



Jackson's Mega-Marketing: Does It Justify The Cost?

by Chris Marlowe

LONDON - Following the release of **Michael Jackson's** first album in almost five years, it is worth taking an objective look at *HIStory*. The Epic album was of course audaciously launched by having 10-meter tall Michael Jackson statues appear throughout Europe. **Richard Ogden**, senior VP of marketing for **Sony Music Entertainment** (Europe) laughs, "Did it work? Well, if the front page of every national newspaper and the national television news in every country that a Jackson photo appeared in is considered a success, then I would say that it was a publicity triumph!"

He emphatically confirms that sales have met all of the label's expectations. "Only two weeks into it we shipped close to three million albums in Europe." Putting that figure into perspective, Ogden says, "Michael Jackson's European sales increased between *Bad* and *Dangerous*, which surprises a lot of people. *Dangerous* has sold almost 10 million in Europe, and it came out in 1991. *HIStory* has done nearly a third of that in only two weeks."

He says it's too soon to give an accurate sell-through figure, but offers an educated guess of close to two million. "So we're absolutely delighted." Criticism of the premium price doesn't bother him in the slightest, either. "We don't appear to have a problem," Ogden points out. "The public is proving that with their wallets. So far in the UK, this album has sold about 300,000 copies across the counter—about 65% of what was shipped. And that situation would be true all across Europe."

Sony is planning a strategy of possibly seven singles to carry it through Christmas 1996. Seasonal peaks aside, there is also the tie-in of the second single *Childhood* with the film "Free

Willy 2" and the probability of a concert tour. It is very much a long-term project.

Although the first single *Scream* held the number 1 position in Music & Media's EHR Top 40 for five weeks, the general feeling over it has not been entirely positive. Ogden admits, "A number of people don't feel that *Scream* has performed quite as well as it should have done, but we knew it was a difficult record for radio—particularly in some parts of Europe where radio tends to be an ACE format."



HIStory is really taking off

The German statue is situated at Saturn Records in Berlin, where the unveiling was slightly overshadowed by Christo wrapping the Reichstag on the same day. The strategy there was based on an extensive radio teaser campaign, according to Hubert Wandjo, deputy MD of Sony Music Germany. "We invited more than 1,000 people from all over Germany—dealers, media people, artists—and gave a big presentation," he says.

Numerous tie-ins with local radio stations hosting release parties for fans followed. This plan seems to have worked. "We shipped 100,000 more than

our target," Wandjo says. "350,000 was our goal and we came up with 450,000—and don't forget that the album was selling at a higher price than usual, and that we're right in the middle of summertime. Since the release we've sold an additional 150,000." Wandjo foresees a sell-through of between 60-80%, not including the many imports known to be in Germany.

He too has faced radio reluctance over *Scream* with equanimity. "It does not quite fit into a format that would guarantee maximum heavy rotation. It's too tough, it's too hard, the beats are too strong—but we still have over 400 plays per week! So we're more than satisfied."

In Italy the statue was unveiled in the middle of Milan's popular water park, in a party run in collaboration with the Radio DeeJay network. Sony Music Italy marketing manager for Epic **Marco Boraso** admits that the radio link at the party naturally helped with airplay. "Radio is playing *Scream* to give a taste of the new album contents, but they have also received the mega-mix with all of the greatest hits tracks mixed together."

His outlet shipped some 150,000 copies of the double CDs and double cassettes on the release date. "In the second week sales had risen to a weekly average of 12,000 units."

The Czech Republic got the statue a month after most capital cities. **Suzanne Smetana**, MD of Sony Music Czech Republic, took the opportunity to heighten awareness both of Jackson and Prague by doing a tie-in with the city's famous dancing waters fountain.

Competitions were run on radio and in the press to distribute the 4,000 invitations, while Sony Czech Republic also benefitted from the momentum started in the rest of Europe.

The video and the special edit both helped overcome radio's initial hesitancy

about *Scream*, believes Smetana, who estimates that some 13,000 copies had been sold by early July. "Considering that the average wage here is 200 dollars a month, over 30 dollars for the CD is quite a lot."

But high sales figures don't come free. Ogden dismisses many of the more exaggerated rumours about promotional budgets ploughed into the project. "Sure, we're spending hundreds of thousands of dollars, but these figures are proportionate to the level of expected sales and the standard of the artist. The marketing of this album will be incremental. You expect to ship two million, so you take probably 10% of your net income and you spend that on the first 60 days of this record." He declines to be more specific.

Smetana refuses to discuss budgets, but she is in an unusual situation. "*Dangerous* was the first album which was simultaneously released in the Czech Republic at all," she explains. "We've sold over 50,000 copies of *Dangerous* now, but it wasn't as fast-moving as *HIStory* is, because the properly developed record shops didn't exist."

In Italy Boraso notes that "The media attention was so big that we really didn't need to spend money at the launch." A more exact budget will be formulated in the autumn, however, after the September figures are in.

Wandjo gets only slightly closer to actual numbers. "Let's just say it's something over a billion Deutschmarks. Mainly on TV advertising, radio advertising and postering." His general feeling reflects Sony's thoroughly optimistic attitude, however. Asked if the sales figures justify the expenditure, Wandjo laughs, "Sure! I mean an artist like Michael Jackson—it's not that you lose money, you know!"

Poland's Biggest Summer Hit Asks For A Translation

by Robert Tilli

WARSAW - Ever had a song in your head in a language you didn't understand at all? And did that really matter? You probably just sung along with it phonetically, didn't you? Not many people outside Poland will understand the lyrics, but everyone will dig the melody to *Lato* ("Summer"), the radio summer pop hit of 1995 in the country. If nobody wants to risk a foreign release of **Formacja Niezwychnych Schabuff's** single—either translated or just in its original version—then a cover version by a "Western artist" seems to be the most logical option.

"The thing is that in Poland everything is still so new. We haven't yet built up much experience with international exploitation," says **Zic-Zac** radio promotions manager **Piotr Rzeplinski**. "To do that you need to have international partners in the first place. Not only that, but we don't have any tradition in publishing. Until recently nobody ever thought about selling our music abroad."

The fall of communism has not yet done anything for Polish music export. **Basia** might embody Polish music abroad, but as a member of **Matt Bianco** she was already based in the UK. Furthermore **Edyta**, Poland's entry to this year's Eurovision Song Contest, is preparing an English album (**Orca/EMI**), while her current CD *Dotyk* passed the gold mark in the first week out (110,000 copies). But international exploitation of Polish product stops there.

Formacja Niezwychnych Schabuff (the "Dead Pork Chops") has been top of the bill in Poland for the last 10 years. "They were very popular some eight years ago, but when their lead singer **Jacek Palucha** left, the band collapsed. They had to rebuild their popularity," says Polish radio veteran **Marek Niedzwicki**, head of music at national ACE **Polskie Radio 3**. "Suddenly the remaining band members had to take over his responsibilities. **Olek Klepacz** stepped up as lyricist and vocalist, while **Wojtek Wierus** had to write the music."

All the patience and hard work paid off, however, with *Fantomas*, their fifth



album, the first for Zic-Zac after they resigned to the company. They had previously made one album for the company before. "It was one of the first releases for the label owned by **De Mono** one of Poland's leading bands," explains **Formacja** manager **Artur Kurpisz**. "The staff at the label was too busy looking after its own musical career then, so it didn't have the time to promote our album properly. However, in the meantime Zic-Zac has become our country's

biggest indie, so we decided to come back."

By doing so their customary subscription to the top slot was fully restored, as the first two singles of the new CD—*Christine* and *Lato* both performed optimally.

Don't even try to pronounce their band name or their equally witty lyrics, because you'll fail. Singing along with the main word *Lato*—the same name as the former Polish football star—and faking all the rest would suffice. Otherwise the best idea might be to propose the song to international grand masters of soft pop such as Elton John or Chris Rea.

The idea appeals to Kurpisz, although he thinks you can't translate all the wordplay in the lyrics adequately. "The guys in the band have done English tracks before, but they didn't really enjoy it. Now they've done two French-language songs. Not for the export, just for the sound of the words. Selling the rights on *Lato* is of course a possibility, but they don't want to sell their own 'baby.' The idea of border breaking for money is still so new."