

Selling and marketing music through digital platforms as an independent musician

Mikael Salo



Author(s) Mikael Salo	
Degree programme International Business	
Report/thesis title Selling and marketing music through digital platforms as an independent musician	Number of pages and appendix pages 49 + 11
<p>This thesis delves into the world of digital distribution and the marketing of music, from the viewpoint of an independent musician. It aims to answer the following research question: “How to sell and market music as an independent artist through digital platforms?”</p> <p>The author, an independent musician himself, had several independent music releases planned for the year 2018. The research period and the case projects for the research part of the thesis were thus formulated accordingly. The effectiveness of the different distribution and marketing channels, as well as other means of attracting listeners such as the use of social media influencers, were examined, and all of the case releases were compared and discussed in chapter 3.</p> <p>The thesis consists of four different parts: the introductory part, aims to shed light into the observed topic by examining the realities that independent musicians face in the era of digital music distribution and marketing, as well as explain the thesis purpose, its key concepts and the case projects studied in the research part of the thesis. Second, the theoretical framework of the thesis gives a more conventional look into the topic by examining different theoretical tools often used in marketing that can be implemented by the target group of the thesis (independent musicians aiming to release and market their own music through digital platforms). Third, the research chapter, which is the main part of this thesis, analyses and compares real-life examples of different independent bands using different methods of marketing and distribution to try and engage potential listeners as much to their advantage as possible. Finally, the discussion part summarizes the thesis and discusses its results in order to give an overlook of the findings and to provide the author’s comments on them. The topic is also discussed with two professionals of the field in an interview section.</p> <p>Anyone who is pondering how and where to release and market his or her own music could benefit from this thesis. Chapter 4 gives a quick summary of the results of the research and they could be used toward one’s own artistic activities. Furthermore, the appendix interviews with Sami Hinkka of Ensiferum and Laureline Tilkin of Tuonela Magazine and Cerulean Midnight (PR agency & marketing start-up) proved to be very valuable in getting insider knowledge about the topic at hand.</p>	
Keywords digital music platform music marketing selling	

Table of contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	The independent artist situation	1
1.2	What do we want to know?	2
1.3	What is the scale of the thesis?	3
1.4	Domestic vs international	5
1.5	Who should read this?	5
1.6	Risks for the independent artist	6
1.7	Concepts you should to know	6
1.8	Explaining the case projects	9
1.8.1	My musical background	9
1.8.2	Northern Seer (2009-)	10
1.8.3	Everfrost (2016-)	10
1.8.4	Thy Row (2017-)	12
1.8.5	Dyecrest (2017-)	12
1.8.6	Case releases	13
2	Useful theoretical tools for digital music marketing	15
2.1	The theoretical framework	15
2.2	4Ps of the Marketing Mix	16
2.3	SWOT matrix	16
2.4	Marketing environment	17
2.5	Direct marketing	18
2.6	Heideggerian authenticity	18
3	Research	19
3.1	The research design	19
3.2	How was research conducted?	19
3.3	What marketing tools and channels are out there for an independent musician?	20
3.4	What distribution tools and channels are out there for an independent musician?	22
3.5	Dyecrest	27
3.6	Everfrost	30
3.7	Northern Seer	31
3.8	Thy Row	33
4	Discussion	35
4.1	Summary of results	35
4.1.1	IQ 1. Which digital platforms are relevant when targeting potential customers for music marketing and sales activities?	35
4.1.2	IQ 2. How do different platforms differ in expected revenue and costs? ...	36

4.1.3 IQ 3. How to optimize one's own music marketing and sales activities?...	36
4.2 Trustworthiness of the research	37
4.3 Analysis of interview's new insight	37
4.4 Suggestions for development or further work	38
References.....	39
Appendix 1: Interview with Sami Hinkka (Ensiferum)	46
Appendix 2. Interview with Laureline Tilkin (Cerulean Midnight / Tuonela Magazine).....	53

1 Introduction

In this chapter I will go through the main components of my thesis “Selling and Marketing Music as an Independent Artist”. I’ll start by going through the background of my thesis, why I chose the topic I have, and why there’s a need for research to be conducted in the field. Secondly, I’ll define the research question and investigative questions required to solve the problem that my thesis is trying to solve: how can one without any label backing sell and market their music in an effective way through digital platforms. After defining the RQ and the IQs, I will move on to the demarcation or the scope of the project. The international dimension of the topic will be covered in the next part, from where I will move on to what benefits and to whom my thesis will produce. Finally, I’ll define the key concepts required to understand in order to gain a proper insight into the field that I’m about to re-search.

1.1 The independent artist situation

The global music industry is arguably one of the most affected industries by digitalization and the rise of the internet. Musical recordings used to be exclusively sold in physical formats for about a century. Now the product has changed into a streaming, digital purchase and niche physical product hybrid. According to the “Global Music Report 2017” study by the non-profit Swiss organization IFPI (International Federation of Phonographic Industry), the global revenue for physical recordings dropped from almost 25 billion USD to 5 billion USD in only a decade (despite a newly found annual industry growth of around 4-6%). This is due to the rise of streaming and internet sales, that have now become the norm for record companies and artists to distribute and sell their music. (IFPI 2017.)

This highly changing environment maybe hard to navigate for the individual artist or band, and therefore the need for research on what the best ways and tools are to reach a modern music-listening audience is in high demand.

A research that comprises of recommendations and analyses for specific service providers and their tools, and studies a highly evolving market area, is always related to the time that the research is conducted. In for example 5 years’ time the research might become obsolete in value, but for a year or two from publishing it should work as a valuable paper for anyone wishing to learn about the covered topic and how to use the information it provides to their advantage.

I myself sing, play and compose in 7 different bands, from which 4 released new original music in 2018, and 5 will release new material in 2019. None of these bands are backed

by a record label's professional marketing team or sales channels, and therefore I have to learn about the topic for my own professional advancement and career as a musician. This works as a great motivator for thesis writing and pushes me to conduct my research in an honest throughout way.

1.2 What do we want to know?

This thesis aims to benefit individual musicians as a kind of a "guidebook" to selling and marketing music on their own, using cost-effective tools that are available for everyone. To gain this knowledge, we must find out what potential sales and marketing channels are there, how to choose the most beneficial for one's own situation, and finally how to utilize them to gain maximum audience reach and revenue gains.

The research question can be worded the same as the thesis title itself:

"How to sell and market music as an independent artist through digital platforms?"

The following are the investigative questions (research question deconstructed into more researchable learning problems):

IQ 1. Which digital platforms are relevant when targeting potential customers for music marketing and sales activities?

What's the use of entering a marketplace if no-one is using it? Usually entering a marketplace has affiliated costs, and if such costs are not met with sales and/or potential consumers reached, entering such a marketplace will only act as a cost, not as a strategically beneficial move.

IQ 2. How do different platforms differ in expected revenue and costs?

Finding out which channels and marketplaces provide the best results for one's money. This research will be focused on comparison between the benefits of different service providers in the field (online music distribution). Comparison tables will be presented for ease of comparing different services.

IQ 3. How to optimize one's own music marketing and sales activities?

This is where most independent musicians struggle, organizing their processes and actions so that they continuously organize marketing and sales campaigns for their new releases. Record labels have practices in place that have been designed to be run each time their artist has an upcoming release in the sales pipeline. I will make recommendations on which tools and methods to use for optimal potential customer reach and response.

The table below presents the theoretical framework, research methods and results chapters for each investigative question.

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Investigative question	Theoretical Framework	Research Methods	Results
IQ 1. Which digital platforms are relevant when targeting potential customers for music marketing and sales activities?	Digital marketing, marketing and sales platforms, marketing and sales channels	Marketing theories, articles, service web pages and experiences on the use of digital channels by independent musicians.	A comparison between different channels and platforms, and an end recommendation.
IQ 2. How do different platforms differ in expected revenue and costs?	Return on investment, digital sales and marketing channel costs.	Theories, articles, service web pages, and experiences on the use of digital channels by independent musicians.	A comparison between different service providers' reach versus costs, and an end recommendation.
IQ 3. How to optimize one's own music marketing and sales activities?	Optimization and processing of one's own marketing and sales activities.	Theories, articles, service web pages, and experiences on the use of digital channels by independent musicians.	A blueprint for an independent musician to organize and manage their sales and marketing in an ongoing basis.

1.3 What is the scale of the thesis?

When I was discussing about my thesis topic with my appointed thesis advisor, the question rose about the scope of the research, how it was quite wide and how the project might implode due to the amount of work required. Therefore, I limited the topic to digital platforms only, since doing a wholesome guide about music marketing and sales through physical channels as well (in its many forms) would make the project impossibly big in the area of research that would have to be covered. After our "Thesis Planning" -course consultation session with our degree programme specialization coordinator, I worked on my investigative questions and reduced them from 5 to 3 more enhanced ones. In my case projects I will focus in the various hard rock and melodic metal genres, since that's where all of my releases operate. This allows comparison to the performance of other independent artists' releases to become relevant.

Having different kind of sounds and styles of course means that each band also needs different kind of marketing and selling activities but going this far in analysis wouldn't make sense since it would simply make the thesis topic too wide and undefined. This is why I plan to limit the topic to sales and marketing through digital platforms, focusing on the tools, services and routes to the music consumer. Anything that's more personal or specialized when it comes to marketing activities are beyond the research scope.

Table 2. Demarcation & project scope

<u>Demarcation criterion</u>	<u>Demarcating dimension</u>
Timeline	Q1, Q2, Q3 2018
Industry	Music
Geography	Worldwide
Department	Marketing & sales
Type of thesis	Project based thesis
Research method	Qualitative (constructive)
Case projects (bands)	4 x Dyecrest Everfrost Northern Seer Thy Row
Case releases (albums/singles)	8 x 18.01.2018 – Northern Seer: Northwind (Single) 01.02.2018 – Dyecrest: First Born Angel (Single) 01.03.2018 – Dyecrest: Red Alert (Single) 23.03.2018 – Thy Row: Hidebound (Single) 17.05.2018 – Dyecrest: Fading/Reaching (Single) 18.05.2018 – Everfrost: A Cold Night Out – Live at The Circus, Helsinki (Digital Video/Live EP) 25.05.2018 – Dyecrest: Are You Not Entertained? 16.06.2018 – Thy Row: The Round (Single) 14.09.2018 – Northern Seer: Freedom or Death (Single)
Genres	Heavy Metal, Melodic Metal, Modern Metal, Metal, Symphonic Metal, Symphonic Power Metal Power Metal, Progressive Metal, Progressive Power Metal, Speed Metal, Hard Rock, Rock, Finnish Rock, Finnish Metal
Release platforms	CD Baby (Thy Row)

	Bandcamp (Everfrost) Inverse Records (Dyecrest) Soundrop Distribution (Dyecrest, Everfrost, Northern Seer)
Methods of analysis	Statistical data analysis (comparison of results) User experience analysis (convenience vs inconvenience) ROI analysis (price vs results)

1.4 Domestic vs international

My specialization in Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences' BBA-degree programme in international business is called "Global Customer Relationship Management". This basically means international marketing and sales, something that is very much related to my thesis.

The topic I've chosen is definitely global in nature, since streaming services and music royalties depend so heavily on the volume of consuming (1 stream equals to about 0,004891 USD), which just cannot be obtained domestically unless you're one of the biggest artists out there with significant label support, and this is a thesis aimed for the average independent artist. (Digital Music News 2016.)

1.5 Who should read this?

As an end result of my thesis, I want to provide independent musicians with an easy-to-understand, yet extensive enough guide to selling and marketing one's music in the digital age of the 2010's. If I can benefit other musicians as well (besides myself), I will be very happy with the result! The benefits that my thesis will hopefully provide can be divided into three main recipients:

1. Benefits to myself through learning as an independent musician and a business student who's interested in the subject, as well as having an urgent need to conduct music sales and marketing through digital platforms with my own releases in the following years.
2. Benefits to other musicians when the thesis is released. Everyone interested in the subject can pick-up my thesis, find a part that they are interested in learning about, and find the tools and strategies to implement on their own projects.

3. Benefits to my university of applied sciences Haaga-Helia. When I was going through thesis's made by previous HH-students, I couldn't find others that were focused in the same topic as I was. Therefore, I would provide the HH-Thesis database a paper with new kind of research targets and topics for future students to find and utilize in their own work.

1.6 Risks for the independent artist

In the field of sales and marketing there's always risk involved. Many artists (not just musicians) nowadays accept the fact that in the early stages of their active career, revenue generated will not meet the expenses involved, just like with a starting business. Making profit out of recorded music seems to many like a distant dream, reserved for only the lucky few who are backed by big labels and big promotional money.

If you are an artist, monetizing your craft and making it profitable can be extremely difficult compared to the conventional industries that entrepreneurs operate in (e.g. a plumber with his/her own business). This is due to the fact that art in itself is rarely created to make profit. The art that the artist creates has a value to the artist on its own, regardless of the monetary return it may or may not provide later on. Therefore, all the small streams of revenue that might come to the artist's way should be optimized, to create a larger pond of revenue, to help the artist deal with the difficult realities of the music industry today. In order to do this, we must recognize the most prevalent risks involved, to evade crippling losses of the artists' very often limited capital for investment, and find what will provide the most bang for the buck when it comes to releasing and promoting one's art.

The most prominent risks for an independent musician would be:

- a) *the marketing campaigns conducted don't attract customers (listeners), and the business doesn't grow (artist in popularity);*
- b) *money is lost through expenses (producing the music or conducting the marketing campaigns) not being covered by sales (royalties through streaming or physical sales etc.)*

1.7 Concepts you should to know

Amazon is the largest online shopping website, as well as one of the most valuable public companies in the world. From Amazon's online store one can buy music in both physical and digital forms. (Business Dictionary 2019.)

Apple is a computer and consumer electronics manufacturer, and the most valuable company in the world. Apple plays a huge role the global music industry, as it has the biggest digital music store in the world, the **iTunes Store**, as well as its own music streaming service **Apple Music**, which is considered to be the biggest competitor to the world's most popular streaming platform **Spotify**. (PC Magazine 2019.)

Digital music distribution is a method of distributing music in the form of audio files that music consumers can download through the internet. Some of the biggest global digital music distributors are **Apple**, **Amazon** and **Google**. (The Pro Audio Files 2017.)

Facebook is the largest social networking site in the world with over one billion users. (Hutchison 2013, 3.)

Google is an American multinational technology company that specializes in internet-based products and services. It is most well-known for its search engine which is the most popular in the world. This gives Google incredible leverage in its value as an advertising and marketing service provider. Search engine optimization of one's own website and the Google Ads platform makes Google a go-to service provider for the independent musician. **Google Play** is the company's own digital music store which has operated since 2008. (TechTerms 2019.)

Google+ was a social network platform launched by Google to be a competitor to Facebook. It allowed users to interact with video chats, posts and was completely integrable to YouTube (Google acquired the company in 2006.) (Techopedia 2019.)

Guerrilla Marketing Tactics are unconventional advertising strategies that focus on low-cost marketing tactics that yield maximum results. Its name derives from guerrilla warfare which is a form of irregular warfare that relates to small tactic strategies used by armed civilians. Guerrilla marketing is often used by small businesses as a creative alternative to traditional marketing methods that require substantial monetary investment. (Creative Guerrilla Marketing 2018.)

Instagram is a free-to-use, online photo-sharing platform/application with more than 1 billion users every month. It was acquired by the social media company **Facebook** in 2012. (TechTarget 2012.)

Marketing tools include the techniques and resources that are used by those involved in the promotion of products and services. It can include analytical tools for customer reach

and behaviour data, or for example automated marketing campaigns in the form of social media advertisements. (Business Dictionary 2019.)

Music streaming is a way of distributing music real time with the means of data buffering instead of downloading files. In practice, this means a continuous stream of data (from which the name is also derived from) using an internet connection with a computer or a mobile device. Many broadcasters prefer this method to selling downloadable files, since it makes it harder for most users to save the content and distribute it further on illegally. (BBC WebWise 2012.)

Myspace is a social networking site that allows users to interact with each other as well and create blogs, upload videos/photos and design their profiles to feature their interests, hobbies etc. (Business Dictionary 2019.)

Qualitative research methods are used when a researcher wants to understand the underlying reasons for a phenomenon. It is also used to uncover trends in opinion and thought, diving deeper into the research problem itself. Data for qualitative research is generally collected in smaller sample sizes, focusing on respondents that fulfil a certain quota. Methods used include unstructured or semi-structured techniques. For example group discussions, individual interviews or participation/observations could be viable qualitative data collection methods. (Snap Surveys 2011.)

Return on investment (ROI) is a tool for measuring the efficiency of an investment made. In calculative form, the benefit of an investment is divided by the cost of the investment, resulting in a ROI percentage or ratio. ROI is used when a company evaluates where to allocate its finite resources in pursuit of growth. (Investopedia 2018.)

Sales channel is a mean of providing services and products to the market for consumers to purchase. Sales channels can be direct or indirect. In direct sales channels, the customer buys the product or service from a business directly, with no intermediaries between. Indirect sales channels include a third party (besides the customer and the product/service providing business), that provides the platform, where the trading event itself takes place. (Business Dictionary 2019.)

Social media marketing means marketing practices that are used through social media websites and social networks. SMM provides companies with a way to reach new customers as well as engage with already existing customers online. Some of the biggest social

media marketing platforms are provided by companies such as **Facebook** or **Google**. (Investopedia 2018.)

Spotify is a digital music streaming service that enables its users to remotely source millions of songs from independent or label-affiliated artists with smartphones, pads, laptops or other devices. (Collins Dictionary 2014.)

WeChat is a Chinese social media platform with over a billion monthly users. It is a very versatile application that features add-on apps, games, video chat, Facebook-like feed and photo sharing. It also acts as a marketplace where users can pay bills and transfer money electronically. (PC Magazine 2019.)

YouTube is a user-based video streaming service. It allows content creators or in this case musicians and artists to upload videos and share or embed them in their social networking pages. (Hutchison 2013. 3)

1.8 Explaining the case projects

1.8.1 My musical background

Regarding the music industry, I have gained some experience in work life and in my educational background. I used to study music theory and bass guitar (which I studied in private lessons for a couple of years prior) in Töölö music academy as well as Helsinki Pop & Jazz conservatory. I took one year of private singing lessons in 2010, as well as attended a CVT (Complete Vocal Technique) intensive course in 2017. I did my military service in the Guardsband of Helsinki as a singer, playing several shows a week for around 7 months in elderly houses, kindergartens, governmental events and various other venues. After the service was over our military band continued as a party-/wedding band, playing a handful of shows a year in private events for live concert fees. I performed in the Slush 2017 tech start-up/investor event with the "Slush Big Band" at the main stage of the event. Besides this I have 5 bands that create original music, with each having a different sound, brand and target audience. Most of these bands have played shows in live clubs and bars around Finland for a few years, with one (Metal de Facto/Trio de Facto) having completed a 19-date European acoustic tour in December 2018 warming up to the Finnish folk metal band Ensiferum. The following are bands I'm creating original music with, and their releases in 2018 will act as case projects for this thesis. They are listed in chronological order from the time I joined them:

1.8.2 Northern Seer (2009-)

Northern Seer is my first band, which was created by me and two friends of mine back in 2009. We started as a tribute band to the American progressive metal/rock band Dream Theater back in 2008 at our high school Helsingin Yhtenäiskoulu, basically just for fun jams and for improving our instrumental skills. It later evolved to be a kind of a speed / heavy power metal band with some progressive elements. We self-released an album length demo in 2012, which got mixed reviews from the Finnish metal press, but is still regarded dear by some of our original fans.

In January 2018 we finally released our first official single called “Northwind” independently with proper mixing by our guitar player Joose Ylianttila, who had become a higher education student of music technology (I had mixed our demo, and the result for that was far from good) and mastering was handled by Esa Orjatsalo, who had worked with some well-known Finnish bands such as Moonsorrow, Kivimetsän Druidi etc. With the same production team, we released another single in September of 2018, one that was also featured on our original demo, now with proper production called “Freedom or Death”. Both of the singles were released through a digital distribution service called Soundrop Distribution.

My role in the band was originally to be the bass player, from which I became a singer/rhythm guitar player, from which I become just a singer, and finally a singer/bass guitar player. Funny how fast the love for your band and the dire need of the situation can make you learn the use of unfamiliar instruments... We've played around 30 shows in our career so far, mostly at Finnish youth centers and later in our adulthood in bars, clubs and some indie festivals and band competitions.

1.8.3 Everfrost (2016-)

Everfrost is a Finnish-Australian symphonic power metal band that has a quite unique idea, unfamiliar to the general metal scene: the band uses Japanese manga artists or in Japanese “mangaka” (漫画家) for the artworks of our records. Our upcoming album titled “Winterider” (to be released in Summer 2019) will feature a fully coherent manga alongside a conceptual album. Sometimes albums like that are referred to as “metal operas” for their grand scale, intertwined storyline and several characters included, usually interpreted by different singers, or different voices created for each character by the singer of the band. Good examples for famous metal operas in the recent years could be the multi-singer project by the Dutch composer and multi-instrumentalist Arjen Anthony Lucassen, with the 2017 release called “The Source”, a double album by his progressive metal

project Ayreon. For a single-singer multi-character example we could for example look at the American-Canadian progressive metal legend Dream Theater's 2016 double album called "The Astonishing", which was orchestrated by none other than David Campbell (Michael Jackson, Beyoncé etc.)

Due to Everfrost's unique take on what it means to be a metal band, the band has some interesting marketing potentials. Rather than tapping just into the potential customer bases of the metal scene in music, the band could branch out to the comic book, Japanese culture, gaming and other subcultures with passionate and substantial fanbases. In practice this could mean appearances at conventions and events of those subcultures, using the same marketing channels as the companies and organizations in those subculture-areas use to approach potential customers etc. Furthermore, such subcultures have a huge discussion board presence with famous sites such as 4chan or Reddit. Having a presence and initiating discussion in such forums could initiate organic growth for very low to none-at-all financial input.

Guerrilla marketing tactics are an interesting field of marketing and haven't been explored enough in the music scene in my opinion. Using such tactics can prove to be surprisingly effective, due to their bottom-up (also organic) approach. (Creative Guerrilla Marketing 2018.) An example of such a user-created marketing hype could be the case of the T-Series (the Indian equivalent of Vevo) vs PewDiePie (the multimillion-subscribed Swedish gaming YouTuber), where the throne for the video streaming platform YouTube was contended in who had the most subscribers in the world. It started when T-Series started to catch up on PewDiePie's subscriber amount in late 2018, who was for a long time considered the most successful YouTuber in the world. T-Series being a huge Indian corporation, that was automatically subscribed by any new Indian YouTube user was not looked over well by the YouTube communities, and so a huge campaign to boost PewDiePie's subscription numbers was initiated, resulting in growth of tens of millions more YouTube subscriptions to PewDiePie. The competition between these two channels is still going on, and it shows how independent movements and hypes created by the users themselves can skyrocket the fame of a brand, an individual or an artist. (The Washington Post 2018.) The possibilities in these differing marketing approaches are promising, and it will be interesting to see how the band can utilize these factors in its favour with the marketing of our future releases.

In this thesis we will examine the release, promotion and reception of Everfrost's digital live video/live EP titled "A Cold Night Out – Live at The Circus, Helsinki". We had no experience of releasing a video as a product in the music industry and were very excited about

seeing how such a releases' reception would turn out. Distribution channels for video concerts differ heavily from music that is just in audio form, and marketing for a visual product like this will most likely differ as well due to its different method of consumption (viewing instead of listening).

1.8.4 Thy Row (2017-)

Thy Row is a Helsinki-based Finnish heavy metal / hard rock band that was founded by guitarist Jussi Laulainen and producer Sami Inkiläinen (ex-Warner Music Finland promotion manager) in mid-2000's. The band's first line-up was finalized when Ville Vase and Teemu Laitinen (Bride Adorned) joined the band, with Lauri Hämäläinen (Ikinä) joining in as a session musician. I joined in late summer of 2017, and we immediately started recording songs that the band had composed in the years since their inception. I brought in my good friend Juho Jokimies (Blame Me!) as a permanent bassist for the band, and so the line-up was completed.

The band released two digital singles in 2018 titled "Hidebound" (featuring guest performances from famous Finnish musicians Ben Varon and Ilja Jalkanen) and "The Round" (featuring guitar virtuoso Teemu Mäntysaari of the Finnish progressive death / symphonic folk metal band Wintersun), and a self-titled EP (extended play) both digitally and physically in 2019. A full-length debut album can be expected later in the year.

Besides playing four club shows in Helsinki and one in Varkaus, the band will be heading to Japan for the Finnish metal festival there called "Suomi Feast" in May 2019 for shows in Akabane and Shinjuku, both in Tokyo.

1.8.5 Dyecrest (2017-)

Dyecrest is a Ristiina-based Finnish melodic metal band, that started their career as early as 1993 (the year I was born). The band took part in the "European Young Metal Gods" contest in 2003, and came in second, securing a record deal with Noise Records / Sanctuary Group. What followed was a debut album (2004's "The Way of Pain") and an extensive European tour with the legendary hard rock band W.A.S.P (USA) and the now highly regarded power metal band DragonForce (UK). After the record label of their 2005 sophomore album "This Is My World", the German Dockyard 1 Records filed for a bankruptcy in 2009, the band went for a long hiatus (with a couple on-off resurgences for anniversary shows etc.) that lasted until 2016, when they started to work on a new album.

I joined in late 2017, and the album entitled “Are You Not Entertained?” was released in May 2018, this time through a publishing contract with the Finnish label Inverse Records / Inverse Music Group. The album was preceded by three singles titled “First Born Angel”, “Red Alert” (featuring singer Björn “Speed” Strid of the Swedish death metal band Soilwork in guest vocals) and “Fading/Reaching” (which also had a music video filmed by the Finnish video production company Gallacas Films). The release show for the album in Mikkeli was a success, and the album entered the official Finnish top 10 physical albums chart (7th place), as well as the top 50 streamed albums chart (48th place). (Musiikkituottajat 2018.)

1.8.6 Case releases

My case projects for this thesis will be two single releases for **Northern Seer**, two single releases for **Thy Row**, a digital video/live EP release for my band **Everfrost**, and finally three single releases and an album release for my band **Dyecrest**. All these bands and projects took a different route when it came to digital marketing and sales channels, yet they were all independent actors in the music market, making the data relevant for the thesis research problem and investigative questions. Only the **Dyecrest** album had a physical product connected to it, and the data for that physical product’s distribution, marketing measures and success will therefore be omitted from the research, to preserve the theme of the thesis which focuses on the digital marketing and distribution environment. It will be interesting to analyze how the different approaches affected the reach to potential customers (music listeners). (Mikael Salo Vocals 2019.)

All the releases were made in 2018. I decided to limit the researched year to one specific year to have a more authentic and reliable data collection period, regarding market fluctuations and the popularity of different service providers, for this could be compromised if the releases were made in radically different times. The bands used a different method of releasing their new material, and since they are all very similar in popularity (the dispersion of page likes in Facebook for example was less than 3000 likes, and even less in Instagram with a dispersion of less than 200 followers), the data collected is comparable, and conclusions as well as recommendations made will be relevant as to what seemed to work the best and why. This in turn makes the research worth conducting, as it can provide real value to struggling independent artists who might find it hard to find information presented in such an easy-to-understand comprehensive package.

The situation I’m facing requires me to study and learn about the different methods of selling and marketing music digitally. Music means everything to me, and I’m excited for the ongoing projects I have as a musician. 2019 is going to be big year in the form of releases

and events, and doing my thesis now on that very topic, knowing that the more I can find out about effective methods, the more successful my projects could become, works as an internal motivator for me to conduct research in a way that will provide actual valuable and practical information.

2 Useful theoretical tools for digital music marketing

2.1 The theoretical framework

In the following chapter I will go through the theoretical framework that I will use in my thesis research. The models will be used to bring the marketing dimension of the topic at hand to a more contemporary marketing framework, making it easier to understand for someone who hasn't considered marketing through the lens of digital music marketing.

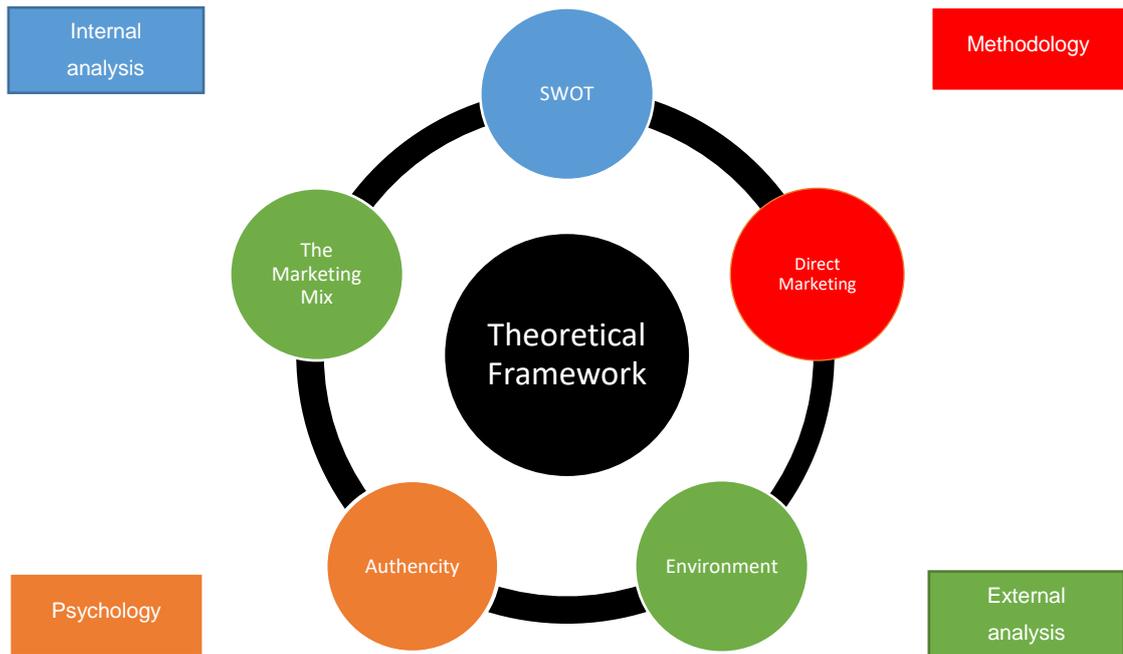


Figure 1. The Theoretical Framework

2.2 4Ps of the Marketing Mix



Figure 2. The Marketing Mix (Hotel Minder 2018.)

The thesis topic is highly marketing based, and the marketing mix model of E. Jerome McCarthy is therefore a very good basic theoretical bedrock. Furthermore, it includes “place” as one of its components, therefore including the digital sales channels as well (that’s an essential part of the thesis topic as well).

2.3 SWOT matrix

Commonly known as the “SWOT analysis”, this is a very common and useful marketing theoretical tool (mainly because it applies to so many scenarios and situations businesses and entrepreneurs might face.) It is based on an analysis to find a given organization’s strengths (S), weaknesses (W), opportunities (O) and threats (T) in a given market. Furthermore, it can be grouped into positive (S, O) and negative (W, T), external (O, T) and internal (S, W) dimensions. Its origins are often credited to the American business and management consultant Albert S. Humphrey.



Figure 3. The SWOT matrix (McMaster University 2018.)

Considering my thesis topic and its relation to the SWOT reality, this is something that the independent artist striving to market their music must conduct on their own work and brand. In discussions with my thesis planning course classmates, they noted a good point that conducting research on the different tools that digital marketing offers, one has to also consider the type of music and artist brand at hand, since consumers from different genres of music might be suitable to different kinds of marketing channels to approach from. Therefore, finding out one's own genre's and brand's strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats can be helpful in channelling one's marketing funds to the right places to gain maximum reach and effect.

2.4 Marketing environment

To gain a grasp of what one should do in order to achieve maximum marketing reach and efficiency, one should first understand the arena that they're playing in. A company's microenvironment consists of actors close to it that affect its ability to create value for its customers. In my thesis topic's case one of the key players would be marketing intermediaries (basically the companies that help the artist sell, promote and distribute their music), which are of essential importance to an independent artist, who usually don't have processes and services in place to provide these services independently. (Kotler & Armstrong 2010. 91-92)

A company's macroenvironment consist of bigger forces that affect actors in the microenvironment. For example, how does the average consumer consume their music, and how their habits dictate which marketing channels and methods are most effective for the artist to use. In the music industry's case, the macroenvironment has changed very rapidly into a very different landscape from what it was before. Therefore, it is important for an independent artist to keep a constant eye on how these broader forces affect the whole

concept of consuming music and in which form should direct marketing in the 2010's be implemented. (Kotler & Armstrong 2010. 94-95)

2.5 Direct marketing

In traditional B2C marketing, segments of potential customers are grouped and then targeted with marketing activity and campaigns. In direct marketing however, the individual is approached, allowing a company (or in my thesis subject's case, the artist) to approach the potential customer from a standpoint that this given customer's needs and consumer attributes align with those that the company is trying to fulfil with their product or service. This shift in marketing approach has taken place especially since the internet has become the average consumer's main social space and channel for shopping, especially in the case of music and entertainment media. The way that modern direct marketing works, is that first information is gathered through internet cookies that record the path of the consumer through the internet and different channels (e.g. Facebook, websites), and the words they've searched in different search engines (e.g. Google, Yahoo). This information can then be used by companies in targeting their ads and communication to the individuals that meet their potential customer profiles. (Kotler & Armstrong 2010. 514-517)

The concept of direct marketing is something my thesis topic is wholly based on, since internet marketing is the only relevant channel of marketing digital music (one could argue live music to be the other, but I don't really see it as much as a marketing activity as an event product itself, where good customer experience aids the artists' marketing efforts.) Therefore, it is fitting to open and include as a core concept of digital platform marketing and sales activities.

2.6 Heideggerian authenticity

Based on the notion of Heidegger M. (1978) that existential authenticity is an overarching framework for a music consumer's identity. This psychological / marketing theory helps me to analyse the differences between genres and artists/bands' when it comes to different sales and marketing channels' performance with different music consumer groups.



Figure 4. Heideggerian Authenticity (YouTube 2014.)

3 Research

3.1 The research design

RQ: How to sell and market music as an independent artist through digital platforms?

IQ1: Which digital platforms are relevant when targeting potential customers for music marketing and sales activities?

IQ2: How do different platforms differ in expected revenue and costs (ROI)?

IQ3: Recommendation: How to optimize one’s own music marketing and sales activities?

In the following research table, I explain where data is collected, what kind of data is to be drawn from that given resource, how that given data is analysed, what is the end product or desired outcome for that resource, and finally which investigative question this end product or outcome helps us to answer. Secondary data will first help me to create arguments for the IQs, which then primary data aims to verify, and possibly change perceptions through new insight.

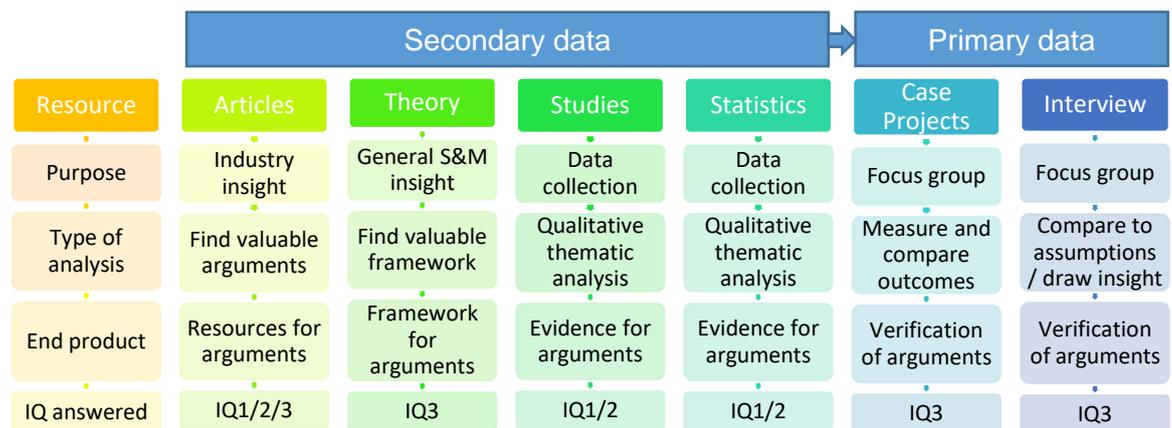


Figure 5. The Research Design

3.2 How was research conducted?

In order to analyse the performance, usability and effectiveness of different service providers in releasing and marketing music, I must use the same data I have available as an independent artist using these services. Besides analysing the reach and engagement acquired by using these tools, I will look at each service provider’s means of providing data, that is what kind of tools (for example graphs, tables etc.) are offered by that particular service platform to analyse one’s performance in the market.

The main data used for analysing the performance of different releases will be from Spotify, since they are the only digital distributor that provides enough day-to-day, month-to-month streaming and listener data, including playlists your songs are on, geography of where your listeners reside etc. to draw effective comparison and performance analysis. This data is available through the Spotify for Artists platform, which is available as a smartphone application as well as a browser version. (Spotify for Artists 2019.)

Two professionals from the field were also interviewed to gain further insight into the music industry, and the issues that are connected to the topic of this thesis. I created six questions tailored for both of them separately based on their background and the kind of information they could best provide regarding their position and expertise in the music industry.

First was the seasoned musician and a professional of the genre Sami Hinkka, bassist of the legendary Finnish folk metal band Ensiferum. He has had a career spanning over two decades, touring globally every year since 2004, featuring performances such as the main stage of the biggest metal festival of the world Wacken Open Air in 2018 for over 30,000 people (the performance is available for viewing through the YouTube Movies service). (Ensiferum 2019.)

Second was someone closer to my age and my own situation as an international business student, Laureline Tilkin. She moved from Belgium to Finland to pursue a career in the metal hub of the world (as Finland has very often be referred to as due to its large number of metal bands per capita). After she graduated with a master's degree in visual culture and contemporary art at Aalto University, she created her own media site called Tuonela Magazine in 2017 "with the idea to promote both young and established Finnish and other artists who have something to do with the scene worldwide." Tuonela spans over a website and multiple social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. (Tuonela Magazine 2019.) Later on, she created a digital marketing & PR-agency start-up called Cerulean Midnight with the co-founder/partner Alexandra Sleaze. (Cerulean Midnight 2019.)

3.3 What marketing tools and channels are out there for an independent musician?

For an independent artist wishing to distribute and market their music digitally, there are a lot of options. Regarding marketing tools available, social media platforms tend to take the lead in popularity. This is due to their wide reach into the general audience. A website that focuses on serving musicians, won't probably have the general music listening public as

users on the sites. People listen to more music than ever before though, and therefore reaching those wide general audiences is vital, to attract real audience engagement and growth in an artist's popularity. (Live for Live Music 2017.) The most essential (by numbers) social media platforms that offer marketing tools for independent actors at the moment are:

Table 3. Social media marketing platforms comparison

Social media platform	Founded in	Active users per month as of January 2019 (x million)	Marketing tools available
Facebook	2004	2 271	Targeted ad post campaigns and video ads
Instagram	2010	1 000	Targeted ad post campaigns and video ads
Twitter	2006	326	Promoted tweets, accounts and trends
YouTube	2005	1 900	Targeted video ads as intros and mid-content clips, promoted front page content

(Facebook 2019; Instagram 2019; Statista 2019; Twitter 2019; YouTube 2019.)

Other platforms such as Google Plus, Myspace and WeChat have had great active user numbers and/or prolific background forces but have other problems that exclude them from being truly sufficient marketing platforms for an independent musician to target the general music consuming public. This should be taken into consideration when planning one's marketing activities, since spreading out on too many platforms can seriously hinder one's ability to conduct effective marketing campaigns. As an example, here's why the above-listed platforms are not the best possible tools to include in an independent artist's marketing strategy as social media platforms:

Google Plus was a major social media platform with lots of investment poured into it, but users seemed to gravitate towards more popular channels such as Facebook and YouTube, since it basically did nothing better than what the other prolific social media platforms did. There are countless examples of similar attempts to create a social media

platform, but just end up being “empty towns” in the map of social media. (India Today 2018.)

According to Statista’s 2019 report, WeChat has a whopping 1 083 million active monthly users, making it a true social media giant. The company focuses on the Chinese market, and whereas its western competitors are forbidden by the communist party government of China to operate in the country, WeChat conducts its business in accordance to the country’s censorship rules and restrictions. Why wouldn’t this be a fruitful social media marketing platform then for an independent artist? Well WeChat has been accused in the past for censoring politically important topics in China. For all artists this might not be a problem, but especially for artists in the metal, punk and rap genres, song lyrics can very often have strongly political and diverse opinions interpreted through art, and as I found out from my interview with Sami Hinkka (Ensiferum), many bands have had to change their lyrics and even performing habits when playing in China due to these rules of censorship. This is not the only reason why WeChat might not be the optimal solution for an independent artist’s marketing activities. WeChat only covers the Chinese consumer market, and has almost no users outside the country, making it a solely domestic platform. (Tech in Asia 2013.)

Myspace has a bit of a longer history than the previously mentioned social media companies, having started already back in 2003. Myspace is the original music and video focused social media platform and might therefore attract attention from musicians wishing to advertise their work. However, after Facebook started gaining immense popularity back in 2008, MySpace lost the throne and has ever since shrunk in active user numbers, even though still operating to this day from its California headquarters with 150 employees. (Bloomberg 2011.)

3.4 What distribution tools and channels are out there for an independent musician?

Companies that offer distributional services for independent musicians have multiplied along with the change of the music industry. Nowadays almost anyone can compose, record, mix and master music with their laptop, all you need is an USB audio interface (sometimes referred to as an external audio card for a computer), a dynamic microphone or any other line-in equipped instrument, an XLR-cable to connect the mic and the interface, and possibly a pop-filter and a stand for the microphone. From stores such as Thomann in Germany, one could easily have this kind of a home studio set-up for around a 150 to 250 euros, and shipping to your doorstep is for free. Therefore, the sheer number of artists wishing to release and make their music heard is ever growing. (Thomann 2019.)

The digital distribution platforms selected for this research are either the most prolific ones in the internet, and/or in my opinion the best ones out there in terms of availability to an independent artist, their reach to streaming and digital store websites and services, as well as their pricing. Here's their comparison table:

Table 4. Digital music distribution platforms comparison part 1/2

Music distribution platform	Founded in	Reach	Tools available
CDBaby	1998	150+ digital distribution partners incl. Spotify, Deezer and iTunes.	Cover song licensing, songwriter splits, physical formats and merch etc.
Distrokid	2013	150+ digital distribution partners incl. Spotify, Deezer and iTunes.	Cover song licensing, collaborator splits, unlimited backups, embedded lyrics, artist page services etc.
Soundrop	2011	Spotify, Deezer, iTunes, Apple Music, Amazon Music, Google Play, YouTube Music and Pandora.	Cover song licensing, collaborator splits, monthly income statements (PDF) etc.
TuneCore	2005	150+ digital distribution partners incl. Spotify, Deezer and iTunes.	Cover song licensing, songwriter splits, physical formats etc.

(CDBaby 2019; Distrokid 2019; Soundrop 2019; TuneCore 2019.)

From these companies, only Distrokid and Soundrop have been created in the last decade when streaming has widely become the norm of listening to music. TuneCore in this sense was a forerunner, having been founded when physical products as well as digital purchases from iTunes and Amazon were the norm. CDBaby was originally a CD and merchandise manufacturing service, which explains its having existed already back in the 90's. Later on, it developed to offer those digital services.

As we can see, the reach with each distribution platform is stated (in all but one) to have 150+ digital distribution partners. The exception being Soundrop, which has only 8 partners. One could argue though, that the sheer number of digital distribution partners that a given service provider has is actually of little importance, since only the biggest ones like

Apple Music, Deezer, iTunes, Spotify and YouTube Music are in popular use by the general public.

All of the compared distribution platforms offer differing analytics, marketing, bookkeeping, and other additional services. Most of them offer cover song licensing, but with different pricing and renewability options. The comparison of these “external services” will be left out in this comparison however, since their benefits depend so much on the artist’s personal preferences and what they prefer their toolsets to be. One should however utilize theoretical marketing tools such as the SWOT Matrix and the 4Ps of the Marketing Mix to evaluate these differences, in that one’s individual situation can determine the usefulness of those additional services. Furthermore, the terms of these additional services are easily comparable through the platforms’ websites. On the other hand, things such as long-term actual prices and legally binding agreements are harder to compare without delving deeper into the services’ terms and making proper comparison.

For example, most of the compared platforms offer cover song licensing services, but with different pricing and renewability options. When an independent artist wants to release a cover song (a song made and released prior by another artist), they must acquire a mechanical license to have the rights to release that song. This mechanical license can be acquired either with an annual payment (Distrokid), or a one-time payment with a share of that song’s income being paid to the copyright holder of that song every time revenue’s generated (CDBaby, Soundrop). These kinds of differences might come to as a surprise to someone who only reads the headline of the cover song licensing service and its price. Especially since the cover song you’ve uploaded might disappear from digital platforms as soon as you stop paying their annual payment (Distrokid).

Table 5. Digital music distribution platforms comparison part 2/2

Music distribution platform	Price per song/album	Division	Terms
CDBaby	Standard 9,95\$/49\$ Pro 34,95\$/89\$	100% – 30% (partner's cut) = 70% (user's cut)	One-time payment (excl. covers), Pro plan includes publishing royalty collection
Distrokid	19,99\$ annually for unlimited albums & songs for a year (excl. covers)	100% – 30% (partner's cut) = 70% (user's cut)	Annual overall payment (excl. covers), if you stop your subscription, all of your uploads will be taken down until a re-subscription is made
Soundrop	Free initial upload (excl. covers), 15% admin cut of all generated revenue	100% – 30% (partner's cut) – 15% (Soundrop's cut) = 55% (user's cut)	No initial payment, only a 15% admin cost for all revenue generated (excl. covers)
TuneCore	9,99\$/49,99\$ annually (first year for an album 29,99\$)	100% – 30% (partner's cut) = 70% (user's cut)	Annual payment for all of your releases separately (excl. covers), if you stop paying for that release's annual fee, the release will be taken down until the payment is made

(CDBaby 2019; Distrokid 2019; Soundrop 2019; TuneCore 2019.)

In my opinion, since the reach and the amount of digital distribution partners is so similar between different service providers, that the cost structure of a given distribution service provider is the most crucial point of observation when deciding which company's services to use. There are big differences (as we can see from table 5) between the terms and payments for different service providers, and unless compared thoroughly, they might end

up in a costly re-distribution later on, once you realize from your bank account the re-occurring payments due etc.

The biggest difference between these payment options and terms I see, especially in how they are marketed at the front pages and ads of these companies, is their re-occurrence and what the consumer is actually paying for. For instance, CDBaby's 49\$ payment for an album might seem costly at first glance, but then you realize that it only a one-time payment, meaning that once you've paid that price, your release will be available always, regardless of if you continue to be their customer in the future and make future payments for them. Then again, we have companies like TuneCore, which proudly states that an album's distribution costs 29,99\$, which is actually only the price of the first year, and from there on you are required to pay a 49,99\$ annual fee just to keep that album available. So actually paying for an album to be released through CDBaby is cheaper, then a one year annual fee to keep your album available in TuneCore. That is a huge difference in the overall cost one's album would be especially after a couple of years. (CDBaby 2019; TuneCore 2019.)

If one is looking for a flexible solution that doesn't acquire any initial investment, one could use Soundrop, since all of the costs it has is a 15% deduction as an admin cut from the revenue a given artist's release will create. It is true that it has the least digital distribution partners, but once again the once they have been widely considered as the most important ones to reach potential general music-listening audiences. (Soundrop 2019.)

Distrokid once again works on a completely different business model. There customers have to pay an overall annual fee of 19,99\$ to have their whole discography uploaded, making it a much more cost-effective solution compared to TuneCore for example. However, one could argue that it is not a very secure solution to distribute one's music (especially considering the amount of streams your releases will accumulate) since that discography will disappear completely from digital distribution channels, if you stop paying for Distrokid's annual membership fee. (Distrokid 2019)

Therefore, I would overall recommend independent artists to use either the services of Soundrop, if they want a cost-effective solution with no initial investment required and a reach that is very often enough for the average recording artist, or CDBaby, which is a one-off payment for an even wider distribution, that doesn't have any re-occurring costs (since Soundrop, in the end, has that 15% admin cut as a re-occurring cost whenever a release of your's makes a profit.) (CDBaby 2019; Soundrop 2019.)

3.5 Dyecrest

When I joined Dyecrest in late 2017, their new album titled “Are You Not Entertained?” was already recorded, mixed and mastered. The band however wasn’t satisfied with the vocals on the album, and therefore invited me to re-record 6 of the 11 songs on the album in January 2018. After recording those songs in 3 days at Miitri Aaltonen’s (producer of such bands as Mokoma and Stam1na to name a few) home studio, the album was quickly mixed (by Miitri) and mastered (by Mika Jussila at Finnvox studios), since only adding my vocals were required, and the album was ready for release by the end of January.

We pondered for a while on how to release the album and decided that it is more important to get a single out first to keep things moving and wait for offers in the wake of that single release. Soundrop was chosen as the platform, since I had previous experience using it with some of my earlier releases (e.g. “Northwind” -single of Northern Seer on January 15th), and it required no initial investment from us, yet still having a wide enough reach in digital distribution partners (like discussed in the previous section of this thesis).

We released the first single for the album called “First Born Angel” on 1st of February 2018 and immediately ran into a problem. The single was on a different artist page in Spotify than the band’s earlier two albums. This was fixed though through Soundrop’s customer support, which had a FAQ page for this very topic and the instructions on what information to provide them in an email so that the situation could be fixed. It took about a week to have the single on the band’s Spotify artist page, and to our nice surprise all the streams it had gotten on the first week remained, so in the end no damage was done to the release’s performance.

First Born Angel was promoted through the band’s Facebook and Instagram pages, as well as the band members on personal social media pages. We used a 50€ budget for 5 separate Facebook advertisements that also ran in Instagram. We also asked kindly for a YouTube-channel titled “Unknown Power Metal YT”, which is an independent channel promoting bands from the melodic and power metal genres. With over 35k subscribers, they can be considered a substantial influencer for a band of this size. All in all, the release was a completely independent endeavour marketing-wise, with help from an independent party. All of the singles first performances and other data will be presented in table 6 further on in this chapter.

Like we expected/hoped for with our independent single release, we got a contact from Inverse Records after the release, asking if they could release the album and the other digital singles prior. We agreed to their terms and signed a deal for this album. They would print the album and use their own marketing mailing lists to internet radio stations and other medias of the scene to promote the releases, as well as take care of their physical and digital distribution. This was a distribution and marketing deal (not a record deal, where an artist joins a given label's roster and is a much more integrated affair), and we had to pay for all of this ourselves, with them taking a compensation from all sales and streaming revenues to cover the costs and make a profit. Inverse is basically available for any artist who contacts and can agree on their price, so it is a viable option for an independent artist in the metal scene (since it is a label focusing solely on the different metal genres). (Inverse Records 2019.)

Red Alert ft. Björn "Speed" Strid -single was released exactly one month after First Born Angel on 1st of March 2018. This time it was accompanied by a lyric video that the band had gotten from a friend of the band as a study work. It was uploaded into Inverse Records' YouTube-channel (which as of May 2019 hosts 3 012 subscribers) and had 7€ ad campaign from the band itself. Through Inverse's promotional efforts, the single was able to go to Spotify's official heavy metal playlists "Metallia Suomesta" and "Heviä Treeneihin". These additions to the official playlists had a huge influence on the performance of the song, which was able to gather over 85k streams.

Finally, the Fading/Reaching -single was released on 17th of May 2018, just a week before the album's release. This was not planned however, since the single was actually meant to be released on 10th of May 2018. This delay was due to Inverse's problems to upload the necessary material to its digital distribution partners. The single was also accompanied by a music video made by Gallacas Films. (Gallacas 2019.) It was promoted only with a 3€ marketing campaign due to the looming album release one week later. Here is the comparison table for all the three singles:

Table 6. Dyecrest singles' performance comparison

Release	Price	Marketing budget (independent)	Marketing platform	Release platform	Streams
First Born Angel (Single)	Standard streaming / digital purchase pricing	50€	Facebook, Instagram and YouTube	Soundrop	14 858
Red Alert ft. Björn "Speed" Strid (Single)	Standard streaming / digital purchase pricing	7€	Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Hearthemusic (Inverse's marketing platform)	Inverse records	85 250
Fading / Reaching (Single)	Standard streaming / digital purchase pricing	3€	Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Hearthemusic	Inverse records	3 045

The album itself was released not long after the last single, on 25th of May 2018. This might've affected the poor performance of the last of the singles Fading/Reaching. It should be also noted, that since the single had an alternative version on it, it didn't acquire streams from the album release itself, where the song is also included. This could've contributed significantly to the streams of the first two singles First Born Angel and Red Alert ft. Björn "Speed" Strid. Here is how the album performed in figures:

Table 7. Dyecrest: Are You Not Entertained? -performance

Release	Price	Marketing budget (independent)	Marketing platform	Release platform	Chart position (FIN) / streams
Are You Not Entertained?	Standard streaming / digital purchase pricing	5€	Facebook, Instagram and Hearthemusic	Inverse records	7 th (physical) & 48 th (digital) / 132 988

The album performed fairly well, with actually reaching the top 10 chart in Finland in physical albums, and the top 50 chart in digital albums. Contributing factors to the album's success could've been its famous guest musicians Björn Strid's (Soilwork, The Night Flight Orchestra) and Piet Sielck's (Iron Savior, ex-Savage Circus) appearances, as well as Inverse's marketing efforts, and the band's previous career's influence on their brand value (their two prior albums and the European tour with W.A.S.P. and Dragonforce back in the mid 2000's). The band's own independent input into the album's promotion wasn't very significant, with only 5€ spent in social media advertisements. It must be remembered however, that the promotional and other services that Inverse Records provided also cost to the band significantly.

3.6 Everfrost

In early 2018 Everfrost got an offer to play at a heavy metal student event called "Valurauta 2018" at a legendary venue called "The Circus" in Helsinki. (Bailataan 2018.) The venue has hosted many legendary acts such as Accept, Manowar and Sonata Arctica to name a few. We knew that these kinds of chances are extremely rare for starting small bands, and decided that we have to film the show to have it as a memory, and also to release it as a digital video product through Bandcamp, which is an independent artist platform that offers a webshop service for bands, but doesn't provide digital distribution partner services, such as Spotify and iTunes, but acts as its own indie marketplace for both physical and digital products. (Bandcamp 2019.)

Earlier in late 2017, we had worked with a filming company called S.KÄRT, as they came to record our show in Bar Rock Bear, Vantaa for free. We were really satisfied with the results of their work and asked them if they could come and film the show for a small fee. They accepted, and we got our own one-man filming crew for the show with 4 separate cameras (FOH, drums, side stage and shoulder cam) capturing the whole show. We

recorded the audio straight from the desk, so our keyboardist/producer Benjamin Connolly could mix the audio for the release properly. (Facebook 2019.)

The digital video was released through bandcamp on 18th of May 2018, as well as an accompanying live EP of 4 songs through Soundrop. The release received some considerable marketing from ourselves in YouTube (a trailer and videos from the show released prior to the release and after), Facebook and Instagram in the form of advertisements with video clips and pictures. It performed poorly however, with only couple of people purchasing the video, and the live EP not really receiving any significant streams.

Table 8. Everfrost: A Cold Night Out – Live at The Circus, Helsinki (Digital Video/Live EP) -performance

Release	Price	Marketing budget (independent)	Marketing platform	Release platform	Purchases / streams
A Cold Night Out – Live at The Circus, Helsinki (Digital Video)	12€	50€	YouTube, Facebook and Instagram	Bandcamp, partly in YouTube	3
A Cold Night out – Live at The Circus, Helsinki (Live EP)	Standard streaming / digital purchase pricing	50€ (same marketing activities for both the digital video as well as the live EP)	YouTube, Facebook and Instagram	Soundrop distribution	472

We think that one of the reasons for the release’s poor performance was the fact that live video purchases in general are not very popular amongst music consumers anymore. This is especially true in digital live video purchases, since the market hasn’t really embraced them at all, seeing how rare they still are. It has almost become a norm that live videos are watched through YouTube for free and paying for that seems illogical for the average music consumer.

3.7 Northern Seer

Northern Seer is my original band that I founded back in 2009 with a group of friends. Our first demo came out in 2012, and indeed it took a long time to finish our singles for 2018. There were several line-up changes, and often after we had recorded something, we just

weren't happy with the production quality. By the end of 2017 however, we were able to finish our first single release "Northwind" after receiving a proper master for it from Esa Orjatsalo, after trying several alternative mastering engineers. The single was released on 15th of January 2018 through Soundrop. We only used our own marketing efforts through Facebook and Instagram ads for which our budget for Northwind was 20€, but just like with Dyecrest's first single, we were fortunate enough to get the song to the Unknown Power Metal YT -channel, which definitely helped the release.

Our next single titled "Freedom or Death" was released on 18th of September the same year, also through Soundrop. We used similar means of advertising, but this time with a larger budget of 47€. Interestingly enough, the release performed much more poorly than Northwind, even though having more than double the budget. Here's the singles' comparison table:

Table 9. Northern Seer singles' performance comparison

Release	Price	Marketing budget (independent)	Marketing platform	Release platform	Streams
Northwind (Single)	Standard streaming / digital purchase pricing	20€	Facebook and Instagram, YouTube	Soundrop distribution	633
Freedom or Death (Single)	Standard streaming / digital purchase pricing	47€	Facebook and Instagram, YouTube	Soundrop distribution	108

Again, I think the contributing factor for Northwind having 6 times more streams than Freedom or Death was the fact that it was able to enter some of Spotify's public playlists for a brief while, which resulted in multiplying its streams for a couple of weeks. Even though the budget for Freedom or Death was bigger, it didn't translate to streams, but instead went to the YouTube upload of the song in the band's channel. What was the lesson here? Well I think it was that you have to carefully think through what is the road your customer will take from your advertisement. If you want streams, then your ad should take a direct one-click route to that desired destination.

3.8 Thy Row

Thy Row's first single release called "Hidebound" was released on 23rd of March 2018. It featured two prominent guest musicians from the Finnish metal scene: Ilja Jalkanen (ex-Kiuas) on backing and guest vocals, and Ben Varon (Oceanhoarse, ex-Amoral) on guest guitar solo. Having well-known names on a release can help reach their audiences and fans and is a very prominent phenomenon in the pop world. (Tampa Bay Times 2015.)

The single was released through CDBaby's digital distribution platform, and we used an independent budget of 87€ on promoting both its lyric video (made by our guitarist Ville Vase), and its Spotify link.

Our second single called "The Round" was released on 16th of June 2018. This time also we had a well-known guest musician from the Finnish metal scene: Teemu Mäntysaari from the symphonic folk metal band Wintersun and a heavy metal tribute band called Run for Cover. He is an internationally respected virtuoso guitarist and was kind enough to share the music video of the song in his Instagram page, which definitely helped the release's promotion! The music video was once again directed by our guitar player Ville, but this time we had a professional cameraman Hannu Käki with us, handling the lighting and filming of the video.

The Round was released through CDBaby as well and had a lower marketing budget compared to its predecessor with only 37€ used. The budget was once again divided between the music video, and the song's Spotify link which were presented through Facebook and Instagram advertisements. Both music videos were released through the band's own YouTube-channel, which at the time had less than 25 subscribers. Here's the singles' comparison table:

Table 10. Thy Row singles' performance comparison

Release	Price	Marketing budget (independent)	Marketing platform	Release platform	Streams
Hidebound ft. Ben Varon & Ilja Jalkanen (Single)	Standard streaming / digital purchase pricing	87€	YouTube, Facebook and Instagram	CDBaby	7 786
The Round ft. Teemu Mäntysaari (Single)	Standard streaming / digital purchase pricing	37€	YouTube, Facebook and Instagram	CDBaby	92 787

Both singles performed well compared to some of my other bands' single releases. This might've been due to the added value of having well-known names attached to the releases. The Round however was able to gather a staggering 92 787 streams, and this was due once again to official Spotify playlists. The song entered two very popular playlists called "Heviä Treeneihin" and "Metallia Suomesta" and stayed on both of them for quite a while, churning streams on a daily basis. The song was also briefly included in the "Viral 50 Finland" list, which had big artists such as Justin Bieber and Cheek on them with their new releases.

4 Discussion

4.1 Summary of results

All in all, the research made for this thesis and conducting the case releases themselves utilizing the platforms and marketing activities analysed in chapter 3, revealed many things about evaluating what actually works and provides real audience response when considering independent digitally distributed music. In this chapter, I'll try to summarize the findings of chapter 3, and answer the research and investigative questions set in chapter 1.2.

Overall, I would say that the biggest surprise from the results of the research was, how little value social media ad campaigns brought to the case releases' reception, at least compared to the effect of Spotify playlists and YouTube influencers. If you compare the success of a single such as *The Round* (which only hosted a 37€ independent marketing budget), to a single release such as *Freedom Or Death* (which hosted a 47€ independent marketing budget), the former was included on several official Spotify playlists, and gathered a staggering 92 787 streams with 3 899 views in YouTube, whereas the latter (with a bigger budget) only got a 108 stream result with 651 views in YouTube. Therefore, I would argue, that social media advertisements are not the best way to use one's limited budget for a release, unless a certain advertisement gathers significant organic engagement. This should be evaluated with a small initial investment ad, that is then analysed for performance, and if the ad starts to get considerable traction, then more investment should be made. As the research question was "*How to sell and market music as an independent artist through digital platforms?*", let's examine how to answer that question by looking at the investigative questions:

4.1.1 IQ 1. Which digital platforms are relevant when targeting potential customers for music marketing and sales activities?

Considering the most important meter of evaluating relevancy for a digital distribution and marketing platform is the return of investment or ROI (which we will examine even more in IQ2), especially since independent artists' funds are often very limited, and artists want to know how to create the most engagement with their fans and new listeners when choosing which services and methods to use. It seems to me on the basis of the research conducted for this thesis that organic reach is way more effective and is much more likely to determine the success of a release. One could of course argue by referring to the Heideggerian authenticity -model that the taste of the listeners affected the results, and for some extent it does of course, but almost all of the releases where the first of those

“brands”, since they were all either new bands with their first releases coming out, or an older band (Dyecrest) with a 13 year hiatus behind them, so existing differences in size of their fanbases’ was very marginal. Therefore I would argue that YouTube in the form of influencers and your own channel upkeep with entertaining (catered to your target groups) videos, as well as content that brings you closer to your follower to achieve organic growth in such platforms as Facebook and Instagram, would be the best option for an independent artist, not several ongoing advertisements themselves with the link to your song or music video. Even with a carefully planned ad text and outlook, this tends to be a bigger drainer of your budget, rather than an effective platform for day-to-day week-to-week marketing activities.

4.1.2 IQ 2. How do different platforms differ in expected revenue and costs?

As seen in the comparison tables 4 and 5, there are a number of differences regarding return on investment and the services offered. The biggest differentiator and the most important factor to weight in when choosing a digital distribution partner is their cost policy for their cover licenses as well as upkeep costs for their distributional services. This may come as a surprise to an artist, if they don’t carefully go through the different companies’ pricing policies. Using tables 4 and 5, as well as their accompanying explanations, one can determine which of the most prevalent services in the market would be the best for one’s own needs. Additional services should be weighed in when making the decision, and this can be added by utilizing theoretical marketing models to the artist/band, such as the SWOT matrix and the marketing mix.

4.1.3 IQ 3. How to optimize one’s own music marketing and sales activities?

This investigative question is a very subjective one, since some choices regarding which platforms to use and what is seen as a valuable service, depends so much on the particular artist or band. However, as overarching points of recommendation, I would name three specific key points, which during the research conducted for this thesis re-appeared time and time again, regardless of which artist or release was being examined as valuable guidelines for the topic at hand:

- 1. Choose a distribution platform that gives you the service(s) you need, for the best price / return on investment value available to you.*
- 2. Use as much organic growth in the form of your own social media content aimed at your target customers, as well as relevant influencers to your brand whenever possible.*
- 3. Whenever using paid social media advertisement campaigns and services for your releases, do test runs first to define the targeting settings and advertisement types*

that seem to attract engagement right from the get-go. Only then additional investment becomes relevant.

4.2 Trustworthiness of the research

Whenever analysing one's own projects, the research is bound to be a limited effort, since getting a large enough sample of researchable cases is near impossible, since in the case of independent music releases, even one case release requires a lot of both time and financial investment, in this case from the author himself. However, the research has 4 different cases of bands having several releases, and therefore might interest people who are in the same situation as I was last year planning and conducting the promotion and distribution of these releases. Therefore, one can evaluate by themselves, if the data provided by this thesis is relevant to their situation with their own releases, and more importantly the goals they have for those releases.

4.3 Analysis of interview's new insight

The interviews I conducted with Sami Hinkka (Ensiferum) and Laureline Tilkin (Tuonela Magazine & Cerulean Midnight) opened my eyes to several factors I didn't pay attention to when conducting my own research, most probably due to the differences we all have in our position in the music industry. Here are two individuals, both professionals in the field that I'm researching, but who have a completely different background. Sami Hinkka is someone who got to know the industry in the times when physical products were still the norm for consuming music, and record sales in general were much higher. He's also playing in a very popular band, and is used to having a team of people working with the band (from the record label, band management and crew etc.), in executing the different tasks that running a band as a business requires. Laureline Tilkin however is more of my generation, someone in their 20's who graduated in the age of social media and digital distribution. She's also a start-up engineer and journalist, unlike me and Sami who see things from a musician point-of-view (even though our background differences are also noticeable, with one being a starting artist, and one being an established one from an earlier generation of musicians), and therefore has a completely different view on the music industry.

Some of the main "revelations" I got from the interviewees were both rooted in their point-of-view into the industry. Sami Hinkka for example underlined the importance for having a presence in the live scene. This is something that a millennial BBA-student like myself might easily miss when considering different social media marketing strategies and their benefits, but does make sense after further consideration and thought. If you see a social media advertisement that is targeted to you, no matter how interesting or intriguing

it is, it cannot replace the profound effect of a good live experience. Also, if you are able to play big festivals from similar genre as you play in, you can reach hundreds, if not thousands of potential new fans who already like similar music styles to yours. This is something that young bands might even not consider at all, when planning their rise to fame. Then again Laureline gave her insight by highlighting the importance for (even for a band) having a marketing strategy laid out. Who does who and when, what do we want to achieve and how can we achieve with the tools we have? Having a clear plan can act as a guideline for any kind of teamwork activities, and why should band activities be any different?

4.4 Suggestions for development or further work

Like stated before, the music industry is in a state of constant turbulence and change due to technological advances, trends that effect the habits of music consumers, changing legislation considering copyrights (e.g. the recent efforts by the European Union's to control these occurring changes) and the distribution of royalties between distributors, digital distribution channels, publishers and the artists themselves, as well as many other global phenomena. Further research will need to be made in order to gain a better grasp on these changes, and to allow artists operate in such a difficult marketplace. (European Parliament 2019.)

I would suggest further research into the royalty distribution aspect of different publishing contracts that artists make with record labels. This area has high differences in the viability of those deals, and making them more transparent for the independent artists would definitely be welcomed with open arms by the artist community.

References

Bailataan 2018. Valurauta 2018. URL:

<https://bailataan.fi/events/ecc4e504-a514-42ab-921d-b64b172cd8e0>

Accessed 29.04.2019

Bandcamp 2019. Everfrost – A Cold Night Out. URL:

<https://everfrostfinland.bandcamp.com/album/a-cold-night-out>

Accessed 30.04.2019

BBC WebWise 2012. What is streaming? URL:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/guides/about-streaming>

Accessed 16.01.2018

Bloomberg 2011. The Rise and Inglorious Fall of Myspace. URL:

https://www.bloomberg.com/bw/magazine/content/11_27/b4235053917570.htm

Accessed 11.04.2019

Business Dictionary 2019. Amazon. URL:

<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/Amazon.html>

Accessed 29.01.2019

Business Dictionary 2019. Marketing Tools. URL:

<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/marketing-tools.html>

Accessed 24.01.2019

Business Dictionary 2019. Myspace. URL:

<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/Myspace.html>

Accessed 11.04.2019

Business Dictionary 2019. Sales Channel. URL:

<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/sales-channel.html>

Accessed 25.01.2019

CDBaby 2019. License Your Cover Songs. URL:

<https://cdbaby.com/license-cover-song.aspx>

Accessed 24.04.2019

CDBaby 2019. Pricing. URL:
<https://cdbaby.com/cd-baby-cost.aspx>
Accessed 24.04.2019

CDBaby 2019. Sell Your Music. URL:
<https://cdbaby.com/sell-music>
Accessed 23.04.2019

Cerulean Midnight 2019. About. URL:
<http://ceruleanmidnight.com/about/>
Accessed 27.03.2019

Collins Dictionary 2014. Spotify. URL:
<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/submission/14382/Spotify>
Accessed 29.01.2019

Creative Guerrilla Marketing 2018. What Is Guerrilla Marketing? URL:
<http://www.creativeguerrillamarketing.com/what-is-guerrilla-marketing/>
Accessed 22.03.2019

Digital Music News 2016. My Band Has 1,000,000 Spotify Streams. Want to See Our Royalties? URL:
<https://www.digitalmusicnews.com/2016/05/26/band-1-million-spotify-streams-royalties/>
Accessed 11.01.2018

Distrokid 2019. Can I Upload Cover Songs? URL:
<https://distrokid.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360013648953-Can-I-Upload-Cover-Songs->
Accessed 24.04.2019

Distrokid 2019. Homepage. URL:
<https://distrokid.com/>
Accessed 23.04.2019

Ensiferum 2019. Band. URL:
<http://www.ensiferum.com/band/>
Accessed 27.03.2019

European Parliament 2019. European Parliament approves new copyright rules for the internet. URL:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190321IPR32110/european-parliament-approves-new-copyright-rules-for-the-internet>

Accessed 04.05.2019

Facebook Business 2019. Ads. URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/business/ads>

Accessed 11.04.2019

Facebook 2019. S.KÄRT. URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/skartvideos/>

Accessed 27.04.2019

Gallacas Films. Home Page. URL:

<https://www.gallacas.com/?fbclid=IwAR2rwFAyCxKIRj7VDUdrw3dQY-ROACEOfQ49WwNEzjjcKnzGvasSwoxOGdII>

Accessed 29.04.2019

Global Music Report 2017, International Federation of Phonographic Industry, 2017. URL:

<http://www.ifpi.org/downloads/GMR2017.pdf>

Accessed 18.2.2019

Hotel Minder 2018. The Marketing Mix. URL:

<https://www.hotelminder.com/img/blog/the-marketing-mix.jpg>

Accessed: 17.01.2018

Hutchison, T. 2013. Web Marketing for the Music Business. 2nd ed. Focal Press. Taylor & Francis Group.

India Today 2018. Former Google+ designer explains why Google's social media play failed: it was mostly office politics. URL:

<https://www.indiatoday.in/technology/features/story/former-google-designer-explains-why-google-s-social-media-play-failed-1370662-2018-10-18>

Accessed 11.04.2019

Instagram Business 2019. Advertising. URL:

<https://business.instagram.com/advertising/>

Accessed 11.04.2019

Inverse Records 2019. Site. URL:

<https://www.inverse.fi/site/>

Accessed 29.04.2019

Investopedia 2018. Return on Investment (ROI). URL:

<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/r/returnoninvestment.asp>

Accessed 25.01.2019

Investopedia 2018. Social Media Marketing (SMM). URL:

<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social-media-marketing-smm.asp>

Accessed 16.01.2018

Kotler, P. & Armstrong, G. 2010. Principles of marketing. 13th ed. Pearson Education. Upper Saddle River.

Live For Live Music. More Music Is Being Listened To By More People Than Ever Before.

URL: <https://liveforlivemusic.com/news/music-listened-people-ever-according-science/>

Accessed 05.04.2019

McMaster University 2018. SWOT. URL:

<https://library.mcmaster.ca/find/swot>

Accessed 27.01.2018

Mikael Salo Vocals 2019. Discography:

<https://www.mikaelsalo.com/discography>

Accessed 22.03.2019

Musikkituottajat 2018. Dyecrest: Are You Not Entertained? URL:

<https://www.ifpi.fi/tilastot/virallinen-lista/artistit/dyecrest/are+you+not+entertained%3F>

Accessed 22.03.2019

PC Magazine 2019. Apple. URL:
<https://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia/term/37872/apple>
Accessed 29.01.2019

PC Magazine 2019. WeChat. URL:
<https://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia/term/70161/wechat>
Accessed 14.04.2019

SAGE Journals 2017. Music in advertising and consumer identity. URL:
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1470593117692021>
Accessed 01.03.2018

Snap Surveys 2011. Qualitative vs Quantitative Research. URL:
<https://www.snapsurveys.com/blog/qualitative-vs-quantitative-research/>
Accessed 25.01.2019

Soundrop 2019. Cover Song Licensing & Distribution: Everything You Need to Know.
URL: <https://soundrop.com/distribute-cover-songs/>
Accessed 24.04.2019

Soundrop 2019. Homepage. URL:
<https://soundrop.com/>
Accessed 23.04.2019

Soundrop 2019. How much money will I make when someone buys or streams my music?
URL: <https://support.soundrop.com/hc/en-us/articles/115000535666-How-much-money-will-I-make-when-someone-buys-or-streams-my-music->
Accessed 24.04.2019

Spotify for Artists 2019. For Artists. URL:
<https://artists.spotify.com/>
Accessed 20.03.2019

Statista 2019. Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2019, ranked by active users (in millions). URL: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>

Accessed 11.04.2019

Tampa Bay Times 2015. 'Featuring' credits dominate modern pop music – here's why. URL: <https://www.tampabay.com/things-to-do/music/featuring-credits-dominate-modern-pop-music-8212-heres-why/2216561>

Accessed 30.04.2019

Tech in Asia 2013. Now China's WeChat App is Censoring Its Users Globally. URL: <https://www.techinasia.com/china-wechat-censoring-users-globally>

Accessed 11.04.2019

Techopedia 2019. Google Plus (Google+). URL:

<https://www.techopedia.com/definition/28380/google-plus-google>

Accessed 11.04.2019

TechTarget 2012. Instagram. URL:

<https://searchcio.techtarget.com/definition/Instagram>

Accessed 29.01.2019

TechTerms 2019. Google. URL:

<https://techterms.com/definition/google>

Accessed 29.01.2019

The Pro Audio Files 2017. The Complete Guide to Digital Music Distribution. URL:

<https://theaudiofiles.com/digital-music-distribution/>

Accessed 16.01.2018

The Washington Post 2018. PewDiePie is YouTube's most-subscribed channel. He's about to be dethroned. URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2018/10/26/pewdiepie-is-youtubes-most-subscribed-channel-hes-about-be-dethroned/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9a582f003f31

Accessed 19.03.2019

Thomann 2019. Shipping Costs and Delivery Times. URL:

https://www.thomann.de/gb/helpdesk_shipping.html

Accessed 05.04.2019

TuneCore 2019. Cover Song Licensing. URL:
<https://www.tunecore.com/cover-song-licensing>
Accessed 24.04.2019

TuneCore 2019. Pricing. URL:
<https://www.tunecore.com/pricing>
Accessed 24.04.2019

TuneCore 2019. Sell Your Music Online. URL:
<https://www.tunecore.com/sell-your-music-online>
Accessed 23.04.2019

Tuonela Magazine 2019. About. URL:
<http://tuonelamagazine.com/crew/>
Accessed 27.03.2019

Twitter for Business 2019. How Twitter Ads work. URL:
<https://business.twitter.com/en/help/troubleshooting/how-twitter-ads-work.html>
Accessed 11.04.2019

YouTube 2014. Are You Authentic? URL:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHT-xeU1LEk>
Accessed 03.03.2018

YouTube Advertising 2019. Ads. URL:
<https://www.youtube.com/intl/en-GB/ads/>
Accessed 11.04.2019

Appendix 1: Interview with Sami Hinkka (Ensiferum)

Following is the interview I conducted with Sami Hinkka (Ensiferum) in March 2019, in order to gain further industry insight from a seasoned professional in the field:

1. Tell us about your background in the music business?

I started playing music in the 1990's for all sorts of bands and projects, but I would say that my entry to the "music industry" to become a professional musician was when I joined the Finnish folk metal band Ensiferum back in 2004 (officially in 2005). I had a couple of record label backed projects before that as well, but they were smaller things that I wouldn't necessarily consider as full-time musician positions like how it is with Ensiferum.

Back when I joined the band the guys had a record deal for Spinefarm Records (a Finnish record label focused solely on the metal genre, nowadays owned by Universal Music), and I realized instantly that being a musician in that kind of a professional environment wasn't all about the so called mantra of "sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll", but more like being an entrepreneur. I was quite of a rookie when I joined, and even though music had been a part of my life since I was a kid, I had never thought of the realities of being a full-time musician before. For example, you have to take care (and take care well) of company business, VATs and what have you, so it was a process I didn't really have experience from before. Luckily the guitar player and founder of the band Markus Toivonen already knew a lot about how to run a band from a business point of view, having had founded the band already back in 1995 and operated it ever since.

One important lesson that I learned from that transition into the professional world was that it's much better to surround yourself with good people who know what they're doing, rather than try to do everything by yourself. It's really hard to be a master in everything (bookkeeping, legal stuff, sound engineering etc.). Of course, you can do that nowadays as a band, but it's usually way more efficient to just pay someone who knows what they're doing to take care of that side of the business'/band's operations. This way you can expect better results and can focus on what is important from your end as an artist, the music and the performance. Also, being open minded of learning about the different procedures and processes connected to running a band as a business I think is really important, and I have always tried to learn as much as I can ever since I joined the band and continue doing it today.

From a theoretical standpoint, your band and your music are the product you're trying to sell, and you have to take care of all the same things that a business would have to take

care of in any industry. You have to pay the rent for your rehearsal room and merchandise storage, do contracts and license deals for your products, pay salary to your “employees” like mixing engineers, managers, accountants etc. There are a lot of sad examples in the music industry, where bands haven’t taken these things into consideration carefully enough and have ended up with huge problems with the tax authorities or having been screwed over by an unbalanced “rip-off” deals with record labels that are legally binding. Again, having good people in your corner can really save your career when it comes to these important issues.

2. What is, in your opinion, the biggest change in the way music is delivered and marketed to consumers in the last decade?

I’d say without a doubt the rise of streaming and social media, overall the internet changed everything for musicians. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter as marketing platforms have become essential, and when it comes to delivering the music to your fans, Apple Music, Deezer, Spotify and such are now the norm. They are very popular, and I can understand why, since they are very convenient and technological development marches on whether we like it or not. Of course, for a musician there’s the problem of how the money collected with these services is divided, and income from music itself has dropped drastically since the streaming services started getting popular.

Regarding where the change came from in the last decade from a marketing perspective, it used to be more focused on physical music magazines and catalogues, internet forum culture and webpage banner ads. That has moved marginally into digital magazines and majorly into free webpage press, conversations in social media and SoMe (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube etc.) advertising. Many magazines that focused on the music scene have gone under due to this change, when people were not buying physical magazines anymore (and digital magazine sales proved to be quite marginal), and therefore also their advertising clients decreased, resulting in their organisations going bankrupt and not being able to meet with their upkeep costs. In some cases, magazines survived with a significantly smaller staff and organization than before, in most cases however they just stopped operating altogether. But then again, things have become much more convenient to the consumer, and because information/data flow in the internet has become so much faster, you can have much more content and have it faster available on websites than ever before. For example, physical magazines had wait until their next issue/pressing of the magazine to release an interview, whereas now you can release it on your website or YouTube for example right away after the interview is finished. Also, whereas ads used to be passive banners and such, nowadays it’s more and more customized through cookies

from any given consumers search histories etc., and more videos are utilized in ads than ever before. Personally, I feel that the changes occurred are a good thing due to their efficiency and convenience, however, I do believe that people's attention span and patience has suffered from these technological changes compared to the old "model" of consuming.

3. What is your opinion on the current situation? Is it optimal? If not, what would you like to change?

Well, from the music consumer's perspective, the situation might be the best it's ever been. Through algorithm recommendations and free platforms such as YouTube, you can discover new music that you like easier than ever before. You can follow the artists that you enjoy and will receive all the information they want to share free of charge in Facebook, Twitter etc. You can even just follow a theme or a certain genre that you like, by following a hashtag like #powermetal or #folkmetal. For example, Metallica (the American heavy metal giant) posts something from all of their shows the same night that that show was played, even live videos with pro shot footage and audio straight from the mixing table. This kind of "closeness" to fans was never possible before the internet and social media. They really ended up revolutionizing the relationship between the artist and the fan. Also, getting new music is super convenient nowadays, with everything being available through your smart device instantaneously from services such as Apple Music, Deezer and Spotify to name a few.

This change is massive, and if you think about individual artists (basically entrepreneurs like stated before), you of course want to know how to get that following, how to get those likes. You naturally want to grow your popularity and your business, and that is how growth is measured nowadays in the music industry. Established artists like Metallica have it much easier, since people will already want to follow them due to their extensive and successful career. However, if you are a starting band, things become a bit trickier. There is so much competition, and the sheer number of artists nowadays can be mind boggling. So how can you differentiate? How can you make people interested in your band, and not one of the other hundred thousand bands out there? Then again, being an entrepreneur in any industry is competitive and tough, especially the phase of building your own brand and making people want to buy your product, no matter if it's an orange juice you're making or an album.

I would add as a kind of a summary for my previous points, that the biggest effect of all these changes and new services, is that the playing field has been equalized. You can release your music basically for free, without a label as a "gatekeeper" who lets in the

chosen few who are given a chance. This naturally results in massive amounts of competition, that can make it hard for an artist to differentiate their “brand” and stand out.

From an artist point of view, many that entered the industry during the “old model”, think that these changes also have negative sides. It used to be that if a label promoted an artist, people kind of knew that at least some sort of professional quality control was in place, and people trusted magazine’s and label’s featured artists to be of high quality. A couple examples of such medias that held big marketing power in the metal genre would be the Metal Hammer magazine and the Headbanger’s Ball TV show. Nowadays that kind of trust for promoted artists is kind of gone, since there are so many varying quality indie artists around and advertisements for these artists may surround us everywhere. Of course, one could argue that the Metal Hammer cover of today could be a viral YouTube video that launches a band into popularity, but again, the competition is more immense and there is just so much more stuff out there than ever before.

I love technology and that things forward, but there are always winners and losers in every technological revolution, and when it comes the new means of music distribution and the monetary exchange there, I would say that the artists have been the ones on the losing side. The sheer drop of price from a 19,99€ album to a 9,99€ monthly subscription where basically all music ever released is available at your fingertips is a monumental shift in the value of music and the amount of money circulating in the industry. Furthermore, this subscription money goes to the service provider, and the publisher of the artist, resulting in a very small compensation to the artist him/herself. The overall pie of income in Spotify for example goes by number of streams, what this basically means is that the money goes to the most popular artists, and even though my fan would only listen to my music, that 9,99€ subscription money that he/her pays to listen to only my music doesn’t go to me, but to the most popular artists in Spotify. This I think is a big injustice in the way the streaming platforms’ income distribution operates at the present time.

This is not the only negative side of the unequal distribution of wealth from streaming services, since it affects the live scene as well. When you take one income away from a musician, the priority goes to the other, merchandise and playing live. Therefore, live shows are increasingly competitive, since full-time musicians have to play shows now to make a living. With many bands touring the states and Europe simultaneously, music consumers (who might even like both bands) will plan carefully where to put their money, due to the overabundance of concerts available. Again, this might be good for the consumer due to the rise in supply, but it makes being a full-time musician increasingly difficult. Merchandise is another important source of income, and is very often sold at concerts, so the

above-mentioned negative affect can be seen in merchandise sales as well. Needless to say this change in the market hits even harder for up and coming bands who are just starting out, it is a huge mountain to climb to first build a brand and then make enough income streams to make it a full-time job.

So as a summary I would say that the new distribution methods are advanced and convenient, but the income distribution of them hasn't been thought through well enough. The current model supports big labels and artists, but absolutely kills the income for small and medium sized bands and artists. I believe though that the situation will improve after the market has settled a bit, and legislation will be passed to protect artists' copyrights and the right for income made with their work.

4. What are the benefits of being a label-affiliated artist in your opinion? Are there any downsides?

The absolute number one benefit of being a label-affiliated artist is that you don't have to know everything yourself. Legal stuff, licensing etc. can be very difficult to master, and having people in your team who do this stuff for a living and have the experience and connections to utilize in your favour is a massive advantage you have over being an independent artist. Promotional activities are also way easier, when you have a team taking care of it.

A downside to being a label-affiliated artist could be the fact that you keep a smaller share from income you make through your music and merchandise, but then again this effect can be offset by the fact that you sell and engage audiences in higher volume, resulting in a higher income in the end. Also, as an independent artist, you can decide all of the deals you make separately, it kind of gives you more juristic freedom then when you are bound by a record contract. From my point of view however, the knowledge and the service you receive is worth this trade-off. I also enjoy team work generally and think it's also very important to realize how difficult it is to be a one-man business. Employing people is a good thing not only to give people jobs, but it can really boost your efficiency and quality of what you do in any industry!

An exception to this could be if you are a huge name and only make so called "master deals", where you record everything yourself and get a better deal for not having a loan from a label to fund your album production, you just present the ready master files to them for distribution and marketing services only. In such a situation you would also have bigger negotiating power because labels would compete to get you in their roster. You could

even run a label independently and just handpick the people who work for your band's organization, and make it benefit you more than a traditional label-artist relationship. That would probably be the ideal situation for any band/artist. Getting to such a situation though is very rare and requires an enormous amount of work and usually time to get a band into that kind of fame and negotiating leverage. That's why I would only probably consider the earlier two options, if I was starting out just now.

5. What was the most successful release of your career, and why do you think it succeeded?

Definitely my first album with the band (Ensiferum) called "Victory Songs". It was released back in 2007, when the "folk metal boom" hit the scene in a big way. Bands like us, Finntroll, Turisas and Korpiklaani became immensely popular in the metal scene, especially in central Europe. Many magazines such as Metal Hammer put folk metal bands in their covers, and it became a big thing in the internet forums and websites as well. For example, we were able to get to the front cover of the EMP catalogue (a clothing/lifestyle company focused on metal, goth, gaming etc. fashion), which was a really big thing back then. Legendary bands such as Iron Maiden were usually on the front cover, and suddenly folk metal bands from countries like Finland and the Faroe Islands were raised to that pedestal! I would say that that album created the brand and popularity we still have nowadays, so it was a very important release for us.

I think the hype came from pop culture in general, since after all everything in culture is connected. It started in my opinion with the hype of The Lord of The Rings movie trilogy by Peter Jackson, which really made these fantastical escapism themes popular in the mainstream as well. Movies like Troy and Kingdom of Heaven followed that hype, and that evolved into other territories as well, such as music. There's an expression called "trend is your friend", and that was very much true in those couple of years of the "folk metal boom". I consider this a bit of a sad reality of the music industry as well, that it can be affected so much by non-music related things such as the image people want to convey, and if something is popular, they want to be associated with that thing. But fact of the matter is, that it was basically the reason for that album's success. So, I would say that it wasn't the organization of the band and the label or even the musical quality of the record, but that it was in the right place at the right time. Playing several tours and being very active in touring around the world prior to the album's release also played a big factor in setting us at the forefront of that wave of popularity that folk metal experienced.

At the time we were on a Finnish label called Spinefarm Records, and I think they definitely did their best to answer the demand that was on the scene at the time, and I remember fondly how things turned out for that album. There were some fans that told us they had drove to another country to get the album, but that kind of thing always happens, since not all markets are created equal, and a label has to focus on the ones that have enough demand for the product (in this case the album) sold. Nowadays of course physical distribution means less than then, and online shopping as well as digital platforms are the main focus.

6. What would you give as an advice for independent artists on how to market and distribute their music in the year 2019?

Whomever you work with and meet it in the music industry, try to be as loyal, honest and trustworthy as possible. This will greatly benefit you with every new connection you make, every new person you meet. Like I've stated in the earlier questions, having connections to people who know their stuff is super valuable, and will greatly aid you in building your own career.

Besides that, if you choose to walk the independent path, try learning as much as possible about social media marketing, and how to distribute your music as effectively as possible! Basically, be open minded, and try to utilize the new technologies to your advantage. There are a lot of possibilities nowadays, but it requires an immense amount of understanding about algorithms, the services available etc. You will also probably invest a lot of your own money in marketing campaigns and activities, as well as manufacturing your own products.

For a metal band especially, playing live can be a huge factor in building one's brand. Especially big metal festivals like Wacken Open Air where you can reach audiences that listen to similar music, but do not necessarily know your band. I think this tends to be overlooked nowadays, when everyone just focuses on YouTube and social media ads. Even though you reach more people with those, it is hard to make people interested in that content because of all the competition and the flood of ads that we get these days. Your reputation as a live act is a much more organic thing, and in my opinion can leave a much more profound experience to people when they make the initial first contact with your band.

Appendix 2. Interview with Laureline Tilkin (Cerulean Midnight / Tuonela Magazine)

Following is the interview I conducted with Laureline Tilkin (Cerulean Midnight, Tuonela Magazine) in March 2019, in order to gain further industry insight from a start-up entrepreneur and a journalist in the field:

1. Tell us about your background in the music business?

My general educational background after high school is that I studied photography and contemporary arts with a minor degree in corporate communications in Aalto university. Getting to know the music industry started for me back in 2008, when I started writing for a Dutch online magazine. I had a bit of a different approach to the people working there however, since I wanted the outlook of the magazine to be more positive, and not have negative reviews in there just for the sake of having a 50/50 balance of both. I think especially the metal culture is about embracing the music and supporting the people who work hard for their art, and naturally I want to write about bands I like already, so there's less chance of having negative reviews in there. I moved to Finland in 2013 and joined another magazine in 2016, but again my writing style tended to be more positive than the what the other journalists did there, and that's the reason I started founding my own companies Cerulean Midnight (digital marketing services & PR agency) and Tuonela Magazine (Finnish online metal magazine) to continue the passion I have for the metal music scene in the way I wanted to do it.

2. How is the music industry different to other industries for starting a business in your opinion?

Creative industries in general have the same initial problems as any other industry where one might want to create a start-up company, it's hard to make it profitable before you make the right connections and a brand that people know and trust for certain quality of content. What's unique for creative industries in my opinions, is that it's hard to monetize photography and arts, since people consume so much of it for free nowadays and it's harder to prove your value as a professional, compared to for example plumber who's degree is often enough to secure demand for their services. You must have top notch quality in your photographic work, and in PR & marketing for artists you really have to offer what the artists themselves value (social media upkeep, quality content creation etc.), then you are able to attract business. I can't emphasize enough the importance of having a strong brand that gets associated with quality clients and names, I feel this is a really prevalent

element in the music scene (not necessarily good, but that's how it is) in Finland, if people see your brand to be connected with their musical idols and well-known names, you will be respected and you will attract customers.

I think the practicalities of founding a business is pretty similar to other industries, but the potential client base is very different. If you offer services straight to bands, you can expect lower budgets, as in the music industry in general nowadays there's less and less money. The difference between the big artists that fill arenas, and the more small/medium sized bands is huge, and the latter unfortunately doesn't have much to go around with buying services and such and will very much keep that in mind when comparing different service providers. Premium pricing options for a company are therefore limited to the big names, and you have to compete with price, even if you feel you provide a lot of service and value for that amount of money.

3. Follow-up question: are there any unique characteristics to providing marketing services in the music industry?

There definitely are, especially for rock and metal bands. In this scene, people very often trust influencers who might be vloggers or bloggers, and therefore those individuals are a big deal in the scene when considering marketing reach and effectiveness. If you can reach out to those influencers and have them review or react to your stuff, you can expect people to check it out themselves as well, and you can grow the brand of your band.

Considering social media marketing, your advertisements need to be targeted very effectively, since music is such a subjective thing, and most people wouldn't even listen to a metal song seeing that it is a kind of a niche genre in the general music scene. So, you have to find your target group, and try to make your ads reach them specifically. The type of ads you use are also different, since you are usually marketing an album, a single or an EP, and the "spearhead" of your marketing campaign is a single song with a video involved. That can be either a music video, or even more commonly nowadays a lyric video. Behind-the-scenes and teasers/trailers are also commonly used in ads, but more often in ads targeted to people who already follow your social media pages.

Last point that I would add as a unique marketing perspective of the music industry is that you as an artist or a musician in the band, are a brand yourself. Your personality and actions in public will affect the way people see your band and your music.

4. What do you think are the pros and cons of being an independent artist versus being a label-affiliated one considering distribution and marketing?

I think that naturally depends a lot on what kind of a deal one would make with a label. It can be a fair exchange of services that boosts the band's popularity with every release, or it can be an income-maximizing (from the label side) and required effort-minimizing deal, in which case it can ruin a band's potential career possibilities. In a good kind of a scenario, being label-affiliated means that you have more resources at your disposal to use on marketing and creating your art and your marketing content, such as music videos and such. Big labels also have a lot of subscribers in their social media channels, for example YouTube, and if you get your content uploaded there, it can have a huge impact on how many hits your material will get.

The pros of being independent are, well being independent! You can make every deal separately and hold all the strings in your hands. You will also get all the revenue you create, with no label in between taking their share. There are a lot of services available for distribution, manufacturing and marketing nowadays that can be helmed by independent individuals, so the possibilities are endless. However, this requires sound dedication from the band's part, as you will have to commit more time and energy in organizing everything yourself.

5. Do you think there'll be more or less independent artists in the future versus label-affiliated artists? Why?

I think there'll definitely be more independent artists in the future. The means of sharing your music have become available for everyone and having all those services for independent artists out there, makes being independent a lot more viable as a solution. Like I said before, you have the strings in your own hands, and you can decide which service provider to use and for which purpose. This change is furthermore accelerated by the fact that digital forms of consuming music have become the norm, with physical recordings having become almost obsolete for the general music consumer. Music not having to be manufactured physically, together with the affordable technology available nowadays to record and mix your own music from your laptop, means that initial investments for producing and manufacturing an album are not as big or as necessary as before, making the need to have a record label to finance your activities as an artist less important than before. I think many people choose this option to self-finance their activities, since any money you get from a traditional label, they of course expect to recoup from the music

sales. Now this becomes a risk for the artist in an era where music in itself doesn't really provide significant revenue to pay that "loan" back.

6. What would you give as an advice for independent artists on how to market and distribute their music in 2019?

My main advice for bands would be to create an actual marketing plan and a strategy. What is the goal of that particular marketing project that you are embarking on? What needs be done and when? By whom? When these factors are clear to everyone in the band as an organization, they can effectively share the tasks and reap great results. Unfortunately, most bands think that the work is over, when the album or whatever the product is that they are marketing is produced and ready for release. It is a whole new story however to get that release heard and noticed by people and requires a completely separate process that needs to be executed as a team in an orderly fashion as well. Also, it is important to include in your strategy/plan whom you are targeting with it, who is the optimal potential customer/listener for you? Analyzing the performance of your previous marketing campaigns can be helpful as well, in sharpening the effectiveness of your advertisements, content marketing etc. And remember to work hard! You will be way more satisfied later on if you actually put the effort in to your marketing activities as well as your art and your craft.