

For Coors Light, a Night Out That Begins on MySpace

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BEER has long been marketed as a sociable beverage, from a campaign for Budweiser that carried the theme "When gentlemen agree" to the Löwenbräu jingle that began, "Here's to good friends." Now, another beer brand, Coors Light, is extending its presence in the new media with efforts on the social networking Web sites Facebook and MySpace.



To promote a new wide-mouth Coors Light can, two clips of the "perfect pour" have been posted on YouTube. New media like Facebook and MySpace have also been enlisted by Coors Brewing.

The initiatives are part of a campaign known as "Code blue," centered on a "cold activated" feature introduced last year on Coors Light beer bottles: the mountains pictured on the labels turn from white to blue when the beer gets cold enough to drink.

For instance, consumers ages 21 and older will be able to send friends "Code blue" alerts on Facebook.com, inviting them to meet up for a beer — a Coors Light, natch. They can even use Facebook maps to direct their potential brew crew to a nearby bar. The Facebook feature, or application, is scheduled to start early next week.

The "Code blue" campaign, a collaboration among Coors Light agencies, is indicative of the growing interest in the new media among marketers outside the realm of technology products and services.

For example, the Paramount Pictures division of Viacom used Facebook to promote "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull," by offering visitors to the Web site a chance to send friends virtual gifts of the familiar Jones fedora. McDonald's is hosting an elaborate game online (thelostring.com), tied to its sponsorship of the 2008 Summer Olympics.

And the Advertising Council, which coordinates public service campaigns for the ad industry, has its own channel on YouTube (youtube.com/adccouncil).

The social-networking aspects of the "Code blue" campaign came after the maker of Coors Light — the Coors Brewing Company, part of the Molson Coors Brewing Company — took other steps to go beyond traditional advertising like television commercials and print ads.

To help bring out a new "vented wide mouth" can for Coors Light, one of the brand's agencies, Avenue A/Razorfish, created a fanciful video clip of what looks like beer drinkers completing the "perfect pour" and uploaded it in two parts to YouTube.

And for a campaign for Coors and Coors Light beers that was centered on the Super Bowl, Coors Brewing sponsored a user-generated content contest for consumers to create video clips and submit them on Web sites to win prizes.

"We talk a lot internally about '360-ing' our innovations," said Andy England, chief marketing officer at Coors Brewing in Golden, Colo., referring to how executives there seek to use all forms of media to reach potential customers in a comprehensive, 360-degree fashion.

When it comes to the new media, "Everyone, particularly in offline businesses like ours, is still in a very experimental phase," Mr. England said. "We, along with our agencies, are trying to learn what works best and expand on those ideas."

For instance, "if you put a viral video out there," Mr. England said, like the "perfect pour" clips posted on YouTube, "How long should it be? How branded should it be?"

"We place bets in the office about this stuff," he added.

The Facebook application and the Coors Light presence on MySpace (myspace.com/coorslight453) are results of work that is coordinated among agencies including Avenue A/Razorfish, part of the aQuantive unit of the Microsoft Corporation; Draft FCB, part of the Interpublic Group of Companies; and the Integer Group, part of the Omnicom Group.

"In this new world we live in, it's something we're learning to live with," Bill Lindsey, creative director for the Coors Light account at Draft FCB in Chicago, said of the cross-agency collaboration required for new-media initiatives.

The campaign started with a television commercial created by Draft FCB that shows a man in a bar sending "Code blue" text messages to his far-flung friends. Curious to learn why he is so urgently signaling them, they find him in a bar, eager to share with them cold-activated bottles of Coors Light.

Discussions about bringing to life the plot of the spot led to the development of the Facebook application after it was determined that text-messaging elaborate "Code blue" alerts as shown in the commercial using mobile devices would not currently be technologically feasible.

"Facebook is so adept at bringing people together," said Tim Sproul, group creative director in the Portland, Ore., office of Avenue A/Razorfish, "and getting in touch with people quickly throughout the day."

"And if you have anything to pitch in a social environment, it makes sense to pitch beer," he added. "We feel like we're not intrusive in the online experience; we're relevant, by giving people a chance to connect."

"The goal in general to be online is increasing our relevance with our 25-year-old beer drinker," the target audience for Coors Light, Mr. Sproul said.

"It's new and it's uncharted waters," he added, "but we feel like we belong online; we have a place there and a story to tell."

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Brewers like Coors and Anheuser-Busch, which are present on Facebook, MySpace and other social-networking Web sites, describe themselves as alert to concerns about visitors to those sites who are younger than the legal drinking age.

For example, there are age-verification requirements in effect for the "Code blue" Facebook application. And Coors Brewing says its content on Facebook and MySpace will adhere to the advertising and marketing code of the Beer Institute, an industry organization.

The code requires that more than 70 percent of the audience for a medium be 21 or older if beer ads appear there. Facebook and MySpace meet that standard, Coors Brewing says, but the Coors Light content would be removed from either or both Web sites if that were to change.

Those with medical backgrounds, a history of hospital visits or a penchant for watching TV shows like "Grey's Anatomy" may wonder about the advisability of using a medical emergency term like "Code blue" for light-hearted beer ads.

"That definitely came up," Mr. Lindsey of Draft FCB said, laughing. After the discussion "went back and forth," he added, it was determined that "it's so tongue in cheek, so fun, the way we use it," there would be few or no complaints.

"So far we haven't had any pushback," Mr. Lindsey said, "with the medical industry or consumers."

As for what new medium Coors Brewing may turn up in next, Mr. Sproul of Avenue A/Razorfish said his agency was still working on the premise of the TV commercial with text messages sent to mobile devices.

"Imagine being able to 'Code blue' someone on your iPhone," he added, "and say, 'I just got laid off; you better go buy me a Coors Light at the local bar.' "

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