

Lessons from American Idol

Marketing 101

Each year, the judges on *American Idol* stressed the importance of “choosing the right song.” On last week’s show, the consequences of not heeding that advice was evident when singing sensation Joshua Ledet, one of three left in the competition, did not receive enough votes from across America to make it to the finals.

It was a decision that clearly dismayed and stunned some members of the audience outside the singer’s family, including mentor to American Idol hopefuls, Jimmy Iovine co-chairman of the International Music Company Interscope.

The three singers had to perform several songs. Ledet’s opening melody was one that I disliked...a lot. In fact, I’d never heard the song before. On the other hand, the other two talented singers performed compositions from musicians that included Mariah Carey, Rob Thomas, and Michael Jackson.

Ledet chose the wrong composition, and presumably made it easier for viewers to exclude him from the finals. Based solely on his vocal ability, Ledet should not have been voted off.

“Choose the right song” is code for achieving marketing success in this industry niche. There are countless talented people vying for the stage. The song is the product and the other crucial element. The brief, straightforward instruction, “choose the right song” is in reality a complex set of rules, a mix between art, science, business, marketing, and gut instinct.

For the first time, this season’s commentary by Iovine hinted at the elements involved in the process behind the cryptic advice “choose the right song.”

Ironically, after being voted out, Ledet's farewell repeat performance of This is a Man's World was arguably, based on audience reaction, a highlight of the show. Had Ledet been able to choose that performance or something similar the week before, it would have been much harder to take him out of the running.

Lesson: Every industry has a unique set of marketing rules, and you have to figure out what they are and whether you have the skill set to execute them successfully.

References

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