

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

You want to become a Hip Hop expert? Learn the info below and you're on your way, yo!

HIP HOP AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

America is a country created by enterprising individuals looking to take a chance on their ideas and abilities and build something new. At its core, the American Dream is about being able to rise up from the humblest of places to ascend to a goal that is limited only by one's imagination. Nowhere is this dream better illustrated than in the birth of Hip Hop culture. Hip Hop was built from obscurity in the slums of New York to become an international business and cultural phenomenon, thanks to the entrepreneurial spirit of men and women who were willing risk it all for a chance at greatness. While not formally included as one of the four cornerstones of Hip Hop culture, entrepreneurship is absolutely considered by many historians and Hip Hoppers to be one of its defining aspects.

In Hip Hop's early days, the entire culture was built around the block parties, or jams. People would come from all around the neighborhood to socialize and dance, while enjoying their favorite DJs, MCs, B-boys, B-girls and Graffiti artists. Initially, these parties were organized by the DJs, who might charge a fee that would help cover the cost of a party space rental or equipment. However, as the Hip Hop scene began to grow, parties began being promoted by people who loved the culture but also saw the potential for a business opportunity. Parties started becoming more elaborate, booking hotter MCs and DJs and attracting larger crowds. As this growth happened, promoters became more professional and sophisticated, improving the look of their print advertising, putting ads for the parties on the radio, and investing serious money to book large venues, hire security and provide food and drink for the partygoers. While the promoters worked hard to make money off of these events, the events themselves also provided business opportunities for others. MCs, DJs and Breakers could earn money for their performances, as well as make connections to perform at future gigs. Graffiti writers had a place to be seen, get hired or sell art. In fact, jams became so popular and well-known for being a place where talented artists could be found, that representatives from agencies, businesses and even corporations would attend to try and find people to hire for TV, movies, concerts and other events. But perhaps the biggest thing to come out of the Hip Hop party scene was commercial Hip Hop music, which has become the biggest area of Hip Hop entrepreneurship today.

Russell "Rush" Simmons (who will be the subject of a future SCHOOL'D lesson) is currently a world famous American businessman reportedly worth \$340 million. But Russell got his start promoting Hip Hop parties in the 1970s. As a result of promoting, he also started managing rappers, most notably his good friend Curtis Walker (aka Kurtis Blow) who became the first Hip Hop artist to be signed to a major record label (Mercury Records, 1979) and the first rapper to have song (which Russell helped write) go gold (i.e. sell over 500,000 copies). Russell named his fledgling entrepreneurial venture Rush Productions. Russell's little brother Joseph (aka Cool DJ Run) served as the DJ for Kurtis Blow but had always begged his brother to get on the mic. In the early 1980s, when Russell finally gave him the chance, Joseph, along with his childhood friend Darryl McDaniels and local DJ Jason Mizell, released a song on Profile Records called "It's Like That". Based on the success of that song (and many to follow), Joseph, Darryl and Jason became known as Run, DMC and Jam Master J, or, the most famous Hip Hop group in the world, Run-D.M.C. Russell's success allowed him to team up with aspiring producer Rick Rubin to form Def Jam Recordings, which would grow to become the biggest name in Hip Hop music. Labels like Def Jam and Sugar Hill Records (which released "Rapper's Delight") paved the way for a multibillion dollar industry of Hip Hop music to emerge which continues strong today.

However, as big as it is, music isn't the only way that Hip Hop creates entrepreneurs. Since the beginning, as it was associated with the party scene where people want to see and be seen, Hip Hop has been known for having a distinctive and ever evolving fashion sense. In the early 1990s, we started to see Hip Hop style go from the streets to the stores. One of the first on the scene was Daymond John (who is known today for his role on the TV show "Shark Tank", where hopeful entrepreneurs come before successful and wealthy business people to convince them to invest in their ideas) with his company "FUBU". FUBU is an acronym for For Us By US which refers to the fact that it is a company created by African Americans selling African American style. This name is notable because, up until this point, Hip Hop fashion was a hodgepodge of styles, usually collected from white American and European designers (i.e. black people wearing white designs created for black people). FUBU changed the fashion

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world by essentially being a "Hip Hop clothes by Hip Hop people" company. Shortly thereafter, in 1993, who else would show up but, once again, Russell Simmons. Russell created his own fashion line, called "Phat Farm" which, like FUBU, still exists today. The design aesthetic of Phat Farm is urban, sporty and preppy, much like Russell's personal style. Around the same time, a designer/Graffiti writer named Marc Milecofsky (who goes by the Graffiti tag "Ecko", started his own Hip Hop inspired clothing line called "Ecko Unltd". Ecko also still exists today and is a favorite among lovers of the Hip Hop style. Since then, many rappers have been bitten by the fashion bug and started their own clothing lines. Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs made "Sean John", T.I., founded "A.K.O.", Nelly created "Apple Bottoms", Pharrell has "Billionaire Boys Club" and Jay Z is behind "Rocawear", possibly the most well known of them all.

Speaking of Jay-Z, he is most notorious in the Hip Hop music scene for being self made in the sense that he didn't sit around waiting to be discovered by a big record company. Instead he started producing and selling his music himself out the trunk of his car through his own record label, Roc-A-Fella Records, with his friend Damon Dash. This has earned him the reputation as one of Hip Hop's ultimate street hustlers, but it is better stated that Jay simply always had the entrepreneurial spirit and found its best expression through Hip Hop. He says in his own words, "I never waited for anybody to give me anything. If I wanted something I knew that I was gonna have to be the one to go out and get it, because wasn't nothing just coming to (someone) like me. Opportunities didn't come my way. I had to chase them. I finally caught one." After becoming one of the most successful rappers of all time, Jay Z then parlayed his business ability and notoriety into a position as the president and CEO of Def Jam. Jay had just announced his retirement from recording before this promotion, though he eventually stepped down as president a few years later to continue making music (hence the lyric in FUNKMODE's track "I Am Hip Hop" which says "I am Jay Z going crazy on business then coming back". Besides music and fashion, Jay also owns a sports bar and is part owner of the Brooklyn Nets NBA franchise.

Moving from being a rapper to starting your own label is becoming increasingly more common, especially as music is now easier to create, produce and distribute. Dr. Dre co-founded Death Row Records in 1991 and then founded Aftermath Records in 1996, which includes Eminem. However, what is less common is taking the success of your own label and using it to become a billionaire. Dr. Dre partnered with record mogul Jimmy Iovine to create Beats Electronics, famous for the "Beats By Dre" headphones. Beats was recently bought out by Apple for \$3.2 billion. While taxes on the sale have kept Dre from becoming a true billionaire just yet, he is by far the richest rapper in the game now.

Hip Hop lovers have also created businesses in the form of worldwide dance competitions like the famous "Battle of the Year", dance showcases like our local "San Francisco Hip Hop Dancefest", DJ competitions like the "DMC World DJ Championships" and art galleries like the "5e Gallery" in Detroit. Hip Hop culture has also produced creators of books, comic books, video games, TV shows and movies.

The basis of Hip Hop has always been creating something out of nothing. Finding a way to make a living doing what you love is a dream to which we all aspire. Whether you want to be a rapper, DJ, producer, fashion designer, visual artist, writer, actor, dancer, dance studio owner, or general business person, there are people within Hip Hop who have already paved the way. The key to getting started down this path is to begin creating. Create with whatever you have at hand, never allowing yourself to believe that what you have now is not enough. With focus and passion, what you have now will become the basis for what you will have in the future. Your dreams start with what is right in front of you. Use the examples of those in this lesson to inspire you to create your own brand of greatness.

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HIP HOP WORD OF THE WEEK

Bae: short for "babe". Can stand for a close friend or significant other. A term of endearment.

EX: "Hey, what's up? What you doin'? Me? I'm just kickin' it down here at the mall with my Bae."

Song reference: "Come Get it Bae" by Pharrell

BONUS: NAME ANOTHER SONG/ARTIST THAT HAS USED THIS HHWOTW

EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) Who is Birdman, and what are three reasons that he might fit into this discussion on Hip Hop entrepreneurship?
- 2) What type of business, Hip Hop or not, do you see yourself most likely to create one day and why?
- 3) Design a logo for your business.