

# The 4 Ps of Marketing

There are a lot of factors besides musical talent that contribute to the success or failure of a business in the music industry. An essential ingredient for success is **marketing**, which is the entire process of getting a product or service to the consumer. Marketing includes everything from identifying your potential customers to figuring out how to design a product or service that meets their needs to pricing the product, promoting it, and selling it.

The **4 Ps of marketing** are four essential elements—product, price, place, and promotion—that your marketing plan should address. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What *product* or service is your business providing? Part of marketing is determining how to design a product or service to meet a customer need.
- What *price* will you charge for your product(s) or service(s)? Part of marketing is determining how to set your prices so that they are low enough to convince people to buy your product or service but high enough to make a profit.
- What's the best *place* to sell or distribute your product or service? Marketing includes deciding where there is a need for your product.
- What form of *promotion* will you use to get the word out about your product or service? Marketing includes deciding how to advertise and publicize your business to attract potential customers.

## WHAT ARE THE 4 Ps OF MARKETING?

**Product:** Merchandise, whether made by humans, machinery, or naturally, offered for sale.

**Price:** The amount of money asked in exchange for a product or service.

**Place:** The location or area in which a business operates.

**Promotion:** An activity or activities designed to stimulate demand for a product, or the use of publicity and advertising to attract customers. Some forms of promotion—such as press releases and media coverage—are free, whereas advertising must be purchased.

Russell Simmons, who cofounded Def Jam Records in 1984, was considered one of the most talented marketers in the history of the music industry. Many credit Simmons with using his insights about human behavior, the current music market, and the potential music market to bring hip-hop to every facet of media and pop culture. As you look at the timeline of Simmons's career, try to identify specific marketing strategies that he employed.

## Timeline of Russell Simmons's Career: Marketing Hip-Hop Culture

**1957**—Russell Simmons is born in a middle-class neighborhood in Queens, a borough of New York City.

**1970s**—Simmons studies sociology at the Harlem branch of City College of New York. During this time, he becomes intrigued with the appeal of rap music to young, urban African Americans.

**1977–78**—Simmons begins promoting parties at college with his friend Curtis Walker. At this time, there are no rap records, only rap artists who perform live. At these parties, rappers come together with DJs, graffiti artists, and break dancers, forming the essential elements of hip-hop as a culture.

**1979**—Simmons's friend Curtis Walker becomes rapper Kurtis Blow; he and Simmons cowrite a minor rap hit called "Christmas Rappin."

**Early 1980s**—Simmons sees in rap enthusiasts a vast audience that the recording industry has yet to tap into. (At this point, rap artists are still primarily performance artists, not recording artists.) He begins to manage local rap artists, producing recordings on shoestring budgets and conducting "rap nights" at dance clubs in Queens and Harlem.

**1983**—Simmons becomes the manager for his brother, who goes by the name of Run. He puts his brother together with MC Darryl McDaniels and DJ Jason Mizell and creates the group Run-DMC, dressing them in black leather suits and guiding their recording decisions. The group's first two records, released in 1984 and 1985, are immediately successful.

**1984**—Simmons meets Rick Rubin, a wealthy white music producer. With a few thousand dollars each, Simmons and Rubin create the tiny Def Jam Records, in order to release music that no major labels would look at. Their first single is "I Need a Beat" by LL Cool J, who was 16 at the time. Rubin is considered the expert in production; Simmons is the talented businessman, managing the cash flow of the company, developing client relations, and focusing on networking. The combination of personalities and talents earns immediate success for Def Jam, which sells more than a half-million records in its first year in business.

**1985**—Simmons and Rubin sign a production deal with CBS Records for \$600,000. At this point Def Jam is very successful, but its target audience continues to be primarily African American youth.

**1986**—Def Jam pairs Run-DMC with the all-white heavy-metal band Aerosmith for a cover of Aerosmith's hit "Walk This Way." The song is a big hit and lands Run-DMC on MTV, which at this point is still sidelining rap. With a new white audience, Run-DMC and Def Jam find themselves with a No. 4 Billboard hit—the first rap song to break the Top 5.

Def Jam signs the Beastie Boys, the first commercially successful all-white rap act. The group's album sells 4.8 million copies.

**1986–90**—Every record Def Jam releases during this period goes gold (sells more than 500,000 copies). In retrospect, analysts point to Simmons's ability to create brand recognition as a major reason for his success. **Brand recognition** is developing a reputation so that people have a positive association when they hear the brand mentioned. Instead of trying to record one-hit wonders, Simmons looked for artists who he thought could have a promising career. He then promoted the artist and his label at the same time. The popular artists reinforced his label's identity, and his popular label gave credibility to newer artists.

**1990s**—Simmons branches into other media to promote hip-hop. He creates Rush Communications, a conglomerate that includes a record label (Def Jam), a management company, a clothing design company, a movie production house, television shows, a magazine, and an advertising agency.

**2001**—Simmons helps to found the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network (HSAN), a nonprofit coalition of hip-hop artists, entertainment industry leaders, civil rights proponents, and youth leaders. HSAN's mission is to use hip-hop music as a catalyst to promote social change to fight poverty and injustice; initiatives have included voter education projects and youth leadership development.

## Questions for Reflection

1. What marketing strategies did Russell Simmons use to help Def Jam Records succeed?
2. Which of the 4 Ps of marketing did Simmons address (according to this timeline)?
3. What image did Simmons create for Def Jam? What aspects of this image do you think attracted fans?