

## For a New Brand, Pepsi Starts the Buzz Online

Stuart Elliott



Posters in stores are part of a campaign to introduce Tava, with flavor names like Brazilian Samba and Mediterranean Fiesta.

A BEVERAGE marketer known for pouring money into splashy ads in the traditional media is taking an unconventional approach with a new product.

The decision by the North American division of Pepsi-Cola, part of PepsiCo, is another sign of the growing use of new media to introduce brands in mainstream categories like packaged goods. Such shifts in media-planning habits by companies like PepsiCo, Coca-Cola, Kraft Foods, Procter & Gamble and Unilever are the reason that spending for ads online is increasing far faster than for any other medium.

Pepsi-Cola North America is bringing out a line of no-calorie, carbonated beverages named Tava — not to be confused, presumably, with Teva, Lava, Kava or just plain java — with a campaign that is bypassing mainstay media like television and print.

Instead, Tava is getting a spirited send-off with its own Web site (tava.com), banner ads, promotions and offbeat stunts like sampling events at popular shops and the delivery of free samples to the employees of prominent companies like Google and MTV.

That would not be an unusual introduction if Tava were intended for the younger consumers who have grown up in a digital world. But the product, which is fruit-flavored and caffeine-free, is being aimed primarily at men and women ages 35 to 49.

"There used to be an assumption this target was not online," said Frank Cooper, vice president for flavored carbonated soft drinks at Pepsi-Cola North America in Purchase, N.Y. "But there's a group in that category that's 'reborn digital.' They've lived through the change and learned to adapt to it."

"This consumer spends significant time online, although what they do may differ from the younger consumer," Mr. Cooper said. "They're not I.M.-ing their friends; they're looking at e-mail or looking up information about travel, music, food."

To help Tava reach the right audience, Mr. Cooper turned to agencies like Tribal DDB Worldwide, the interactive unit of DDB Worldwide, part of the Omnicom Group; TracyLocke, an Omnicom shop that specializes in tasks like promotions aimed at shoppers; Element 79, an Omnicom advertising agency; and Grow Marketing, which creates what it calls "brand experiences" that are meant to generate favorable consumer recommendations (a.k.a. a positive word of mouth).

"The heart of it is creating more of an emotional connection with consumers by tapping into their natural inclination to tell other people about their experiences," said Cassie Hughes,

strategic director at Grow in San Francisco, which also works for marketers like J. Crew, Levi Strauss and Visa.

For Tava, "the strategy was going in to talk to the right few who could fuel the many," she added.

In addition to providing samples to employees of companies like Apple, Bliss Spa, Google and MTV, Pepsi-Cola is giving away Tava at events like the Sundance Film Festival and to customers of businesses like Frank's Chop Shop, a barbershop on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. It will also offer the beverage to arts lovers at plays, concerts and festivals, and to celebrities at locations like the set of the TV soap opera "General Hospital."

According to Ms. Hughes and Mr. Cooper, the campaign is zeroing in on eight major markets where consumers seem to appreciate soft drinks that contain vitamins and bear new-age flavor names like Brazilian Samba, Mediterranean Fiesta and Tahitian Tamure. They are Boston, Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Seattle and Raleigh, N.C.

The online aspects of the campaign extend beyond local markets. The Web sites on which the Tava banner ads are to appear include AOL, chow.com, CitySearch, dailycandy.com, discovery.com, Evite, MSN, oprah.com, People and weather.com.

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"The target spends significant amounts of time online every day," said Christian Dietrich, director for the Pepsi-Cola client business at the Dallas office of Tribal DDB, "not just for utilitarian reasons but for interest-based exploration."

The idea for the banner ads is to "give you that taste, pun intended, for what the brand is about," he added, "and increase your predisposition to click through to the Tava site."

The content of tava.com goes beyond pitches for the product, including downloadable songs from emerging musicians like Deccatree, a rock band from California, and Stephanie McKay, a singer from New York. It also features the work of artists like Amy Guip, an illustrator and photographer, and carries information about arts events like the Boston Arts Festival, the Chicago Jazz Festival and Shakespeare in the Park at Central Park.

"If Tava was a person, this is what he or she would be into," Mr. Dietrich said.

As alluring as a bottom-up marketing strategy for Tava may be, there are risks to forgoing the traditional media to introduce a product.

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Television commercials, for instance, can quickly create awareness for new brands. And inserts in newspapers offer a fast way to distribute millions of cents-off coupons to encourage people to try the product.

In 2005, Pepsi-Cola North America sponsored a campaign without TV commercials to reintroduce a diet cola, Pepsi One. When was the last time you saw someone drinking one?

"The risk is always there that you won't connect to consumers," Mr. Cooper said. "You can come from the top down and not get traction, and you can come from the bottom up and not get traction."

"To build trust between a consumer and a brand, people need to feel they're sharing it with other people instead of a corporation pushing it down on them," he added. "The goal is to have people experience the product on their own terms and turn them into brand ambassadors."

Hmmm. Perhaps the brand ambassadors could locate their embassy on a park and call it Tava on the Green.

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