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Articles

Hitting the promo mark

By: [Joanina Pastoll](#)

This year's Cannes Lions revealed a whole new way of approaching promotions. There's no recipe - but there are some key ingredients.

For those who believe there's nothing new under the sun, may I suggest a visit to the Cannes Lions. While judging the promotion category at this year's festival, I was struck by abundance of fresh ideas that creatives are coming up with to help brands achieve impact and results. Promotions are implementing new cross-platforming innovations and ideas - and they're helping to redefine the category.

Promotions have moved so far from being a simple 'enter and win' tagged on to the end of a brand to generate fleeting interest. What was very clear at Cannes this year was just how much promotions have to offer a brand - if they're done correctly, executed creatively and underpinned by fresh ideas. Cannes witnessed some prime examples of great promotions. Whether they used sampling, tie-ins, competitions, events, in-store advertising, PR, the web, exhibitions or direct marketing (or even a combination of a few of the above) all of them were intrinsically and strategically linked to their brand - and the winners took a uniquely creative approach.

Telling stories

The HBO Voyeur campaign was an excellent example of that first characteristic of a great promotion - fresh, new ideas and a unique and intelligent way to tell a story.



A premium television programming subsidiary of Time Warner, HBO offers two 24-hour pay television services, HBO and Cinemax, to over 38 million US subscribers. The Voyeur campaign goal was to fortify HBO against increasing competition by strengthening the brand's relationship with 'super-fans', who seek intelligent, cutting-edge entertainment experiences. They already recognise HBO as one of the few brands that respects their intelligence so the promotion need to impact the perceptions of an already positively-disposed audience.

In order to impact perceptions among an already positive audience, it wouldn't be enough to tell super-fans that HBO were the leaders at cutting-edge, innovative storytelling - they needed to show them. So HBO Voyeur took the act of watching, already an integral part of the HBO experience, and intensified it.

The Voyeur promotion kicked off in June 2007 with a life-size projection on the side of an apartment building in downtown Manhattan, seemingly providing an unobstructed view of the people and stories inside.

The viewers became essential players within the story, their gaze the very essence of the concept for HBO Voyeur: sometimes the best stories are the ones we were not meant to see. It encouraged viewers to seek more, become a part of the story and engage with the content. Participation beyond passive viewing is critical to HBO super-fans and the promotion managed to engage fans at multiple touch points.

Two weeks before launch, clues and teasers were posted on YouTube and other file sharing networks to create buzz and intrigue. Street teams armed with iPods and PSPs gave New Yorkers a sneak peek of the stories and distributed Go-Cards promoting the screenings.

The result? Some 3,200 people visited the Manhattan event. Over one million users logged on to HBO voyeur.com within the first three weeks (*Google Analytics*). Viewers outside of New York could experience the event in theatres and it aired on TV as well. The web was used as a powerful tool where they showcased the same film that was projected onto the wall. People could zoom in and out of each story. Further exploration on the site revealed a vast city scape populated with even more stories and viewers were invited upon discovering one of these settings to download a movie called "The Watcher". The hippest musicians were contracted to compose the music for each story. The entire experience was enriched with a mobile content element that sent clips and added experiences of the stories to viewers. The campaign was mentioned in over 500 blogs (*Nielsen BuzzMetrics*), prompting conversations and debate. That's buzz you can't buy - and it made the campaign the Grand Prix Promotions winner at Cannes for 2008. (Visit <http://www.hbo.com/voyeur/>, <http://www.hbovoyeur.com/> and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8hLyPS4_08 or <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCr853VVo9c> to check out the campaign.

Getting people involved

Another key characteristic of a great promotion is the ability to create interaction, to get people talking, move them to do something and in so doing, delight them.

The D'oh Thank Heaven promotion with 7-Eleven Convenience Store and *The Simpsons* Movie leaps to mind as an excellent example of this.



At 12am on the morning of 1 July 2007, twelve 7-Eleven convenience stores in North America simultaneously began a transformation that would bring one of the worlds most popular cartoons to life for the first time ever. What were 7-Eleven stores in 12 cities on 30 June, had become by daybreak 12 Kwik-E-Marts, the beloved convenience store that features in *The Simpsons*.

To celebrate the release of the upcoming *The Simpsons* movie, 7-Eleven transformed the store exterior to make it look like a Kwik-E-Mart and stocked its shelves with products that had previously existed only in *The Simpsons* - things like Buzz Cola, Krusty O's cereal, Squishees, Sprinklicious donuts and a limited edition *Radioactive Man* comic book created exclusively for 7-Eleven/Kwik-E-Mart.

To create a true cartoon experience, all interior point of purchase materials were recreated to allow customers to feel as if they had walked into a real cartoon convenience store. An online sweepstakes for the promotion was also created and featured a once-in-a-lifetime prize: the chance to be animated into an actual upcoming episode of *The Simpsons*.



Lines began forming the first day and steadily spread throughout the week to the point where customers were experiencing hour-long waits to get inside. Most stores sold out of products in the first day, requiring emergency shipments of replacement products. Squishee machines had to be shut down due to overheating and some stores were selling as many as 7,000 Sprinklicious donuts a day (which equates to a donut every 13 seconds!).

By day two the online buzz was growing. Kwik-E-Martblogs were created, videos from in-store began to show up on You Tube and Flickr.com housed thousands of Kwik-E-Mart pictures which had almost 1 million views. Over the months, 7-Eleven's website received almost 80 million visits and the story was featured steadily on all major national networks, local affiliates, MTV and in local and national periodicals.

Talk show hosts Jay Leno, Conan O'Brian and Jon Stewart all referenced the Kwik-E-Marts in their interviews and monologues. But most importantly, for 31 days in July 7-Eleven stores were transformed from an eighty-year-old brand into one of the largest pop culture stories of the year. A buzz-worthy endeavour that has both the client and the customers saying: "D'Oh, thank heaven". (And oh, thank you for a Gold Lion!)



Being brave

The previous two promotion examples probably enjoyed the benefit of several million dollars' worth of investment, but money is not the only (or even the most necessary) thing to make a great promotion. Sometimes, just being brave is enough.



Freezing the Game, a Tricom internet promotion in the Dominican Republic, is a great example. The task was to promote Tricom's High Bandwidth internet service, and to do this the team needed to consider a few things. Firstly, for Dominicans there are very few things more important than baseball. The Licey Tigers and the Cibao Eagles are where its at, and when a Dominican doesn't go to the stadium, he follows the game either on TV, through the radio or over the internet. That's why the stadium became the perfect place to promote Tricom's High Bandwidth.

With 30,000 spectators in the arena and more than a million people watching at home the promotions team decided to create a live action on the field that simulated the experience of surfing the web on a slow connection. Prior to the game they rehearsed with the players so that, upon a signal that only they could see, they would freeze, then go back to playing normally and then freeze again. After repeating this a couple of time a person would come out with a sign that read "Live it without the wait with Tricom's High Bandwidth".

The idea was to show the audience what it was like to watch the game through an Internet connection that wasn't Tricom's. The ISP experienced a 23% growth in new subscriptions. Some bloggers published the video on their blogs and it became a viral under the title "The Quisqueya Stadium freezes up". It also received comment the next day in the newspapers, radio and on sports TV shows. And it won a Gold Promo Lion award.

At the end of the day, there is no recipe or fixed formula for a great promotion - but there are some key ingredients. Engagement, understanding your consumer, relevance, strategy, execution, and above all creativity help to unlock greatness. Old-style promotions are dead. Long live the new generation.

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In 1995 three friends, Joanina Pastoll, Janine Rech and Adele Wapnick, broke away from an established advertising and design agency to start something they believed would be more agile, flexible and creative than what clients were used to. They called their agency Cross Colours. Andrew Broom and Craig Wapnick have since joined as partners, and Shona Danckwerts as an executive director. - more....