

The **Ace Communicator Award** recognizes a company or individual who is outstanding in the fields of public relations & corporate communications, shining light on the hard job of raising awareness for non-marketing messages and managing internal/external comms.

Submission #1

Dmitri Vietze, Founder & CEO, Rock Paper Scissors

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I am nominating my boss and friend, Dmitri Vietze (CEO/founder of Rock Paper Scissors), as Ace Communicator for this year's Bizzy Awards. Dmitri is one of the clearest voices defining music tech today. He does more than tell stories or get clients noticed; he is committed wholeheartedly to supporting the community and the music industry, to growing the pie for everyone.

He has always done things his own way, forging his own path with a style that cuts through cliché and lamestream thinking to the heart of what really matters on a human level. He has taken this tack from the moment he founded RPS, spurred by his deep passion for music, cross-cultural dialogue, and business. He took on international artists and projects that other people frankly fumbled, and he got mainstream music journalists to listen to music and talk about events they didn't normally cover by telling deeply human stories. This deep pitching broke bands from Tinariwen to Balkan Beat Box, among many many others, in the US. For Dmitri and for RPS, artists were people, not anthropological specimens.

This commitment to true connection and smart storytelling has led Dmitri to create the industry's most creative and hardworking publicity firm, one that now represents and transforms the businesses of music companies. RPS has continued to break innovative voices and ideas that truly serve music, from Endel and Mogul, to Loudr (acquired by Spotify) and Singa, to new successful streaming services including Audiomack and Vocana . Under Dmitri's deft guidance, RPS has also worked to share the stories of major industry players (The MLC, SESAC) and independent trailblazers (CD Baby, LyricFind, Reservoir).

To support this mission, Dmitri has focused on tech that has helped RPS scale its very hands-on, intensive approach. This tech has allowed the agency to score more than 3500 placements in outlets big and small in the past three years for its music industry and music tech clients. These outlets include NYT, The New Yorker, Esquire, The Verge, Tech Crunch, and many other leading national and international outlets, as well as regular articles in the music trades, including Billboard, MBW, and Music Ally, among others. RPS has increasingly branched into creative content as well, though Dmitri has long urged our team and our clients to explore non-traditional, outside-the-box ways of conveying important messages, from cool trading cards to graphics to events to short-form video and influencer relations.

Our agency's success would not have been possible without Dmitri's leadership and spirit. His acumen is about more than natural talent and inclination, though he has those in abundance; his brilliant communicator's mind shines on his weekly Music Tectonics podcast, a platform for music tech innovators. It's about hard work, true love for connection, and genuine passion for music and the community that makes it.

https://musicbiz.org/wp-content/uploads/gravity_forms/269-e0d1d74f92bda1ed1ed94e24051bd324/2026/01/Rock-Paper-Scissors-Press-Highlights.pdf

Trista Newyear, Rock Paper Scissors
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Dmitri is relentless about “crystallize the story,” meaning that if a journalist can’t repeat it in one clean sentence, we don’t have it yet. His discipline makes me sharper, more specific, and more ruthless about defining story audiences. He’s also incredibly good at connecting dots I don’t even see yet!

During one meeting I walked into a conversation thinking we had a straightforward product update story. Dmitri listened for five minutes and basically went, “Cool, but that’s not the story,” and proceeded to reframe a feature launch as a larger, more meaningful trend story. Same information, but viewed through a completely different lens. That is what I find Dmitri often does. He finds the larger pattern, connects it to what the industry cares about, and does it in plain language.

RPS has helped trade media view tech as a crucial and core part of the music industry, not a side project. They’re also great at taking complicated, inside-baseball stuff and translating it into tangible outcomes a journalist can actually use. Not “here’s a new tool,” but “here’s what this changes for creators, money, rights, discovery, or the way music gets made.” And when it comes to events, RPS has been creating common spaces where creators, technologists, labels, and everyone else can be in the same room and actually learn from each other.

Dani Deahl, BandLab Technologies
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Dmitri played a fundamentally meaningful role in how we articulate AllTrack’s story to the marketplace. Initially we wanted to keep a lower profile related to our launch and progress, limiting communication to the market until everything was just perfect. Also, we tended to focus more on technical specifications than big picture storytelling. Dmitri helped us reframe our narrative for creators, licensees and partners into a clear, compelling value proposition that speaks to the broader music industry ecosystem. He pushed us to think less like a back-office rights administrator and more like a category-defining platform company, one that’s modernizing how performance, mechanical, and neighboring rights are licensed, collected, and paid globally. His guidance sharpened our positioning around independence, transparency, and technology leadership, and helped us communicate why our model is different from legacy PROs and CMOs without sounding overly technical.

One pivotal moment came as we were preparing to announce our expansion into neighboring rights. Our initial instinct was to lead with operational details such as territories covered, administrative improvements, collection mechanics, and compliance advantages. Dmitri challenged us to step back and re-center the narrative around what this actually means for creators: faster payouts, fewer black boxes, and materially higher international royalty collections. He reframed the announcement from a technical milestone into a creator-impact story, which dramatically improved how it landed with both the press and industry stakeholders. That shift influenced how we now approach nearly all major

communications. We no longer ask, “What did we build?”. Instead, we first ask “What problem did this solve for creators or licensees, and why should the industry care?” That mindset has become part of our internal culture, not just our external messaging.

RPS is a very unique PR and marketing firm. They have elevated music-industry PR from simple announcement distribution into true narrative and category-building strategy. Rather than chasing headlines for their own sake, Dmitri and his team focus on shaping long-term perception, credibility, and trust, particularly in complex areas like rights management, music tech, AI, and licensing infrastructure. These are very complicated industries, and he and his team have done an amazing job at just even getting up to speed on who all the players are and what roles they serve in the ecosystem. They have also played a meaningful role in professionalizing and humanizing coverage of the music-tech sector. RPS doesn't just work for its clients; it connects founders, creators, engineers, and executives into a more coherent community. They are excellent about encouraging interaction of companies within the industry, both through online meetups and by building the pre-eminent music tech conference in LA (Music Tectonics) from the ground up. From our vantage point, RPS has helped move the industry conversation forward, away from hype cycles and toward thoughtful coverage of how technology is actually changing creator economics, licensing frameworks, and global rights flows. Dmitri's leadership in that effort has made him not just a PR executive, but a trusted company advisor.

Hayden Bower, ALLTRACK
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Dmitri has had a meaningful impact on how I think about business strategy and marketing within the music industry. Through his Cosmologist roundtables, which bring together industry leaders to discuss timely and relevant topics, I've gained a broader and more nuanced perspective on the evolving music landscape. Additionally, attending the Music Tectonics conference introduced me to a wide network of peers and helped me build relationships that have been both personally and professionally valuable. These experiences have directly influenced how I approach my business and how I understand the industry at large.

Before launching Mogul, I was very hesitant to invest in PR due to unsuccessful experiences in the past. Working closely with Dmitri and his team fundamentally changed that perspective. I learned how to clearly articulate our story, highlight what truly differentiates Mogul, and position our work within the broader industry narrative. By following RPS's strategic guidance, we were able to acquire our first 1,000 users. This was an important milestone that demonstrated how a focused and well-executed press strategy can drive real, measurable business results.

The clearest example is the Music Tectonics conference, which I consider one of the most impactful events in the music industry. It's rare to see a PR firm not only support an industry but actively build and sustain a community at this level. Dmitri has a unique ability to invest in the ecosystem by creating platforms that foster meaningful connections while also delivering tangible outcomes for the companies involved. Because of that combination of community-building and results-driven execution, working with Rock Paper Scissors feels like an obvious choice every time.

Jeffrey Ponchick, Mogul Services, Inc
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Dmitri helped us bring the Endel x James Blake story to major outlets like The New Yorker and was very helpful in crafting the narrative around this groundbreaking collab. Dmitri definitely served as a great amplifier for Endel. I think Rock Paper Scissors is the only firm out there that cares for the music tech community and is actively working on building it. There's really nothing like RPS.

Oleg Stavitskii, Endel
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Submission #2

Ellen Truly, Chief Marketing & External Affairs Officer, The MLC

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As Chief Marketing and External Affairs Officer of the Mechanical Licensing Collective (The MLC), Ellen leads communications for a complex, government-mandated organization whose success depends not on promotion, but on clarity, credibility, and trust. In a business long defined by opacity, Ellen has built a communications model rooted in transparency and education, unlike anything else in the industry. From the outset, Ellen recognized that The MLC's mission required a fundamentally different approach. Rather than relying on traditional marketing tactics, she established a strategy focused on demystifying the royalty process, proactively sharing data and outcomes, and translating dense legal, regulatory, and technical information into clear, accessible language for songwriters, publishers, policymakers, and partners. Her work has turned non-marketing messages—compliance requirements, matching challenges, usage data, and royalty distribution mechanics—into tools of empowerment.

Under Ellen's leadership, The MLC has grown to more than 76,000 Members and distributed over \$3.5 billion in royalties—milestones that reflect not only scale, but the confidence creators place in the organization. Ellen's transparency-first philosophy has reshaped how creators engage with their data, helping them understand where their royalties come from, how they are calculated, and what steps they can take to ensure they are paid accurately.

Ellen's communications leadership extends well beyond external messaging. She oversees an integrated approach spanning public relations, government relations, education, and internal communications, ensuring consistency and alignment across every audience The MLC serves. She spearheads strategic engagement with Congress and federal agencies, clearly communicating The MLC's statutory responsibilities under the Music Modernization Act while reinforcing the organization's commitment to accountability and public service. These efforts have positioned The MLC as a global model for efficient, transparent rights management, operating with an annual budget of less than 4% of total royalties processed—well below global norms.

In addition to policy and government engagement, Ellen plays a pivotal role in fostering The MLC's relationships across the music industry. She has built a strategic industry network grounded in trust, using word-of-mouth as a highly effective communication channel. She engages directly with publishers, songwriters, industry organizations, songwriter groups, and other stakeholders to ensure they understand The MLC's mission, tools, and processes. By building trust and maintaining open lines of communication, she strengthens collaboration, drives transparency, and advances initiatives that benefit the entire rights ecosystem.

A hallmark of Ellen's impact is her ability to scale education as a core communications function. She has led more than 1,000 outreach and education initiatives, including nationwide roadshows, monthly webinars attracting thousands of participants, and hands-on programs that bring royalty education

directly into studios and creative spaces. Last fall, The MLC launched the Songwriter Hub, a platform that gives songwriters, representatives, and industry professionals unprecedented visibility into song data from The MLC. The Songwriter Hub reinforces transparency while providing practical tools to help ensure data is complete, up to date, and earning the royalties it should. Ellen played a lead role in the launch and in building industry awareness of the Songwriter Hub, which now serves nearly 7,000 songwriters, representatives, and industry professionals. She has also expanded multilingual resources, ensuring accessibility for a global creator community.

Ellen's leadership demonstrates how public relations and corporate communications, when grounded in transparency and integrity, can drive lasting impact for an entire industry. Through consistent, honest, and user-first communication, Ellen has helped transform a once-opaque system into one where creators feel informed, respected, and confident.

Liz Mayo, The MLC
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Submission #3

Grey Gordon, Communications & Digital Marketing Manager, A2IM

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A2IM is a standout leader recognized for its ability to clearly and effectively amplify non-marketing messages that matter to the independent music community, with Grey Gordon (Communications & Digital Marketing Manager) leading the charge. Through thoughtful internal and external communications, A2IM elevates critical conversations around policy, advocacy, education, equity, and industry sustainability, often translating complex issues into accessible, actionable insights for its members. The organization's communications work not only raises awareness but also builds trust, alignment, and engagement across a diverse global membership, reinforcing A2IM's role as a credible, steady voice for the independent sector at large. Grey's work spans both internal and external communications, ensuring alignment across A2IM's staff, board, members, and industry partners. She leads messaging around major advocacy efforts (including the recently passed HITS Act and A2IM advocacy work), conference and event communications (such as Indie Week and community mixers), member education programs (A2IM Indiesdiscussion Webinar series), and timely industry updates through A2IM's weekly newsletter (Indie Weekly). She also runs A2IM's social channels, including the quickly growing LinkedIn page. Her approach helps A2IM members understand not just what is happening in the industry, but why it matters and how they can engage.

Arielle Aslanyan, The Syndicate
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Submission #4

John Vlautin, Founder & CEO, SpinLab Communications

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I am nominating John Vlautin, CEO & Founder of SpinLab, for the Ace Communicator Award in recognition of his exceptional leadership in public relations and corporate communications.

John operates behind the scenes of some of the most influential executives and companies in the music and entertainment industry, with a remarkable number of his clients consistently represented on the Billboard Power 100. His impact is not driven by flashy marketing, but by thoughtful, strategic communications that elevate non-marketing messages, protect reputations, and build long-term trust with both internal and external stakeholders.

He works tirelessly as a strategic advisor—guiding executive messaging, navigating moments of risk and opportunity, and helping organizations communicate with clarity, credibility, and purpose. John’s approach is marked by discretion, discipline, and a deep understanding of how strong communications can shape culture, leadership, and outcomes.

Above all, he is a humble and dedicated partner to his clients, prioritizing their success over his own visibility. His ability to raise awareness for complex, often unseen communications challenges makes him a standout example of what the Ace Communicator Award represents.

Sari Delmar, SpinLab Communications

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Submission #5

Stephanie Calvinisti, Public Relations Manager, Adarga Entertainment Group

stephanie@adargagroup.com

I am submitting myself, Stephanie Calvinisti, for this Public Relations award because of my work coordinating, managing, and promoting projects for internationally recognized artists, including GRAMMY®, Latin GRAMMY®, Lo Nuestro, Billboard, Dove, and Premios Arpa winners and nominees such as Ricardo Montaner, Miel San Marcos, Elevation Worship, for KING & COUNTRY, Blanca, and Lecrae.

In my role as PR Manager at Adarga Entertainment Group, I have created strategic partnerships, organized high-impact events, and secured media coverage across radio, television, and digital platforms. I have contributed to major events such as the Latin Dove Awards Showcase, Miel San Marcos' record-breaking EVANGELIO concert, Explor Music Fest, and the Latin GRAMMY® Brunch Kingdom + Culture, ensuring memorable experiences for both artists and audiences.

I am also dedicated to mentorship through GRAMMY U, serve on the Gospel Music Association Latin Committee, and have pursued advanced studies in communications and image consultancy to strengthen my expertise. My creativity, strategic vision, and proven results in public relations drive me to continually advance the industry and support the artists I represent.

Stephanie Calvinisti, Adarga Entertainment Group
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Submission #6

Stephanie Hernandez, Director of Marketing & Communications, Frost School of Music at the University of Miami

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I. THE GOAL

Upon joining the Frost School of Music as Director of Marketing and Communications in 2022, Stephanie Hernandez set out to build a PR-centric communications discipline to strategically position the Frost School as one of the top music schools in the world.

This was an ambitious, aspirational goal—one that became a reality in 2025. Under Stephanie’s leadership, the Frost School evolved from having limited external visibility to executing a comprehensive earned media strategy that included issuing announcements, conducting proactive media outreach, creating media-worthy moments, activating high-impact partnerships, and positioning faculty as trusted industry thought leaders.

By 2025, media coverage increasingly referenced the Frost School as a leading music institution—an affirmation echoed by alumni, partners, and cultural tastemakers—demonstrating a measurable shift in perception driven by consistent, strategic communications.

II. THE WORK

Stephanie and her team led a comprehensive audit of the Frost School’s media presence, perception, and competitive landscape, using these insights to develop a robust public relations strategy anchored in clearly defined KPIs and measurable outcomes.

With the Frost School celebrating its 100-year anniversary in 2025, the strategy honored the school’s historic legacy while reframing it as a forward-thinking institution setting new standards for music education. A central focus was the strategic engagement of media around major institutional milestones to elevate visibility and spotlight the caliber of Frost School talent and the professional opportunities afforded to its students.

A marquee activation was the Centennial Celebration Concert held in April 2025 at the University of Miami. Hosted by celebrity alumnus Jason Kennedy and featuring performances by Frost School students, faculty, and famous alumni like Pat Metheny, Bruce Hornsby, Jon Secada, Joshua Henry, amongst others, the event was positioned by Stephanie as a national media moment that reinforced the school’s cultural relevance and artistic excellence.

Stephanie also spearheaded strategic partnerships with top-tier music and entertainment media outlets, including Billboard, The Hollywood Reporter, as well as the Latin GRAMMY Cultural Foundation. At Billboard Latin Music Week 2025, she led a Frost School activation celebrating alumni recognized on Billboard’s Latin Power Players list and honored Frost School alumnus Jorge Mejia, President of Sony Music Publishing Latin, with the Publisher of the Year Award.

Joining forces with The Latin GRAMMY Cultural Foundation under Stephanie’s leadership resulted in a new student scholarship, signaling two nationally renowned music institutions in South Florida coming together to support the next generation of music leaders. The Frost School hosted an in-person ceremony welcoming seasoned industry leaders as well as top-tier talent like Elena Rose to perform with Frost School of Music students and alumni. This resulted media coverage and positive mentions post scholarship ceremony, while marking the beginning of a now ongoing partnership.

In partnership with The Hollywood Reporter, Stephanie and her team also supported the launch of a national consumer poll focused on the Future of Music. The findings were unveiled during a high-profile panel discussion in Los Angeles also attended by industry leaders, media, and influencers—further cementing the Frost School’s voice in national industry conversations.

Beyond large-scale milestones, Stephanie successfully positioned Frost School leadership as trusted experts, securing interviews and profiles for Dean Shelton “Shelly” G. Berg and Interim Vice Dean Serona Elton on timely topics such as the global rise of K-pop and GRAMMY Award nominations. She also expanded the school’s reach through niche storytelling, including outreach to sports media around an MLB commercial directed by Frost School alumnus Pharrell Williams that featured current Frost School students and highlighted the school’s interdisciplinary influence.

Across all initiatives, Stephanie and her team maintained disciplined and consistent messaging through targeted outreach and press releases, ensuring every activation reinforced the Frost School’s reputation, values, and long-term positioning.

III. RESULTS + IMPACT

To measure impact, Stephanie and her team established two primary benchmarks: Share of Voice by Reach and mScore, which tracks brand perception over time by equally weighing mentions, reach, and sentiment.

Under Stephanie Hernandez’s leadership, the Frost School of Music achieved a 75% year-over-year increase in Share of Voice by Reach in 2025, with brand perception improving by 13.2% compared to competitors.

The Frost School also experienced its most expansive earned media presence to date, generating more than 360 original stories and 5,600 placements, resulting in billions of impressions across national, regional, and industry outlets. Notable coverage included Access Hollywood, Associated Press, Axios Miami, Billboard, CBS News New York, Entertainment Tonight, Extra, The Hollywood Reporter, Miami Herald, Musical America, NBC 6 South Florida Live, People, Sports Illustrated, Vanity Fair, and Yahoo News.

Stephanie and her team continue to build on this momentum, developing forward-looking communications strategies that further elevate the Frost School’s reputation within the global music and media landscape.

Serona Elton, Frost School of Music at the University of Miami
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Submission #7

Adarga Entertainment Group

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I am submitting Adarga Entertainment Group for this Public Relations award because of their exceptional ability to connect artists with audiences, partners, and opportunities in innovative and impactful ways. As an independent, minority-owned company with over 200 clients, 14,000 music assets, 11 billion video views, and 12 billion audio streams, Adarga has consistently leveraged strategic public relations to elevate its artists and projects to global recognition. Their work has helped clients receive prestigious accolades, including GRAMMY®, Latin GRAMMY®, Dove Awards, Monitor Music Awards, and Premios Arpa.

Stephanie Calvinisti, Adarga Entertainment Group
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Submission #8

Downtown's Communications Team

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Downtown's communications team, which sits within the company's b2b marketing department, leads on one of the most complex and proactive corporate communication strategies in the industry. Over the last few years, Downtown has experienced intense public attention and structural change amid one of the most widely discussed mergers of the last decade. Despite this, Downtown's team continues to own its narrative and create compelling and clear external messaging for its brand.

Downtown's businesses operate across four core divisions, spanning business-to-business and creator-focused services. In 2023, these businesses were unified into a single operating company, while simultaneously navigating multiple integrations and mergers, including the acquisition of Curve Royalty Systems and the integration of Adrev into FUGA to create one of the industry's most powerful UGC tools. Downtown's communications team transformed a complex web of M&A and structural change into a straightforward, coherent narrative, articulating who Downtown is, how its businesses operate and where the future lies.

The team built a three-layered proactive communications model to help support its messaging. Designed to serve its broad range of audiences, the approach reinforced the single narrative of Downtown's mission to empower the independent community.

1) The Music Industry Lives Here - in September 2024, Downtown launched its largest and most ambitious brand marketing campaign to date: The Music Industry Lives Here (TMILH). This multi-channel, multi-year project features nearly 100 artists and songwriters across a wide-ranging digital campaign - including John Lennon and Yoko Ono, Tori Amos, The Hives, and Yoss Bones - alongside interviews with over 50 clients globally, celebrates Downtown's exceptional client base across its four divisions, aligning those divisions under one banner for the first time and positioning Downtown as the true home and partner to the music industry.

2) IN FOCUS - an owned online content series featuring 20-minute, in-depth conversations between Downtown team members and clients / partners globally, allowing for granular discussion surrounding a particular expertise and / or trend. The series spotlights the innovative work happening across the music industry and gives audiences a chance to hear fresh perspectives in a concise, engaging way.

3) Thought Leadership / Owned-Opeds - this involves the creation of high-impact opinion pieces authored by Downtown's own leadership and expert teams, positioning them as trusted voices on the music industry and its evolution. In 2025, Downtown published almost 15 owned Op-Eds.

This owned-content cycle is supported by a robust and prolific global and regionally driven press strategy, built around a consistent PR schedule that aligns with local market trends and industry developments. In 2024, this resulted in 28 global and regional announcements, followed by 21 announcements in 2025,

covering new signings, senior hires, integrations and the launch of new divisions. These announcements are consistently picked up by the key global and local trade publications, from Japan and the Philippines, through to Germany and Brazil.

The communication team's ability to deliver timely, reactive messaging - both in response to commentary involving Downtown and to wider industry trends - has ensured the company's voice remains clear and cohesive during moments of heightened attention.

Also central to Downtown's corporate communications philosophy is that strong storytelling should also elevate the people who make the brand possible.

Downtown's team has amplified voices across genders, regions, divisions and seniority levels. Through speaking opportunities, features, podcasts, award recognition and curated industry lists, Downtown has actively and prolifically created visibility for its expert team and career-building opportunities. In 2025, the communications team secured nearly 60 speaking engagements and more than 20 media features across podcasts, interviews and editorial features. This included placements with key trade outlets such as Billboard, Variety, Music Row and Music Ally, as well as industry recognition from the Music Week Awards, Libera Awards, Music Ally Marketing Awards and Bizzy Awards. The team also positioned company leaders on major global conference stages, including Indie Week, Mondo, Music Matters, TGE, Reeperbahn, Music Biz, ADE, Big Sound and many more.

Downtown has consistently maintained and delivered on a clear and compelling communication strategy amongst a complex and often highly unpredictable environment. The team has successfully unified multiple businesses under a single brand story, maintained sustained external attention during a landmark merger, built scalable platforms for leadership and storytelling and elevated diverse voices across a 600+ person organization operating throughout the global music ecosystem.

The corporate communications team has shown how storytelling, reactive and owned messaging can shape brand perception and successfully guide an organisation through transformation.

Emma Cordell, Downtown
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