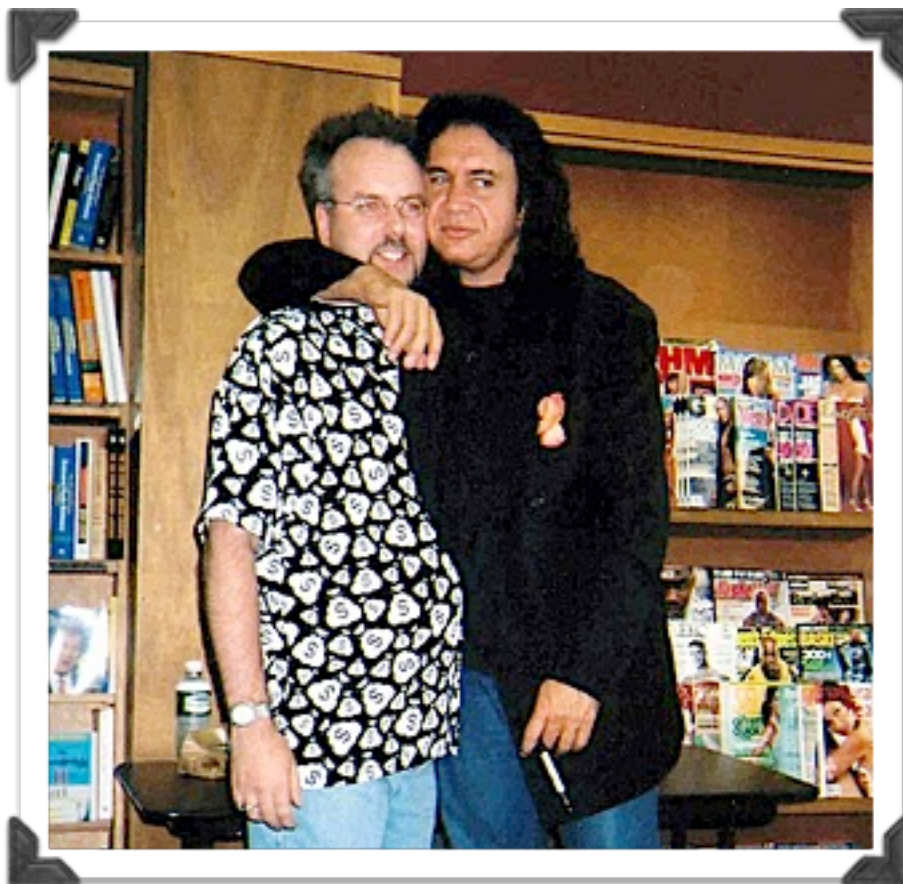


# **KISS School Of Marketing**

## **11 Lessons I Learned While Working With KISS**



**Michael Brandvold**



Michael Brandvold and Gene Simmons

**"Quite eloquent. You're a powerful and attractive man." - Gene Simmons**

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## *Chapter 1*

# ABOUT



Michael formally launched Michael Brandvold Marketing, leveraging his years of online marketing experience to provide knowledge, direction and assistance to large and small clients. He has been a speaker or panelist at SXSW Interactive, California Music Industry Summit, Quicktime Live, NARM, NARIP, The Conclave, Canadian Music Week, Webforum 2012, the PR Consultants Group, Driven Music Conference Atlanta and Florida and PR Summit, to name just a few events.

Michael is a Klout star and expert in online and social marketing, e-commerce, fan acquisition & retention.

Some of the recent clients Michael has worked with include Andy Gibson, Alexa Carter, Greg Kihn, Jimmy Dillon, the San Francisco Music Club, Bill Ortiz, Miller's East Coast Deli, The Silver

Comet, Hometown Restoration, EON Records and Goomba Records.

Michael is a member of both The Recording Academy and the National Association of Record Industry Professionals.

Michael is the co-host of the Music Biz Weekly and the Rock Star Branding podcasts as well as the Music Biz Weekly Marketing webinar series.

Upon graduating from Mankato State University in 1987, Michael accepted the position of Director of Marketing with DKP Productions, an artist management firm in Chicago, before joining Red Light Records in 1990 as National Radio Promotions manager.

A self-taught master of HTML, Michael launched websites for Perris Records, Creative Communications, Sportmart and Montgomery Ward. But it was KISS Otaku — his KISS fan site launched in 1995 — that would change his fortunes forever.

In 1998, Gene Simmons of KISS discovered KISS Otaku and personally tapped Michael as the Director of Web Services at Signatures Network, a Sony/CMGi company, where he built from scratch, managed and grew KISSonline into a multi-million-dollar enterprise with over half a million visitors per month.

Michael was also instrumental in the development and execution of VIP Platinum Ticket Programs, which are now ubiquitous in the concert industry. The first band to offer such a VIP Platinum Ticket program, KISS' 2003 60-date U.S. tour achieved 100 percent sellout of the \$1,000 tickets, generating \$1.5 million. Michael implemented the same VIP ticketing programs, and managed the online branding, marketing and sales efforts, for U2, Motley Crüe, Rod Stewart, Madonna, Ozzy Osbourne, Dream Theater, Alice Cooper, Jessica Simpson and Britney Spears, grossing \$20 million in first 12 months of operations. Michael's responsibilities included working closely with Universal Music Group, BMG/Sanctuary Records, Rhino Records and Playboy.



Photo By Michael Brandvold

## *Chapter 2*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank You:

The Demon, The Starchild, The Catman and The Spaceman; Gene Simmons, Paul Stanley, Peter Criss and Ace Frehley. Your influence on my personal and professional life is huge.

My mom, Myrtle, for buying me my first KISS record. Everything changed with that.

Catrina for supporting this dream of mine to have my own company.

Editing assistance by [PRThatRocks.com](http://PRThatRocks.com) and [Thornybleeder.com](http://Thornybleeder.com).

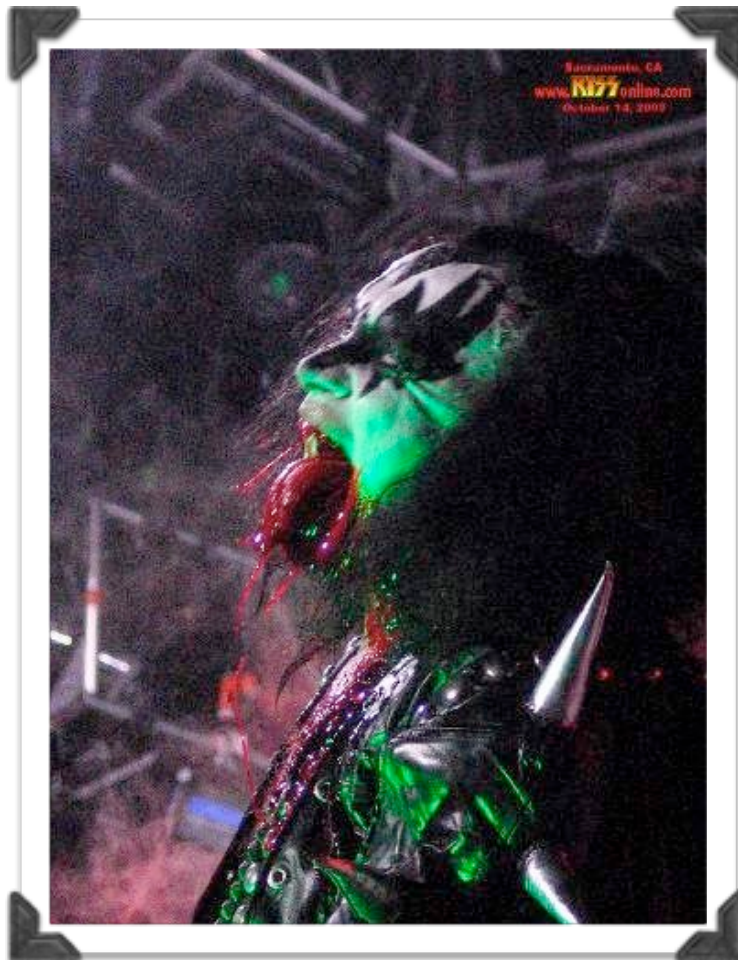


Photo By Michael Brandvold

## *Chapter 3*

# TESTIMONIALS

Michael's efforts in pushing original KISS guitarist Ace Frehley's Anomaly pre-release sales was definitely part of the reason the album debuted at #27 on the Billboard 200 charts. He did a great marketing push on the album and was a big help." – **Frank Munoz (Associate Producer, Anomaly)**

'Brandvold' is Norse for 'Marketing God'" – **Christopher Buttner, PRThatRocks.com**

We honestly couldn't have reached that goal without you." – **BMG/Sanctuary Records, commenting on shipping KISS Symphony Gold**

Had a keen sense of what the people surfing the web at the time wanted to see, hear and participate in on the Internet. – **Joseph L. Bongiovi, Vice President – Entertainment Licensing and Marketing, Signatures Network**

Mike is a true pioneer and expert on website creation, development and ROI for artists in the music industry, which now also extends to the leverage of social marketing. – **Paul Miles, Author Sex Tips From Rock Stars**

Thanks for all your hard work I know it's doing the trick...you are a rockstar !!!! - **Debby Gibson**

Michael Brandvold is one of the best in the industry at cutting through the music marketing fog and getting things moving. - **Donn Aaron, Romeo Spike**

GREAT JOB! - **Greg Kihn**

The most informative and helpful blog on the web in terms of music marketing and social media for both beginners and experts. - **Featured Artists**

I have seen Michael speak -- he's nothing short of awesome. - **Joel Denver, All Access Music Group**

Michael Brandvold is that rare breed: a true social media and marketing/PR expert. - **David Perry, CEO, David Perry & Associates, Inc.**

## Chapter 4

# No Denying The Influence



Michael Brandvold with Gene, Peter, Paul and Tommy.

I am a KISS fan, going back to 1976 when my mom first bought me Rock N' Roll Over. I remember taking heat in the late '70s at school for liking the band; I heard the phrase "KISS sucks" more than a few times. It also took a lot of courage to wear a KISS T-shirt to school at the time: you became an instant target. I grew up with KISS, and their marketing has clearly been an influence on me and on my

business growth. I often tell people I went to the KISS School of Marketing.

In 1998 I landed a dream job for a KISS fan. I was personally recruited by Gene Simmons to build and manage the band's new website, [www.Kissonline.com](http://www.Kissonline.com). I spent the next seven years working inside the KISS world. I was associated with much of their merchandising, including helping guide and develop items such as Kissopoly and the \$1,000-per-ticket Platinum VIP Meet and Greet packages. I was there during the 3D Psycho Circus, the Farewell Tour, World Domination and Rock The Nation Tours.

I received RIAA Gold album plaques for my involvement in the release of the Psycho Circus album, the Box Set album and the DVD release of KISS Symphony.

Love them or hate them, there is absolutely no denying the influence that KISS has had on the music industry. KISS, in the course of their 36-year career, have sold over 100 million albums and have over 2,500 product licenses (coffins, condoms and credit cards). Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley get it when it comes to business.



## Chapter 5

# Lesson 1: ALL Press Is Good Press



Going back to the very beginnings of the band, they were trashed by the press. Check out this quote:

**“I HOPE THE FOUR GUYS WHO MAKE UP THE GROUP, WHOSE NAMES DON’T MATTER, ARE PUTTING MONEY AWAY FOR THE FUTURE, BECAUSE KISS WON’T BE AROUND LONG.” – SEATTLE DAILY TIMES, MAY 27, 1974.**

If you believe in what you are doing in your music, don’t worry about the press. Everybody is a critic. Everybody has an opinion.

**Gene Simmons: "Critics are failed human beings not good enough to be in bands, but they want to comment on music. My point to critics is this: If you don't think what I do is the best show on Earth, let's see what you've got!"**

## *Chapter 6*

# **Lesson 2: Love Me or Hate Me, Just Spell My Name Right**



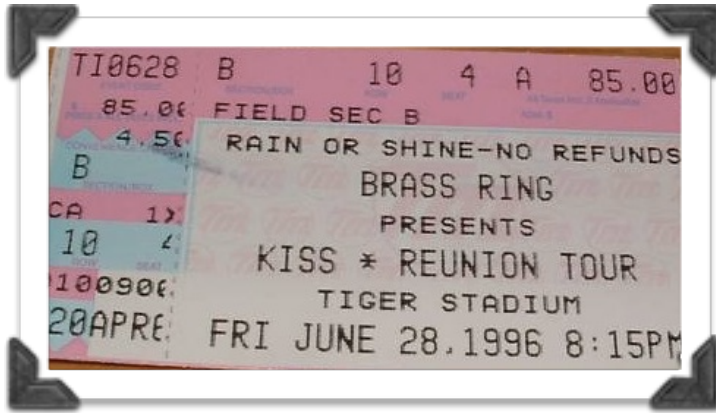
Photo By Michael Brandvold

This lesson is closely associated with lesson #1. Make sure they spell your name right, even in bad press. Today, you also want to make sure they have the right URL.

**Gene Simmons: “As long as they print our picture, ‘We the people’ decide and that’s how we win every time. KISS - 1, Critics - 0, every time, because our power doesn’t come from backroom politics. ‘We the people’ - it’s the American way.”**

## Chapter 7

# Lesson 3: Wait For The Right Time



Don't rush things. When the time is right for something — a song, a tour, an album, an interview — it will happen. KISS waited for their reunion tour and the results were stellar, selling out nearly 40,000 tickets in 47 minutes to the first show on the tour.

The tour lasted for 192 shows

over eleven months and earned \$43.6 million, making KISS the top-drawing concert act of 1996.

**Paul Stanley:** It was absolutely astonishing. We all knew this was going to be big, and as big as we thought it was going to be — which would have been very big! — this obviously went beyond that. We were very, very ... I guess we had a deep sense of gratitude to the fans and masses and it made us that much more committed to not letting them down when they came to see the return of the 'legend.' Nothing would have been more disappointing than for them to think this would have been better left alone. What was amazing to us was not how big it was, but the absolute mania of it again — that we could put a show at Madison Square Garden on sale and 45 minutes later sold out four and could have sold more. That was typical all over the country and it was absolutely awesome, beyond our expectations — and our expectations were very high!"

## *Chapter 8*

# Lesson 4: It's All Branding

Gene Simmons this and Gene Simmons that. Even I have had issues with how KISS has become more of a brand than a band, but that brand is what it is all about. And Gene Simmons knows that. Ask Gene Simmons about his TV show, Family Jewels, and he will act like he has never heard of it, replying, "You mean Gene Simmons Family Jewels." Gene Simmons and KISS are associated with everything they do. Make sure you are always thinking about how your band is represented as a brand. Make sure you are referred to by your band name.



## *Chapter 9*

# Lesson 5: Not Everything You Do Will Succeed



Photo By Michael Brandvold

what you can and move on to the next idea. Got a content idea for your website? Try it. If your fans don't get excited, move on to something else. That last contest didn't work? Try a different contest.

Gene Simmons understands that everything he does will not succeed. That does not stop him. He keeps putting out business ventures, KISS product, tours and albums. He knows that some of these will succeed and they will be remembered. Our attention spans are so short today that we will quickly forget the failures. Don't stress them; learn

**Paul Stanley: "The lessons of success are a lot sweeter, but without failure, you don't appreciate success. Failure is a reminder that you're not perfect and that you can be better. If you don't learn anything from failure, you probably aren't going to succeed."**

## *Chapter 10*

# Lesson 6: Treat The Media With Respect



Photo By Michael Brandvold

You need to love the media! Radio, TV, magazines, newspapers, websites, bloggers, photographers — all of them! They can make you look like kings or they can make you look like has-beens. At every single show, KISS gives the photographers pose after pose of perfect photos so they look great in the paper the next day. I have seen them stop and give a reporter or photographer backstage an extra two minutes of undivided attention so they get the cover. Treat the media like the gatekeepers — because they are!

## *Chapter 11*

# **Lesson 7: Listen To Your Fans, You Work For Them**

Never forget who you work for: the fans! You are doing this for them. Everyone would kill to have an Army of (sometimes blindly) devoted fans. Listen to what the fans want, not what the critics want. Critics don't buy your music or your tickets; they often get them for free. Those with the wallets speak the loudest.

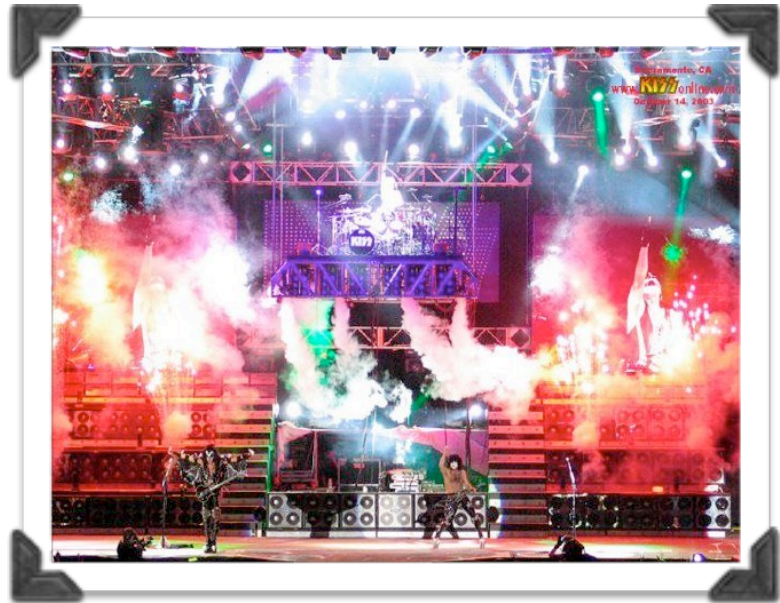


Photo By Michael Brandvold

**Gene Simmons: “The fans want makeup. We’re not here to dictate, like a tortured artist who only does what he wants. We’re clear that the fans are the bosses and we work for them. In any restaurant, a professional chef will give you the meal you want and make it as good as possible. We’re not here force-feeding opinions down anyone’s throat.”**

## *Chapter 12*

# **Lesson 8: “The Secret To Success Is To Offend The Greatest Number of People”**

Quote by George Bernard Shaw, repeated by Gene Simmons.

I love this saying. Think about it: If thousands of people are offended by what you are doing, you are doing something right to get attention. In the 1970s, KISS offended many parents by looking like demons, spitting blood and breathing fire. Prior to KISS, Alice Cooper did the same. KISS were never the darlings of reviewers and critics. That didn't stop them. They believed in what they were doing. Don't be afraid to offend someone with your passion. Just make sure you believe in what you are doing.



Photo By Michael Brandvold



## *Chapter 13*

# **Lesson 9: IF YOU DON'T ASK FOR IT, YOU WON'T GET IT**



Photo By Michael Brandvold

If you don't ask to be on the cover, it is not going to be given to you. If you don't ask for the headliner slot, it won't just be volunteered to you. Somebody else will ask for it. If you don't ask for \$1,000 a show, it is not just going to be freely offered. If you want your fans to repost something on their Facebook wall, ask them to do it. Ask and you shall receive.

I actually used this lesson the very first time I worked for Gene. He had hired me to manage the online marketing efforts for the book *Kisstory II*. I had negotiated my pay and then said to myself, "I want a leather KISS Army jacket." So I asked, and Gene said yes. I know in the scope of things the cost of the jacket was nothing to Gene and KISS. He was not offering the jacket to me. I had to ask. Ask for what you want.

## *Chapter 14*

# Lesson 10: Separate Business And Pleasure



Photo By Michael Brandvold

This means you do business with someone that you might not like personally. And just the opposite: Don't do business with someone just because they are a friend. It is all about the deal. If it is a great deal, don't sweat it that the person doesn't like the same things you do, or that they don't even really like your music.

## Chapter 15

# Lesson 11: They Aren't Afraid To Change Their Minds



In the pursuit of business, KISS is not afraid to change their minds and do something that they previously claimed to be against. Example: marketing to kids. In the late 1970s, around the Dynasty tour, KISS had become “Disney,” with colorful costumes, toys, etc. In a TV program, they even said they had become something they weren’t. They were a rock and roll band, but they were seeing young children at their shows. Today the band is directly marketing to a young audience and encouraging them to become fans. They realize that if they can grab the kids today, they have a new generation of fans growing up with them. On their last tour of the U.S. they offered free tickets to kids, and they now have merchandise for kids

and even babies. Several years ago, I pushed for the very first KISS baby bottle and bib to be sold, and they were hits. The fans from the '70s are grown up and have their own kids who are now growing up with KISS in their family.

**Paul Stanley: “Nothing really changes. You become more sure of who you are because you’ve lived that much longer being who you are. You hopefully see the wisdom in things you do and the stupidity in some of the others, and hopefully you learn what works and what doesn’t. I don’t think anyone is a different person. Everybody is a more defined version of who they were.”**

## Chapter 16

# The Encore: Create And Name Your TRIBE

**BRAND**  
LIKE A  
**ROCK STAR**



USING ROCK 'N ROLL TO MAKE YOUR BUSINESS FAMOUS

## STEVE JONES

personal values and political stances.

Beyond music, well-identified tribes of fans help elevate brands. Mac vs. PC wasn't a battle of products, it was a battle of identities. Harley-Davidson owners aren't bikers. They're HOGs. If you ride a Honda, you're not welcome. Jeep Wrangler owners give each other a secret wave as they pass. If you drive a Jeep Compass, you don't know about it.

KISS didn't just have fans, they had an "army". How awesome is that? The KISS Army is one of rock's legendary fan club successes. A major element of that success is the name. That simple name made the KISS fan club into an identifiable entity and made its members part of something real ... a movement. Not a fan club ... a freaking ARMY!

The Grateful Dead had Deadheads. They taped and shared concerts, always bringing new members into the tribe.

Jimmy Buffett has Parrotheads. They dress up in grass skirts, coconut bras, and know exactly what to do when the band starts playing "Fins."

Lady Gaga has Little Monsters. They follow her religiously, reflecting not only her fashion sense but also her

The concept of belonging isn't new. Maslow's famous Hierarchy of Needs places the need to belong to a group as one of the first things we seek out once our basic survival and safety needs are satisfied. We look for friendships, partners, and people with whom we can identify. When you give your tribe a name, especially a great name like The KISS Army, you create a gathering place where people can satisfy their need to belong.

When your product serves a need, it becomes something people can't easily live without. At that point, surviving recessions and outlasting new competitors becomes infinitely easier. After all, you're a need and not a want.

Courtesy of Steve Jones, [Brand Like A Rock Star: Lessons from Rock 'N Roll to Make Your Business Rich and Famous](#)

Be sure to check out the [Rock Star Branding Podcast](#).



Presented by The Music Biz Weekly

# THE ROCK STAR BRANDING PODCAST

**with Brian Thompson,  
Michael Brandvold and Steve Jones**

## Chapter 17

# My Takeaway



Photo By Michael Brandvold - The last bow by the original four members of KISS.

My takeaway from KISS was, don't get caught up in everyone else's opinions and advice. Everyone has them, and often they aren't really qualified. Stick to your guns and do what you believe in.

And ... it is called the Music "Business."

*Chapter 18*

# Contact & Links

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