

Should retailers care about what music they play in-store?

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Music and branding specialist Rob Wood examines the impact of music on a retailer's brand and customer relationship

"Music is music, right? As long as you have any old pop music blaring out of your speakers you will make your store feel like a happening event and attract young consumers into it."



According to Rob Wood of music agency [Music Concierge](#), that's the premise that the majority of retailers on [Oxford Street](#) have been working to for the last 30 years or so. "The truth is they are missing a trick, or rather they are missing a great opportunity to connect with their customers," he says.

Experiencing the brand through sound

"Music is very powerful in the way it affects people. Hearing is the second most important human sense after sight," continues Wood. "Your customers are experiencing your store and brand through sound whether you like it or not. If the store is full of inappropriate or worse still irritating music it will simply put people off spending time there."

"If however the music has been carefully curated to speak relevance to your target audience and create the right ambience for browsing, you will be attracting the right kind of customer and encouraging them to dwell."

Wood adds that the choice of artists is important as it can denote relevance. "People's music tastes say a lot about them and they will align themselves with that taste, so some artists and tracks will have an immediate emotional resonance with them, whilst others will be a turn off."

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Musical identity

He cautions therefore that brands need to design their music identity very carefully. "Random chart music might work for some brands for instance, but in fact it actually says you are like lots of other brands – in other words it can make you sound like the rest of the high street," he says.

"To stand out from the high street your brand might need to sound luxurious and elegant, or quirky and intriguing, or hip and fashion-forward, or traditional and classic. Music can be used in all those ways and plenty more to help position your brand and store as some where different or even unique."

Wood gives the customer example of [Boodles](#), where a "timeless, graceful atmosphere that denotes quality and beauty and encourages long relaxed browsing" was created.

Impacting the body

Aside from emotionally connecting to people, Wood explains that music also has a physiological impact on the human body. "When you go to a spa soft music is played to help you relax and unwind. When you go to a gym fast regular music is used to stimulate and provide a rhythmic structure to work out to. So we know music can energise and relax us, it can also scare us, or make us sad, or elate us."

Though fast pop or dance music might be relevant to a brand's identity, Wood warns that retailers also need to understand the effect it is having on shopping behavior. "Studies have shown that up-tempo music will stimulate shoppers so might potentially move through your store quicker," he says.

"Perhaps you should be looking to encourage slower browsing through slower music. That's why our music design for Boodles is slow and luxurious. We have also applied this thinking to restaurant environments where the objective is to turn tables or encourage longer meals with more courses and higher spend."

Taking control of the sonic journey

For Wood, the conclusion has to be that if certain artists and music styles convey meaning and relevance to people - and if brands can build or reinforce an emotional bond with that customer through the tracks that are played - music has to be carefully selected and thought through for any brand looking to build loyalty.

"But aside from actual the choice of artists, the sound of the music and the soundscape or atmosphere it creates will stimulate or slow down, or even outright annoy customers," he adds. "Therefore it's obvious in my opinion that retailers should be in control of the sonic journey customers take through each store."

"However don't for a second think that your staff will be able to do this for you," he warns. "They may be music fans, most people are, but they won't know how to select on-brand music or be experts in how music affects people, yet along be up on music copyright law."

Wood concludes that music needs to be carefully curated and managed by specialists because retailers should emphatically care about how they sound. "Thinking about all the senses makes complete sense," he concludes. "A tool that when used carefully can help attract customers, keep them in store and make them feel happy would be good, right?"