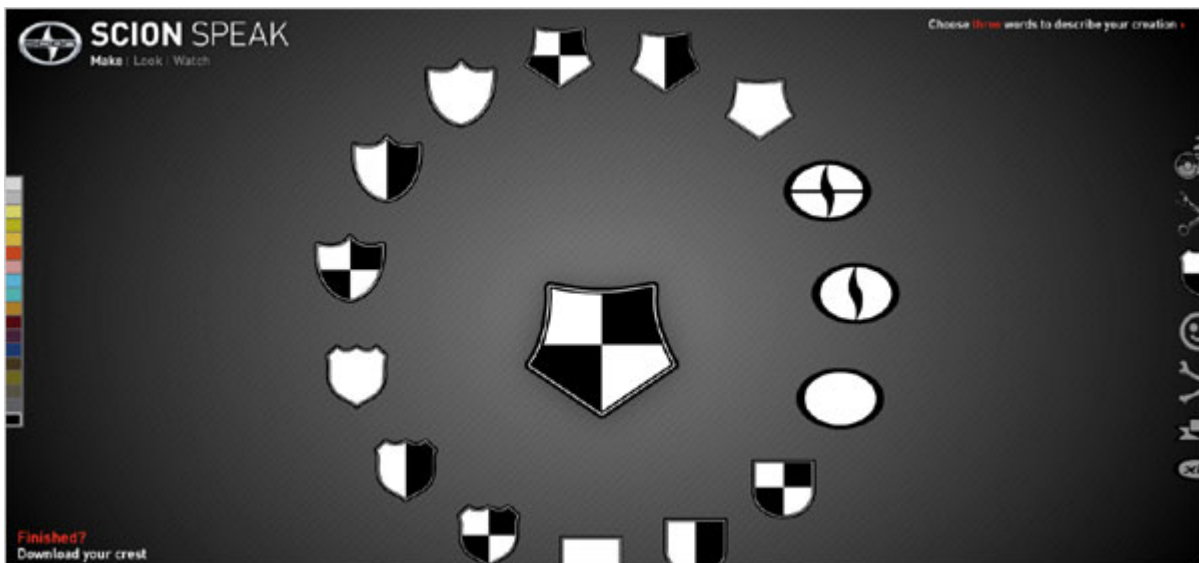


Do-It-Yourself Logos for Proud Scion Owners

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A new Web site for the Toyota brand Scion lets users design a coat of arms.

TOYOTA likes to think of its quirky, boxy Scion as a 21st-century chariot of the soul — not just an affordable car, but also a unique expression of the young, hip person who Toyota hopes is driving it.

Now Toyota's Scion enthusiasts will have even more "me time": a marketing campaign with an underground vibe that is intended to show just how much their chosen transportation reflects their personality.

With an eye to the social networking ethos that has made Facebook and MySpace wildly popular, Toyota will let Scion owners design their own personal "coat of arms" online, a piece of owner-generated art that is meant to reflect their job, hobbies and — um, O.K. — karma.

In making their personalized crests, Scion owners can choose from among hundreds of symbols, all designed by a professional graffiti artist. The symbols range from an eagle, a jester, a king's crown and a worker's fist to Japanese anime-style flowers, a three-person family and a yin-yang circle. Customers can download their designs and have them made into window decals or take them to an auto airbrushing shop to have them professionally painted onto their cars.

The Scion is an economy car aimed at younger, stylish drivers, and the design Web site, scionspeak.com, is free. But Scion enthusiasts must pay for the auto shop renderings of their design, an indulgence that can cost thousands of dollars.

The campaign, called Scion Speak, was created by StrawberryFrog, an advertising and marketing agency based in New York and Amsterdam that is known for its quirkiness and for representing new or hipster brands. The agency spent six months last year escorting a graffiti artist, Tristan Eaton, around New York, Los Angeles and other cities to talk to Scion owners about their lifestyles. Based on those conversations, Mr. Eaton designed the symbols.

"These guys love to personalize their cars, and we give them a tool to do that," said Kevin McKeon, the executive creative director of StrawberryFrog in New York.

At the same time, Scion Speak is meant to be about more than the individual. "We brought the people we're communicating with into the process and had them build the idea with us," Mr. McKeon said. "That's what we find particularly cool from our perspective."

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StrawberryFrog's clients have included Old Navy and Morgan Stanley. The agency was called upon last month to introduce Mahindra, the first line of cars made in India to be sold in the United States. StrawberryFrog helped to introduce SmartCar, a Mercedes brand, in Europe, and it is the main agency for Mitsubishi Motors.

With Scion Speak, Toyota is jumping into one of the hottest nascent fields for marketers: harnessing, imitating and creating social networks to promote a brand.

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As social networking Web sites like Friendster, MySpace and Facebook have risen to popularity, consumer brand companies have been trying to figure out where they can fit in.

Social networking for brand marketers "is all very unexplored territory," said Jim Nail, the chief strategy and marketing officer of Cymfony, a unit of TNS Media Intelligence, in Boston. "These places have been for individuals to connect with one another, and brands have been relatively absent. But the benefit of it is having that very intimate direct conversation with customers."

Mr. McKeon of StrawberryFrog said that Scion Speak reflected social networking trends because it revolved around input from what he called a rabid base of Scion lovers. In one group, fans call themselves "Scikotics," in another "a cult without the Kool-aid."

The "wrong way" to engage in social marketing, Mr. McKeon said, was to "create an artificial social network and try to draw people to it. You have to walk into the conversation, and if they're talking about Britney Spears, you can't say, 'By the way, do you want to hear about my new car?'"

The Scion Speak campaign is aimed not at future Scion owners but at current ones. StrawberryFrog says that it wants "to reduce Scion's investment on conquering new customers and increasing the passion for the brand among its core fan base."

At least some Scion owners who have created their own coats of arms seem pleased with the results. A Scion driver, writing online as Monsterslovecandy, created a design that included a harlequin pattern, crossed wrenches and a phoenix, and wrote on a fan Web site, "I think it came out freaking sweet."

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