

# Cultural Daily

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## 944 Things Creative People Can Learn From Spotify

Adam Leipzig · Thursday, February 2nd, 2012

When you're a creative person or an entrepreneur, sometimes it feels like you're working in the salt mines. Grinding work, day after day, pushing out songs or words or business plans.

Let's do a thought experiment, and pretend that today, instead of being, say, a musician, you actually are making salt.

You dig your salt, package it for sale, and bring it to market. As an artist or entrepreneur, that's pretty much what you do, day after day, year after year: mine, package, sell. Since you're a creative person, after a while you get bored with one kind of salt, so you decide to spread your wings and try making different kinds of salt...maybe you try smoked salt, or sea salt, or pink salt. Eventually, your salt repertoire looks like this photo I took yesterday at a Whole Foods Market:



You are obviously a creative genius! You have 62 different kinds of salt! That's exactly what you should be doing – dreaming up new kinds of salt, pushing the boundaries of your salt-repertoire.

From this perspective, 62 kinds of salt don't seem excessive, as it would appear to the average consumer. It's your work. You're the salt-artist, and you should spread your wings.

Now let's go back to you being a musician. You don't sell your music at the grocery store, so you put your music up on Spotify, the online music super-collection. To fit into Spotify's system, you need to fall into a genre, a category. So you look at Spotify's genre list and freak out – because there are [944 genres, from Aboriginal Folk to Zydeco!](#)

944 genres? That seems crazy. Who could even think of all those categories?

In the answer to that question lies the difference between the creator and the seller, between the artist, on the one hand, and the consumer-targeted machine that brings the artist to market, on the other.

Spotify has 944 categories of music so it can appeal to 944 tastes in music. That means Spotify has 944 categories of customers – and, by putting its customers into hyper-specific niches, it can target them, “know” them, sell them advertisements or special offers or different subscription packages. It also lets Spotify users find exactly what they're looking for, whether it's Ambient Dub or Anime Music, to pick two from the start of the alphabet.

Marketing today is all about knowing your customers well. That's what's behind Google's privacy changes, and what propels Facebook's multi-billion-dollar IPO. Spotify's doing exactly the right thing by having hundreds of genres, because the more “niche” niches Spotify can service, the customers they'll have.

Here's where you, as an artist, might get caught and confused. You want to express yourself brilliantly and in as many ways as possible. You really want to appeal to everybody. At the same

time, you need to sell to your audience. Are you an artisan salt-maker, or a smaller version of Spotify, mining customer information to close the sale?

In fact, if you're going to be successful, you will be both. You will be an artist and an entrepreneur. You will make 62 different kinds of music, but you'll make it in a form – or genre, or category – that will appear to a defined niche of customers, so you can identify with them, dialogue with them, and close the sale. In other words, all of your music will be “salt.”

Seen this way, the apparent conflict isn't a conflict at all. Artists spread their wings to create, then narrow their focus to sell. It's like looking through a telescope from both ends – first to have a wide view, then turn it around and see things magnified. You have to be salt and you have to be Spotify.

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