



Interaction and brand management

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Whitepaper

Interaction in Advertising

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Interaction in advertising

Interactive advertising has finally become interactive. Until relatively recently, interaction in advertising meant: 'I show you my ad, you click on it'. Everything was *called* interactive – interactive agencies, interactive campaigns, interactive advertising – but truth be told, there was very little real interaction between a brand and its audience beyond the click.

From 'interactive' to 'interaction'.

In the [Journal of Interactive Advertising's first published issue](#) (Autumn 2000), the editor's introduction defined interactive advertising as: "the paid and unpaid presentation and promotion of products, services and ideas by an identified sponsor through mediated means involving mutual action between consumers and producers". There are two phrases here that deserve particular attention. The first is the prophetic: *Paid and unpaid*. Advertising today is not just about paying for a third party medium to carry the advertiser's message to its audience. Some of the biggest brands in the world today are engaging directly with their audiences to promote themselves through branded online communities, virtual worlds and games, and social media.

The second phrase is: *involving mutual action between consumers and producers*. Early banner ads can't really be described as 'interactive' in this sense. But that is changing, and it is this – the evolution of interaction *within advertising campaigns themselves* (in other words, not what we'll call 'brand extension projects': branded websites, online sponsorships, forums or virtual worlds) – that this paper will examine.

Engaging, not 'eye blasting'

Today's online world is all about engagement: two-way communication with audiences. Everyone's talking about it, lots of brands are struggling with the concept of it, many are starting to do it.

Let's consider briefly what's driven this idea of engagement. It's often said that the shift in the online behaviour of consumers is technology-driven: broadband penetration, personalisation of content (including over mobile), Web 2.0 technologies. But it's unlikely that consumer behaviour has changed as a result of technology; rather that technology now allows consumers to behave online in the way that they have done offline.

Human beings are (for the most part!) natural 'interactors'. We don't like it when someone stands in front of us and shouts at us, or doesn't listen to what we want, or won't let us talk to one another. Online environments let us communicate – not just with each other, but with the brands

we like. We can be heard (if a brand chooses to listen); our opinions count; we can share stuff we like (just like we do in the real world). We ask the opinions of our friends before we commit ourselves to action – whether it's buying a new car, or going to a club, or playing a new game. We like things that make us laugh, or move us, and we talk to each other about them.

The IAB, in its '[Interactive Advertising Outlook 2009](#)', cites that a key trend for 2009 is for advertisers to 'engage with and learn from' their target audiences. But it's interesting that there is still little discussion here of ad formats that support interaction. That's not a criticism of the IAB, but shows that the area of 'advertising engagement' is really still in the hands of early adopters. The [2008 Outlook report](#) talked about user generated content as a key trend, but at that time, the answer was seen by many advertisers to be advertising on social networks to capitalise on this trend. And yet [a presentation by uVizz](#) claims that for every 10,000 times an ad is shown on Facebook, it is clicked on just 8 times. Hardly engagement nirvana.

The fundamental issue is that people use social networks to interact with their friends, not with advertisers. It will be interesting to see how uVizz is received by users: it works by helping advertisers to engage users by creating viral video from user generated content – rewarding both the content generators and those who distribute the viral. Users effectively create ads themselves, get rewarded for doing so, and share the ads with their friends.

'No-one likes being interrupted'

Advertisers are recognising the importance of considering engagement within their advertising campaigns. Let's be really clear here – what we're talking about is engagement within the ad campaign itself. In 2008, two superb blog posts on iMediaconnection from Jim McNiven, the managing director of [Kerb](#), [considers the benefits of 'engagement' over 'eye blasting' in online advertising formats](#) . In the [first post](#) he likens the existing online ad formats to interruptions, saying:

" ... the use of engagement to deliver a message, rather than the interruption method preferred by online display advertising. A consumer is much more likely to connect with a message that they have chosen to listen to than one forced upon them, especially given that an interruption advert by its very nature stops the user from doing something that they have chosen to do. The implicit brand message gleaned from interruption advertising is: 'We stop you from doing the things you enjoy'.

In recognition of this, some excellent campaigns are offering interactive rewards in return for the click – for example, the award-winning [Pringles Can Hands ad](#) is a polite banner which pokes fun at the click-through concept. Every time the user clicks on the ad, it refreshes with a humorous new message. In effect the ad itself begins talking to the viewer, challenging them to keep on clicking.

But taking this much further, Forrester's Josh Bernoff [talks about the growing trend of introducing social elements to advertising campaigns](#), and cites the importance of building communities ahead of expecting consumers to jump in and endorse (and in some cases, create) your advertising campaign. He outlines three stages to engagement within advertising (quoting Microsoft's 'I'm a PC' campaign as an example of a campaign that engaged users to contribute content), in order to give a campaign a clearly defined beginning and end. This is summarised here as:

1. Create a launch plan, to engage users within a community, so you have a base of loyal 'fans' who will engage with your ad campaign as the early adopters, bringing others in through word of mouth.
2. Pay attention to your customers' participation in the campaign, and be prepared to make changes if necessary. Get involved. In Bernoff's words: 'importantly, your company has to participate...the feedback from you is the fuel that will keep things going.'
3. Understand how you will close the campaign. Will it leave you with a dormant community? Can you continue your interaction with that community after the campaign has ended?

Who's doing it, and how?

There are five main ways that we see currently to engage users in ad campaigns.

The first is to **carry engagement one step further**. This can be done by addressing the audience personally: making them feel there is a genuine conversation taking place with the brand, as [Vitaminwater did](#) by means of giant Transvision Screens, installed in 17 key cities, targeting passers-by with personal messages like: "Hey you in the pink top yeah you taking my photo, say cheese!"

Or engage by targeting very closely and providing your audience with exactly the right kind of engaging entertainment: Nestle launched Kit Kat Chunky Cookies and Cream in their first [all-digital campaign](#). The campaign centred around a new sport – "Chunga" for teenage boys to 'Break the Boredom' using Kit Kat Chunky as playing pieces in a game with the games' greatest player, Hans Fagerlund (who was given his own presence on social media and gaming sites such as MySpace). The campaign results were impressive with 58 percent of all Aussie teen boys online engaged with Hans; a total of 44,000 Chunga game plays and an average playing time of seven minutes.

[Oakley's snow goggles product launch](#) was supported by a custom '[advergame](#)', which allowed users to challenge their friends and try to claim the top spot on leader board. In four months, the campaign snagged 324,294 clicks and an average brand exposure of 24 seconds. The banners alone delivered more than 64,600 clicks, an average interaction rate of 24.8%, and 153,800 "game plays," effectively driving awareness and sales of Oakley's Goggles.

Another great example of engagement and interactivity was [The Travel Channel's Kidnap! game](#), a Facebook app developed to drive traffic to and engagement with the Travel Channel. The app challenges users to "kidnap" their friends to their favourite hideout city using a variety of methods. To escape from the hideout city and begin kidnapping their own friends, kidnapped players must answer a trivia question related to that city. It quickly became the #1 branded application on Facebook and drove more traffic than Google, Yahoo, and MSN combined. As a result of the campaign, at the time of writing this, Travel Channel was approaching 1/4 Billion kidnaps and averaging 2 million monthly users. It also accomplished its goal of engaging a younger audience as two-thirds of players were aged 18-35 and 36%, 26-35.

The second is to **incentivise consumers to participate**. Walkers Crisps, in its [campaign to promote the new 'Sensations' range](#), encourages consumers to describe their favourite crisp flavour in 160 characters, in order to win a box of Sensations crisps. This is really an online take of a tried and tested tactic – 'describe in your own words why you love X to win Y'; it appeals to brand 'fans' – i.e. people who want to win the crisps. A similar campaign is from fast food brand Chick Fil-A where participants upload photos of their faces which take part in a grandstand '[chicken wave](#)'. The first 250,000 entries receive a coupon for a chicken sandwich.

Atari ran the [Tomb Raider Challenge](#) with a global treasure hunt to find Lara and a downloadable desktop featuring exclusive footage of Lara Croft. Daily clues sent users to the Google Earth plug-in to conduct their search, rewarded with prizes for the first to find the eponymous heroine. [The results were exceptional](#), with absolute unique visitors to the campaign reaching 56,218 and 286,616 brand experiences recorded. Desktop Lara, the key to an ongoing relationship with the audience, was downloaded 42,662 times.

The third is to **elicit help from consumers in creating an ad, or developing a product**. A great example of this comes from Hyundai, which recently completed a campaign, "Edit Your Own", to promote the new Genesis Coupe. Participants were invited to edit their own version of an ad that saw them take the car for a virtual test drive, using clips and music provided by Hyundai, and adding their own titles and effects. The winning cut is due to be promoted through web advertising in late 2009.

Tourism Queensland's "[Best Job in the World](#)" scooped up awards with a campaign illustrative of the enormous global impact interactive advertising can deliver when deployed across multiple platforms. It created an international job search to fill the "best job in the world"—an onsite, live-in manager of an island on the Great Barrier Reef. The central component of the campaign consisted of social media, which was integrated with traditional media around the globe and leveraged the potential of consumers' engagement and their zeal for generating their own content. Potential applicants were asked to create a one minute video and post it to a site where the winner would be selected. At the end of the campaign, close to 35,000 individual videos from 197 countries were uploaded. On an estimated advertising budget of \$1.2 million, the campaign garnered media attention worldwide valued at \$165 million.

[Vitamin Water is running a campaign](#) with an interesting twist on content creation. It is crowdsourcing by encouraging Facebook members to download a shareable application which lets them vote for a new Vitamin Water flavour. They can choose from 10 flavours (which in turn have been chosen by the amount each flavour is discussed in online conversations). Voters can also specify the vitamin content, write the ad copy, and design the packaging – with \$5000 for the winner.

[Jim Beam's "The Remake" ad](#) contest solicited spoofs of a series of Jim Beam commercials with a grand prize that included a trip to Las Vegas, \$25,000 cash prize, and the chance to have the winning video posted to [jimbeam.com](#). It generated 312,668 unique visitors with 1,376,642 million page views since the campaign launch.

The fourth is to **create an advertising campaign that *is* the community**. [Cesar's 'I promise' campaign](#) involved pet owners by encouraging them to pledge promises to their pets within a dedicated Cesar site.

A campaign just begun at the time of writing is one created for Orange by [Poke London](#). Addressing an audience who spend more time on social media than they do watching TV, "[The Sound of Orange RockCorps](#)" invites users via MySpace, Bebo, Facebook Twitter and Flickr to create their own unique soundtracks using sounds created by their Facebook mates and Orange Rockcorps volunteers. When finished, a keyboard of faces chosen by the users plays the tracks. Hugely viral and very entertaining: too early to see the results yet, but it should raise awareness of the Orange RockCorps community volunteer programme.

The fifth is to **create a sense of community around an existing campaign**. The best example of this currently, and arguably the campaign that's elicited the most response from consumers this year (certainly in the UK) is the much-loved 'Compare the Market / Compare the Meerkat' campaign, created by VCCP for comparethemarket.com. While the initial TV campaign was 'traditional' advertising, it is the subsequent online engagement campaign that is interesting. A 'comparethemeerkat.com' website was created in parallel to the real site, depicting a fictional Moscow-based company, whose CEO is meerkat Aleksandr Orlov. At the time of writing, Orlov has more than 26,000 fans on his own [Twitter feed](#), well over half a million fans on Facebook, and regularly interacts with his followers. Complete storylines keep this engagement alive (at the time of writing, Orlov is communicating to fans the development of a 'special project' with his sidekick Sergei) – probably well past the expiry date of the original campaign had it been run without the online element. There is even now a campaign from Orlov to put Orlov's catchphrase, 'simples', in the Oxford dictionary. It is an inspired mix of 'traditional' and engagement advertising, mixing real and surreal, online and offline, and a great example of how to interact with consumers by creating a sense of community around an advertising campaign.

But does all this interaction have a positive financial impact? Yes, according to the [Engagementdb Report](#), which states:

"... this landmark study has found that the most valuable brands in the world are experiencing a direct correlation between top financial performance and deep social media engagement. The relationship is apparent and significant: socially engaged companies are in fact more financially successful."

So, let's assume engagement and interaction are Good Things. What are the implications for brands that interact with consumers within their advertising campaigns?

Brand reputation

The most pressing issue is that of brand reputation. Pre-interaction, when advertising was measured on a combination of brand recall and whether the chairman drove past his company's ad billboard on his way to work, life was simple: we tell you what's good about us, and you either react... or not (either way, we'll never really know).

But now, it's all much more transparent. If an advertiser is actively encouraging consumers to comment, upload content and interact with an ad, they are effectively handing over control of content and messages to users. [Statistics from e-Tailing Group](#) show that 49 per cent of brands

are worried that social media engagement would let 'people trash my products in front of large audiences' (although 93 per cent of companies surveyed said they are 'seeking greater customer engagement through social-media efforts').

Skittles got this wrong earlier in the year when it turned its home page over to a live Twitter feed. What started as a bold experiment with social media ended up with [Skittles backtracking hurriedly](#), as users flooded the feed with swearwords and content with which Skittles clearly would not want to be associated. Moderation has a clear role to play here. The Skittles example is a stark reminder of how the best ideas can come back to bite you, if you allow complete free rein to consumers. To be clear: we are not advocating censorship. If you are to interact with consumers, they need to have the freedom to say what they think about you – good or bad (see 'responsiveness' section below). But brands should protect themselves from association with content that is offensive, abusive, or harmful – or at worst, illegal. They also have a duty of care to other consumers who might view that content.

Responsiveness

The great (or frightening?) thing about interactive advertising that uses content from consumers is that it can give you close insight into what those consumers think of your product (and your campaign). How you respond to that can be the difference between a positive interactive experience and a negative one. Jeremiah Owyang keeps an updated list of ['Brands that Got Punk'd by Social Media'](#) from which the recent Asus competition stands out as an example of where an attempt at a (cheap) ad campaign which asked readers to vote for their favourite blog reviewer backfired. Readers chose an unfavourable review of an Asus product, and, in a masterstroke of inappropriate response, Asus changed the competition rules to allow another review to win - with the predictable backlash from voters, and a less-than-adequate explanation from Asus.

Responding effectively to negative feedback takes dedicated resource, and a significant commitment from the brand. Dell, which was publically burned by 'Dell Hell' blogs back in 2005, launched 'DellIdeaStorm.com' in 2007, a social site where consumers are invited to make suggestions for products and services – of which 50 have been implemented, according to the company. Listening and responding is a huge area in itself, and one we have [discussed in some detail](#) over on our blog.

How should you approach interaction with consumers through advertising?

We've compiled a list of things that, in our experience, advertisers should consider (and address) before embarking on an interactive campaign. If you have others, we'd love to hear them on [our blog](#).

- **What are you trying to achieve?** Are you interacting for the sake of it, or do you have a long-term objective to engage with users? Does this interaction support the business and overall marketing objectives?
- **Who are you targeting?** Are the people who are likely to participate in your campaign the people that you want to reach (i.e. the target audience that will have the most positive impact on the business)?
- **How are you going to encourage people to participate?** Consider a crowdsourcing strategy to encourage users to bring other users in to the campaign. To achieve this, the campaign must be compelling enough for users to want to get other people involved.
- **Are you offering them the right level of incentive to take part?** This incentive might be financial or product-related, but equally could be recognition, self-promotion, or just the chance to experience something new. Create a positive experience for users, and they'll want to take part (and tell their friends about it, too).
- **What does success look like?** How many people will it take to get involved for the campaign to be a success? What will those people have done, or what will they do next? Can you keep them engaged after the end of the campaign? And what if no-one responds? Consider testing the idea with a small group before you dive in to a live launch.
- **Are you set up to respond quickly?** If you get negative feedback or a question from a user, will you spot it? And can you respond quickly? If you're expecting consumers to interact with you, you must be prepared to respond quickly to them.
- **Are you prepared to listen to negative as well as positive feedback?** A campaign that simply blocks negative response will soon turn consumers away. Responding, however, could turn a negative comment into a positive experience. A campaign should

differentiate between negative feedback, and offensive content (which should be moderated, and filtered out – to protect both the brand, and its consumers).

- **Agree your approach to moderating comment / user-generated content.** Set clear terms of use for participants, and enforce them. At the very least, be prepared to filter offensive or illegal content. Set moderation in place to ensure participants stay within the rules of engagement.

In summary

The rules of advertising have changed: static content is not enough to engage consumers any more. This presents a huge opportunity for agencies to show creativity, and demonstrate the value of their campaigns through engagement with consumers.

Granted, it can feel like a leap into the unknown for brands who are used to controlling messages and content in their advertising campaigns. But the rewards – engaged users and a community of loyal customers – could be immense.

About eModeration

Founded in 2002, eModeration Limited is an international, specialist user-generated content moderation company. It provides multilingual community management and content moderation to clients in the entertainment and digital publishing industry and major corporate clients hosting online communities and consumer-driven projects.

eModeration's CEO and founder, Tamara Littleton, has an established background in editorial quality control, fault escalation and process management gained from previous work as the Product Delivery Director for Chello Broadband and Online Operations Manager for BBC Online, where she managed the world's first ISO 9000-accredited team for digital publishing management and monitored over 400 BBC websites. Tamara Littleton is a member of the Home Office Internet Taskforce for Child Protection on the Internet which brings together government, law enforcement, children's agencies and the internet industry, who are all working to ensure that children can use the internet in safety. She was also the Chair of emint, the online community for community professionals from 2006-2007.

eModeration's team of moderators and staff are the key to eModeration's success and excellent client list. eModeration draws on the expertise of carefully recruited and trained moderators located mainly in the US and Europe with specialist editorial and community moderation skills, which are matched uniquely to the client. The company can moderate 24/7 in more than 30 languages. All its moderators are managed online from eModeration's headquarters in London, United Kingdom.

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