



Marketing Messages

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Harnessing social networks to generate word of mouth and word of mouse

Traditional advertising such as print, broadcast, outdoor and direct mail has taken a hit of late. It's a blow suffered at the hands of the new kid on the block, social media and other online applications. There's infatuation with social media. Like a new romance, it is mysterious, intriguing and hot. The difference however is, unlike a flaming summer romance, this new partnership is going to last. The reason? This new social media partner is thoughtful, likes to listen and share. They are not boastful and showy. And most of all, they are personal - forever at your side courtesy of the increasing proliferation of iPhones, Blackberry's and other data devices. Traditional media are unlikely to go anywhere soon since they hold a tremendous amount of power and clout for getting a message out to the masses. But the secret will be to utilize the strengths of both traditional and new media in unison.

One interesting area in transition is the publicity stunt. Long a bastion of businesses in search of publicity and media coverage, what has changed is the effort to engage online chatter via social networks and blogs along with traditional TV, radio and print media in the antics. Let's look at a couple recent examples:

Think you've seen it all when it comes to clever delivery of advertising messages? Think again. Enter to latest human ad platform: backvertising. Take one very hairy man, carve out your message on his follicle-enhanced slate, and send him strolling down Kits Beach handing out Parissa Wax Strip samples. It was sure to be a head turner, and generate talk both on the beach and online, amongst the primary target market: beach going men and women in search of a smooth body. The publicity stunt was the brainchild of Vancouver advertising agency Rethink for North Vancouver based Parissa, a supplier of hair removal products throughout North America. Marketing and media types were given a heads up to the exercise the day before through a teaser release and seeded mentions in various blogs and on Twitter. Do a search for hairy back and kits beach and you'll see how this stunt generated online and offline interest.

If you've been in a bar in Vancouver recently, you've likely seen a poster or drink coaster promoting the cell phone Breathalyzer. The service available by calling 1-877-EZ-ALCO-TEST, instructs callers to blow into the cell phone microphone for a continuous five seconds. With the endless parade of gadgets and capabilities on cell phones these days, it's easy to see how, with a few drinks, this technology might seem plausible. Think again. Duped callers, following their breath test attempt, are met with the response, "If you actually believe this works, you're probably drunk out of your mind and may require a designated driver; please call Keys Please at 1-866-586-5397. They'll dispatch a driver to get you home safely." Calgary based Keys Please, operates in BC, Alberta and Manitoba. Arguably better than any poster or ad campaign since it strikes at a moment of truth keeping drunks off the road, the surprising humour created a lot of buzz around Vancouver clubs, via talk, text and online groups. The non-traditional campaign won a gold at Canadian advertising industry Marketing Awards in June. Rethink strikes again.

Aside from flat out creativity and the ability to touch the target market in a meaningful and memorable way, these two campaigns achieved a coveted accomplishment: word of mouth and word of mouse. Third party endorsement, from a trusted source, can be one of the most powerful advertising vehicles out there. Smart businesses will continue to strive for this in clever ways while utilizing social networks and online tools that give the message buzz. Social media as an engaged partner are here to stay. Expect to be seated with this summer romance at the Thanksgiving table for some time to come.

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