

Music and the (Real) World: Thirty Years of MTV

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- January 1981, Manhattan: New idea for a “visual radio station” for the younger generation by John Lack
- Lack, Pitman, and Nesman receive a \$20 million investment from Warner and Amex and launched that August in 1981
- First premiered in 2.1 million homes, after the first month that increased to 2.5 million homes
- It took MTV 3 years to break even in expenses and profits
- 1983 generated \$25 million in revenue from 14 different companies.
- Expands genres after the release of Michael Jackson’s “Billie Jean.”
- Gradually transitions to reality and talk TV related to entertainment and celebrities

1-A: The beginning risks

- “What were the risks involved in getting MTV on cable television?”

Warner and Amex were skeptical about launching MTV. Record sales were declining, so it was a hard idea to invest in.

Once MTV launched, record companies were needed to provide video content at no extra cost, which was an issue because the record labels had no guarantee that the extra work would promote record sales- but it did!

Another risk involved was defying the traditional cable format, and how society would react to the rebellious and young attitude of music television

1-B: What were the risks involved in getting MTV on cable television?

PROS OF RECOMMENDED APPROACH

1. New target audience and new image
2. Advertisement revenue
3. Promote record sales
4. Publicize new and upcoming artists
5. Immediate success

CONS OF RECOMMENDED APPROACH

1. Hard to find investors
2. Negative feedback from society/ breaking norms: accused of sexism, racism, and offensive content
3. Needed wider variety of genres and artists

2-A: Content choice and issues

Once MTV gained greater power and flexibility to choose its content, what problems arose and how did they handle those problems?

- Backed by 140 companies
- \$100 million from record companies
- The separation of “Black” and “White” music
- Stopped Michael Jackson from being able to present his music
- Created new genres
- Brought more diverse music to the industry
- VH1 and Nickelodeon causing a threat

2-B: After gaining greater power, what problems arose and how did MTV handle them?

PROS OF RECOMMENDED APPROACH

- 1. R&B Music**
- 2. Billie Jean making music diverse**
- 3. Bringing in more revenue with record deals**

CONS OF RECOMMENDED APPROACH

- 1. “Black” and “White” music**
- 2. Not allowing artist to thrive**
- 3. Lost in viewership**
- 4. Opened the market**

3-A: Effects and Impact

What effect did Lack's idea have on the artists as well as the record labels?

How did Music Television ultimately impact the music industry?

- **Promotion of New Artists**
- **Changed promotional tools**
- **Increase in record sales**
- **Helped foreign artists enter U.S. market**
- **Allowed artists to “polish” their image**
- **Record labels increased music video production and spending**

3-B: What effect did Lack's idea of MTV impose on artists and record labels? How did Music Television ultimately impact the music industry?

PROS OF RECOMMENDED APPROACH

1. Offered new medium to music industry
2. Viewers could watch the videos for free
3. Exposed new and popular artists
4. Could target specific demographic
5. Allow fans to see and hear the artists performing without going to the concert

CONS OF RECOMMENDED APPROACH

1. Focused specifically on Rock 'n Roll genre
2. Artists had to focus on image as well as music
3. Video clips were expensive to produce and had to be given at no cost

4-A: Transition to reality television

How was MTV affected with the switch from music to Reality TV?

Started because record sales continued to grow but the music industry growth rate started to slow down. The decline was happening because we had a slow economy and illegal downloading of digital music files was available.

The concepts for reality shows were born because of financial constraints.

Because of controversy they found a new platform

International growth led to a 50% increase in viewership

Increase in advertising in 2002

4-B: How was MTV affected with the switch from music to reality TV?

PROS OF RECOMMENDED APPROACH

1. Sparked interest from consumers
2. Started new trend in television
3. International growth

CONS OF RECOMMENDED APPROACH

1. Lost viewership from people who were used to watching the old MTV
2. Influenced younger generation in a negative way

5-A: Changes over time

- How did the concept of “Forever Young: change MTV and why?

After 30 years, how did the changes in the music industry impact MTV and their viewers?

- Created their company direction.
- Current youth culture.
- Responsibility to show what's happening now.
- Moving with technology.
- Increased competition.

5-B: How did the concept “forever young” change MTV?

After 30 years, how did changes in the music industry impact MTV and their viewers?

PROS OF RECOMMENDED APPROACH

1. Making of TV shows
2. Mobile and Digital platforms

CONS OF RECOMMENDED APPROACH

1. Created controversies
2. Not expected impact or revenue

Ultimately Successful

- Music and TV industry were slowing
- Youth demographic was elusive until this point
- Increased record sales and new artist exposure
- Changed Music dynamic and promotional tools
- Music diversity should have been emphasized in early stages
- Michael Jackson started major changes in MTV
- Moved from Music Videos to Reality TV