Chapter 32

From Consumers to Producers:
Engagement through User-Generated Advertising Contests

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ABSTRACT

If reality television is any indication, people have an interest in being known. For some, creating and possibly starring in some form of user-generated content can be a route to being a reality star. The Internet provides a way for consumers to share their documentaries, antics, music videos, and even commercials with other users. Several marketers have capitalized on this trend by combining the desire of users to create their own content with the time-honored concept of a sweepstakes. The purpose of this chapter is to present a model of consumer engagement that encompasses user-generated advertising content. The model will then be placed into context by discussing specific examples from 15 user-generated advertising contests and making theoretical connections for each of the key contest elements.

INTRODUCTION

The declining effectiveness of television advertising has been attributed to viewers who use their DVRs to zip through commercials, shrinking television audiences, and the increase of advertising messages, trends that are expected to continue, according to a 2006 McKinsey & Co. report (Klaassen, 2006). Viewers are also turning to the Internet to watch their favorite programs, in some cases, free of commercial interruptions (Hansell,

2005). Faced with these challenges, advertisers are employing new strategies and looking to the Web for a way to engage consumers in a brand conversation. While consumers have always had some degree of control over the brand, they now have more methods to communicate about their brand experience. Web users have already demonstrated they are eager to share their documentaries, antics, music videos, and even commercials with other users through sites such as YouTube. In response to these challenges and opportunities, advertisers are learning how to harness the energy of consumers willing to create brand content, potentially

creating a higher level of engagement between consumers and brands.

This chapter examines user-generated advertising contests, which are used as a way to motivate consumers to produce advertising content, often a 30-second commercial. Precursors to user-generated advertising include jingle contests and customer testimonials (Klein, 2008). Although much has been written about user-generated advertising contests in trade journals and the mainstream media, no previous study has aggregated these contests to deepen understanding of this trend and its theoretical implications.

The use of the term user-generated advertising can encompass 30-second spots, but also images or films. Advertisers have also solicited other types of user-generated content from consumers such as stories, videos, and photos that are personal expressions of an individual's relationship with a brand. Some user-generated advertising is inspired solely by the producer and is generally created for a product either loved or despised. The foremost example of this type of content is George Masters' homemade iPod commercial, which was posted to his Web site in 2004 and then circulated to 37,000 viewers through blogs and e-mail (Kahney, 2004). This ad is widely regarded as the first consumer-generated commercial that was a "pure ad" and not parody or political commentary (Kahney, 2004).

User-generated content is not a panacea for the advertiser. The risks involve the creation and distribution of subversive messages and the inability of the producer to truly understand the brand and product positioning as well as the audience (Mills, 2006). Consumers can also be critical of this marketing tactic. Heinz's "Top This TV" contest generated online comments that Heinz is lazy and looking for cheap labor (Story, 2007). In addition, although creative costs are lower because the advertiser often relies on the creator to produce the actual spot, the advertiser still has costs associated with promoting and administering the contest as well as promoting the final spot

and paying for media space (Story, 2007). User-generated advertising, however, is a novel concept that has created another way for advertisers to engage with consumers and tap their creativity.

Agency executives have speculated whether user-generated advertising will replace agency-generated advertising (Morrissey, 2006). This trend may create a new role for agencies as they are needed to promote contests that solicit user-generated advertising, drive consumers to the contest Web site, and promote the winning spot, as Frito-Lay's agency Goodby, Silverstein & Partners in San Francisco did for the Doritos contest. Another perspective is that the proliferation of low quality user-generated content may actually create a backlash against its use and be a vindication for advertisers (Snoddy, 2007).

This chapter examines user-generated advertising contests and places them into the context of an engagement model of advertising. This research will examine the various elements of this model—the advertisers, producers, and consumers—in addition to content and media by describing how the contests addressed each element, discussing the theoretical considerations, and offering suggestions for future research. The analysis of user-generated contests also provides insight for practitioners into the variety of ways these contests are administered.

ADVERTISING ENGAGEMENT MODEL

The traditional model of communication is a model of information transmission whereby the source sends a message to a receiver. Lasswell (1948) characterized this process as "who says what to whom in what channel with what effect." Even prior to widespread use of the Internet, Stern (1994) described the shortcomings of the model:

Despite the postulation of noise and feedback, the traditional model fails to capture the interactivity

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