

TITLE OF CASE STUDY: "Justin Bieber: Never Say Never" Paramount Pictures

Business Objective

Our business objective was to generate strong audience turnout for the theatrical release of the concert film *Justin Bieber: Never Say Never*. Success would be measured primarily by opening weekend box office gross, as well as overall domestic gross of the film.

Concert films have an inconsistent track record at the box office. While the Miley Cyrus film *Hannah Montana/Miley Cyrus: Best of Both Worlds Concert* earned an impressive \$65 million in 2008, the Jonas Brothers' film *Jonas Brothers: The 3D Concert Experience* took in a disappointing \$19 million in 2009 and was widely considered a flop. Given that the Jonas Brothers were even more successful than Justin Bieber at the time their concert film was released (*Billboard* Top Money Makers), we also needed to ensure that *Never Say Never* avoided a similarly lackluster performance at the box office.

Never Say Never had the added pressure of being the first film released by Paramount's Insurge Pictures, a new division designed to produce lower-budget films with minimal marketing spend. The success of this film would help make a name for Insurge in the industry, as well as ensure continued financial support from Paramount.

Campaign Objective

Our campaign objective was to overcome some of the negativity surrounding Justin Bieber. Despite having achieved phenomenal success at a young age (or perhaps because of it), Bieber has attracted an unparalleled level of derision. By early 2011, he was the most disliked celebrity on YouTube, starring in 5 of the top 6 most disliked videos on the site (ReadWriteWeb, 2011).

Bieber's history of magazine cover failures also did not bode well for his film debut. His cover of *Vanity Fair* was the magazine's worst selling issue in 12 years. An April 2010 *People* cover featuring Bieber sold 25% below average and was the third worst seller for the magazine that year. Even Bieber's October 2010 *Teen Vogue* cover (presumably aimed at a more ideal demographic) sold only 121,054 issues, 12% below the magazine's 2010 average (ABC data).

The campaign needed to overcome some of the widespread aversion to Bieber in order to expand the film's audience beyond existing fans. Tracking surveys and opening weekend exit polls would indicate whether the campaign succeeded in appealing to a wider audience. At the very least, *Never Say Never* would need to attract a more diverse audience than the Jonas Brothers film, where only 1 in 4 audience members were over the age of 25 (Disney exit polls).

Research Story

Quantifying the Bieber Backlash

We began with a quantitative brand health and positioning study conducted in late October 2010 among 400 general moviegoers, 300 kids, 400 teens, and 250 parents. Amidst widespread criticism and negativity regarding Justin Bieber, this research helped us quantify the “Bieber Backlash” and understand what facets of Bieber’s celebrity were most disliked.

In order to evaluate Brand Bieber, we compared the pop star with 16 other musical artists to gauge his relative power and popularity. Bieber emerged as the most disliked personality we tested. And with only 22% favorability, he was among the most disliked individuals ever tested by Penn Schoen Berland across entertainment, media, and politics.

Compared to Kanye West, John Mayer, Eminem, Selena Gomez, Demi Lovato, and the Jonas Brothers, among others, Bieber was seen as the least authentic and least talented artist. He was also ranked second to Kei\$ha as least inspirational and least relatable. Overall, we found that the Bieber brand was niche and interest in the film was confined largely to Bieber fans.

The Politics of Personality

We realized that in order to sell Justin Bieber “The Movie” we needed to sell Justin Bieber “The Person.” This meant deviating from the traditional approach of marketing a film. What we needed was not a movie campaign—it was a political campaign. This breakthrough shifted the way we approached the research and development for *Justin Bieber: Never Say Never*. We used segmentation analysis to identify the “Bieber Base” of Fans (mainly girls 8-12) plus two key audiences of “swing voters” for the film: Bieber Skeptics (mainly female teens 13-17 who did not necessarily dislike Bieber but disliked the hoopla surrounding him) and Moms (of girls 8-12). We knew the Bieber Base would turn out on opening weekend, and we knew our challenge and opportunity lay in reaching out to the swing voters.

Positioning the Candidate

We used maximum difference scaling (MaxDiff) to identify the marketing hooks that each audience found most motivating. Allowing respondents to rate the importance of eight different positionings relative to other choices helped us zero in on the aspects of the film that truly mattered most to our base and swing audiences. While Fans were most interested in the 3D concert and behind-the-scenes elements of the film, Bieber Skeptics and Moms were more interested in Bieber’s family background and rags-to-riches story. Given the importance of the swing vote, we decided to focus the campaign on the inspirational, biographical story of how Justin Bieber became a sensation rather than the concert element of the film.

Crafting the Message

Our next step was a series of qualitative focus groups conducted in December 2010 among Fans, Bieber Skeptics, and Moms to better understand their perceptions of Bieber as well as explore potential creative executions. These groups helped us confirm specific misconceptions about Justin Bieber (he’s not talented, he’s not musical, he’s a manufactured pop star) that were used to develop the rules and messaging for the campaign.

The focus groups confirmed that the biography strategy was effective among the Fans and especially the two swing audiences. The more they heard about Bieber’s personal background and struggles, the more they liked him. This research was also critical in the development of creative assets for the campaign. The first set of focus groups in early December 2010 helped identify the optimal poster treatment for the film. There are two posters for *Justin Bieber: Never*

Say Never, one developed pre-research and one post-research. The impact of the research and resulting strategy is clear when comparing the two.

The first poster was released online in early October 2010 and features “Bieber the Superstar,” a stylized black-and-white image of the pop star decked out in a bejeweled letterman jacket and striking a heroic pose. There is no tagline, just the title of the film and a website address. The second poster was released in January 2011 and depicts “Bieber the Regular Teen,” dressed in jeans and sneakers and straddling two worlds, his small Canadian hometown of Stratford (population 32,000), and the glitz and glamour of New York City. A tagline reads, “Find out what’s possible if you never give up.” The first poster primarily appealed to the base while the second poster provided the relatability and rags-to-riches story that won over the swing voters.

We also tested multiple trailers and television spots. This helped us identify the scenes and moments that were most effective for each of the three audiences. Insights from this research were used to develop targeted spots used in the television campaign. We found that Fans were most curious about what happens backstage as they are already likely to know the story of Bieber’s rise to stardom. Fans also needed a sense of the 3D concert spectacle in the film. Bieber Skeptics and Moms, on the other hand, responded more to Bieber’s pre-fame life and home video footage of him performing as a young child. These scenes conveyed Bieber’s humble beginnings as well as his natural talent. Moms particularly liked scenes showing Bieber’s strong bond with his mother, and a targeted spot entitled “#1 Fan” was specially created to showcase this relationship.

Marketing Strategy

Our strategy was to run a “political” campaign for Justin Bieber, marketing his personality and values rather than the film itself. This meant positioning *Just Bieber: Never Say Never* as a documentary more than a concert film. The 3D concert element played a part (particularly in appealing to Bieber fans) but the main marketing emphasis was on Bieber’s inspiring rags-to-riches story of hard work, determination, and refusing to give up.

This inspirational story was fundamental to attracting Bieber Skeptics and Moms—the two swing audiences who were our best opportunities for extending the film’s appeal beyond the Fans. By focusing our efforts on these three audiences, we were able to develop a targeted campaign without wasting resources on the vast majority of moviegoers who had no interest (and indeed, an active disinterest) in Justin Bieber.

We developed a set of rules that governed all marketing efforts. These were based on insights into our target audiences and provided a values-led messaging framework for the campaign.

Rule #1: Emphasize authenticity—destroy the “packaged pop star” pre-conception by highlighting Bieber’s progression from humble beginnings in a Canadian small-town to being discovered by fans on YouTube.

Rule #2: Build musical credibility—reveal Bieber’s natural musical talent (playing the drums and guitar at a very young age) and show his more recent association with legitimate performers like Usher.

Rule #3: Reinforce wholesome persona—avoid sexualizing Bieber as this is a turn-off for Moms (who prefer a wholesome role model for their daughters) and makes Bieber look less authentic.

Rule #4: Increase relatability—show Bieber being a real person, interacting with friends and family off-stage. Bieber’s close relationship with his mother is especially appealing to Moms.

Rule #5: Use surrogates to underline humility—similar to a political campaign, surrogates (including Bieber’s mother, manager, and mentor Usher) can advocate for him and tell his story, preventing Bieber from coming across as overly self-confident.

Rule #6: Convey inspirational message—underscore that Bieber’s journey to stardom was not easy and involved a lot of industry rejection. However, Bieber had the drive and determination to overcome these obstacles and succeed.

Rule #7: Use concert element judiciously—it is a turn-off for Bieber Skeptics (especially the footage of screaming fans) and Moms. Yet Fans do want to know that there will be concert footage in the film, especially since they can’t all attend Bieber’s live performances.

Campaign Description

The “Never Say Never” campaign launched in mid-January 2011 and ran until one week after the film’s release on February 11th. The campaign was governed by a fundamental truth uncovered in research: *The more you know about the real Justin Bieber, the more you like him.*

The film’s theatrical trailer, poster, TV and radio spots all featured key moments of Bieber’s life story, highlighting his journey to stardom from humble beginnings in Stratford, Ontario. The campaign targeted our three distinct audiences: Fans, Bieber Skeptics, and Moms. Media spend was concentrated on cable television, where each audience could be reached and targeted efficiently, with minimal spend on those outside the target. TV also allowed key facts about Bieber to be conveyed using home video and documentary footage culled from the film.

Prints-and-advertising (P&A) spend totaled approximately \$20 million, nearly half the average for a major release (Baseline Intelligence, 2009).

Tracking Progress

After the campaign launched, online tracking surveys conducted thrice weekly in the eight weeks leading up to the release of *Justin Bieber: Never Say Never* gave us the confidence that the campaign was working. In-depth subgroup analysis allowed us to track interest among our target audiences. This research also helped us appropriately gauge the film’s box office potential. Industry press predicted “a modest theatrical success” (*Screen Daily*) with an opening weekend between \$17 million (*BoxOffice.com*) and \$20 million (*The Hollywood Reporter*). However, our tracking inspired a prediction 50% higher, which proved to be a more accurate forecast.

Business Results

Justin Bieber: Never Say Never earned a remarkable \$29.5 million in its opening weekend. This was the second-best opening for a concert movie, after *Hannah Montana/Miley Cyrus: Best of Both Worlds Concert* (which opened to \$31 million)—although it is worth mentioning that the Miley Cyrus film was originally billed as a one-week event before Disney decided to extend the engagement. *Never Say Never* made over twice what *Jonas Brothers: The 3D Concert Experience* pulled in during its debut (\$12.5 million), and more than *Michael Jackson’s This Is It* (\$23.2 million after opening on a Wednesday).

Exit polls showed that 84% of Bieber’s audience was female and 67% were less than 25 years old. That 1 in 3 audience members were over the age of 25 confirms that the film was

successful in attracting an audience beyond Bieber's fan base of young girls—especially compared to the Jonas Brothers film, where only 1 in 4 audience members were older than 25. Another indication of the campaign's effectiveness is the film's performance beyond its opening weekend. As predicted by the *Los Angeles Times* on the day the film opened: "Regardless of how it starts, *Never Say Never* will probably have a short box office life. Most films featuring pop stars and musical performances have a big opening day with hardcore fans packing theaters and then fade quickly as few casual moviegoers show interest" (11 February 2011). But *Never Say Never* did not fade quickly. The film retained box office heat, falling only 55% in its second weekend—compared to a 67% decline for *Hannah Montana/Miley Cyrus: Best of Both Worlds Concert* and a 77% decline for *Jonas Brothers: The 3D Concert Experience*. And on that second Saturday, the Bieber film was down only 49% from a week earlier. On Sunday, it was down only 37%.

Never Say Never went on to earn \$73 million domestically, making it the highest grossing concert film of all time, beating *Michael Jackson's This Is It* (\$72 million), *Hannah Montana/Miley Cyrus: Best of Both Worlds Concert Tour* (\$65 million), *Jonas Brothers: The 3D Concert Experience* (\$19 million), *Madonna: Truth or Dare* (\$15 million), and *Glee The 3D Concert Movie* (\$12 million). *Never Say Never* was also the year's top grossing documentary, and the third highest grossing doc of all time, behind only *Fahrenheit 9/11* (\$119 million) and *March of the Penguins* (\$77 million).

With a production budget of \$13 million and a P&A spend of \$20 million, *Never Say Never* was an enormous success for Paramount and helped establish its new division, Insurge Pictures. The campaign was remarkably efficient, demonstrating that Insurge was capable of successfully releasing a film on a budget. Don Harris, general manager of distribution for Paramount, summed it up nicely when he said, "The ad spend was about half of what you would normally have to put out to get a gross like that." The film's success helped Paramount rank number 1 in market share at the domestic box office in 2011.