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MUSIC & ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY
EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION

Journal of the
Music & Entertainment Industry
Educators Association

Volume 14, Number 1
(2014)

Bruce Ronkin, Editor
Northeastern University

Published with Support
from



MIKE CURB COLLEGE of
ENTERTAINMENT and MUSIC BUSINESS

BELMONT
UNIVERSITY

Get Classy: Comparing the Massive Marketing of *Anchorman 2* to the Non-marketing of Beyoncé's *Beyoncé* Album

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Abstract

In the fourth quarter of 2013 two entertainment industry blockbusters were released: the film *Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues* and a release by recording artist Beyoncé Knowles titled *Beyoncé*. While the *Anchorman 2* team spent months promoting the December 18 release by traditional (and some very non-traditional) means, the *Beyoncé* album was cloaked in secrecy until it was issued by surprise on December 13. These two completely different strategies both proved successful, as the film sold US\$122 million in tickets within its first month of release and *Beyoncé* sold 1.4 million albums during this time. This paper describes the marketing tactics used by both camps and the market and critical reactions to those tactics, and shows how sales success is not dependent upon one single strategy but rather upon a strategy that works best for a particular release at a particular time, both on the calendar and during an artist's career. Implications for music labels, managers, and artists are discussed.

Keywords: *Anchorman 2* marketing, marketing Beyoncé's surprise album, marketing Ron Burgundy, marketing the Beyoncé brand, DIY artists, DIY marketing, music marketing, music industry, entertainment industry, film industry

Introduction

When Beyoncé released a new album to an unsuspecting public on December 13, 2013 she was widely praised for the lack of marketing that accompanied the record. Out of the blue, it was there, available worldwide on iTunes. Singles, the most popular configuration on Apple's store, were not made available. Instead, those wanting Beyoncé's new music had to purchase the full album for US\$15.99. This harkened back to an era when record labels made most of their money from sales of full-length CDs. Because *Beyoncé* included seventeen new videos, this "visual album"¹ included enough value that neither fans, critics, nor the greater music industry complained. The headlines were supportive:

“The Brilliant Business Strategy Behind Beyoncé’s Record Breaking Weekend.”²

“Beyoncé Broke The Music Business: Release Of Her New LP Changes Everything.”³

By the following week, this surprise release was the number-one album on the Billboard Top 200 Albums chart and breaking iTunes sales records around the world.

Five days later a movie began playing in theaters around the country that was anything but a surprise. *Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues*, a comedy starring Will Ferrell, Steve Carell, and Paul Rudd, had been announced with great fanfare a full twenty months earlier. The marketing and promotion that followed became what one writer considered the “most content-rich marketing campaign in history.”⁴ From social media to unique corporate partnerships, in addition to traditional marketing elements, *Anchorman 2* beat the first movie’s box office internationally by more than eight times while breaking the domestic \$100 million tally, something its predecessor could not do.

How did Beyoncé do it? In an industry built on tried and true pre-release marketing tactics, what did she and her team do differently? How did the *Anchorman 2* team do it? What made their marketing campaign so different from traditional movie marketing campaigns? This paper describes the background behind each brand and then highlights the different aspects of each operation. Then it examines the key techniques and characteristics the two teams shared to see what young filmmakers and unsigned, do-it-yourself musicians can learn to achieve their own successes.

Anchorman Background (2004-2013)

On Friday, the ninth of July in 2004, Paramount Pictures released a film with a \$26 million budget⁵ titled *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy*. By Sunday evening, the film had earned back its production budget with receipts of \$28.4 million.⁶ By the time the film left theaters on October 7, it had earned over \$90 million worldwide.⁷

Anchorman, as the film came to be known, was not a massive hit. Even with international ticket sales, the movie couldn’t break the film industry’s \$100 million benchmark for hits. It was a success, but not the

kind of success that spawns sequels and prequels. The director/co-writer, Adam McKay, star/co-writer Will Ferrell, and cast members, including Paul Rudd, Steve Carell, and Christina Applegate, carried on with their careers creating and acting in other projects. *Anchorman* was in their rear-view mirrors.

Paramount spent \$40 million on prints and promotion for the film.⁸ While the theatrical box office didn't break any records, the film did take on legendary status upon its home video release on December 28, 2004. Rather than package the film with the customary single DVD, Paramount took extra steps. In addition to the original theatrical release, it also made an unrated version of the film available. Also, what has been coined a "spiritual sequel"⁹ or "alternate film companion,"¹⁰ *Wake Up, Ron Burgundy: The Lost Movie* was included. This additional film was made up of scenes edited out of the finished theatrical release. Enough content existed to create this standalone film. Because of the film's eventual airing and re-airing on pay and basic cable stations including HBO, TBS, and TNT, plus the growing influence of video social-sharing networks like YouTube, *Anchorman*'s shelf life persisted for years.¹¹

Anchorman creators Adam McKay and Will Ferrell created comedy video website Funny or Die in April 2007.¹² During a 2008 Funny or Die comedy tour of eight college campuses, Ferrell reprised the Ron Burgundy character and interviewed celebrities including Tom Brokaw.¹³ More one-off joke than strategic initiative to further brand Ron Burgundy, the character was put aside by its creators. *Anchorman* was done. It was time to move on.

Other comedies released in the same period as *Anchorman*, such as *Dodgeball* (\$167 million),¹⁴ *50 First Dates* (\$196 million),¹⁵ and *Along Came Polly* (\$173 million)¹⁶ all grossed more at the box office than *Anchorman*. But the mix of characters, comedy, and social media fan support helped *Anchorman* seize a place in America's cultural zeitgeist. None of the other three received the long-term love from audiences that *Anchorman* enjoyed for years (see Table 1).

Social media deserves much of the credit for the continued interest in the film. "The concept of social media barely existed at the time of the first *Anchorman*," Andrew Runyon, Paramount's Vice President of International Interactive Marketing, said to *Adweek*. "Facebook had just been conceived a few months prior, and YouTube and Twitter hadn't been created. But social has allowed *Anchorman* to live on as a film. And it

Film	Release Date	U.S. Box Office	International Box Office	Total Box Office
<i>Along Came Polly</i>	1/16/2004	\$88,097,164	\$83,866,222	\$171,963,386
<i>50 First Dates</i>	2/13/2004	\$120,908,074	\$75,574,808	\$196,482,882
<i>Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story</i>	6/18/2004	\$114,326,736	\$53,395,574	\$167,722,310
<i>Anchorman</i>	7/9/2004	\$85,288,303	\$5,285,885	\$90,574,188

Table 1. Comparable Comedies to *Anchorman* In 2004.

makes us believe that we have something really zeitgeisty here that we can capitalize on.”¹⁷ “Our fans have been creating content and essentially marketing for us,” said Megan Wahtera, Paramount’s Senior Vice President of interactive marketing.¹⁸ Clearly, there was ongoing interest in *Anchorman* since its 2004 release.

***Beyoncé* Background (2003-2013)**

One year before *Anchorman*’s theatrical release, former Destiny’s Child vocalist Beyoncé Knowles released her first solo album, *Dangerously In Love*. According to SoundScan, this album has sold 4,910,114 units¹⁹ in the United States since June 17, 2003. She released three more albums between 2006 and 2011. Table 2 shows release date and album unit sales as of February 2014 for Beyoncé’s four solo album releases, courtesy of SoundScan.²⁰

Album Title	Release Date	Domestic Sales
<i>Dangerously In Love</i>	6/17/2003	4,910,114
<i>B’Day</i>	8/15/2006	3,365,740
<i>I Am...Sasha Fierce</i>	11/18/2008	3,126,911
4	6/28/2011	1,392,141

Table 2. Release date and album unit sales as of February 2014 of Beyoncé’s four solo album releases (SoundScan).

Beyoncé stayed in the public eye between 2003 and 2013 with four solo album releases which sold a combined 12,794,906 units. She toured five separate times, a total of 371 shows, including one European tour, one North American tour, and three tours worldwide.²¹ There were four promo tours, one major charity concert (in 2003), two telethons, the MTV

Music Awards in 2011, and a performance as headliner for the Super Bowl XLVII Halftime Show in 2013.²² She also appeared in eight films over this ten-year period and sang three songs during the 77th Academy Awards telecast²³ on February 27, 2005. The ceremony was broadcast in over 150 countries.²⁴

Beyoncé created and endorsed the perfume line *Heat* in February 2010;²⁵ the catch phrase “Catch The Fever” helped market the new brand. A limited edition EP (“extended play” or short album) featuring Beyoncé’s rendition of the 1950s song “Fever” came out a year later. Three other scents were released in August of 2010, February of 2011, and July of 2012 respectively. A fifth, limited edition scent named *Heat: The Mrs. Carter World Tour* came out in June 2013 to promote the ongoing concert tour of the same name.²⁶

In December 2012 Beyoncé signed a novel type of endorsement deal with Pepsi-Cola²⁷ that focused on the traditional and non-traditional. The singer’s face appeared on a limited-edition line of soda cans and Beyoncé appeared in television spots internationally.²⁸ But in a new twist, Pepsi also set aside a “creative content development fund”²⁹ to collaborate with Beyoncé in new creative ventures. The overall deal was estimated to be in the \$50 million range.³⁰

A high profile marriage to hip-hop artist/record company executive/entrepreneur Jay-Z in 2008³¹ and higher profile birth of a daughter, Blue Ivy, in 2012³² kept her consistently in the public view.

Life Is But A Dream, a documentary directed by and starring Beyoncé, aired on HBO in February 2013.³³ The film also aired in the U.K., Belgium, and Australia later that year.³⁴ It was reported to be HBO’s highest rated documentary in ten years and was watched by 1.8 million viewers.³⁵

In August 2013 it was announced that Beyoncé’s “Love On Top” video, from her album *4*, received Vevo certification after being viewed over 100 million times.³⁶ It was another in a string of massive hits for Beyoncé, with perhaps her best-known song to date being “Single Ladies (Put A Ring On It)” from her 2008 *I Am...Sasha Fierce* album. “Single Ladies” was more than a number-one hit in the U.S.³⁷ The video was a cultural phenomenon.³⁸ Parodies from *Saturday Night Live* to Joe Jonas,³⁹ cover versions of the song, and even a mention and “hand flip” by President Obama and his wife Michelle in 2009⁴⁰ strengthened the Beyoncé brand.

To date, Beyoncé’s Facebook fan page has over 56 million “Likes.”⁴¹

Considering she has only tweeted eight times, 13.2 million people follow Beyoncé on Twitter. She is one of the music industry's biggest superstars.

General Movie Marketing and Distribution

As with music, there are different classes of movies released on any given weekend. There are the blockbuster films, with production budgets well over \$100 million, like *Iron Man 3* (\$200 million budget)⁴² and *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (\$130 million).⁴³ There are middle-market films, like *Lee Daniels' The Butler* (\$30 million)⁴⁴ and *Lone Survivor* (\$40 million).⁴⁵ There are also the independent films, many created by independent filmmakers willing to put the entire budget of the film on their credit cards and face the risk of personal bankruptcy, like *Uncross The Stars*.⁴⁶ *Anchorman 2* fell into the middle-market film budget category, with a production budget of \$50 million.⁴⁷

Each class of film is marketed based upon the studio budget, the season of its release (e.g., Memorial Day or Christmas), competing releases from other studios, and the number of screens available at that time.⁴⁸ The films with the largest production budgets are released on as many screens as possible simultaneously.⁴⁹ A film's gross revenue in its first weekend can be a strong indicator of what its eventual box office will be.⁵⁰ And the greater a film's final theatrical box office, the greater the revenues of future ancillary markets like pay-per-view and home video.⁵¹ In order to maximize publicity a marketing budget can sometimes add nearly 50% to a film's production budget.⁵²

Traditionally, the areas in which a studio spends its marketing dollars range from newspapers and magazines to television, from theatrical trailers to billboards, from the internet to special events.⁵³ Most studio films in the middle- and blockbuster-tiers follow standard marketing procedure: a press junket (round-the-clock interviews for one or two days by the stars and director with as many news and entertainment outlets as possible), one or two movie trailers, and appearances on various television talk shows.⁵⁴ Online marketing of a film can also be similar across tiers and genres: periodically updated Facebook pages and Twitter feeds, plus YouTube videos mainly comprised of the same trailers moviegoers see in theaters.⁵⁵ The *Anchorman 2* team did not follow tradition.

General Music Marketing and Distribution

Unlike movies, which can have budgets up to \$200 million, the bud-

get for a typical record album is anywhere from \$125,000 to \$300,000.⁵⁶ Marketing costs range from \$100,000 to over \$500,000 depending upon the artist. Like the film industry, there are tiers of artists. The highest tier is made up of the superstars, like Justin Timberlake (over three million full-length units sold in 2013) and Bruno Mars (over two million).⁵⁷ There are middle-tier artists, like Kings of Leon (250,000 full-length units sold in 2013) and Ariana Grande (390,000).⁵⁸ The majority of releases are from independent label and DIY (do-it-yourself) artists (to whom most of the public is never exposed). For example, of the twenty million songs available on streaming service Spotify, twenty percent, or four million, have never been streamed.⁵⁹

It is widely known that for an artist to sell large quantities of music, he or she needs the help of a major label. In 2013, there was not one artist on the Top 10 Most Streamed Songs or Top 10 Most Played Songs who did not have an association with a major label distributor.⁶⁰ Generally, new and unknown artists need the budgets, connections, and expertise of major labels if they are to have any hope of making a substantial living in the field.

Prior to a major label artist releasing new material, it is traditional for an initial single to be released to radio, along with an accompanying music video (uploaded to YouTube and other video websites, and made available to cable television music networks). The artist may visit radio stations in a region and perform interviews for magazines and newspapers. In addition, a tour supporting the album will be either announced or well underway once it has been released. *Beyoncé's team* did not follow tradition.

Anchorman 2 Marketing and Results

When the sequel to a film is announced, normal Hollywood procedure is to send out a press release.⁶¹ As with everything related to *Anchorman 2*, “normal Hollywood procedure” would not be followed. On March 28, 2012, Will Ferrell, dressed in the maroon suit his character Ron Burgundy wore while broadcasting the news throughout *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy*, interrupted Conan O’Brien’s late-night TBS talk show *Conan* by playing jazz flute, a well-known comic bit from the first film. After Ferrell-as-Burgundy poked fun at O’Brien (“It’s probably something only a professional like me would notice, but...Conan, you look awful.”), the audience erupted at some news: “I want to announce this to everyone here in the Americas...to our friends in Spain, Turkey, and the U. K.—including England, that as of O-900 Mountain Time, Paramount

Pictures and myself, Ronald Joseph Aaron Burgundy, have come to terms on a sequel to *Anchorman*.”⁶²

The announcement took place nearly twenty months before December 18, 2013, the date the film arrived in theaters. That week in December 2013 *Conan* averaged 1.1 million viewers per show.⁶³ To date, the Ferrell/Burgundy sequel announcement has received over 5.7 million views on YouTube. Google lists over 123,000 results for the term “Anchorman sequel announcements.”⁶⁴ It was just the beginning.

The marketing surrounding the sequel, and the creativity that went into that marketing, was put together by multiple parties: Paramount Pictures, the film studio; Zemoga, a digital design agency; Jetset Studios, “an agency of content creators who tell stories that connect people to brands;”⁶⁵ social site Tumblr; the website Funny Or Die, owned by *Anchorman* & *Anchorman 2* creators Adam McKay and Will Ferrell; and the writers, director, and “talent” from the film.⁶⁶ Table 3 summarizes the major marketing efforts put together in the long run-up to *Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues*.

As Table 3 suggests, there were many non-traditional *Anchorman 2* marketing activities, a handful of which were completely new to movie

Partner	Type of Marketing
Dodge/Funny Or Die	70 commercials filmed
ESPN	Peyton Manning interview
CNN/Funny Or Die	Short film: <i>Burgundy's America</i>
Newseum	Anchorman exhibit, 11/13/13 - 8/14/14
Conan	Three Ron Burgundy appearances: 3/28/12, 1/31/13, 11/20/13
KX News (North Dakota)	Co-Anchor of Nightly News
Ben & Jerry's	Scotchky Scotch Scotch limited edition ice cream
Tumblr/Jetset Studios	50+ videos, memes, and GIFs
Dan Patrick Show	December 5, 2013 appearance
Paramount Pictures/Zemoga	“Join Ron's News Crew” Tumblr promotion
Emerson College	School of Communication named after Ron Burgundy for one day

Table 3. *Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues* marketing chart.

marketing. The key component of this marketing variety was actor Will Ferrell's dressing and acting as the lead Ron Burgundy character at nearly all appearances. This concept worked as the team focused on what a real news anchor does—read the news. Ferrell, as Burgundy, was recorded reading the news about other countries, like Ireland and Australia, in order to bring local interest to those territories.⁶⁷ The process worked, as Ferrell told *Fresh Air's* Terry Gross in December 2014, "We've kind of gotten into different pockets of the audience we never would have reached through Ron's appearances."⁶⁸ The Ron Burgundy/news anchor theme was taken even further. Ferrell, as Burgundy, read a full half-hour newscast as co-anchor of the evening news on North Dakota's KX News on November 30, 2013, two weeks after an *Anchorman* exhibit opened in Washington D.C.'s Newseum, an interactive museum of news and journalism.⁶⁹

On December 4, 2013 Boston's Emerson College renamed, for one day, its School of Communication as "The Ron Burgundy School of Communication."⁷⁰ Ferrell visited the school in character and held a press conference with the Dean of the School of Journalism and the college president. During the 45-minute Q&A, the Dean and President were not asked a single question.⁷¹ The press conference has received to date over 92,000 views on YouTube.⁷² In addition, there were up to one hundred media requests in the Boston area for time with Ferrell/Burgundy.⁷³

Adam McKay and Will Ferrell's Funny or Die website also produced a short film in conjunction with CNN titled *Burgundy's America*. This film, just over three minutes in length, stars CNN personalities Wolf Blitzer, Chris Cuomo, and Anderson Cooper.⁷⁴ Interestingly, Ferrell/Burgundy never speaks on camera. Instead it is a scripted "documentary" with the three CNN anchors talking about their (fictional) relationships, past and present, with Burgundy.

As a comic character, Ron Burgundy's personality was also effective as a pitchman for something not news related: the Dodge Durango. In August 2013, Funny or Die filmed seventy commercials⁷⁵ starring Burgundy. After the spots began airing in October, sales increased by 59%.⁷⁶

The real news coverage, Dodge commercials, and CNN documentary were all successful in promoting the film's release, December 18, 2013. The final five seconds of each thirty-second and sixty-second Durango commercial featured an "In Theaters This Christmas" bumper. The final seven seconds of the CNN piece also featured a bumper with the release date. In addition, Ferrell/Burgundy performed a filmed interview with

Denver Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning for *ESPN The Magazine* that to date has received over 4.9 million views.⁷⁷ A radio interview done for *The Dan Patrick Show* was filmed and split into two YouTube videos. Combined, they received nearly 560,000 views.⁷⁸ For perspective, the second most popular *Dan Patrick Show* interview, with ESPN personality Erin Andrews, received 57,000 views, just over one tenth as popular as the Burgundy interview.⁷⁹

Paramount also put in place a promotion based on the traditional movie marketing idea of cross-promoting movies with products. In this case, rather than simply brand the film's logo on a package, Paramount and Ben & Jerry's ice cream got a little more inventive. Burgundy's likeness appeared on packages of a limited edition flavor named "Ron Burgundy's Scotchy Scotch Scotch."⁸⁰ The product featured butterscotch ice cream with butterscotch swirls. The web page featured a large image of the container and a description fitting with Burgundy's attitude and famous oft-repeated expression, "Stay classy."

Memes and GIFs (Graphics Interchange Format, a form of computer image that is capable of animation)⁸¹ were prepared by the *Anchorman 2* team and Jetset Studios on a special Tumblr page. Fan engagement, including creation of their own memes and GIFs, was encouraged. In fact, much time was spent organizing the thousands of user-generated GIFs⁸² in order to maximize the promotional possibilities.

Paramount didn't ignore traditional marketing, as there were billboards and ads placed on television networks, websites including *The Huffington Post*, and as trailers before other films.⁸³

From videos customized for territories all over the world to multiple character-driven appearances in unlikely (for a movie) places, from ice cream to autos to the internet, the marketing surrounding *Anchorman 2: The Legend of Ron Burgundy* is now considered by some to be not only the future of movie marketing, but the greatest combination of content marketing to date for anything.⁸⁴

The *Anchorman 2* team did not "force" fans to watch the film with a bombardment of traditional television, print, and social media advertising. They drew attention to themselves by creating entertaining content that brought attention to the movie and its release date without blatantly telling people to go. The content they created—the CNN faux-documentary, the Emerson College press conference, the Newseum exhibit, another appearance on *Conan* hawking an imaginary book by Ron Burgundy featuring

prison riot survival tips, a “Scotch Toss” mobile app that required the actors to come in and record new lines independent of the film,⁸⁵ and even the Dodge Durango ads—was content that could be watched independently of *Anchorman 2*. It was content that, on its own, was entertaining. The goal, facilitated by creating all this content, was to generate as big a box office as possible, which down the line would generate larger revenue streams from home video, pay-per-view, first-run and syndicated television commitments, merchandise, and more.

Anchorman 2: The Legend of Ron Burgundy was a story on film, but the content surrounding it created more stories. As Jonny Rose, product evangelist at U.K.-based “content intelligence” company, idio⁸⁶ wrote in *The Guardian*, “All Ron Burgundy has to do is turn up in a new situation, that is appropriate for a ‘celebrated’ news anchor, and the brand storytelling continues.”⁸⁷ Go to Google and type in “Anchorman 2 marketing” and there are 1.2 million results.⁸⁸ That means there are a lot of people impressed with the work put in to promote this sequel.

From a bottom line, how did the film do? Table 4 presents a comparison of the first and second *Anchorman* films. Clearly, the sequel made more money at the box office than the original film. What’s telling is how *Anchorman 2* made nearly nine times the international box office as the original. This can be attributed to not only nine years of pent up demand due to television and social media attention but also the marketing team’s push to “localize” marketing content for territories outside of the United States.

Film	Budget	Domestic Gross	International Gross	Total Gross
<i>Anchorman</i>	\$26,000,000	\$85,288,303	\$5,285,885	\$90,574,188
<i>Anchorman 2*</i>	\$50,000,000	\$124,894,430	\$44,100,000	\$168,994,430
*Figures based upon 58 days of release.			Difference:	+\$78,420,242

Table 4. *Anchorman, Anchorman 2*: comparison.

Surprisingly, the film did not open up at the number-one position at the U.S. box office. In fact, according to Box Office Mojo, a website that tracks the film industry, the first *Anchorman* had a better first week, \$28.4 million, compared to *Anchorman 2*’s \$26.2 million.⁸⁹ *Forbes* magazine believes the core audience knew about the film and wanted to see it but they

were ten years older than when the first film came out. They had different lifestyles now; they'd see it when it was convenient for them (and their babysitters), not the movie studio.⁹⁰

The box office tallies show that *Anchorman 2*'s marketing investment was worth the time, money, and effort. Could they have followed the traditional path of movie marketing and turned a profit? Quite possibly. Smartly, the sequel's budget was middle-tier, which gave more latitude to all involved to experiment and create. The bottom line is that more people came to see *Anchorman 2* worldwide than the first film. *Anchorman*'s box office was \$64.5 million more than its original budget. The *Anchorman 2* box office was nearly \$119 million more. Based upon these comparisons, one might conclude that *Anchorman 2* was 84% more successful than its predecessor.

On Friday, February 28, 2014 Paramount Pictures took the unprecedented step of releasing a second version of *Anchorman 2*. Titled *Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues: Super-Sized R-Rated Version*, the new rendering opened in one thousand theaters for one week only and featured the same story but with all new jokes.⁹¹ This was done in keeping with the tone of the *Anchorman 2* marketing. Surprisingly, said Adam McKay, it wasn't the filmmakers who came up with idea of another release. Rather, it was Paramount, which decided to move ahead mainly because this concept had never been done before.⁹²

The home video was released on April 1, 2014. This move was about more than generating home video revenue. This additional slice of content marketing, albeit on a large scale, also reinforced awareness of the *Anchorman*/Ron Burgundy brands. For example, it brought more awareness to ancillary markets such as pay-per-view. Viewers now had more choices in how to spend their *Anchorman 2* money.

There weren't sequels to *Along Came Polly* or *Dodgeball*. Based upon the strong ticket sales and positive worldwide reception to the content surrounding *Anchorman 2: The Legend of Ron Burgundy*, one might think we will one day see *Anchorman 3: Staying Classy*. According to writer/director McKay, we won't.⁹³ "It's done," he said. It was almost ten years between the first two films. Despite what McKay says, maybe he and Ferrell will revisit the idea in another ten.

Beyoncé Marketing and Results

Five days before *Anchorman 2* reached movie theaters, the entertain-

ment world was rocked by the unannounced release of a new Beyoncé album simply titled *Beyoncé*. There was no advance single. The artist had not held a press conference nor done the talk show circuit. At a few minutes after midnight on Friday, December 13, 2013 *Beyoncé* was suddenly available for consumers to purchase, solely as a full-length album in the iTunes store.

What was novel about this surprise approach was how the focus of consumers and the record industry machine over the past decade had been on singles. Ever since Napster had illegally taken individual track downloads into the mainstream in 1999⁹⁴ and Apple's iTunes Store had legitimized the practice in 2003,⁹⁵ long-form albums had lost favor among music buyers, much to the chagrin of the major record labels.

The twenty-first century record business is drastically different compared to the last thirty years of the 1900s. What was once an industry built upon long-form LPs, cassettes, and CDs was also an industry built upon dollars. The retail price of a CD was \$18.99 at its peak in the late-1990s. That price meant real dollars in revenue to the labels, enough dollars so that after they paid out manufacturing, publishing, marketing, and artist royalty expenses, they could still keep dollars.

Today, it's a business of pennies.⁹⁶ While the labels would love to go back to receiving revenue mainly from full-length album sales, the business has become one that is based upon the sale of individual tracks, generally priced at \$0.99 to \$1.29 per song. Critics deride albums stating there is no point in putting out collections of singles in which nine out of every ten songs are not very good.⁹⁷ Today labels report album sales as "equivalent albums" because, in a land of single-track sales, the majority of sales off of an album come from only one or two songs.⁹⁸

Artists also fear today's singles-driven culture. When Flo Rida can sell two million singles of his song "Club Can't Handle Me" but only move 62,000 full-length albums,⁹⁹ or Cobra Starship can sell two million copies of "You Make Me Feel..." but only 33,000 albums,¹⁰⁰ artists don't have the "luxury"¹⁰¹ of sitting back and resting on the success of a single. As artist, songwriter, and Senior Vice President of A&R at Universal Motown Records, Ne-Yo, said in mid-2012, "I feel like the thing that makes you go out and get a person's whole album is you liking that artist, you connecting with that artist."¹⁰² His suggestion to the industry: Don't build "fly-by-night, add-water-and-stir artists." Build icons.¹⁰³

Beyoncé is anything but a "fly-by-night" artist. She is an example of

the icon Ne-Yo suggests the industry build. As one of the songwriters of Beyoncé’s “Irreplaceable,” a song that spent ten weeks at number-one on the Billboard Hot 100 Singles chart in 2006 and 2007, he should know.¹⁰⁴

The decision to release *Beyoncé* only as a full-length album, from which consumers could *not* buy singles, and the decision to distribute it exclusively through one retailer, iTunes, could therefore be considered risky given the current state of the music industry. *No* singles? If fans wanted Beyoncé’s new music, they had to buy the whole record. No doubt her label, Columbia Records, loved this return to a business of dollars, even if it was with only one artist.

Did the strategy work? According to SoundScan, *Beyoncé* sold 617,319 units and was the number-one album in its debut week.¹⁰⁵ Considering the album was released on a Friday, and other new albums competing for that top slot were released three days earlier, on Tuesday, her accomplishment is even more impressive. Table 5 shows the artists from the week of December 15, 2013 who sold albums in excess of 100,000 units. Note how *Beyoncé*, at number-one, sold 445,811 more full-length units than number-two, *Blame It All On My Roots* by country music icon Garth Brooks.

The plan to sell *Beyoncé* as a full-length album at a \$15.99 was likely a business decision, but Beyoncé presented *her* reasoning in a press release: “While not a concept album, the record is designed to be consumed

Wks On	Label	LW RK	TW RK	Artist	Title	TW Sales
1	COL		1	BEYONCE	BEYONCE	617,319
3	GBRK	1	2	BROOKS*GARTH	BLAME IT ALL ON MY ROOTS	171,508
7	RCA	3	3	CLARKSON*KELLY	WRAPPED IN RED	136,016
1	RCA		4	KELLY*R.	BLACK PANTIES	133,426
3	COL	2	5	ONE DIRECTION	MIDNIGHT MEMORIES	123,224
7	ENAS	5	6	ROBERTSONS	DUCK THE HALLS:A ROB	107,714
	Key:	Wks On = Weeks On Chart LW RK = Last Week Rank on Chart TW RK = This Week Rank on Chart TW Sales = This Week Sales				

Table 5. Top albums for week ending Dec. 15, 2013.

as a comprehensive audio/visual piece from top to bottom. The antithesis of making singles, the visual album is a non-linear journey through the thoughts and visions of Beyoncé.”¹⁰⁶

The visual portion of *Beyoncé* was an inclusion of seventeen music videos. This video inclusion was a smart move, as it brought tremendous added value to a project asking consumers to spend \$15.99 at iTunes when they were more accustomed to spending \$1.29. Including a music video with an audio project is not a new concept. The newness here was the sheer volume of videos included with the release. Fans could perceive this extra content as a great deal.

Beyoncé and Columbia Records took a risk with this surprise release by selling exclusively through iTunes. By locking out Target and Walmart, two of America’s top music retailers, and other online stores like Amazon, was she not only limiting sales potential during the iTunes period of exclusivity but also in the aftermath should any of these retailers elect to not carry the title out of punitive resentment?

Beyoncé broke iTunes sales records with its number-one week,¹⁰⁷ besting the previous first-week sales of Justin Timberlake’s *The 20/20 Experience* and Taylor Swift’s *Red* by 27,000 units and 152,000 units, respectively. In addition, Beyoncé was the number-one album in 104 of the 119 countries where iTunes is available.

If one wanted to calculate the benefit of making *Beyoncé* exclusive to just one retailer, one might look at the aggregate hype to judge if the marketing exposure and overall buzz would have been the same had she and her team followed the traditional release and distribution model. According to *Mashable*, “Facebook mentions spiked 1,300% in the hours after the album dropped.”¹⁰⁸ Twitter released an animated map showing the location and density of Beyoncé-related tweets during December 12 and 13.¹⁰⁹ While tweets heavily skew toward the United States, international impact of the release is also evident as demonstrated by intense social chatter in Europe, Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, and Australia. In all, she was mentioned 1.2 million times on Twitter immediately following the album’s release. “That’s 1.2 million essentially free pieces of advertising, perfect for a generation whose news comes in the form of Twitter links and Facebook shares,” wrote Florent Le Mens, a social media strategist in Brisbane, Australia.¹¹⁰ Searching Google for “Beyoncé new album” yields more than 70 million results. After announcing the album release on her Instagram page, where she has 8 million followers, the post (Surprise!)

received over 603,000 Likes.

Would this amount of social energy have occurred if the album had been announced months in advance and if fans were able to sample a single or two before deciding whether to buy the album? Possibly. But consider Beyoncé's previous four solo albums. Her first peaked with sales of 4.9 million units; her fourth dropped to 1.4 million. Even if a traditional marketing approach had been applied to *Beyoncé*, sales would have likely been strong—but not record-breaking. As Maura Johnston, editor of *Maura Magazine* and ILA Journalism Fellow at Boston College, wrote, “By allowing listeners to click the ‘buy’ button in iTunes when the memory of the album’s announcement was fresh, it cut through the chatter that so many other cultural products fall prey to in the promotion-saturated age.”¹¹¹

Interestingly, much of the buzz following the album’s release speculated how other retailers—all shut out from iTunes’ exclusive deal—would react. Industry insiders looked towards Target, Walmart, and Amazon; would they carry the album in its physical format? Target did not. Its reasoning was that, because the album had already been made available digitally, potential CD sales would be negatively impacted.¹¹² But beyond that, perhaps Target’s decision not to sell Beyoncé’s new album (they’d had an exclusive with her in 2011 for *4*) was a message to the rest of the industry: beware the decisions you make that don’t include us.¹¹³ Walmart and Amazon did carry the album.

Beyoncé’s release plan has been described as risky. But was it? Was it risky for Beyoncé to release an album with no advance notice and no pre-marketing to support the release? As the artist’s press release stated when the album first came out: “Stripped of gimmicks, teasers, and marketing campaigns, this project is truly about art before hype.”¹¹⁴

What many people missed as they praised the *Beyoncé* release was the fact that it was *because* she was a superstar artist that the surprise release skewed so positive. It was as if every blogger and reporter loved the tactic so much that they didn’t realize Beyoncé, the artist, had been very active promoting herself all along. In fact, 2013 had been one of Beyoncé’s busiest years (see Table 6).

In 1980 John Lennon released the album *Double Fantasy*. It was his first solo album in five years. During the period from 1975 to 1980, Lennon had not toured the world multiple times, starred in films, enjoyed multi-million dollar endorsements, or appeared as a guest on other artists’

Date	Partner	Type of Marketing
July 2012	Heat	New fragrance release
December 2012	Pepsi	Endorsement (and more) campaign announced
2013		
January 21, 2013		Sang "The Star Spangled Banner" for President Obama's Second Inauguration
January 29, 2014	Columbia Records	Destiny's Child compilation and new single release
February 3, 2013	NFL	Super Bowl XLVII Halftime Show
February 10, 2014		Grammy Award appearance and win
February 16, 2013	HBO	"Life Is But A Dream" documentary
April 15-June 1	Pepsi	Mrs. Carter World Tour - Europe
May 7, 2013	Interscope/Warner Bros. Records	"Back In Black" released on Great Gatsby soundtrack
May 24, 2013	20 th Century Fox	Character voice in animated film <i>Epic</i>
May 28, 2013	Def Jam Recordings	Track appearance on The-Dream album
June 14, 2013	Universal Republic	Track appearance on Kelly Rowland album
June 28-August 5	Pepsi	Mrs. Carter World Tour - North America
July 2013	Heat	New fragrance release
July 4, 2013	Universal Music	Three-track appearance on Jay-Z <i>Magna Carta</i> album
September 8-September 28	Pepsi	Mrs. Carter World Tour - South America and North America
October 16-November 9	Pepsi	Mrs. Carter World Tour - Australasia
November 25, 2013		<i>Life Is But A Dream</i> DVD release
November 30-December 22	Pepsi	Mrs. Carter World Tour - North America
December 13, 2013	Columbia Records	Beyoncé surprise CD release
2014		
February 20-March 24	Pepsi	Mrs. Carter World Tour - Europe

Table 6. Beyoncé marketing chart.

albums. When asked in 1980 by *Playboy* magazine what he had done during those five years, he replied, “Baking bread.”¹¹⁵ Surely, he was goaded, there had to have been “secret projects” taking up much of his time. “Are you kidding?” Lennon replied, “There were no secret projects...Because bread and babies, as every housewife knows, is a full-time job. There ain’t no space for other projects.”¹¹⁶

Beyoncé’s first child, Blue Ivy, was born on January 7, 2012. Nineteen months later, the superstar was not at home, John Lennon style, baking bread. She was busy releasing a surprise album to a fan base she had been meticulously cultivating. While *Beyoncé* was an album that came out of nowhere, and the marketing leading up to it was not traditional, there *was* a year-long strategy that culminated in record sales and a massive public, critical, and social media reaction. In all that was written about her in December 2013, most of the accolades focused on the surprise itself. The bloggers and traditional media seemed to miss that, while her fans had no idea an album was coming, they also had no idea that they were being marketed to so fiercely and intensely all year long.

In other words, what was being marketed was the Beyoncé brand. It didn’t matter what she was selling, e.g., concert tickets, DVDs, or a fragrance. She spent 2013 selling us Beyoncé and all that the Beyoncé brand represents: fun, energy, and empowerment. That an album was released with no advance warning did not mean there was no advance marketing. There was, but the message was about the person, not the product. And in the end, after moving away from the traditional model and focusing instead on the grander idea of artist and career—not individual unit sales—Beyoncé and her team succeeded.

Conclusion

In order for an NFL running back to score a touchdown when the ball is handed off to him, he has to find a hole. He must see where everyone who wants to tackle him is going, and either run through before they get there or slip beyond their grasp. The running back isn’t somebody the team randomly selects from the stands. He is a professional athlete, finely tuned and trained to be on that gridiron. And when handed the ball, he doesn’t decide on the spot where to run. On the contrary, he is working in conjunction with ten other teammates on the field and a full coaching staff on the sidelines, all of whom have planned and practiced for years for this very moment.

The *Anchorman 2* and *Beyoncé* teams were well prepared for their respective games. Adam McKay and Will Ferrell didn't decide out of the blue to put out a movie sequel and create incredible supporting content. Beyoncé didn't decide on December 12 that she wanted to put out an album when the clock struck midnight. In order for each project to achieve successful results, the two teams had to have strong, comprehensive plans in place, plans that took advantage of each party's strengths.

The team around *Anchorman 2* was made up of funny, intensely creative people. The actors and creators were comedians before they were stars. Taking comedic risks and making people laugh is in their blood. If being funny was what they knew best, they wisely took full advantage of those gifts and made more than just a funny movie. They set the bar for other content creators (movies, music, arts and sciences, etc.) to do more. Based upon the principles of *Anchorman 2* marketing, the project isn't over when the director on the set yells, "That's a wrap." In fact, it's just the start.

Beyoncé, artist and businesswoman, took the same approach. Her December 13 "surprise" release was a well-calculated event that took into account her skills as a performer, personality, and music superstar. A likeable person with a strong voice and beautiful face, Beyoncé was able to spend a full year promoting her album worldwide—even though nobody knew that was what she was doing. By being the type of star who could sell out venues, attain high-profile sponsorships, and appear at even higher profile events, Beyoncé was able to take advantage of her place in popular culture for a full year before her album came out.

Perhaps the most important key that both the *Anchorman 2* and *Beyoncé* teams shared was the focus on creativity. Both teams could have followed traditional paths and made money. Nearly ten years of pent-up demand for a sequel was probably assurance enough that Paramount would earn back its investment and have a property that could generate modest ancillary revenue for years to come. Therefore, the *Anchorman 2* team didn't have to film 70 Dodge commercials. But they did. Will Ferrell didn't have to appear in character as Ron Burgundy in so many different places. But he did. Beyoncé could have released a single to radio in November to prime fans for her album release. But she didn't. She could have announced on YouTube or at a concert that her new album was coming out on December 13 so her fans could keep \$15.99 on hand before spending it on other Christmas gifts. But she didn't.

A quote aimed at the *Beyoncé* release applies to both. “Beyoncé didn’t break the rules, she simply figured out a way to take existing notes and rhythms and write a new song.”¹¹⁷ There are only eighty-eight keys on a piano, yet people keep writing new songs. The same goes for marketing a film, a song, or an album. It’s the creativity that matters.

Unfortunately, the results—a film with a \$180 million worldwide gross and a record-breaking number-one album—are not necessarily replicable for independent filmmakers and unsigned artists. For example, unsigned musical artists release songs on iTunes every day. To the greater public, all of these are “surprise” releases. But we never hear about them because the name one clicks on to buy them is not “Beyoncé.” As stated earlier, four million songs available on Spotify have never been streamed once. One can learn the following from this:

1. The artists didn’t maximize their inherent “gifts” to build an audience.
2. The artists and their respective teams didn’t plan well enough to build demand for even one stream (note the artists themselves don’t appear to be streaming their own songs even once).
3. The artists and their teams didn’t use creative focus to help maximize awareness of each song’s existence.

In Anita Elberse’s book, *Blockbusters: Hit-making, Risk-taking, and the Big Business of Entertainment*, she reinforces the Spotify example. “According to Nielsen SoundScan, of the 8MM unique digital tracks sold in 2011, 94% sold fewer than 100 units, and an astonishing 32% sold only one copy. In that same year, 102 tracks sold more than 1MM units each, accounting for 15% all sales.”¹¹⁸

Maura Johnston made the following point comparing Beyoncé to independent artists: “Eight million Instagram followers translating into one million sales is a 12.5% conversion rate, which is good for an artist with eight million followers but not so great with one who has one-thousandth of that.”¹¹⁹ In that case, the artist would have 8,000 Instagram followers and sales of 1,000 units. The profit to the artist(s) from the sale of 1,000 units wouldn’t be enough to fund another album.

For recording artists who have an established fan base, there are lessons that can be taken from *Anchorman 2* and *Beyoncé*. Don’t rush. Plan ahead. Be creative. These lessons also apply and may be even more impor-

tant for the DIY artist. Remember, Beyoncé was once part of a group that started from zero. Before *Anchorman 2*, there was a first film that wasn't considered a big success. If artists and independent filmmakers can understand the lessons from *Beyoncé* and *Anchorman 2*, they may be able to maximize their opportunities in any career stage. Who knows? Maybe in ten years, those artists will break through based upon what they learn here.

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