As the father of a music-loving 3-year-old girl, those lyrics will forever be burned in my brain. The music video for that song has over 2.4 billion views on YouTube, and I’m pretty sure our daughter is responsible for about 5 million of them.

But all those times hearing “Shake it Off” got me thinking – what did Taylor Swift do to become such a successful artist? According to Forbes’ list of “America’s Richest Female Entertainers 2017”, this 28-year-old is worth $280 million. Although I’m not really a Taylor Swift fan, I think there are some things we can observe from Ms. Swift’s career that we can use to help our own businesses:

1. She has carefully crafted an image that she steadfastly maintains.

Taylor has marketed herself and her brand as a clean, all-American girl. She is very careful about what she allows the public to see. Everything she does – her music, her tours, her endorsements – are designed to match and enhance her image. What is your business’ image and how do you maintain it? Do your employees understand your image and consistently deliver an experience that lives up to your image? How much time do you spend thinking about this and actively managing it?

2. Fans can relate to her.

Taylor’s music, at least what I’ve heard, is relatable. She writes about her relationships and her growth as a person – experiences everyone has gone through. Contrast this to so many other pop songs about riding in private jets or wearing Rolexes – an average person might dream about that, but can’t actually
relate to it. So how do you, as a business owner, take your message and make it relatable to your customer? What need or want are you fulfilling and how do you do it better than everyone else? Are you communicating that message effectively so it resonates?

3. Taylor understands the value of her product.

If you follow the music industry at all, you’ll know that in the last decade or so, streaming over the Internet has turned into the primary means to access music. However, until 2017, Taylor did not allow her music on most streaming services, calling attention to what she felt was unfair compensation to artists from those services. She was unwilling to sell her product at a price she felt was unfair. Do you understand the value proposition of what you offer? Are you under-pricing for fear of missing out on opportunities?

Whether you like Taylor Swift’s music or not, there’s no denying that she’s developed a huge business around her music and her image. Thinking about makes people like Taylor so successful can be a great way to improve your own business.

As for the music situation in our house – there’s hope! This morning, on the way to daycare, my daughter demanded I play a different song on repeat – “Immigrant Song” by Led Zeppelin. With any luck, and maybe some influence from her dad, her musical taste will continue to evolve!

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