

# ThEME Case Studies

## CASE: MICK JAGGER - THE SUSTAINABLE STONE

7/26/2013 - by MARTIN PORTER

The Rolling Stones' 50-year storm of publicity, scandal, stress, and changing personnel and relationships has also been a phenomenal, sustained commercial success marked by a compelling alchemy of personality, physicality, and musicality. Their music, deeply influenced by the American blues that gave rise to rock and roll, resonated from the start and continues to gain fans generations past the Baby Boomers. The bad-boy, iconoclastic heartthrobs of the 1960s have developed lasting appeal.

The band's sustained success reflects careful stewardship, and much of the credit goes to Mick Jagger. For 45 of the band's 50 years, Jagger has been in direct control of the Rolling Stones' business and brand: marketing, publishing, tour planning, merchandising, public relations, and accounting.

### Attention to Detail

One of Jagger's key traits is a razor-sharp awareness of and attention to detail – factual and sensorial. His rebellious image notwithstanding, Mick's eye for detail has been observed in many settings. For example, on one of his voyages around Britain, he visited an art museum with Sir Cecil Beaton, the Oscar-winning costume designer and visual artist. Beaton was surprised by Jagger's close attention to the collection and remarked that "Mick has much appreciation, and his albino-fringed eyes notice everything. He has an analytical slant and compares everything he is seeing here with earlier impressions gained in other countries."

On another occasion, Jagger was the guest host on Saturday Night Live. Longtime producer Lorne Michaels said, "If you watch him get ready to put on a show, you'll see that there is nothing that he is not aware of, that he is not intimately involved with, from lighting and design to how the curtain is going to hit the floor. There are very few people whose production skills impress me, but he's one of them. He's as good a showman and a producer as there is." In Martin Scorsese's film "Shine a Light" which depicts a Rolling Stones concert, Mick's over-preparation even became a running joke among the producers. However, after all of the frustration over Mick's "particularness," the show went on in spectacular style, without a hitch—completely fulfilling Mick's vision.

Since he took over the Stones' management in 1967, Jagger has made it his job to remain keenly aware of every detail involving or affecting the business of the Rolling Stones. With this information, he controls the environment around him to create the best experience for the audience member, and for the band itself. Some might say it's because he's a tight-fisted control freak. Jagger would probably say it's so that the Stones can continue to deliver the goods, and reap the rewards, effectively and so the audience gets the right experience. There's no doubt that it's worked.

On the Rolling Stones' lavish touring plane, there's a back room where Jagger does his work. On the wall of that room, there's a map of the entire tour area with a pin stuck into every stop. Once a tour stop has become profitable, the color of its pin is changed (presumably to green).

In his effort to make the Stones as successful as possible, Jagger keeps tabs on everything from travel costs to licensing agreements to new hires. "He even concerned himself with the price of pencil sharpeners in the Stones' office".<sup>1</sup>

## Ownership and Stewardship

Mick's desire to control all aspects of the Stones' business, much as Steve Jobs did at Apple 20 years later, reflects one of the core values of the Rolling Stones: ownership and stewardship.

From the beginning, the Stones wanted to create their own work. At a time when popular musicians did not necessarily write their own material, the Stones stressed that all of their original material be written by a band member, not a staff writer. Having gotten burned over ownership rights in the early 1960s, they were determined to retain control over their own material. Andrew Oldham, their first manager, once forced Keith Richards and Mick Jagger into a room and wouldn't let them come out until they'd written a song together. Since then, the Stones' original material has formed the core of their repertoire. Songs such as "You Can't Always Get What You Want," "Wild Horses," and "Ruby Tuesday" have made fans cheer for decades, and because they wrote and own them, the Stones get all the credit and all the royalties.

Their desire for ownership and self-determination has not diminished through the years. Every new Rolling Stones album since 1962 has been packed with original material, and Jagger is both selective and successful at licensing the rights to the Rolling Stones' music. For instance, the band reportedly reaped \$5 million for licensing "Satisfaction" to the makers of Snickers candy bars.

The Stones' financial success reflects shrewd merchandising as well as their music. A keystone of their merchandising has been the Rolling Stones' logo—the red lips and stuck-out tongue so brilliantly representing Mick Jagger's (studiously) lascivious and anti-authoritarian own. Commissioned by Jagger for the 1971 "Sticky Fingers" album—because he wasn't satisfied with the designs provided by Decca, the band's record label—it has since become one of the most recognizable, iconic logos ever created. Its subsequent merchandising—from t-shirts to coffee mugs, underwear to stickers—was a stroke of marketing and branding genius, for which credit has to go to Jagger. Last year he commissioned Shepard Fairey to update the tongue logo in honor of the band's 50th anniversary.

## Collaborative Leadership

For all of his control over the band's finances and direction, Mick Jagger was far from a dictator, and his collaborative leadership style has been key to the Stones' longevity. The Stones came directly out of the era that made "We're breaking up the band" a cliché. Jagger's continual insistence on listening to the members of the band and apologizing (eventually) when he didn't, even when he disagreed, created a whole that is much greater than the sum of its parts.

---

<sup>1</sup> Deborah Sharon Davis, "Mick Jagger, Closet Conservative" NewsMax 2013.

As a leader Jagger welcomed and valued dissenting opinion in both artistic and business matters. For example, in a songwriting session, Mick was composing aloud, fiddling on the piano and experimenting with lyrics, while Keith Richards was lying on a nearby couch, apparently uninterested. In the middle of the tune, Keith heard a chord he didn't like, sat up straight, and said, "No!" Mick changed the chord immediately.

The other pillar of dissent in the Stones' organization is Alan Klein. Upon taking control of the Stones' management in 1967, Mick hired Klein as a financial management assistant. Mick Jagger did not need help with the books. He had attended the London School of Economics and had more than enough financial knowhow to manage the band's budget. He brought Klein in to be his foil, someone who would challenge and inform his opinion.

## Passion

Though the band's founders are now senior citizens, Rolling Stones tours continue to be top-shelf, inspirational to younger musicians who look up to Jagger on a professional and artistic level. Why? Because Mick Jagger and his bandmates have sustained their passion for fifty years.

From the start, the driving force behind the Rolling Stones' success has been their passion. The musical relationship between Jagger and Keith Richards began when Keith saw his old school friend Mick walking around with some blues records under his arm. The two formed a blues band that became a rock band, and they soared to stardom side by side. Their catalogue has always included covers of old blues and rhythm & blues songs – the music that originally ignited their passion. Many of their albums since 1970 have been "back to basics" collections that get in touch with their roots.

Part of the passion is showing respect for their artistic roots, and giving credit where credit is due. When many white rock bands were covering American blues music and calling it their own, the Stones (especially Keith Richards) credited their influence and recognized the black musicians that had created the blues. As soon as their own influence allowed, they invited blues legends like Muddy Waters and Buddy Guy onto the stage with them, paying homage to the masters on whose shoulders they'd stood while becoming successful.

It is impossible to overstate how much of himself Mick Jagger gives to the Rolling Stones. He is nearing 70 and his passion hasn't dimmed. He works out for hours every day in order to maintain the strength to run around the stage and then belt out a song on-key and to cavort energetically before an audience that's paying dearly to get swept up in his energy. On tours he brings President Clinton's doctor along to monitor his health and fitness, and to gauge the level of performance he can achieve on any given night.

Fellow rocker Jon Bon Jovi, whose 2010 "Circle Tour" grossed \$200 million and hit Australia, New Zealand, Tokyo, Europe, Argentina, Brazil, and all of North America, captured Jagger's enviable passion and energy well in an interview.

"This band is past the point of breaking up or anything silly like that. There's such a mutual respect. We continue to make Number One records and fill stadiums. But will we still be doing 150 shows per tour? I just can't see it. I don't know how the hell Mick Jagger does it at 67. That would be the first question I'd ask him. He runs around the stage as much as I do, yet he's got almost 20 years on me."

It is his passion and commitment as a manager, performer, and musician that fuels Mick Jagger. His pursuit of excellence, his desire to keep reaching higher, and his uncanny business sense have made him and the Rolling Stones who they continue to be, 50 years on.

---

Both an artist and a leader. A powerful and sustainable combination from whom we can all learn and enjoy.

---

@ThEME  
POSTED ON 7/26/2013  
[theme.nycp.com](http://theme.nycp.com)