way to tie a tour back to streaming, this is a simple but highly effective move – ensuring that it drives up streams of their biggest hits ('Pour Some Sugar On Me' was the track on the opening date of the US tour at the XL Centre in Hartford CT) but also seeking to give the more esoteric or overlooked songs at the end of the long tail of their catalogue a boost.

They might have been late to the party, but they're certainly starting to get the hang of this digital business.

CAMPAIGNS

The latest projects from the digital marketing arena

HOWZAT'S WHAT I CALL MUSIC: GAANA GOES INTO BAT FOR CRICKET



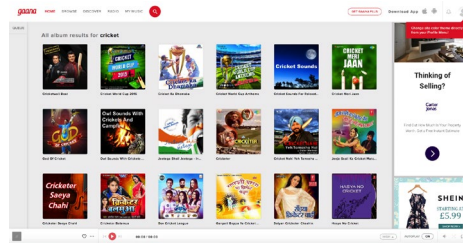
Until now, music's only real connection to cricket was Buddy Holly (or, more esoterically The Duckworth Lewis Method, featuring Neil Hannon from The Divine Comedy).

Indian streaming service Gaana is, however, looking to change all that. It has created Game Of Sixes which is effectively a kind of MMOG (massively-multiplayer online game) that blends playlists with cricket teams.

Users are expected to have some knowledge of cricket – and with the bulk of Gaana's users being in India or part of the Indian diaspora, we can take it as read that they will be up to speed on the sport.

They are asked to select a city cricket team – such as Mumbai, Hyderabad or Rajasthan – and then register to a cumulative and collaborative playlist for that city team. Points (or, rather, runs – given this is cricket) are scored as follows: one run per play of a track on the playlist; and six runs for every song they add to that playlist. The whole competition last for 15 days and the winning team will be the one whose users have worked together to score the most "runs."

KFC has signed up as a partner brand for the competition and the



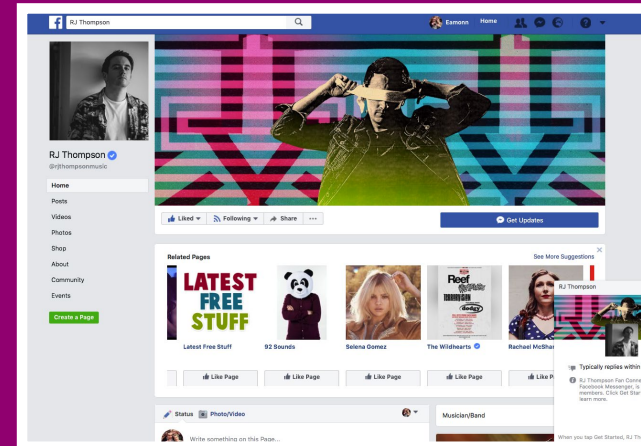
whole thing is aimed at boosting interest in both cricket and music among young consumers aged 12-34.

There are faint echoes of the fantasy football league that Kasabian created last June for their For Crying Out Loud album as a way of pushing plays of catalogue and new tracks on Spotify. The Gaana approach is, of course, not tied to an individual act but rather it is about boosting plays and playlist adds for as many tracks and acts as possible.

It comes as the service is finding itself in an increasingly competitive streaming market in India. It raised a \$115m funding round earlier this year, led by Tencent, before then seeing rival Saavn merge with telco Reliance Industries' JioMusic service in a deal valued at more than \$1bn in March. Interestingly, there are many cricket-themed playlists on the service so this could be seen as its latest attempt to link itself to the sport in order to bowl a googly against the competition.



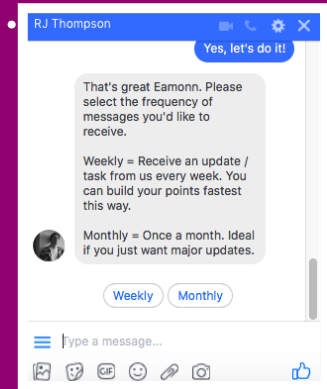
DAILY THOMPSON: BRITISH MUSICIAN BUILDS HIS OWN BOT FOR REGULAR FAN ENGAGEMENT



There are a number of companies building dedicated bots for social media platforms – with The Bot Platform and I Am Pop being two notable ones with multiple music clients – but British singer-songwriter RJ Thompson has decided to go it alone and build his own for Facebook Messenger.

One of the best things about signing up to this RJ Thompson's bot is the ability to set frequency of messages from the bot to weekly or monthly, with the latter option being used to deliver only the most important updates. To drive user engagement, those signed up to the bot are encouraged to listen to Thompson's music and watch videos as well as spread news about him among their social media circle, earning points for these assorted tasks.

They can also collect points by taking part in games and quizzes, getting an initial



boost of 100 points if they turn on Facebook alerts. "If you do this, you will be notified when RJ posts something new on Facebook (a couple of times a week at most)," explains the bot. "The benefit of this is that you can be the first to react to a post, earning points, and being ahead of the game in Fan Connect."

With the resulting points earned, fans can cash them in to receive a social media "shoutout" from the singer as well as get merchandise and access to meet & greets. "I didn't want to create just another form of mailing list," explains Thompson. "Messenger is, by definition, social. I wanted to have conversations with my fans and make them feel a part of what we are trying to do – and I wanted it to be a fun and rewarding experience."

This is, for an independent act, a smart way to move and it appears to be delivering results. In its first three months, it has signed up 5,000+ active users and delivered a 2,514% increase in Facebook engagement (e.g. likes and comments on Thompson's posts) as well as strong increases in his followers on YouTube (up 215%), Instagram (up 201%) and Spotify (up 275%).

BEHIND THE CAMPAIGN

GEORGE EZRA



Staying At Tamara's is the second album from British singer-songwriter George Ezra and it came out in March 2018, almost four years after his debut, Wanted On Voyage, which went four times platinum in the UK. With such a big gap between albums, there was a long lead into the campaign to re-engage his fanbase, starting with the "warm up" single 'Don't Matter Now' in June 2017. **ALEX EDEN-SMITH** (head of marketing at Columbia UK) and **EDD BLOWER** (senior digital marketing manager at Columbia UK) explain why his Sunday Service playlist and a weekly journal gave him a rolling presence between albums, how a video of pensioners dancing to his 'Budapest' hit was used to reawaken fans, where this became an audience-led campaign rather than a release-led one and how a podcast series was his secret weapon and an indicator of campaigns having to move beyond the actual music.

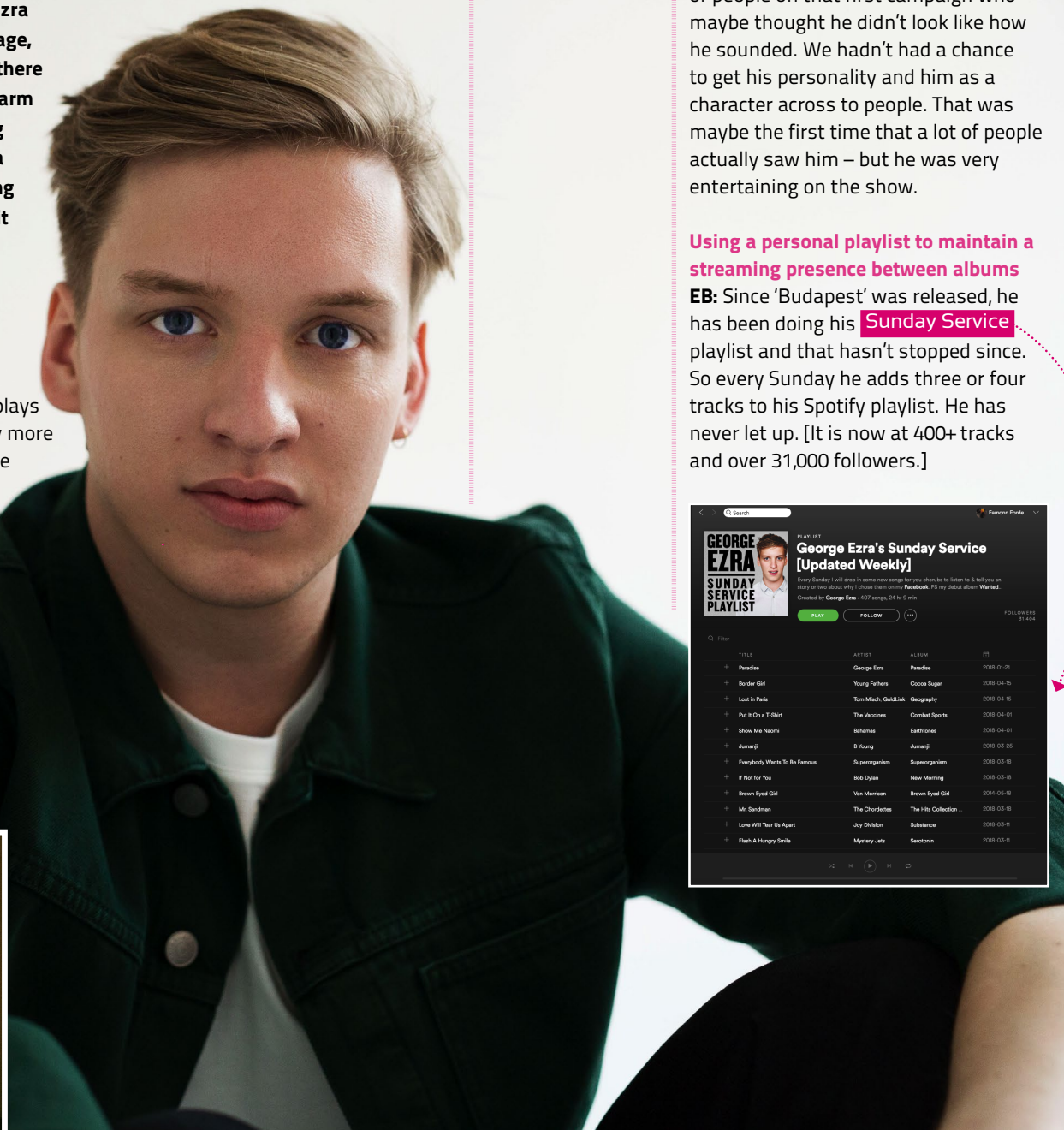
Capitalising on the swift initial success around his early EPs and debut album

AES: The last single from his debut album was 'Barcelona' in 2015, just after The Brits. That was our final single, but the campaign had been a full two years. His first EP [Did You Hear The Rain?] came out in October 2013 and it moved quite quickly from there.

In today's world it would be harder to move that quickly with a new artist as you would need to build up a streaming base. But at the time we managed to get enough momentum, particularly across Europe, on the first campaign. 'Budapest' naturally stuck its hand up as a hit. It was a responsive track whenever it was getting airplay. In the UK, there were a couple of TV syncs before that Christmas which precipitated the whole thing.

There was a watershed moment when he did Graham Norton [on BBC One] in September 2014. It was a real crossover moment and you could tell the difference in the people that were engaging with him.

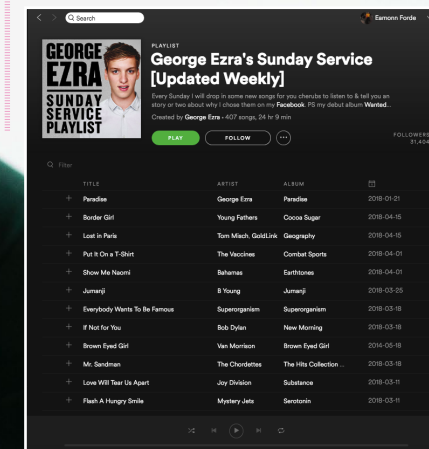
We had had Radio 1 and Radio 2 plays and that got us through to a slightly more casual audience at that point. People were able to connect the voice to his personality and how he looks. There was a lot



of people on that first campaign who maybe thought he didn't look like how he sounded. We hadn't had a chance to get his personality and him as a character across to people. That was maybe the first time that a lot of people actually saw him – but he was very entertaining on the show.

Using a personal playlist to maintain a streaming presence between albums

EB: Since 'Budapest' was released, he has been doing his **Sunday Service** playlist and that hasn't stopped since. So every Sunday he adds three or four tracks to his Spotify playlist. He has never let up. [It is now at 400+ tracks and over 31,000 followers.]



AES: Way back, Spotify came to us and said they were using it as an example of how labels should work with their platform in terms of helping to bring people onto it and helping them engage.

Releasing a taster track to start the slow lead up to the album and to re-engage the audience

EB: At the end of 2016, we started to get to work [on this album], but the album itself didn't come out until 23rd March 2018.

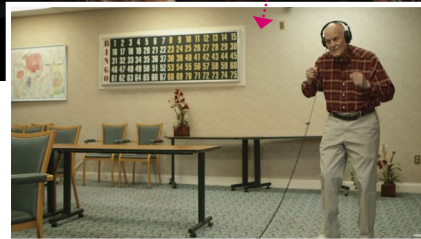
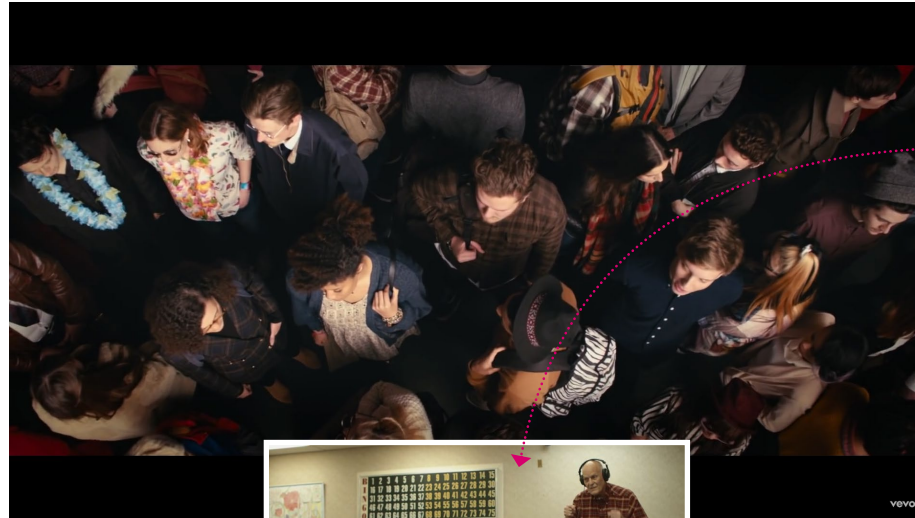
AES: There was a single called 'Don't Matter Now' which came out in June 2017. That was really just to have a track out there. It was like a toe in the water for new material. He wanted to get back on the road and play shows and festivals – and we wanted to have a piece of music out before that.

We weren't pushing it as a commercial single; it was more of a reintroduction to George. The focus was on him playing live. He was also still working on the album – so we didn't have a finished album at that point in time.

With this campaign, we knew we had a lot to do to re-engage the fanbase. We had to get people excited again. Way before that single came out last summer, there was a lot of reposting of content.

Seeding video content to draw the fans back in

EB: We wanted to remind people why they liked George. We started re-serving people bits of his old videos on YouTube. We started with his music videos, some of his live sessions and the covers he has done.

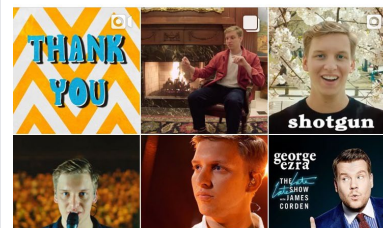
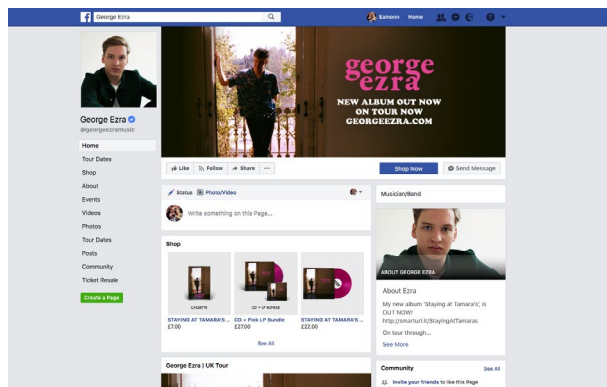
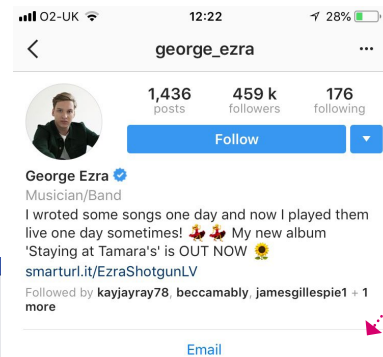


We were putting those out organically and, if they were performing on his socials above a certain benchmark that we had calculated internally, then we would post them with some more spend to reach more of his

core audience. We were basically trying to reach lapsed fans and bring them back into the loop.

Twitter, Facebook and Instagram with the main three platforms for that.

We can't put full tracks up natively on



Facebook, so we were using snippets to remind people about George and then taking them out to playlists on YouTube and Spotify.

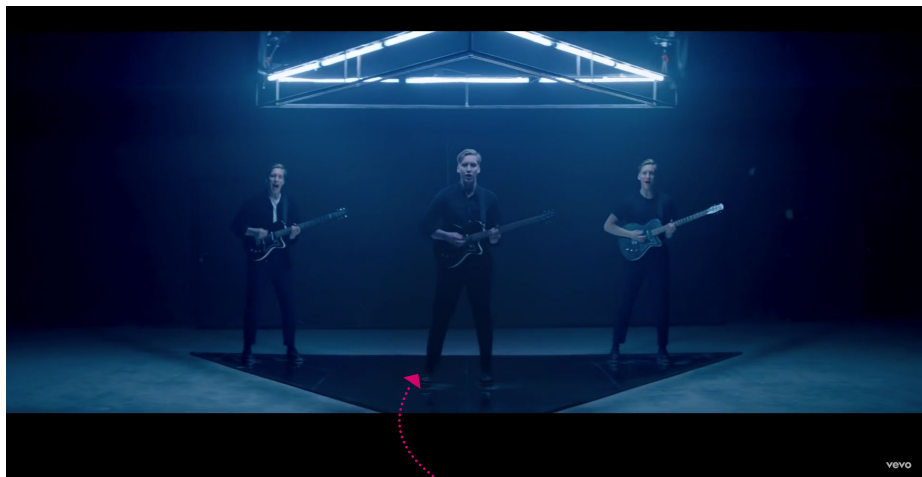
There was a video of **seniors dancing to 'Budapest'** and that was definitely one of the most explosive ones that we put out. The video doesn't have George in it – but it is a video of old people listening to the track. This was something that the US team commissioned. Seeing that resonate with George's fanbase meant they were reminded of the track and they went on from there.

AES: The thinking behind it was this: the first album was successful, but it was primarily driven by two really successful songs. There was a large part of the audience that we saw who knew those two songs and who liked them but didn't know that much about George or even the story of the album title.

We had all this content and we presumed that most people would have seen it – but we realised that most people wouldn't have actually seen it. We wanted to make sure we were using assets that we had to set up and prime the audience, getting engagement up before we went with new material.

The power of the slow build

AES: He did what was called the Secret Tour where he went and played some out-of-the-way and small places last May. It was a way for him to play new material and get back out on the road. He also played Glastonbury and a number of other festivals over the summer. At the same time, he was still finishing the album. We didn't know how long it was going to take



to finish all the music.

It has served our campaign really well to wait until it we were ready and we had everything. We spent the time before Christmas shooting videos, getting the artwork together, getting photos done and so on. That meant we were really composed at the start of this year when we began.

It was about getting the strategy right and working out what we needed to do.

We were ambitious from the start. We believe in George, we believe in his music and we believe in his ability to connect with people. We knew we had a great record with lots of potential singles on it. So, it was about how we presented that.

Going heavy with the first “proper” single

AES: ‘Paradise’ felt like the first single. It was the one that was leading up to the album. That was released on 19th January and it was a concentrated launch of the video and the track going live at the same time. We also announced the tour and the album at the same time. We were very much going for it!

‘Paradise’ reacted incredibly strongly from the start. We knew that one of the things we needed to do strategically was to have a TV moment early in the campaign.

With streaming you can get an initial burst but then it can take quite a long time before the familiarity of a track and the airplay can really crank through the gears. We wanted something that would help connect people.

As his tracks go straight to playlists, we had to manage the situation with the radio quite carefully and set an earlier impact date so that we could manage when it got playlisted. We knew we were going to service to radio, but we wouldn’t get added to playlists for three weeks after that. We knew we needed more moments to fill that gap.

EB: He got on New Music Friday straight away – but we didn’t know when some of the other big playlists would come in. We knew we needed enough time to generate album pre-orders and to build the streaming on the single.



AES: We had to think very carefully about the tension between needing time to build the album and them not having too much time that radio run out of steam.

His podcast series was the secret weapon

AES: One of the core parts of promotion was his podcast. He is a big fan [of the format] and during his year off he really got into them.

EB: When he was travelling and writing the tracks for the album, he was listening to a lot of podcasts. That became the second-favourite hobby after music.

AES: He launched his own podcast series

[George Ezra & Friends] at the start of February this year. That was part of our strategy. We had been talking to him about the need for a content strand that was not just about the music. It was about us thinking how we could get his character and personality across.

We won’t take credit for it because it was his idea.

He decided he wanted to make a podcast series and he wanted it to be about music and creativity. It was to look at the processes that people go through. So, he just started approaching people, bought himself some podcast recording kit and basically went out and started doing it.

It was purely his own thing and something that he wanted to do. It wasn’t initiated by any partner. It was just something he was really interested in and wanted to do. We knew he would be great at it and it would be a really interesting part of our campaign. He launched the first one with him and Ed Sheeran.

This fits in with something we have always been looking at – how we reach other audiences and how we can talk to people beyond the artist’s fanbase.

Today you really have to look at how people consume media and art. We are competing not just with other musicians but we’re also competing for people’s attention and their emotional engagement – and that could include things like films, computer games, TV and whatever else you want to put in that.

To have a successful campaign, you have to look outside of areas that are solely music.

EB: He has also partnered with the Mind charity and that is a thread that goes through every podcast. He talks about them the end of each episode. It's a theme on his album and he also did a charity event at the end of last year, playing at the union Chapel in London to raise money for them.

One of the reasons he bought the podcast equipment himself is that as soon as he knows the diaries are aligned he can just pack his bag and off he goes. He just goes and does it. It feels like you're listening into a conversation because he intentionally bought lapel mics instead of desk mics. That means the people he is talking to don't have that visual reminder of a massive microphone that they are being recorded – you want it to be secondary to the conversation.

He ended season one with an interview with Elton John. But there will definitely be a second season. We are just looking at that at the moment.

His weekly journal over-indexed

EB: When something is written by the artist, that definitely gets the best open rate and click-through rate. When we told him that he bounced the idea back to us and suggested that he write a weekly journal. He has been doing that for over a year now.

So, every Thursday at 8pm UK time he will send out **his journal**. It's an overview of what he's done in the last week but also what is coming up, so there is a



sense of exclusivity.

They are quite lengthy journals and there are exclusive videos with them occasionally. That has been a real success for us. The open rates are double what you would expect on a normal mailout.

Pre-sales and pre-saves

EB: We launched the 'Paradise' video alongside the album announcement and the tour pre-sale incentive. So, fans could pre-order the album through the D2C in order to get access to his tour tickets [when they went on sale]. The first tour sold out almost immediately.

I hate the phrase 'pre-save' as it is not consumer friendly at all. The way we run it is that you don't pre-save the album; you follow the artist and their top tracks playlist and the instant grats that will drop before the album will also go into that playlist. The catalogue is also in there – so you can kill two birds with one stone.

AES: We did a **Spotify event** [to Spotify Premium users at the Shoreditch Treehouse in London] on the Friday of album lunch. He also did some signings at HMVs. He was on the Chris Evans breakfast show on Radio 2 that morning. There was a lot of radio promo and various TV shows.

He does appeal to the new streaming audience but also to a more traditional audience who still buy CDs and downloads. Adapting to the fact his audience had made the transition to

streaming between the first album and the new album

EB: We did audience research at the start of 2017 and there was a segment of his audience aged 25-35 who said they bought the first album physically had since moved on to become streamers. That was a job we didn't have to do. They were already in that space.

Segmentation and matrix marketing

AES: We had a matrix of the different audiences that we were hitting with bits of different content at different points. It was very deeply segmented. We wanted to take everyone through a discovery journey that was targeted to the level of interest they were coming from and what they were engaging with.

EB: It was audience-led marketing rather than release-led marketing. It was all about who the audience are, where they are and how engaged they are with George. The aim was to deliver them different messages and take them deeper into George's world. We dialled different pieces up and down based on moments in the campaign – like instant grats and TV performances. We almost had something every week, so that was very useful for us to build around. :)

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Marketing people: do you have a campaign you are working on that you would like to see featured in Behind The Campaign in a future edition of **sandbox**? If so, send a brief synopsis of it to Eamonn Forde for consideration and your work (and your words) could appear here.

Email: eamonn.forde@me.com



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