

Getting the Tone Right

Hearing plays an important part in making a brand perceptible with all our senses. Audio branding translates brand identities into sound and helps in the strategic and emotional positioning of companies, brands and products. According to Cornelius Ringe, brand sound exists intrinsically in a brand's DNA. The managing director of the agency WESOUND explains what's important about acoustic brand management.

In everyday life, when you're confronted with noises or sounds, you can't not hear them. Audio in all its facets is an inherent part of daily life. We can't close our ears and are thus perforce exposed to the auditive stimuli of our environment. This is also true when companies address their target audience with acoustic elements as part of their communications strategy.

After all, advertisers want to offer customers and users a consistent customer journey along all brand touch points. Auditive communication is understood as part of the marketing instrument audio branding. Audio branding or sound branding are strategic and operative measures that contribute to making a brand audible. The resulting brand

sound becomes an inherent part of the brand and has the task of translating the brand's identity, values and philosophy acoustically. The aim is in this way to create an unambiguous association to a particular brand and an unmistakable identity. One prominent example is the brand presence of Deutsche Telekom. For almost 20 years, the sound logo with its distinctive five-tone progression has been omnipresent and is now firmly anchored in our auditive memory.

Audio branding elements can be used at various touch-points, for example in video productions, web sites or as an acoustic point of sale accompaniment, at trade fairs and events and in showrooms. Then there are the still



Photo: WESOUND



relatively young forms of communication like for instance language assistants, which in turn offer new opportunities for advertisers. Since 2005, Cornelius Ringe has been a consultant on auditive brand management for international brands and since 2017 managing partner of Wesound. The sound agency's offices and studios are to be found in the hearts of Berlin and Hamburg. Wesound advises, develops and creates acoustic presences for brands like Bayer, DFL, Manner and Seat. In the interview, Ringe explains what role the subject of audio branding plays in healthcare and pharma companies, what he associates with the Doppelherz sound logo and how sound can be experienced by the hard of hearing. He also explains how brand values can be captured in musical notes and what role sound plays for a brand's DNA. And the boss of Wesound also gives tips on what companies should look out for, so that the sound becomes part of the brand identity and provides added value.

HEALTHCARE MARKETING: Cornelius Ringe, what is the sound of health?

CORNELIUS RINGE: What health means to people varies widely. Depending on culture, society and context, your question could call forth different answers. The same applies to the definition of music. Indeed, one could philosophize and debate such definitions and correlations at some length. At the end of the day, you have to find a suitable consensus for all participants. That is already an important process in brand management.

Cornelius Ringe

is managing director of Wesound, based in Hamburg and Berlin. An economist specializing in advertising psychology, he did his PhD at the Institute for Music and Media Science at Humboldt University in Berlin. Since 2005 he has worked as an auditive brand management consultant for international brands. He started out at Wesound as responsible for Strategic Business Development, before becoming managing director in 2017. Within the framework of his teaching activities as a visiting lecturer, Ringe headed up the field of study of Audio Branding at Humboldt University Berlin and the Pop Academy Baden-Württemberg. In 2009, he set up the Audio Branding Academy as a globally central institution for acoustic brand management with congresses in Hamburg, New York, Oxford, Moscow and Berlin. Since 2017, the academy has hosted the International Sound Awards.

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Cornelius Ringe, Managing Director Wesound

HEALTHCARE MARKETING: Music and voices are perceived by different people in different ways – what delights some might drive others to despair. So isn't the very attempt to give a brand a voice or a sound automatically doomed to failure?

RINGE: No, brands successfully face this challenge on a daily basis in all areas of brand communication. Taste isn't something to argue about. So it's all the more important that brand sounds are not seen as questions of taste. A well-led brand knows its own identity. Its sound, the brand sound, is an auditive reflection of this identity. So it doesn't have to be invented, but discovered and revealed. This is a basic paradigm of modern brand management. Yes, we humans are all very different and have differing brand preferences. Brand-makers know and exploit this. Brand sound is already an intrinsic part of a brand. Our task as a sound agency is to decode this DNA and encode it in sound parameters. Take our Wesound logo for example. It is a visualised code which can be communicated via all media – including audio.

HEALTHCARE MARKETING: What significance does sound have for a brand's DNA and how is this expressed?

RINGE: Sound is effective above all where the brand image is created – in the subconscious. And this happens faster and more directly than any other cognitive stimulus. Where this implicit brand knowledge is gathered and the reward system makes the decision to buy, is also where brand values and messages are communicated far better via implicit sound codes than by explicit language.



HEALTHCARE MARKETING: Can you describe the audio branding process?

RINGE: When brand DNA is optimally transmitted via sound codes, it's either an incredible piece of luck or the result of a well thought-through and rigorously implemented audio branding process. Gambles should be avoided. An audio branding process is characterized by clear methodology and a defined amount of leeway for creativity and artistic licence. The right amounts of these two elements must be coordinated. The best methodology is useless if later on the creative side is not in the hands of experienced, brilliant designers. Thus, one decisive success factor is the people who take on the creative aspect in the middle of the audio branding-process. The surrounding process methodology is necessary in order to steer the creativity in the right direction and achieve a consensus with all participants. But more is required to actually make a brand's DNA audible. Without a clear implementation concept and long-term audio management, even the best brand sound concept is destined to decline.

HEALTHCARE MARKETING: Let's talk about the health industry. To what extent does the subject of audio branding play a part in healthcare and pharma companies?

RINGE: The connection between music, sound and health has been obvious from time immemorial. Be it prehistoric shamanism, modern music therapy or simply one's own mood management – sound is used to increase the feeling of wellbeing. The negative effects of unwanted music and sound are equally unquestionable. In my opinion it's natural that healthcare and pharma companies use sound to a great extent in their brand communication. For example, the iconic Doppelherz [“Double Heart” food supplement] sound logo has existed almost unchanged ever since I can remember. It's an inherent part of my childhood memories. When I hear that final melody in a Doppelherz commercial, I have this incredibly reassuring feeling of familiarity like no other OTC brand manages. But nowadays that isn't enough to make a brand in all its significance come alive auditively for the entire customer journey.

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Cornelius Ringe, Managing Director Wesound

HEALTHCARE MARKETING: At first one thinks of classic sound logos as used in commercials. What touch-points are important for auditive brand management?

RINGE: We're confronted on a daily basis with new auditive touch-points which often make very specific demands of sound design. The variety of media used in brand communication is exploding. But they all have one thing in common – they have audio. So it may be easier to say where audio branding is not needed. Is it just the traditional print media?

HEALTHCARE MARKETING: Are there other medical fields where audio is gaining in significance?

RINGE: In medical technology, brand sound is becoming hugely significant for the design of the user experience, at the interface between humans and machines. Whereas humans used mainly to come into contact with medical technology in hospitals, today in these times of digitalisation and demographic change this occurs to an ever greater extent at home or indeed anywhere. Health is one of the most important topics in our lives. It's clear that this is reflected in the range of mobile apps and speech assistants. The demands for functional, aesthetic and at the same time brand-conform sound design are by no means trivial. It has to be created by experienced experts. For Sivantos, formerly Siemens, for example we developed brand-specific sound design for hearing aids. Creating good sound design for the hearing-impaired was a particularly educative experience.



HEALTHCARE MARKETING: That does sound like an exciting task. How did you master the challenge?

RINGE: The hearing aids are used for a wide variety of hearing impairments and have to be set up for the individual needs of the wearer. The spectrum ranges from balancing out a slight impairment to almost complete deafness. Modern hearing aids are really super headsets with numerous features. For elderly people with limited fingertip sensitivity, they have to be easy, intuitive and accessible to use via tiny switches that are usually found behind the ear and of course they have no display. To primarily guarantee very good signal legibility, we developed three simple and prioritized design principles which transformed the brand sound with decreasing audibility into ever clearer signals. The positive results of market research provided impressive confirmation of this methodology.

HEALTHCARE MARKETING: What must companies look out for so that the sound becomes a part of the brand identity and creates added value?

RINGE: Audio branding is not a one-off project with a discreet end. It is an ongoing element of brand management. After the brand sound has been implemented, it has to be continuously maintained and managed. Problems with use have to be systematically registered, solved and documented for further development. This is the only way to create added value for the brand in different channels in the longer term. Larger companies should seek out a sound agency as a long-term partner. The return on investment through higher performance and cost optimisation needs to be checked regularly. Those in charge will be amazed by what is possible. A recent Ipsos study in the USA showed that commercials with brand sound assets have an eight-and-a-half-fold chance of successful brand awareness than those without brand sound. Similar results were shown last year in a study of the AS&S [ARD Sales & Services, who market advertising in public service broadcasting in Germany]. With such impressive results, every controller should check if the budgets for brand communication are being employed efficiently. I can't imagine that these figures can be ignored.

HEALTHCARE MARKETING: What role does audio play in a company's corporate guidelines?

RINGE: Good brand design guidelines for users have to be clear and simple assistance for the creation of brand experience. Without such guidelines it's almost impossible to ensure a strong, consistent brand presence across larger teams and periods. The German Football League DFL already had brand sound assets when they asked Wesound to develop a clear brand sound strategy and user-friendly guidelines. Sometimes brand sound can already be improved on paper.

HEALTHCARE MARKETING: What mistakes should advertisers avoid when they approach the subject of audio branding?

RINGE: For an audio branding process, there should definitely be sufficient time and resources available, and all relevant stakeholders should be on board from square one. Above all, they should work with experienced audio branding agencies. That is still the best insurance against possible mistakes.

HEALTHCARE MARKETING: The audio universe continues to grow – what is particularly in demand from your clients at the moment?

RINGE: For the last years or so we've registered an increasing number of enquiries about initial orientation workshops. This shows that many of those responsible for brands have recognized the significance of the subject for the future, but would first like to get an overview. We welcome this development, because it's a good, quick instrument for defining a brand's exact needs and requirements when it comes to a brand sound.

HEALTHCARE MARKETING: A propos the future: How will companies and brands make people aware of themselves in a loud world?

RINGE: We should all work towards the world not sounding louder, but better, thanks to better sound concepts. Brand sound doesn't mean that still more sound emanates from brands, but that their sounds are created more consciously and in a more targeted manner. Brand sound is a question of getting the tone right.

Interview: Anna Jäger

WeSound

was founded in 2011 as an agency for audio branding. The executive board of the company based in Hamburg and Berlin is made up of Cornelius Ringe, Carl-Frank Westermann and Lars Ohlendorf. The team covers all facets of sound, including the development of intelligent, interactive sound systems for e-mobility, the fields of virtual and augmented reality, and virtual assistance. Among the agency's clients are Allianz, Bayer, DFL, Lufthansa, Manner, Mastercard, Seat and Volkswagen.