



The creation of buzz and fame

Peter Field examines the techniques used to drive word of mouth

MUGH HAS BEEN written in recent years about the effectiveness-enhancing power of 'fame' or 'buzz', as it is variously referred to. Recent analysis of the IPA dataBANK (i) confirms this power, identifying fame as the single most effective broad communications strategy of those examined by the data.

Fame is not simply about generating brand awareness (which turns out to have limited value for most established brands). It is about building word-of-mouth advocacy for the brand - getting it talked about, creating authority for the brand and the sense that it is making most of the running in the category. Fame works - and it makes hard-pressed communications budgets stretch further by getting consumers to do some of the work. Fantastic; but why don't more brands court fame? It is clearly not straightforward to achieve.

A cursory examination of the global case studies in the WARC archive suggests that many more aspired to fame than actually achieved it. And not every brand in a category can achieve fame - for every winner there must be losers. But happily the potency of the strategy is illustrated by many case studies for which word

of mouth played an important part in business success.

Studying these, it becomes clear that there are a number of broad techniques that appear to be important and can, it is to be hoped, inspire your brand. So this article examines these techniques to see what general learning can be gleaned from their use.

Find a taboo to break

The most common fame tactic is to find a relevant 'taboo' to break. So long as the brand is the first to do so, it is guaranteed a new voice in the category and almost always a willing audience in these iconoclastic times. Thus **Angelsoft** (2) discovered that in a US category full of twee euphemisms, there was humour and real engagement to be had in sharing toilet mishap stories. Extensive buzz was created not only by the TV campaign itself, but also by the online competition to encourage people to share their own stories. Despite being massively outspent and with a reduced budget, the brand grew market share.

The **nzgirl** (3) website found a particularly rich way of expressing its 'tell it as it is' angle on life, through the ultimate

public humiliation of an ex-boyfriend. A banner was towed above a massive concert crowd belittling a (fictitious) Scott Kelly in an apparent act of female revenge. Word spread rapidly and Scott Kelly's inventor was later revealed by another banner reading 'Don't mess with nz girls'. The nzgirl website traffic surged by 45% as a result of this NZ\$5,000 stunt.

In similar vein, **OPSM Contact Lenses** (4) created buzz around a scenario in which women who forgo their spectacles in order to look their best fail to spot how ugly a bloke is until it's too late. **Paddy Power** (5) betting landed itself in lucratively deep water by exploring the tendency of gamblers to bet on everyday events, however unacceptable they may be. A poster quoting odds on two elderly people crossing a road in front of a speeding car was banned, but only after a high-profile campaign by OAPs had generated massive fame for the brand. And **Ryvita Minis** (6) diet crackers tapped a rich vein of buzz by celebrating language used by large women but normally avoided by the category. **Philips Norelco** (7) created online buzz for its body shaver with the 'extra optical inch' claim noted in a previous edition of this column.

Rich pickings, then, if your brand can credibly explode a social taboo. But what if not: how else can fame be fabricated?

Create tribal allegiances

Another widely used buzz strategy is to kindle a shared sense of tribal belonging that encourages tribe members to interact through the brand. The **Lynx Pulse** (8) campaign was a great example of this, with its highly successful tribal mating dance: consumer interaction that went way beyond buzz.

The launch of **Monopoly Here & Now** (9) involved the creation of a live online version of the board game to introduce gamers to its new design and get them hooked. With the help of London cab drivers (infamous as propagators of buzz) as part of the online recruitment effort, the campaign achieved record sales and the No.1 slot. The vital contribution of the online game to sales was made clear by



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Starbucks DoubleShot: humour has always been a potent selling tool, but when used to create buzz it can take on a new level of influence

comparison with less impressive mainland European sales where no online game was offered.

The **Travelocity** (10) travelling gnome and supporting website has certainly prompted a segment of travel lovers to share their experiences - good and bad - with others. And watchmaker Lange & Sohne (n) created an evidently unmissable global online event for the tribe of those who measure their worth by the mass of metal they strap to their wrists.

Good old-fashioned creative audacity

Some of the examples already mentioned also benefited from the power of their communications idea to contrast with the conventions of competing brands.

Perhaps one of the most celebrated UK examples of this is **Honda** (12) and its 'cogs' commercial. In many ways a brave commercial - it showed no car (except for a few dismembered parts) - it proved massively successful for the brand. Almost certainly the absence of the car was an important part of the intrigue created by the commercial and the subsequent online buzz that magnified its success. Conventional car marketers take note: the cliched car beauty shot is probably costing you dear in terms of missed buzz.

Similarly, the spectacular **Sony BRAVIA** (13) 'Balls' commercial generated fame and fortune for the brand - when did you last watch 250,000 brightly

coloured plastic balls cascading down a hill in San Francisco? **Oasys Mobile** (14) found an intriguing new angle on ringtones in the US: renamed 'pherotones' the website turned ringtones into a tool for sexual attraction. **Bridgestone Golf** (15), hugely outspent by the big players, needed an unconventional approach to get golfers talking about its balls. The quirky Japanese cry of 'Tobu' did the trick, providing a massive swing for the brand.

Surprising juxtapositions

By now the importance of surprise in generating fame will be clear. No amount of conventional, strategically well-disciplined communication will generate the same level of buzz as a single piece of well-judged unpredictability.

So, not surprisingly, there is a rich vein of fame to be found in campaigns that engineered eye-catching juxtapositions of familiar but usually unconnected elements. When **Xbox 360** (16) launched its *Gears of War* game in Europe, it not only used the conventional game medium of TV, but also expressed the central emotion of the game - desperation - through unconventional floor art. A floor mural at a gaming convention developed into a pavement stencil campaign across Europe. The game became the talk of gamers - that is when they weren't killing locust hordes.

St Louis radio station **KTRS** (17) created local buzz on an impressive scale to

announce its new broadcast rights for local baseball team **St Louis Cardinals**. With just six poster sites and a highly imaginative pseudo-vandalised poster idea, the radio station became the talk of the town. Meanwhile **Standard Bank** (18) in South Africa made branches look like fashion outlets as part of its Achiever-Plan campaign - a novelty that created considerable word of mouth.

Humour

Humour has always been a potent selling tool, but when used to create buzz it can take on a new level of influence, as **Starbucks DoubleShot** (19) discovered. DoubleShot is a double espresso in a can positioned as a morning kick-start product, but it had previously achieved only lacklustre sales. As a humorous illustration of its ability to reawaken the dead, the commercial featured reformed 19803 rock band **Survivor**, singing their signature tune 'Eye of the Tiger' with some amusing new lyrics. Widely pirated, the commercial circulated freely among social networks and the brand received a huge shot in the arm that no conventional commercial would have produced.

Honda's first documented experience of the power of buzz came with its 2000 viral campaign to launch the **Honda HRV** (20) in Europe. Ten humorous short soundless films were shot and sent only •



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1. L Binet and P Field: *Marketing in the Era of Accountability*. WARC, 2007.
2. Angelsoft: Bathroom Moments. Effies, 2006.
3. nzgirl: Scott Kelly. CAANZ, 2004.
4. DPSM Contact Lenses – avoiding the guesswork making contacts. APGA, 2004.
5. Paddy Power: Betting on-line with notoriety. APG, 2001.
6. Ryvita Minis – The campaign that's big in every way. IPA, 2006.
7. Philips Norelco: Bodygroom. Effies, 2007.
8. Lynx Pulse: Proving the value of integration. IPA, 2004.
9. Monopoly Here & Now – Pass GO. Collect £1.5 million: how a radical, experiential approach to communications reinvigorated Monopoly, turning it into the best-selling game of 2005. IPA, 2006.
10. Travelocity: Roaming gnome. Effies, 2006.
11. Lange & Söhne – The Lange time zone event. Euro Effies, 2006.
12. Honda – What happened when Honda started asking questions? IPA, 2004.
13. Sony BRAVIA LCD TV – Balls: making the BRAVIA brand famous through effective social network media. IPA, 2006.
14. Oasys Mobile: Pherotones. Effies, 2007.
15. Bridgestone Golf: Tobu. Effies, 2007.
16. Microsoft Xbox 360 – *Gears of War*. Euro Effies, 2007.
17. KTRS and St Louis Cardinals: Missing Birds. Effies, 2007.
18. Standard Bank – Achiever Campaign. IPA, 2004.
19. Starbucks DoubleShot: Bring on the Day. Effies, 2005.
20. Honda Motor Europe: Infectious laughter. How a viral marketing strategy brought Honda joy. IPA, 2001.
21. Telecom New Zealand – Rubbish Film Festival. CAANZ, 2006.
22. Sony Ericsson – The power of participation. IPA, 2006.

to known contacts of Honda and its agencies. Within weeks, website visits to view the commercials had reached 3,500 per day and interest in the car took off among the intended younger target.

What about user-generated content?

User generated content was once touted as the next big thing in engagement, but seems to have spawned as many cautionary tales as success stories. **Telecom New Zealand** (21) and **Sony Ericsson** (22) are two rare success stories with their 'Rubbish Film Festival' and 'take your best shot with a phone' campaigns respectively.

The secret of fame

There is no single winning formula to fame, but some general observations emerge. It is not sufficient merely to be 'wacky' - successful fame campaigns are unconventional in ways that are intriguing but also observe the strategic discipline of the brand proposition. They are wacky in the right way. ■



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