

# Research Report

# Artist Branding

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# INTRODUCTION

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The hip-hop culture is growing faster than ever, especially in the Netherlands. Currently the Dutch charts are flooded with hip-hop artists from in and outside of the Netherlands. This would not be the case a couple of years ago.

Of course the growth of this genre comes along with new music labels. For a long time Top Notch was one of the few well known hip-hop music labels. Nowadays there is a lot more competition for them from labels like; VanKlasse, Noah's Ark, Rotterdam Airlines and Bravoure Music.

Currently I'm involved in a music project, together with a few artists. We try to make a lot of music and eventually spread it across the world. This is the reason why I want to do research into artist branding. I want to find out what other artists experienced when trying to generate more brand awareness. How did they try to reach their goal and what tools did they use? I am also wondering what influence the labels have when they are trying to get more brand awareness for their artists.

After finding out what I wanted to research I started looking for an artist to analyse. I choose for Jonathan Hoost or better known as Jowners. Jowners is an upcoming artist and is currently signed with the label Bravoure Music. He started to gain recognition back in 2015. In 2016 he ended 2nd in the Dutch hip-hop competition "grote prijs van Nederland". By interviewing this artist I want to gather information about how he started to gain recognition and what tools he used to get there. Jowners was able to gain brand awareness in a relatively short amount of time. I want to know how he achieved this. I also want to get in contact with Bravoure Music to find out what they were able to do for Jowners and his brand.

## **Research question:**

How did the upcoming artist Jowners manage to generate brand awareness?

## **Sub questions:**

Were there any marketing tools used to reach this goal?

Where the tools used on purpose?

In what way was the music label Bravoure music involved in this process?

# RESEARCH

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Before I would do the interviews I wanted to make hypotheses about what I could expect to hear from Jowners, The label owner of Bravoure Music and the strategies they would be using. I am very interested in finding out what the artist uses to gain brand awareness and if he used any strategies on purpose. With the interviews I want find out if I can confirm my finding and eventually know what the best way is to create buzz around an artist.

## **Social-media and the Two way process**

Of course social-media is an essential part of communication nowadays. For artist this is one of the most efficient of cheapest ways of interacting with their following. There are different ways to approach this tool. U could just use social media to post your own content and have one-way communication with your audience. There is also another way to use social media and this strategy is called the two way process. This strategy is about communicating with your followers.

A good example of an artist that is using this strategy is Bizzey. Bizzey is a Dutch dj. He often asks or challenges people on social-media to share his content. When he released his new song "Traag", he asked his followers to let him know what they think of his new song. Bizzey challenged them to dance to the song and if he thought the video was funny or good he would post it on his own social page. A lot of people reacted on his appeal and they wanted to be posted on his page.

Nancy Baym is Associate Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Kansas. In an interview she talks about the importance for artist to interact with their following.

"Fans have new power to serve as publicists by sharing information and embedding and linking to music they love." (Nancy Baym, 2011)

This is exactly what Bizzey did. He got his followers to be his own publicist. (Cool, 2011)

By producing the right content on social media, people are willing to share these things with their own friends and family. Therefor the followers of the artist are expanding the brand awareness.

This is why social media is one of the most important parts about creating brand awareness is using social-media.

## **Video**

For artists it's relatively simple to write a lot of songs. I see a lot of upcoming artist releasing their songs on soundcloud, youtube and sometimes even spotify. Still a lot of singles are released without a corresponding videoclip. I understand It is a big investment for some people but it is an essential one. With a videoclip u will get a lot more attention from your followers but also from blogs. Especially in the Netherlands videoclips are very popular. I will give a quick example.

This is a video form the artist Lil Yachty. He is a world famous artist and tours around the whole world. On the 18th of November 2016 he released a videoclip for his song "Minnesota". This video has 18 million views. (Yachty, 2016)

On the 27th of December 2016, Ronnie Flex released his song and videoclip "Energie". This is a Dutch artist and his video has over 25 million views. Of course this is just an example but is clearly shows the popularity of videoclips in the Netherlands. (Flex, 2016)

# RESEARCH

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## **Perform**

This part of generating brand awareness is probably where the music labels come in play. I assume that most artists would like to perform as much as possible. This isn't always the case in the beginning, because maybe you don't have enough brand awareness yet. I think music labels like Bravoure music are able to arrange performances. They will have the right connection to put the artist on for example festivals or as support act for another concert.

If you have a good live act and you are able to show this to a new audience you are gaining more brand awareness. There are always people who haven't heard from you yet. Performing is a good way to get these people to be more familiar with you as an artist.

Besides gaining more brand awareness, performing also helps you to learn. You will gain experience by doing more and more gigs. This will improve your act and therefore more people will know or think that you are a good artist.

If you are lucky some influential people are attending your gig and maybe someone will book you for another concert, festival or something else. (Clifford, 2009)

# INTERVIEW JOWNERS

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## Interview Jowners

The journey of Jonathan Hoost as an artist started of with him making songs about topography to remember the cities for his tests in primary school. In 2015 he turned 22 years old, and that was the year he started to gain recognition. I interviewed Jowners about how he became part of the Dutch hip-hop scene and what tools he used to get there.

## Brand

As an artist you are not just a person who makes music but eventually you become a brand. You will have an exemplary role and that will come with responsibilities. I asked Jowners about being or becoming a brand and in what ways this helped in creating more brand awareness. He mentioned a couple of different topic.

An important part on this topic is your own sound. As I mentioned earlier, Jowners started making music from when he was little, but somewhere in 2014 he truly discovered his own sound. In America there where some rappers who where using auto-tune. Auto-tune is a machine or plug-in that makes your voice sound better, but these rappers where using it in a different way. The young rapper from Hoorn was inspired by their songs and tried it out. He then gave it his own twist and there was the Jowners sound. This clearly applies to a lot of things. If you want to get your product out in the market you will have to create your own image, sound, tone of voice etc.

Jowners also told me about different concepts he used to establish himself as a brand. In the beginning of his career he sang a lot about smoking weed. He also smoked on video's on his social-media pages for example. Later on he felt and saw that some of his followers where starting to smoke as well. Now I have created some brand awareness I also have an exemplary role, he said. So he quit doing that and now he is trying to turn this around with a new concept. He is trying to do the same thing but then with lollipops.

Not only because of the exemplary role he has, but also with thoughts about the future. He would like to have his own lollipop. Like a gimmick.

Another concept he used to gain brand awereness was Jowners hattrick. With this concept he was going to release three new songs in one week. Not only with the release of the songs but also upfront of the releases he gained attention. This was a way for him to already create buzz without releasing the songs yet. Different blogs wrote articles about this project. (Ballinnn', 2015)

## Social-media

Everybody will understand that social-media is an important tool for artists to use. Jowners just emphasised that in the interview. "social-media is very important" is the first thing he said. "People want to have the feeling that they are joining you on a journey".

Social-media is the best way to get "personal" with your fans. People want to know who you are as a person. It is also a good way to get feedback form your followers. You get to know what they think about your music or the way you communicate. Jowners tells me that this way of interacting with your fans also makes them more loyal. They want to keep following you as an artist.

If you are able to post the right content on the different social media platforms, people will share your content. This will create even more brand awareness. Besides this powerfull way to generate brand awereness it is all cost efficient as I earlier mentioned.



# INTERVIEW JOWNERS

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## **Blogs and Vlogs**

Jonathan tells me there are a lot of ways to create buzz or brand awareness for him self. One of the first things he mentioned when I asked him about this topic was blogs. There are a lot of well-known blogs that write about today's hip-hop culture, For example Puna, Ballinnn and Axed. He tells me that these blogs are important because they are trustworthy. The followers of the websites will instantly think the song is good because that is what the website is all about. So keeping in contact with these people is very important.

When he started to get more recognition and was posted on different blogs for a couple of times he kept releasing new music. He tried to be consistent in giving new music to he fans and followers. This worked out really well he tells me.

In the future Jowners would like to collaborate with youtuber's. Youtube is becoming bigger then ever before and he wants to jump on that train. He would like to get well known youtubers to use his music in their videos. When a youtuber is using his songs he will expand his own reach of followers.

## **Visual presentation**

With the release of a new song you want to get even more attention. A good visual presentation is essential. The artwork on the cover of a song has to enthuse the viewer to click on that particular cover. You will have to grab their attention. The best case would that there is a corresponding videoclip.

"I have the luck to also be a photographer"

Jowners currently studies at the Herman Brood Academy in Utrecht but before that he did a study on photography. This is why he always closely involved in the visual presentation process of his own work. He thinks trough every item he wears in his videoclips or every photo on his cover artworks. He tells me the followers will appreciate it if you are confident and passionate about your own product or brand.



# INTERVIEW GAETAN

## Interview Bravoure Music

Bravoure music is a music label that was established in 2016. Owner Gaetan van de Sande decided it was time for him to go and put his own stamp on the Dutch hip-hop scene. He has worked with a lot of big artist in the Netherlands. He was partially responsible for releases from artists like Ali B, Yes R and Sjaak. He worked for other clients on these artists and he wanted to do this for himself. That's why he started with Bravoure Music. (Sande)

Trough Jowners I tried to get a hold of Gaetan and he happily wanted to help me. I arranged an interview trough the telephone. I wanted to know what his opinion was on the best ways to generate brand awareness and mostly what role a music label can have in this process.

When I asked Gaetan about the essential parts about creating brand awareness for artists like Jowners he told me a good balance between different tools is very important. I divided the subjects he told about to explain them all separately.

## The role of Bravoure Music

I started the interview by asking what role Bravoure Music has in the career of Jowners. "For Jowners we do the whole package" said van de Sande. It really depends on the artist. Bravoure has a couple of different artists signed. Not everybody needs all the support Bravoure can offer. For example Shepherd and Skinto don't need us to do their management. For them Bravoure is only a publisher. For Jowners they do a whole lot more. They will help with building his career, support financially, do administration as well as being a publisher. He is in contact with Jowners a lot to discuss all things related to him as an artist.

## Creating a Brand

Gaetan was very clear when I asked him about becoming a brand when it comes to artists. He thinks you are building your own brand from the start. It already begins when you are thinking of your own artist name. Bravoure is there for Jowners to expand his brand and get it to become as big as possible.

## Social-media

Gaetan mentioned the importance of social-media. It was funny to me how he almost said the same thing to me as Jowners said. "You want to take people with you into your world". This just emphasises what this tool is all about and that is personality. The direct interaction is what makes this tool so powerful.

Gaetan actually learned something new from me because he did not hear from the two way process before. Of course he did knew about the principle and told me about the importance of it. I often encourage my artists to do this. Jowners does not do this as often yet but especially for the better-known artist this is pretty important. There are different ways to do this and it depends on what kind of artist you are on how you are going to use this.



# INTERVIEW GAETAN

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## Media

I told Gaetan about the importance of blogs for Dutch rappers that Jowners was telling me about. He agreed with him on this topic but he said it is even bigger than only the blogs. All media is very important for artist. There are not only the blogs that are important but also other media like television, interviews in newspapers with new releases and appearances at radio stations. This is where the music label comes into play very often because they have the right connections.

A good example of the role Bravoure could play in the career of Jowners is the video for Adidas. The music label was able to arrange a appearance in a online video of Adidas and Ajax. The whole video had the song "Right Now" from Jowners in the background. The song is named in the description of the video and there are also people in the communication section who are wondering where they can find this song. Probably not a lot of people who watched the video had heard from Jowners before. They do know now so he instantly expanded his following.

Gaetan said something very interesting about the blogs when I asked him about that topic. "They are the gatekeepers". Jowners already mentioned the blogs but Gaetan confirmed that they have a special function. They decide if they think a song or artist is good enough to be posted on their website. They can have a big impact on your music career. But they are certainly not the most important he said. It is all about a good balance between all different tools. Nowadays spotify playlists have a similar kind of function. If you or the music label succeeds in getting you in the right playlists you will get attention as well.

## Perform

Gaetan also talked about the importance of performing. It is good for artists to perform as much as possible because you will only get better by doing it. Getting booked for a performance is the goal for a lot of artists, but there are some things a music label is able

arrange for them. Bravoure could for example help with throwing a release party for an EP (extended play) or album. They also have to right connection to get you to perform as support act for bigger artist. On the 20th of may 2016 Jowners was able to be the support act of Migos in the Melkweg Amsterdam. Migos is a group of rappers from Atlanta. There are a lot of fans that showed up at the concert. Therefor a lot of people saw the support act up front. This is a good way to introduce yourself to a new audience Gaetan told me.



# CONCLUSION

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## **How did the upcoming artist Jowners made sure to generate brand awareness?**

As I already thought there are a whole lot of ways to approach the way to the top. Every artist has his own image and therefore his own way to gain more brand awareness. You will have to find out for yourself what approach you would like to take and also look at what your following likes and wants.

I can come to the conclusion that there are quite a lot of main guides to follow that can be applied to everybody. Jowners was able to tell me the guidelines he used. Now I have a report I can take a look at with every step I try to make in a career as an artist.

I learned a lot from the interviews with Jowners and Gaetan. I am new in this world of music so I thought all the things they said were very interesting. I now know for example that the media is still very relevant. Those are things I would not have guessed in the first place. Being posted on a blog or website isn't all there is. An appearance in a radio show or interview in the newspaper is still a very efficient way to expand your reach.

As an artist it is not always easy to get to perform in the beginning. I do know now that is important to take every change to do so. It will not always be the biggest venue or party but the more often you will do it the better you will get. When you are more confident with yourself being on the podium the more the audience will like it.

When I started doing this research I was wondering how many of the marketing techniques were used on purpose. It could also just be trial and error. It seems that it is a bit of everything. Jowners used social media from the start. This is not something he learned from a music label or someone else. This is just self-evident. However Gaetan is also pushing him to use two way processing.

The role of a music label is very important but defers for each artist. As I mentioned, Jowners is getting a lot of help in his career from Bravoure Music. But for other artists it's just only a way to get their music out there and have financial support. A music label can give your career a good boost but it will also cost you money. After hearing both Jowners and Gaetan I think it is good to try and get your career going for yourself and consider a music label later on.

I wanted to do this research because I'm making music myself and I wanted to know how to promote yourself as an artist. The good thing is that these methods can also be applied to a lot of other things. As a multimedia and communication design student I could change artist with for example product or campaign. You will also have to make use of your following through social media. The same is true for the other topic is discussed. Performing could be applied on the way you are going to present yourself in presentations or in front of clients. Promoting an artist is very similar to promoting a campaign or product.

It is almost time for me to graduate. When I am going to work on a project I can look back at this report. I can take all the tools in consideration for my own project because I now know what these tools are capable of.

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# APPENDIX

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## Interview questions

note: Keep in mind that i had conversations with the two people i interviewed. I constantly deviated from the questions below.

## Interview Jowners

Hoe ben je begonnen als artiest? (met muziek maken)

Hoe probeerde je aan het begin buzz te creëren?

Op een gegeven moment heb je brand awereness. Hoe ben je toen verder gegaan?

Ben je een plan gaan maken?

Wat is voor jou het belangrijkste bij de promotie van een single/release?

Hoe belangrijk is social-media voor jou als artiest?

Probeer je interactie te creëren op social media? (two way process)

Als je een plaat wilt gaan promoten zet je waarschijnlijk zelf een X aantal tools in. (social-media, websites, blogs)

Heb je wel een promoters ingezet om je releases te promoten?

Welke valkuilen ben je zelf tegengekomen?

Op een gegeven moment word je als artiest een merk in plaats van een persoon die muziek maakt. Op welke manier merk jij dit?

Een heel belangrijk onderdeel van branding is het imago van een artiest. Denk aan de manier waarop je jezelf presenteert op social media, in de media zelf maar ook op de manier waarop je je kleed of laat zien in videoclip. Hoe ben jij hier zelf mee bezig?

Soms is het voor artiesten handig om het imago dat ze willen bereiken door samenwerkingen aan te gaan. Voorbeeld: Mula B zal niet snel samenwerken met paul sinha. Herken jij dit en zo ja op welke manier?

Het imago/stijl is natuurlijk ook heel belangrijk om onderscheidend te zijn. Omdat het uitbrengen van muziek steeds makkelijker is moet je nog meer onderscheidend zijn.

Je hebt een video gemaakt in samenwerking/voor Ajax. Wat was jou idee bij de promotie en op welke manier heeft het positief bijgedragen aan jou carrière? Je kan ook mensen afschrikken.

(Bravoure)

Hoe ben je bij bravoure gekomen of hoe ben je benaderd?

Waarom heb je ervoor gekozen om bij een label te signen?

# APPENDIX

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## Interview Gatean van de Sande

Je bent natuurlijk al lang erg actief in de nederlandse hiphop scene. Als ik het goed heb bestaat bravoure music nu ongeveer een jaar. Wat heeft je doen besluiten om zelf een label te starten?

Ik geloof dat na de grote prijs je rond de tafel bent gaan zitten met Jonathan. Op welke manier ondersteunen jullie Jowners in zijn carrière?

Wat zijn de voordelen voor een artiest als Jowners?

Op een gegeven moment word je als artiest een merk in plaats van een persoon die muziek maakt. Op welke manier merk jij dit?

Bij de release van een nieuwe single of plaat is er natuurlijk promotie nodig. Je gaat het verspreiden op social media, maar misschien ook op blogs. Wat zijn volgens jou de meest essentiële tools om de muziek aan de man te brengen?

Wellicht ben je bekend met de term two way processing. Dit houdt in dat een artiest of merk niet alleen voor eenzijdige communicatie zorgt maar ook daadwerkelijk interactie heeft met zijn following. Is dat belangrijk voor een artiest als Jowners?

Wat ik interessant vond aan het interview met Jowners was dat hij zij dat blogs heel belangrijk zijn. Met name vanwege de betrouwbaarheid. De mensen geloven heel erg in de blogs. Als ballinnn of puna iets post moet het wel wat zijn. Hoe ervaar jij dit?

Elke artiest heeft natuurlijk zijn eigen imago. Hou je hier ook rekening mee als het gaat om promotie? Bv: de manier waarop je content op social-media plaatst. De een zal het anders aanpakken dan de ander.

Het is tegenwoordig steeds makkelijker om muziek uit te brengen en er is dus ook een groot aanbod. Hoe zorg je dat je je kan onderscheiden van de grote groep artiesten die ook allemaal net beginnen?