

Freddie DeMann, a veteran music producer, has an amazing career spanning over three decades and has managed both Michael Jackson and Madonna. 'You know, I'd like to say there's a little bit of an artist in me,' he told Business Playground. 'When I was a kid I took drum lessons and I took tap dance and when I was about 20 I took acting lessons. I thought I wanted to be an artist, but was wise enough to realise I didn't have "the stuff". I'm not in this business by accident, I'm in this business called show business, but it's the arts that I like and being close to artists and I like being close to the creative process. It's what gets my rocks off. It's what gets me up every morning with enthusiasm. When I was a manager I told people I was the bridge between art and commerce. And thank God I have a pretty good business mind. But I always have an artistic mind and I think that gives me some special credentials, and I love what I do so much. God gave me a good ear to recognise a hit song and, by extension, a hit song is a hit script, is a book, is a play, is a show.'

He told Business Playground about how gut instinct has helped him recognise potential hits. **'You just know it,' he said.**

'It's like when somebody plays a song for you and you hear eight bars and you know it's a smash.'

Often the artists themselves don't know which of their work is just good and which is so great that it will take the charts by storm. 'It takes someone else to say *this*, this is the smash, and not this.' He gives an example: 'I've had a lot of experience with that. I was managing The Jacksons way back in 1978 and at that time they had left Motown and gone to Epic and they weren't hot, they were kind of cold, they were ice cold, and they were also in disarray and they were fighting amongst themselves. I told them there's one hit on this album and *that's* what we're putting out. It's called 'Shake Your Body Down To The Ground'. I was right, it sold two million singles and caused the album to go platinum⁵ and that was the rebirth of

⁵In fact it made double-platinum status from the Recording Industry Association of America.

The Jacksons, which led to Quincy Jones producing Michael and having those two incredible albums, *Off The Wall* and *Thriller*.'

We asked Freddie if he had a process or technique for recognising the winning ideas, the ones that would be hits. He said, 'I hate to disappoint you, but I don't know the answer to that. Very often I have myriad thoughts that are kind of rushing through and it's very distracting. But if something is really, really good and it grabs you by the throat, those thoughts stay away and you're completely engulfed in what you're hearing.' He adds, 'When you were playing 'Hole in the Fence',⁶ I was already thinking what theatre it should open in New York. I was already thinking who I'm going to get on the production team, who should be augmenting what you've done. So, yes, I do tend to race ahead when I'm enthusiastic about something.'

The role of gut instinct in picking the winner is confirmed by Evan Williams, co-founder and CEO of online social networking tool Twitter.

Prior to launching Twitter, Evan had launched a blog publishing system called Blogger, which his team had developed as a by-product to another project. Evan told Business Playground, 'It wasn't at all what our company was planning to do, it was very much just an idea on the side which seemed like a very small idea compared to what we were working on.' But, he says, 'I just couldn't get rid of the Blogger idea, it kept nagging me.' Evan and his team pursued with Blogger and it eventually became a huge success.⁷

Christian Audigier, creative genius behind clothing labels Von Dutch and Ed Hardy, describes 'just knowing' when an idea has the potential to be big. In 2000 he was brought in as the head designer for Von Dutch. The clothing label is named after car and motorbike 'pinstriper'⁸ Kenneth Graeme Howar, who had often signed his work

⁶The title song Dave wrote for a stage musical.

⁷They sold their company, Pyra, to Google in 2003.

⁸Pinstriping is the application of very thin lines of paint.

