

QUICK PRINTING

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My Generation

Staff Writers

Don't be a copy; be an original.

To start the bimonthly process of writing this article for your reading entertainment, I "Googled" the words "best singing voices" and clicked on the highest ranked listing. That instantly took me to a website featuring the "100 Most Unique Singing Voices" on the planet.

(Note: The above paragraph should give you a sense of the highly scientific and time consuming research that goes in to being an illustrious magazine columnist. I'm a professional. If you're going to try this at home, for goodness sake, be careful out there.)

Appearing in the #1 position at www.the-top-tens.com [<http://www.the-top-tens.com>] is Sarah Brightman—the original Christine in her now ex-husband Andrew Lloyd Webber's Phantom of the Opera. Josh Groban—who my 18-year-old absolutely adores—comes in second. A bunch of people I've never heard of follow, before getting to the late Freddy Mercury of Queen at #13. Roy Orbison singing for the lonely sits at #29. Neil Young, Janis Joplin, and Bob Dylan are scattered throughout the list. Tiny Tim just sneaks in at #99.

At this point, you may be wondering exactly where I'm going with this. No surprise there. I frequently receive comments from folks saying they scratch their heads and ask themselves that question while reading my articles. But somehow, they point out, I manage to pull it all together. So stick with me here. The lesson at the end is worth the wait.

Escalation

Of course, there are many directions I could have taken this topic:

- Writing about the interesting mindset of the marketplace was one: "Sure, digital has come a long way the last few years, but for superior quality nothing beats the look and feel of traditional. Go with offset."
- Pointing out the importance of a good team was another: "You have to surround yourself with talented employees to make it in the printing business. Talent is the great competitive advantage. Go find talent."
- Reminding those who are struggling to keep the faith was a third: "Success comes slowly. Look at Willie Nelson (#81 on the list); he was 40 years old before his first big hit. You'll get there. Go with your gut."

Let's pause and back up a few octaves. The reason music is always on my mind right now is because I entered the high-tech world of an Apple portable media player last month. Yes, after watching my wife and three kids walk around for several years with wires sticking out of their ears and acquire music for their various Classics, Nanos, and Shuffles, I finally took the leap. Or, should I say, the leap took me. When we purchased a new MacBook for our aforementioned Josh Groban fan to take to her freshman year of college, one of the giveaways was an iPod Touch. Looking around the living room that evening, it was clear which of us would be the recipient of that perk—although my 14-year-old son did try to negotiate his way to an upgrade before saying, "Okay, Dad, you can have it, but I'll get it ready for you."

(Tip from The Coach to all readers over 40: It pays to have a technologically savvy teenager around the house to help with these things, especially if operation involves any use of opposable thumbs. If your kids are too old or too young, borrow one as needed from the neighbors. Oh, and keep an eye on them.)

There's a term you may have heard called "scope creep." For the uninitiated out there, no, it doesn't refer to someone you knew in grade school with greasy hair who needed mouthwash. It's about a project that starts out at a manageable—and approved—cost level, then grows bigger and bigger, until expenses run amok and the team leader gets called into a C-level office to hear, "How did this happen?" As you probably know from the experience of buying equipment for your printing business, "Free iPod Touch," in our case, turned out to be just the ante.

First, Kyle told me we needed to spend \$10 online to upgrade the software. Seems this one was already a generation behind, and, "C'mon, Dad, you have to have the latest; it's the only way to get all the really cool free stuff." No biggie. Heck, the iPod would have cost \$299; what's 10 bucks? Obviously, I needed to have some music on the thing, so number one son loaded songs I selected from our slim CD collection, but, hey, I've heard those recently. What about the hits from all those 70s and 80s albums sitting in the closet because I no longer have a turntable? "Just make a list," he said. "I'll get them for you." Super! Two hours later, an email from Apple appeared in my In Box showing our credit card would be charged 99-cents each for the 54 singles I picked. Piece of cake! I can handle another \$53.46.

"Dad, you really should get a case with a flap to protect this, otherwise the screen and back will get scratched" was the next suggestion from my progeny with the unlimited budget. How much will that run me? "I'll go to Target with you," he responded. "I know exactly what you need." Thirty dollars later the overall tab was approaching \$100...and I hadn't yet listened to a single song on my "free" high-tech music machine.

"It doesn't sound as good as I imagined," I told Kyle, upon finally pushing play and hearing Bruce Springsteen and The E Street Band for the first time. "I mean, it's fine, but nothing special. Maybe my expectations were too high." Was that out loud? Did he hear me? Bad mistake; shouldn't have let that slip.

"Dad," said Kyle with The Smile, "you need to get a noise canceling headset. Those ear buds aren't going to give you what you want." And that costs how much? "Well, you can go cheap, but you'll want to experience QuietComfort first." How do you know all this? "I'm 14. It's what we do."

He took me to the Bose website, and I immediately roared a demonstrative "No way!" to spending \$349 for that elite audiophile privilege. The \$49 version from Sony will have to suffice. And that's exactly how I'm listening to The Boss' Glory Days as I write this.

The One and Only

Actually, it's the music that's most important, not the price of the listening device or expense for getting songs on your iPod. Those 100 people on the list, and whomever you listen to for pleasure and inspiration, found their own unique voice and practiced it into a finely tuned instrument. They didn't try to sing like Sinatra, croon like Crosby, Stills & Nash, or tingle like Tina Turner. Instead, each took his or her individual giftedness and went with it, making the sound theirs. There are hundreds of cover bands—from an all girls version that performs Led Zeppelin, to groups with names like Fab Faux that expertly reproduce The Beatles. They have talent, but none have the audience of those they imitate.

I found the same thing in my writing. A few years ago, I wrote what I thought I was supposed to write, being a trained journalist and all that nonsense. In those days, I rarely received feedback on my articles, and magazines like this one weren't asking me to be a part of their editorial content. Then one day, I said to heck with it and started writing what I feel inside. You may have noticed my style is somewhat different—especially when compared to the other columnists in *Quick Printing*. That's intentional. I drift in and out of narrative, offer side comments, and frequently mix and match stories to make a point that, hopefully, leaves you thinking, "Huh, that's worth considering."

So consider this: Don't be a copy; be an original. Only you are you. Find your unique voice—what sets your printing business apart—then start singing and living it loud. Forget what others might think. You'll attract a loyal following who want to be your raving fans. Want proof? Ask Gordon Matthew Thomas Sumner, who made it big singing "De do do do, de da da da." He's #30 on the list. You know him as Sting. Unique.

Addendum: While we were researching headsets on the Bose website, I noticed something called a "SoundDock Digital Music System"...but kept it to myself. After my son went to bed that night, I went back online and ordered one for \$229. Opting for the less expensive, week-long delivery charge of \$10, it should arrive in the next few days, opening the door to a wonderful auditory experience for the whole family. The subsequent conversation with my wife went like this: "You know that free iPod Touch? It actually cost us \$382 with taxes." I smiled. She laughed. Kyle will be so happy.

David Handler is the founder of Success Handler, LLC, an executive coaching firm that helps clients explore their professional and personal dreams. He's seen Bruce Springsteen in concert on 11 occasions dating to 1978. In April, he took the entire family to experience an evening with The Boss. Total cost: \$590. Singing with his kids during "Born To Run": Priceless. To start finding your unique voice, send an email to coach@successhandler.com [<mailto:coach@successhandler.com>] or visit www.successhandler.com [<http://www.successhandler.com>].



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