

A Rock Band You Can Look Up to for PR Inspiration



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In 2019 rock band The Who released an album titled, “Who,” 55 years following their debut. They did this despite only having two members left of their original foursome, Pete Townshend and Roger Daltrey — but the Who was always a collection of huge personalities who somehow made it work.

The Who always rolled with the punches, stayed ahead of the times in changing musical eras and cultural shifts, never cared what anyone thought and gave it their all.

There’s a lot these rock legends can teach someone in any profession, but what can a public relations firms learn about making their clients legends from the career, characters and music of the Who?

Pinball wizard

The Who's original drummer, the late Keith Moon, used to boast that he was the "world's greatest Keith Moon-type drummer." It's a funny quip, but there is a lesson here. The greatest Keith Moon-type drummer was all Moon ever needed to be. Once on his report card, an art teacher called him idiotic, and his music teacher added that he "has great ability but must guard against the tendency to show off." For most that would be good advice, but Moon picked the one profession where showboating was part of the job description. Moon's bombastic drumming became inseparable from the band's identity, his hotel-trashing, drum explosives and prankster-nature.

Everyone working in a craft they pursued has a reason they're there. For those who have found themselves in public relations, there is something you bring to the table that no one else can. Find that and embrace it. There is something you see in a way that no one else does; it might not even be in a way you are aware of.

Maybe you are good with the clients, maybe you are creative or a master of writing. These sound like things that broad groups of people have, but everyone excels in each of those areas in a different way. It would be like saying Keith Moon was a great drummer. Sure, there are lots of those, but he was the world's greatest Keith Moon-type drummer, and that's a bit more special.

The motif arises throughout 1969's "Tommy," where the central deaf, dumb and blind kid becomes a Pinball Wizard by feeling the vibrations of the table better than anyone, unburdened by other senses.

"He ain't got no distractions/Can't hear those buzzers and bells/Don't see lights a flashin."

Find the thing you do differently than everyone else and

weaponize it.

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Getting in tune

“Music is one way of individuals getting in tune with one another,” Indian Sufi master Hazrat Inayat Khan once told Pete Townshend. Khan’s words inspired the song “Getting in Tune,” a Who’s Next track originally written for Townshend’s aborted Lifehouse project. The Lifehouse project was wildly ambitious (with a plot far too complex to try and explain), centering around the idea of musical vibrations reaching a point so pure as to reflect the personalities of the audience. The Lifehouse project would form a “universal chord” to produce a transcendental experience where everyone is connected. The project wasn’t completed, at least by The Who (Townshend would release solo Lifehouse work), but the idea of music’s connective power permeated the band’s work.

In “Tommy,” Townshend envisioned the music on the album transmitting the vibrations being felt by the character, as if to have the listener become the titular character.

This kind of connectivity through craft, deeper than the obvious, is pursued in every medium of storytelling. Brands and PR campaigns need to be distinct, different and connect with people in the press, media and social media. The new media age has ushered in an excess of content. For effective copy to shine it must be “in tune” with your clients and their customers. If you can find harmony in your PR campaign, clients and customers may sit up, take notice and stop scrolling.

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Be ambitious and consistent

For Townshend and The Who many tracks from the abandoned project were repurposed for “Who’s Next,” creating one of their most beloved albums full of iconic rock anthems like Baba O’Riley.

Townshend’s ambition led him to these classic works, and he was disappointed to siphon off the planned rock opera, but he produced work that kept the band in the cultural zeitgeist.

In the ever-changing technological landscape, marketers must show the same ambition, consistency and flexibility. Every project should be approached with the same energy and vigor as the last. Even ambition that ultimately falters can produce good ideas. And what the clients want is ever-changing so you should be too.

Townshend reconciled ambition with the importance of delivering consistent quality work earlier in his career as well. After adding “Pinball Wizard” to a Tommy record that was shaping up as potentially dark, Townshend said, “If I had failed to deliver The Who an operatic masterpiece that would change people’s lives, with ‘Pinball Wizard’ I was giving them something almost as good: a hit.”

Be ambitious and consistent. Roll with the punches, stay current, think ahead and play the hits.

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