

SONGS THAT SELL: THE IMPACT OF MUSIC IN CHARITY STORES.

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WHY MUSIC MATTERS.

As physical stores continue to fight with online retailers, customer experience is more important than ever, and music is a huge part of that. What customers hear can have a significant impact on how they feel, behave and, ultimately, how much they spend. Many retailers have been in tune with this for years, but most research to date focuses on traditional retail or hospitality.

Charity shops, however, are a different environment. They rely heavily on in-store income, attract broad audiences, and lean into community and values-based motivations. Yet researchers have never explored how music affects these environments. To investigate this ourselves, Startle partnered with a leading UK charity retailer to **analyse the impact of music on sales** in their stores.



The project: our aim.

Amongst Startle's client base is UK charity retailer, DEBRA, which supports people living with epidermolysis bullosa (EB), also known as Butterfly Skin. DEBRA initially approached Startle as they wanted to improve their customer and staff experience, and sought a background music provider that understood their values and need for flexibility. We've now been managing DEBRA's music for around a year, taking care of music selection and scheduling so their staff don't have to worry about managing playlists.

To investigate the impact of music in a charity shop environment, we worked with the Milngavie store in Glasgow to test whether different background music genres - pop, classical, and jazz - would influence:

- **Total sales**
- **Average customer spend**
- **Staff mood**
- **Customer engagement and atmosphere**

Each genre of music played in the shop for seven days across a 21-day period. During this time, the tempo and volume of music were kept consistent to ensure that genre was the primary variable.



Headline findings.

Across the 21-day period, **jazz music delivered the highest average daily sales - significantly higher than pop music**.

Classical and jazz music also noticeably improved staff mood and created a calmer, more welcoming environment for customers.

Pop music, by contrast, produced the lowest sales and elicited no customer feedback.

Why it works: the psychology behind the music.

Behavioural research shows that music subtly shapes how we shop. Key factors include:

1. Mood and energy.

Low-tempo music relaxes customers and encourages browsing.

2. “Fit” with the environment.

Music that feels like the right “fit” for the audience and location enhances the customer experience.

3. Emotional contagion.

When staff feel calmer and more focused, their interactions change, and customers notice.

In our study with DEBRA, jazz and classical music aligned with all three of these drivers.

STAFF FEEDBACK.

As part of the study, we kept in close contact with DEBRA staff to hear how they felt about the varying styles of music and how they influenced the atmosphere. Across the three weeks, store staff described the jazz and classical playlists as:

"CALMING AND RELAXING"

"A BETTER FIT FOR OUR CUSTOMERS"

"GOOD FOR PRODUCTIVITY"

"SOOTHING AND PLEASANT"

Staff were also instructed to record customer feedback in order for us to gauge the feeling about the overall experience. Feedback from customers showed that many shared the sentiment about the playlists. One customer commented that the jazz music made the shop feel like "cooking with a glass of red wine." Another joked that the classical made it feel like "a concert hall."

Interestingly, during the seven days that pop music played, no customer comments were recorded, suggesting that "generic" playlists rarely shape perception.



THE IMPACT ON SALES.

Over the 21-day test, the store recorded **£6,045.33** in total sales. Breaking this down by genre revealed a clear pattern:

Mean daily sales (per genre).



Jazz
£379.73



Classical
£309.58



Pop
£228.56

Jazz music produced the highest average daily sales, followed by classical, with pop producing the lowest in-store sales.

Average customer spend.

While average customer spend was not the main focus of the study, the pattern in the results was similar to overall store sales:



Jazz
£16.02



Classical
£13.73



Pop
£9.75

Pop music was, once again, the weakest performer here.

What the statistics tell us.

To check whether the differences in sales were real and not simply random fluctuation, we ran ANOVA and post hoc tests - a standard statistical process used in research. In simple terms, this compares groups to see if one genuinely performs better than another.

The ANOVA and post hoc tests showed that:

- **The difference between music genres was statistically significant**
  (meaning the results are very unlikely to be due to chance)
- **Customers lingered longer in the store.**
- **Music genre accounted for about one-third of all the variation in sales.**

That last point is particularly important. It means that the type of music playing in the shop wasn't just a small background factor - it had a major influence on how much customers spent.

While classical music didn't hit statistical significance in this study, both jazz and classical were still substantially stronger than pop music in driving sales.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR RETAILERS.

These results highlight something powerful:

For charity retailers, where margins matter and store experience is vital, this is a high-impact, low-cost opportunity.

For the broader retail sector, it reinforces that music shouldn't be left to chance or generic playlists; expertise should be sought to implement a strategic music solution that's designed around the business.

Practical takeaways for retailers.

1. Consider what music "fits" the environment and customers.

Genres like jazz and classical aligned well with this shop's older, more affluent demographic. Different stores may require different approaches.

2. Use low-tempo, relaxing music to support browsing.

It's proven to increase dwell-time and encourage discovery-led purchasing.

3. Avoid default "radio-style" pop playlists.

They rarely influence perception, mood, or spending.

4. Treat music as a brand signal.

Music is one of the quickest ways to express who you are and what you represent.

5. Test and optimise.

Small changes can lead to surprisingly big results.

CONCLUSION.

Our charity retail study shows that background music doesn't just create an ambience - it's a strategic lever that directly influences how customers feel and how they spend. In this instance, jazz music proved to have a significant impact, delivering the strongest sales performance and creating the most positive store atmosphere.

For retailers - charity or otherwise - the message is clear:

If you'd like help designing, testing, and optimising that soundtrack, Startle can help - just as we did for this pilot store.





ABOUT STARTLE.

Startle creates and manages strategic audio-visual experiences to make retail brands unforgettable. Through carefully curated background music and digital signage, we help retail spaces come to life, becoming a powerful element of your brand building whilst easing operational headaches with our intuitive, industry-leading tech.

Our intuitive user platform, Studio, allows you to easily replicate a perfectly branded atmosphere across an entire estate. And it's all supported by our award-winning Relentless Support™. From making your switch to Startle as easy as possible, to giving a fully managed service that takes care of you and your brand for your lifetime as a Startle customer.

Retail brands we amplify.

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LUSH

Lucy & Yak

ORLEBAR BROWN

CHARLES TYRWHITT

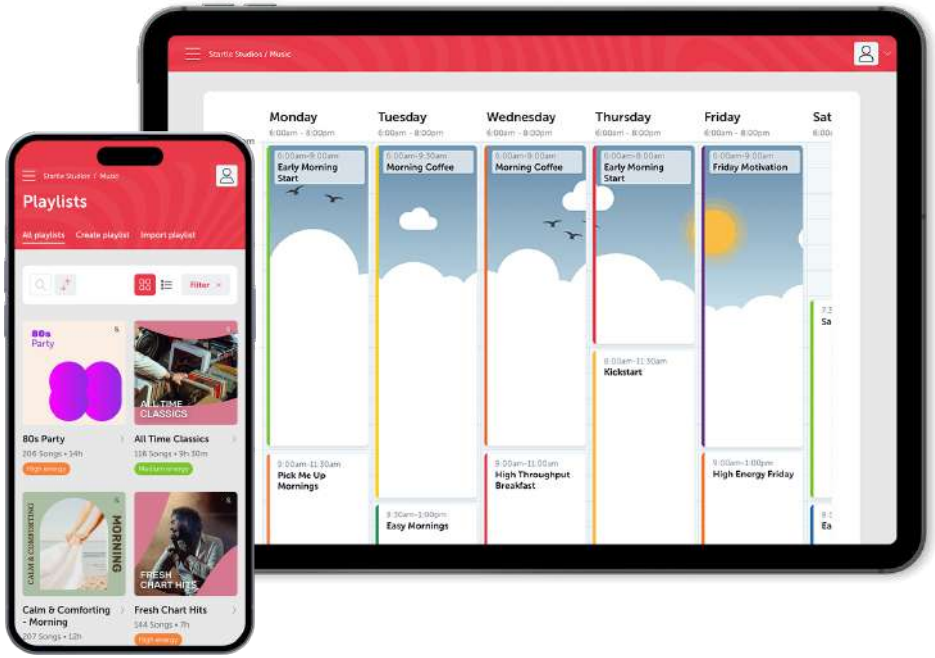
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Designed for independent venues and multisite businesses alike, our user-friendly platform allows you to easily replicate a perfectly branded atmosphere across your business.

- Manage music across multiple sites simultaneously.
- Tailor music to different times of day with our drag-and-drop scheduler.
- Customise your schedule by setting your unique opening and closing hours.
- Schedule playlist volume and EQ to perfect the music experience.
- Easily override your schedule, for those spontaneous and unexpected moments.

Our Services.

Effortless Background Music.

A professional music system with over 100 curated playlists, multisite management, and flexible scheduling for every daypart.

Professional Playlist Curation.

We work with you to build your brand a fully personalised music profile and curate playlists that align with your values and goals, backed by robust, academic models.

Branded Radio.

A modern, branded radio service. Easily create and manage impactful playlists and audio adverts from one platform.

Dynamic Digital Signage.

Amplify your messages with vibrant visual displays, managed from the same single platform as your music.

Branded TV.

Transform the way customers engage with your brand with a custom TV channel. Design your perfect mix of promotions, brand content, entertainment and more.

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