



Is your brand hitting the right notes?

Leveraging the power of emotion in music

Distinctive brand assets such as logos, colours or slogans are key facets in many of the world's most successful brands.

With strong assets a brand can grab attention at key decision points, giving brands a big advantage in categories where consumers are overwhelmed by choice. Brand assets work best when they are: clear, memorable, strongly associated with the brand, and bring the brand instantly to mind. In this way they contribute to a brand's sense of meaningful difference, building long term value¹.

When we think of brand assets, it is often visual assets that spring to mind first – logos, colour associations and even celebrity endorsements. But dig a little deeper and you see some brands have successfully created distinctive auditory assets.

The idea of auditory assets is not new. Many of us might recall popular jingles and catchy radio ads from our childhood. More recently though, this idea has broadened into Sonic Branding, where brands now develop a full suite of auditory assets (sounds, music, jingles etc) as a strategy to build recognition and memorability for their brand.



Consider these examples where brands use auditory assets in powerful ways:

McDonald's: 'I'm Lovin' It' campaign



Made famous through a Justin Timberlake song of the same name. The simple melodic line 'buh, duh, duh, duh, dah' works as a sonic asset, linking a variety of executions together, in a consistent, catchy, and memorable way.

United Airlines: Rhapsody in Blue song

UNITED



United Airlines has used this tune for many years in ads and other touch-points. The association is well embedded and builds a deep, consistent connection with the brand.

Technology is amplifying the importance of auditory assets

With the advent of smart speakers in the home and more connected devices, auditory assets are becoming more important for brands. Recent research also shows how sound favourably enhances viewing experiences for Tik Tok and social media video². Platforms like Spotify now enable brands to build auditory assets through published branded playlists.

For example:



[Mastercard: Priceless Album](#)



[Gatorade Amplify: Workout playlist](#)



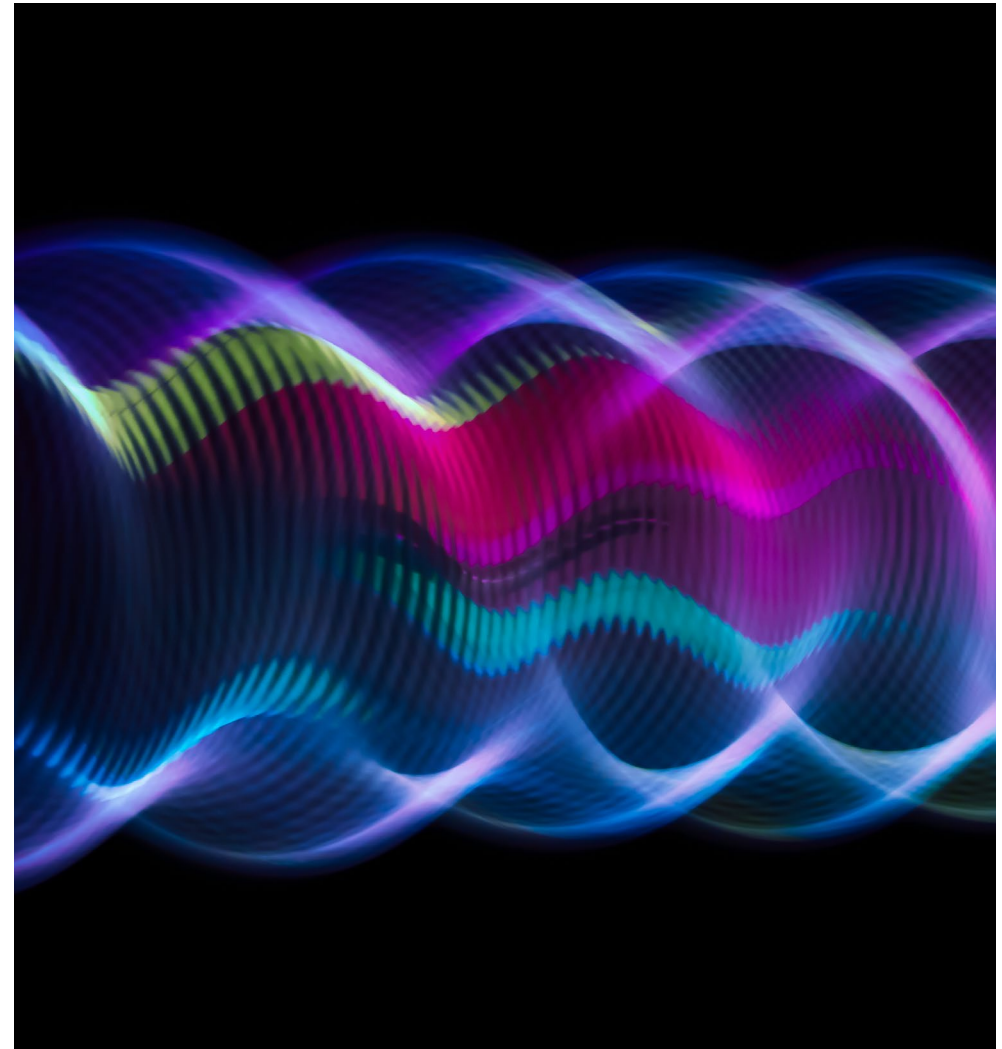
[Singapore Airlines: Boarding playlist](#)

These playlists are often part of a broader initiative to build a Sonic Brand Architecture. The goal being to offer a multisensory brand experience, with richer and more resonant auditory touchpoints.

Brand 'fit' holds the key to success

Given this, Sonic Branding may seem an obvious thing for brand owners to do. But it is not so clear cut. On closer inspection notable examples of Sonic Branding reveal the importance of brand 'fit.' Why did the cheerful, upbeat jingle for 'I'm Lovin' It' seem right for McDonald's? What makes the grand, flowing tones of Rhapsody in Blue work so well for United Airlines?

It comes down to emotion. The most powerful, valuable brands are built on emotion. It is at this level that they gain meaningful difference from competitors. This first step, establishing sound brand strategy, is vital. Identify the right emotion from which to build your brand first, then develop assets



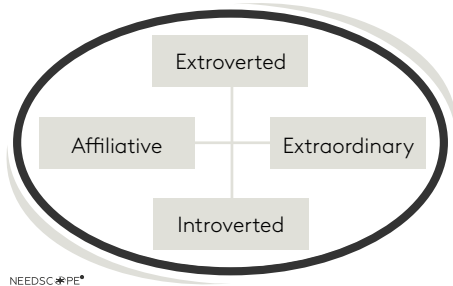
that support this and execute in a tonally consistent way.

For brand positioning, we use the NeedScope framework to understand universal emotion. NeedScope reveals the nature of the emotive needs in a category. These form the basis of potential positioning territories that

brands can occupy. NeedScope is based on proven psychological principles, the Jungian concept of archetypes.

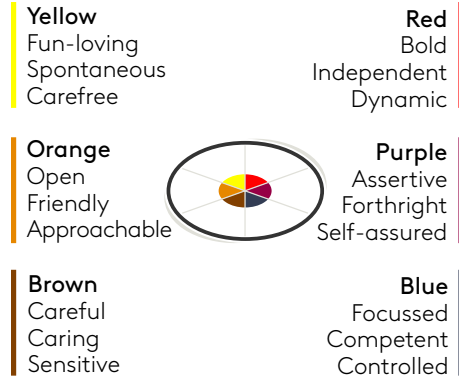
A framework for brand positioning

Universal drivers



NEEDSCOPE®

The six emotive spaces

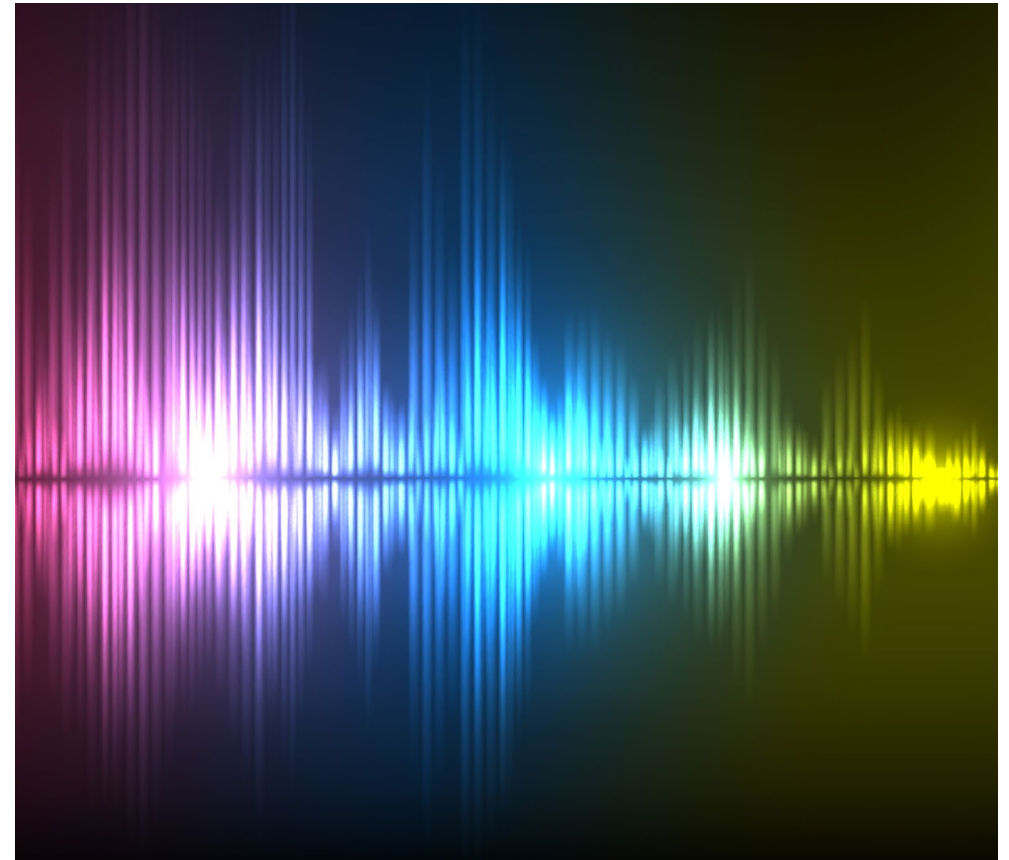


The strongest brands develop a clear positioning against these territories and are single-minded in their delivery to that positioning across the full marketing mix at every touchpoint. This includes music and other auditory brand assets. The NeedScope model also helps understand the emotion in music.

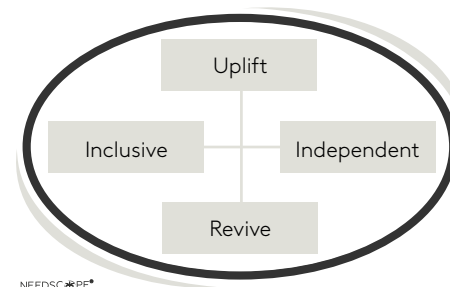
Understanding the emotion in music

Emotion underpins our music choices. Whether we want to feel a part of something or stand out – or whether we are letting go or chilling out, we are looking for music to alter our mood. By overlaying music, we can align musical selections and auditory assets with our brand positioning territories.

Auditory assets such as music can be present in many brand touchpoints including retail, branded websites, customer service experiences, advertising and more.

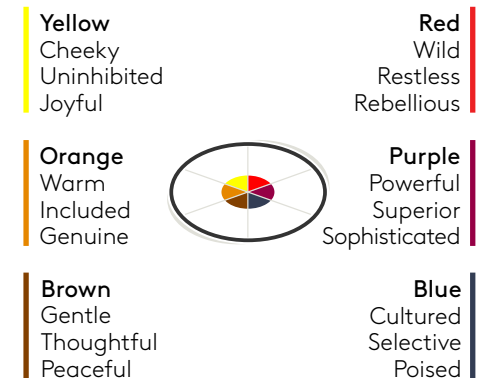


Music drivers



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Emotions in Music





How does this work in practice?

To illustrate, let's look at Singapore Airlines in more detail.

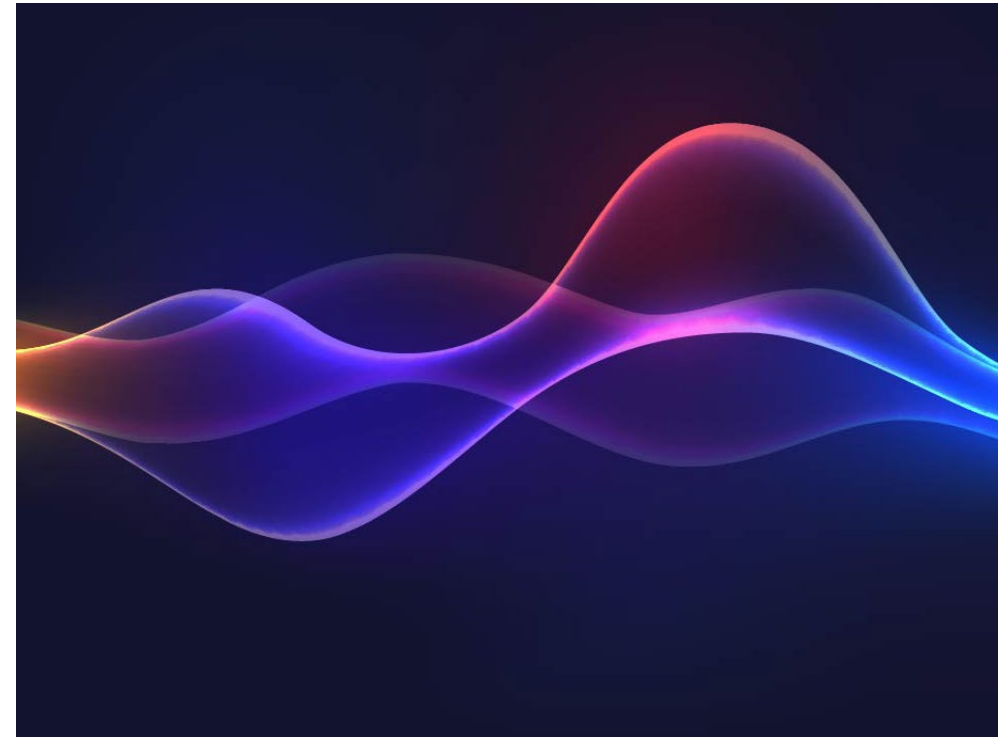
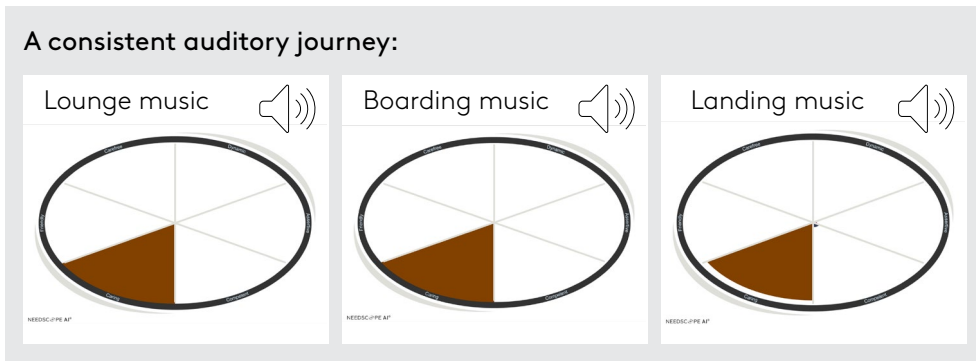
Through the NeedScope lens Singapore Airlines occupies the Brown space with elements of Blue:

- Its service is premium: discreet, thoughtful, understated, with a sense of modesty and composure
- Its logo is graceful and elegant
- The 'Singapore Girl' attendant (often used in ads) epitomises the brand: modest, reserved, and attentive

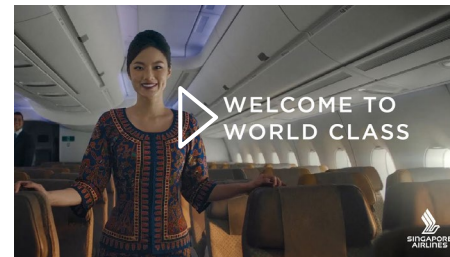
Singapore Airlines' new sonic identity, ['Symphony of Flowers'](#) promises a branded auditory experience throughout the passenger journey, from advertising through to user experience.

Using NeedScope's AI Decoder (machine learning to understand the emotion in auditory assets) we see the boarding and landing music in their sonic identity dials up a consistent gentle, contemplative, and peaceful 'Brown' emotion.

This extends to other touchpoints too. Once again, using the NeedScope AI Decoder to analyse both visual imagery and music, we can see the 'Welcome to World Class' ad campaign is broadly consistent with the sonic asset tonality. Video ads tell a story, so the emotion is more variable with contrasts and tension, but the ad is clearly grounded in similar gentle, contemplative Brown, and Blue spaces. The music in the ad complements the imagery adding tones of culture, refinement, and sophistication in a coherent way for the brand.



Welcome to World Class

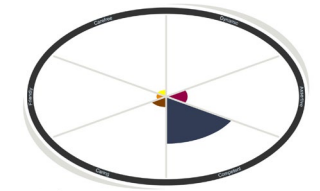



This level of consistency can only come from a brand with the confidence and self-awareness in its positioning and brand image. It is no surprise that Singapore Airlines is a meaningfully different brand in its home markets of Singapore and Malaysia (Kantar BrandZ™).

Image tonality



Music tonality





Auditory assets and brand building

Like any brand asset, auditory assets need to do a 'distinctive' job for the brand – be clear, memorable, be strongly associated with the brand and bring the brand instantly to mind. Beyond this, auditory assets should also play a key role to reinforce the brand positioning through a straightforward process:

1. First, know the emotion you want in your brand's positioning
2. Understand the emotion in existing and proposed assets
3. Optimise your auditory assets to best support your desired brand positioning

In this way music and auditory assets don't operate in isolation, they build a sense of meaningful difference for the brand. Applied consistently over time, this builds long term brand value.

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¹ Kantar BrandZ™ brand equity research shows brands with high meaningful difference grew in value five times more than those without.

² Kantar report: [How brands are making noise and driving impact with sound on TikTok.](#)