

Berklee College of Music

BrianZani.com
Online Production Portfolio & Services

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Master of Music in Music Production, Technology and Innovation

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Abstract

This project has been pursued with efforts to develop a production portfolio and online presence unlike any other. By integrating audiovisual elements with eye-catching aesthetic into a website format, visitors will be introduced to an interactive medium that welcomes professional collaboration alongside an easy to understand business model. Completed song masters and video productions that can be readily streamed directly from the website will showcase qualitative service suited for specific artistic needs. BrianZani.com will serve as the foundational business model for current and future productions, collaborations, visions and services for the local and global scale alike.

Keywords: engineering portfolio, audio production services, collaboration, audiovisual

1. Introduction

During his time here at Berklee in Valencia, Brian planned to expand upon his strengths as an audio engineer whilst also broadening his musical horizons by utilizing the endless pool of student talent on campus. With students from all around the world, each with different and unique musical backgrounds, Brian offered his production skills to them so that he can absorb more of their influences and performance styles.

For his culminating experience project, Brian has developed a production portfolio consisting of a variety of different projects. The portfolio will surface to reality as a professionally built website for the engineer, primarily housing service options and production packages alongside the portfolio work. With music industry business models rapidly changing, this culminating experience will demonstrate cutting edge relevancy by mixing global communication methods with file/payment transferring to better provide audio services tailored to the 2020's and beyond. The portfolio contains ten songs from hand picked artists here on campus that are fully mixed and mastered by Brian. The artists' chosen are different from one another in genre, so that the portfolio will contain a variety of artistic visions and musical styles to help better demonstrate his engineering versatility. During tracking sessions, Brian was present to oversee the production process, assisting with microphone placement, acoustic treatment and outboard patching considerations just to name a few, to ensure that the best sound possible was captured directly from the beginning phases of each portfolio song.

The production portfolio also contains several music videos of varying videography styles. Video and engineering crews worked together under Brian's leadership to capture the initial audio and video of in studio performances, following

technical specifications, input lists and studio plots organized and set up by Brian in advance. Once the performances were captured, he was responsible for mixing and mastering the studio session audio and also editing together footage to build one cohesive product where he is on both sides of the spectrum - audio and video.

The ultimate goal of the production portfolio is for it to be available online to create a self-branding powerhouse. With an efficient navigation system, interactive streaming of professional material, video content and consistent updates, the portfolio is designed to bring in new clients whilst also acting as another platform to promote new music and projects completed by Brian. After graduation, the website will launch to the public, acting as an important focal point and online extension of the culminating experience, revealing a whole new platform of professionalism and branding that will be sure to catch the eyes of potential employers or clientele worldwide.

2. Review of the State of the Art

The concept of an online production portfolio is not necessarily an original idea, however the way that the information can be presented and displayed is where creativity and innovation can come into play. After speaking with several personal mentors combined with intensive research, Brian has discovered that work portfolios and branding is a crucial first step toward landing that positive first impression on employers or clients. For reviewing the current state of portfolios, examination of several favored engineers has helped assess his idea of how to make this portfolio unique and proudly stand out from other professional portfolios.

One of the first engineers that come to mind when Brian thinks about influences is Chris Lorde-Alge. Chris is a five time Grammy award winning mixing engineer, with

countless credits tied to his name and an extremely impressive yet simple and stylistic website portfolio. Upon entering his website, the visitor is greeted by Alge's logo within a spinning digital globe graphic.¹ Various lines point to different areas of the globe that outline various website directions, creating a simplistic design that conveys his global presence as an engineer.

Although most professional engineers have websites, another engineer that influences Brian is four time Grammy award winner, Jimmy Douglass. Jimmy's website, like Alge's, tends to remain on the side of simplicity however Jimmy keeps his layout even more straightforward. With no moving graphics (let alone any graphics at all), his website is almost all exclusively average definition photographs combined with basic text, several outdated samples of his productions, and a few videos from other companies who have interviewed him in previous years – collected together within a confusing to navigate continuous scrolling fashion.²

Needless to say, it becomes quite confusing to see legendary engineers with outdated websites or mediocre design. Perhaps their client list has been loyal for so long that these star engineers have no reason to dedicate time into website design or portfolio presentation. Nevertheless, these styles of portfolio presentation exhibit major issues. Between confusing website navigation, outdated multimedia and website templates that aren't smartphone friendly just begin to scratch the surface of conflicts. By recognizing these issues in aesthetic, design, marketing and communication, Brian was able to

1. Lord-Alge, Chris. "Title N/A." Official Chris Lord-Alge Website. 2017. October 29, 2018. <https://www.chrislordalge.com/>

2. Douglass, Jimmy. "Title N/A." Jimmy Douglass Official. 2012. October 29, 2018. <http://jimmydouglass.com/>

revolutionize the way a professional online portfolio should look and feel through optimizing media design and information for the ever-expansive music industry.

3. Description

3.1. Website & Affiliated Features

Unlike these examples, Brian’s project portfolio will stand out with a distinct professional feel and aesthetic. With the help of Berklee, Brian decided to use Wix.com as the primary means of building the custom website with streaming portfolio integration. Deciding to use Wix made it possible to promote, stream, track statistics and sell music while also engaging clients or fans within a custom built space.³ This culminating experience portfolio will also bridge the gap of production fields, as he does not only consider himself an audio engineer, but as a collective creative with an entrepreneurial mindset. The online portfolio will consist of full-length completed songs (with intention to be continually updated), custom built design, videography/editing skills demonstrated through audiovisual content, and live videos of him mixing in the moment for a major concert. Brian’s portfolio will also use eye-catching phrases and graphics to immediately capture the attention of visitors. Using this technique will attract clients from the moment they visit the page. Here, the visitor will easily find themselves on a journey of interest, as the website seamlessly carries the visitor into other website features such as client testimonials, social links, news, and postproduction services.

3. Wix Inc. “Create Your Stunning Music Website.” Wix.com. 2019. May 5, 2019
<https://www.wix.com/music/website>

Unlike other common portfolios, artistic aesthetic and creative writing will be heavily tied into the website, as still images and basic text alone does support a positive first impression of a business. Affiliated write-ups on effective teamwork, ‘about’ sections, and services will carefully be written to take the visitor on a journey intended to help support positive collaboration and future business opportunities, rather than trying to force them into a quick decision. The website will also house social links for artist pages, rather than just my own links, which is a technique typically not used by others. By posting the social links of clients, this encourages website visitors to reroute their curiosities to the artist’s music (and Brian’s mixing/mastering that is tied to the songs), ultimately giving clients free publicity and acknowledgement on the website. Brian decided to complete this through intertwining the multimedia portfolio with a testimonial section, as it helps provide a more in depth look on the productions and relationships.

3.2. Portfolio Production

Of course, the website would not have been nearly as effective without the portfolio or productions involved. This was the bulk of the work that required daily attention and consistent communication to guarantee completion within the year. The focus was to be involved in all aspects of the production process to ensure qualitative end products. Depending on the artist, all songs required different needs or requests. While some artists’ worked with full teams, others solely relied on Brian to finish the project in its entirety. However the most consistent aspect of all productions was that Brian would be the engineer to mix and master all portfolio songs or affiliated audio for videos.

For the mixing process, outboard compression and some EQ from Berklee studio equipment was printed onto pre-recorded audio stems through multiple studio bookings.

Brian's decision to use analogue equipment with his own plugin investments allowed the portfolio mixes to be completed in the digital realm while still maintaining that classic and warm analogue sound. The outcome was a huge success, however the disadvantage to using outboard equipment in this way required a lot of studio bookings and quick decisions that are not easily reversible or recalled (as opposed to saving plugin settings on a computer file). However, the patience was worth it as every single song manages to shine uniquely in their own light. Every artist claimed that the final song masters had exceeded their expectations, which led to future collaborative opportunities that will take place after graduation. This in itself was the entire reason the portfolio culminating experience was chosen - to build and maintain long lasting professional relationships.

4. Innovative Aspects

Unlike other standard audio engineering websites, BrianZani.com aims for implementing a global business model within a home studio space. This will be accomplished through utilizing high speed Internet, file transferring, online banking, and eventually audio over Internet protocol (IP). Nowadays, the home studio stands proudly within the competition against major studio facilities. With the right owner and connectivity behind a home studio, virtually any space of production can be suited for global trade. Brian's business model welcomes emerging technology by offering services globally. Whether someone needs stems recorded from a session musician in another country, or an artist with a smaller budget is looking for a producer, Brian Zani will act globally while working locally. Recorded stems or sessions can easily be sent around the world with proper transfer services and video calling capabilities are becoming more powerful than ever, allowing ease of communication when it comes to working out

details with an internationally placed team. With PayPal and easy to use currency conversion methods, artists, musicians and engineers involved with projects will be able to pay for services that move a production forward with absolute ease.

As the technology progresses, Brian will soon be investing in an Audio over IP system for his home studio. These systems will allow users to transmit multiple uncompressed digital audio signals over Ethernet cables with minimal latency, allowing artists and producers alike to work on recording sessions together from anywhere around the world with no perceivable delay in audio.⁴ With an international network of music professionals and Berklee alumni, Brian plans to continue working with everyone no matter where in the world everyone resides. This will drastically reduce travel costs while also having the ability to acquire musical parts from specific musicians or vocalists no matter the location. Digitally connecting home studios will also quicken turn around times for project deadlines and the overall efficiency of each phase of productions.

5. New Skills Acquired

The first newly acquired skill that was made revolves around project coordination and workflow strategy. When dealing with over ten different productions, communication is imperative with everyone involved. Communication and meticulous time management are fundamental skills needed to continually advance to the next step, all the way up until release. When dealing with this number of projects, Brian was able to juggle roles and responsibilities by setting up short term goals for long term success.

4. Pack, Brad. Vintage King Audio. "The World of Sending Audio Over IP." Vintageking.com <https://vintageking.com/blog/2018/02/audio-over-ip/> (accessed July 1, 2019)

Such coordination spilled out of the studio and onto the stage when he was responsible for designing the technical specifications of another student's culminating experience, putting on an electrical orchestral show consisting of forty musicians. Here, Brian was responsible to build the concert plan and complete specifications from scratch and disseminate specific tasks to a stage crew of other Berklee students with little to no live sound experience. Technical specifications help users to understand how equipment works while also providing insight on how to use an item for a specific purpose that contributes to the larger picture.⁵ This milestone proved that no matter the situation, communication and proper pre-production is an excellent recipe for success.

Another important skillset acquired was the ability to conduct fundamental music business between the producer/engineer and artist/client. Understanding how to draft basic contracts to ensure positive business is a win-win situation for both parties. It not only keeps things simple and outlined, but also encourages the utmost success upon project release within a collaborative environment. This experience has taught Brian not to be hesitant about discussing rates, royalty splits and service options, allowing the artist to feel more at ease and confident about the collaboration at hand. Approaching opportunities in this manner over time creates positive customer rapport, loyalty and long term friendships that will continually benefit each party for years to come.

6. Challenges: Expected & Unanticipated

One of the biggest unanticipated challenges Brian experienced was the complication of acquiring artist metadata. Most projects required multiple recording

5. Gary Davis, Ralph Jones. *Sound Reinforcement Handbook: How to Read and Interpret Specifications* Buena Park, California: Yamaha, 1990, 71.

sessions, where some of the artists wanted to do the programming or editing themselves. Generally, this could be helpful but became difficult as time progressed without hearing from certain artists. Chaotic schedules and various excuses from artists became common, but consistent communication and follow-ups was the quickest solution to acquiring all the necessary files and metadata needed from these busy artists.

Another challenge that was expected was the quality of mix notes written by artists. When the time came for mixing, all songs would undergo multiple rounds of revisions until the artist was technically satisfied. A crucial part of revisions is the constructive notes received by artists, however some artists would either never provide mix notes or end up writing confusing suggestions that often were over excessive and didn't make sense. This challenge was overcome by meeting with them in person and discussing the timbre and needs of the song, which would then get corrected and completed inside the studio.

7. Future Ramifications

As of now, BrianZani.com is set to be released to the public at the end of 2019. More songs and testimonials will be added to the portfolio continually as work and discographies grow. Following innovation will be a crucial step through implementing Audio Over IP home studio systems within the next two years. This will allow the global business model to be fully pursued and encourage more work to be accomplished. In the meanwhile, Brian will continue to market himself in person and online to help direct traffic toward the website and portfolio, ultimately paving way for more clients, productions and overall career progression.

8. Conclusion

Qualitative production doesn't start in the studio; it starts at the very first inception of an artistic vision. It's the considerations and decisions that are made during beginning stages that truly make the end product spectacular - that's what this culminating experience has truly been about. Art always starts at an idea and demands execution to bring it into reality. Nowadays humans are blessed with the interconnectivity of technological advances like never before seen, which allows us to act globally in regards to whatever our aspirations are. BrianZani.com is the essence of global action for the music industry models of tomorrow, encouraging collaboration from all cultural backgrounds regardless of regional location. Not only does this qualitative portfolio support future business practices, but it also calls out to the underground artists all over the world who seek professional postproduction audio services, no matter where they reside. When it comes the music industry, it's hard to tell where things will end up. However, with the continual progression of technical and social platforms, we as humans can work together to create and distribute art across the world for everyone to enjoy. It all starts with a vision and ends with a smile – and as for all the in between technical details, feel free to leave that work in the hands of a true professional at BrianZani.com.

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