

What made Discover Weekly one of our most successful feature launches to date?

Posted on November 18, 2015 by Sofie Lindblom (<https://labs.spotify.com/author/sofielindblom/>)

discover weekly-01



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WHAT IS DISCOVER WEEKLY?

Every Monday Spotify delivers 75 million unique mixtapes to music lovers all over the world, we call these mixtapes Discover Weekly. As a Spotify user you get a playlist based on your own listening as well as what others are playlisting and listening to around you that you might also like. By combining clever algorithms with human curation we manage to do personalization at scale and with a quality we've never done before. In this blog post we will go behind the scenes and tell you the thinking around and learnings gained when developing Discover Weekly.

HOW IT ALL STARTED

Back in 2011, we wanted to give users a Christmas gift. Led by our marketing team, that idea turned into Year in Music (YiM), which included a recap of your listening for the year. In 2014 we expanded Year in Music to also include a playlist of new-to-you music called "Play it Forward."

The team at Spotify who built “Play It Forward” also maintained Spotify’s Discover page. Over the years, this feature was placed several layers deep inside the product. We were confident in the engineering behind it and its ability to serve up great discoveries, but finding new music through Discover required a fair amount of user time and attention... if they could even find it at all.

Innovation tends to happen when different ideas and people collide. By smashing the “Play it Forward” playlist concept from YiM with the old Discover feature, the first version of Discover Weekly was born. BOOM!

GOING FROM IDEA TO SOMETHING CONSUMERS WANT

The team’s first iterations experimented mostly with playlist length, frequency, and the format itself. Playlists are Spotify’s “native unit” so the team felt respecting its simplicity and “humanness” would help make discovery more approachable. They eventually decided two hours was a good length, long enough to have the potential of an immersive listening experience. Having fewer songs made the ones we chose feel more special! The team settled on a weekly update for the same reason.

There was also a lot to do in selecting and filtering content, with plenty of bugs and tracks that seemed almost comically misplaced in the beginning. Some happy accidents happened too; a bug that occasionally let semi-familiar content through ended up staying in, since it turns out having one or two things you recognize seems to build trust in the playlist. After a few weeks of iterations on quality and methodology, the team felt confident enough to roll out to employees (and wow did we love it).

“It’s as if my secret music twin put it together. Everything in it is good.”
— feedback from employee test

We are well aware that we shouldn’t rely too heavily on what Spotify employees think. Most Spotify employees are superusers and extreme music fans and as such, we are not a good proxy for Spotify users in general, so a small user test followed. One of the brilliant things the team did was to put a link to a Google form in the playlist description to help understand how it was perceived. Over 1500 listeners responded. WOW! The survey helped to confirm that Discover Weekly was a mixtape... a great one. Thanks to a control group with a “default” playlist image they could clearly see the large impact the personalized image had. The overall response from the test was off the charts, and we proceeded towards full roll out.

“Yes! @Spotify your Discover Weekly playlist is on point and I love it! Excellent work! I’m finding tons of new wonderful music”
— Tweet from user after test phase

WHAT WE LEARNED

- Reusing a format people already know, in the simplest way possible way, can help your idea reach a large audience quickly.
- Quality over quantity is very attractive in a world of information overflow.
- Weekly refreshes of content is a good path to habit formation.
- A personal image can help create a sense of ownership, and draw more people into the experience.
- Our underlying personalization technology is in a better shape than ever, but it was hidden several layers into the experience.
- Involving marketing, design and other functions early on is crucial for success.
- Letting tweets and survey replies inform the marketing message works very well.

TWEAKING IT? YOU BET!

- We can learn from Discover Weekly to improve all personalization at Spotify.
- We want to make it clearer who owns each discovery weekly playlist to simplify sharing.
- We want to give users the possibility to provide feedback.

THANKS FOR READING!


/Sofie Lindblom in collaboration with Matt Ogle


*You can read the full press release for Discover Weekly here


(<https://press.spotify.com/it/2015/07/20/introducing-discover-weekly-your-ultimate-personalised-playlist/>) for more context.


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