

Disrupting Boundaries

How understanding a tribe of “Urban

In the spring of 2005, as Sony PlayStation prepared to launch its new portable gaming device, the PlayStation Portable (PSP), it faced a number of challenges. While PlayStation was undeniably the number-one gaming platform in the world, Sony PlayStation’s PS2 was entering its fourth year in an industry where product lifecycles last five years or less. Additionally, Nintendo held a 98% market share of the existing portable gaming market, and was made up largely (80%) of kids under 17 years old. This contributed to the perception that handhelds were electronic babysitters. No brand had ever taken the handheld market into a serious gaming or adult territory.

Fortunately, Sony PlayStation PSP delivered the necessary product innovation; however, in order to succeed, Sony would need to be equally innovative in understanding and connecting with its ideal target audience.

We started our analysis by examining the polarizing pull of two macro trends affecting contemporary adults.

On one hand, young adults have never felt more overworked and overwhelmed—they weren’t even taking their vacation time. So strong was the current that the *Baltimore Sun* summarized it by saying, “Life is moving too fast. We can feel it rushing through our bones. Our work, diet, health, or relationships and sex lives are all suffering. We feel like we’re rushing through our lives rather than living them. We no longer have the time to connect with anyone or anything properly.” Even *Fast Company*, once the champion of work on one’s own terms and “free agent” status for all, was not optimistic.

Concurrently, and on the opposite end of the spectrum, leisure has become more important than ever. Consumers are now looking for entertainment in everything they do. According to Michael Wolf, author of *The Entertainment Economy*, the



Nomads” fueled the success of Sony’s PSP.

rate of personal savings has declined to a 63-year low of 2.1%, while entertainment spending is at a high of 8.4% of total consumer expenditures. Even the channels are evolving, with the number of U.S. households playing games on their cell phones climbing to 16.3 million — double that of last year.

Our team used an anthropological approach to get a closer look at the culture swell beneath these attitudes and behavior. Our hypothesis was that consumers are forever moving from one point to another, both physically and mentally. Being in a state of constant motion is part of everyday life. Movement and adaptability to change are emerging as the new values of the urban condition. We are, in fact, the new nomads. Obviously, the cell phone was a huge driver of this new mobility, much the way anthropologists and historians believe it was the “yurt” (or movable tent) that got man out of the caves and down to the river.

So if the cell phone is today’s “yurt,” what other tribal tools did we need to learn about?

We found that today’s “Urban Nomads” rely on turbo-boosting tools and techniques to help them survive the shift from multi-tasking to hyper-tasking, and to manage the intense and compulsive connectivity they cannot live without. Often described as the ADD Generation (Attention Deficit Disorder), 66% of this group watches TV while online, and wouldn’t limit themselves to having one conversation at a time. They are responsible for creating markets for new turbo-boosting fuels, including Power Gel, Jolt Gum, Red Bull, Budweiser’s caffeinated beer, and even the absurd — caffeinated soap.

Always on the go, “Urban Nomads” consequently crave opportunities to connect with other members of their tribe. This “addict-like” behavior, often referred to as the need for online oxygen, can be

“scored” thanks to the institutionalization of WiFi by the likes of Starbucks and even McDonalds. Properly caffeinated, this tribe is driving not only the ubiquity, but the new dimensions of Web 2.0, helping to migrate its dominance from PC desktops to portable devices.

Beyond their need for connection, we looked for other ways that “Urban



Nomads” expressed themselves. We found that play, fashion, technology and design were all means for “Urban Nomads” to represent and define themselves.

This is an audience that values discovery and has a pathological need for self-expression. They read niche publications and subscribe to the personal blogs of those they find authentic, interesting, honest, or merely entertaining. And since “Urban Nomads” bring their identity with them everywhere they travel, they believe that all technology should be fashionable and ultimately a form of personal or tribal expression, as demonstrated by girls in Southeast Asia who wear their mobile

phones as functional jewelry, and in Finland, where a mobile phone is referred to as “Kanny” — an extension of the hand.

The bottom line is that “Urban Nomads” are a new breed of consumer driving the demand for portable devices that will give them control, customization and creative license with their experiences. This is not a generation that will watch, listen or play *content*. Instead, “Urban Nomads” create, produce and participate in *experiences*. Whether it is camera phones, portable video recorders, or blog-enabled communicators, this group feels a need to capture, play and share their lives with others in real time.

Clearly, to successfully launch the PSP, we would need a fresh way of engaging this audience, and it would begin by positioning the PSP as more than a portable gaming device. For “Urban Nomads” who believe life has no boundaries, the PSP would be fuel for life.

Our communications and connections strategies needed to reflect the insights that our anthropological approach uncovered; specifically, that our audience’s greatest fear was that of being bored, and that they were constantly on the hunt for stimulation. Our audience would not accept restrictions on choice or options. And finally, discovery is key. Our audience is always looking to be the first to find the next new thing and spread the word.

Our connections strategy leveraged these insights, erasing the boundaries of standard communication channels and allowing the “Urban Nomads” to discover PSP as part of their daily nomadic experience.

The first phase of the communications strategy was to infiltrate the Urban Nomad lifestyle, generate buzz and reframe PSP in a relevant way. This included a robust outdoor campaign in high-traffic urban areas, all places where video game brands had never been seen before. Additionally, we intercepted our audience in →

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← entertainment and community sites online where they were either looking to discover something new, or socialize with other members of their tribe. The objective of this first phase was less about driving next-day sales, but rather to create a cultural wave and encouraging our audience to invent the dialog about it.

Reflecting our audience's penchant for customization and creativity, we blended expected and unexpected media genres and channels. During the week of the launch, we sponsored a fashion show in L.A. where Marc Jacobs, Coach, J.Lo, Phat Farm and other famous designers showcased a range of accessories, cases and clothes created specifically for the PSP. In hindsight, this proved to be the first step in elevating the PSP out of the portable gaming and toy ghetto into the haute-couture of high fashion with the

excitement of a "Hollywood premiere." The wave swelled, the buzz was deafening, and Sony sold 500,000 units in the first 24 hours.

In Phase II of the communications strategy, the goal was to continue to legitimize this new entertainment platform by showcasing innovation in both technology and entertainment. We stayed "true to the tribe" by mastering the language of the streets, making it easy for our audience to "Find it, Pass it and Check it."

Find It. By seeding the urban nomad our creative message through innovative graffiti executions — on their turf — our audience could use the power of art to naturally discover and disseminate the PSP message to their network of other urban influencers.

Because art offers ideas that reveal

greater truths, challenge us, and force our everyday thinking to evolve, we created a series of unified graffiti images featuring seemingly hypnotized kids playing with various toys, but replacing each toy scenario with a PSP. With no words and no logos (just paint) the approach was highly disruptive when compared to standard gaming communications, as the work seemed more like street art than an advertisement. The creative cleverly demonstrated that the PSP would push the boundaries of entertainment, while also sending our target a resonating message that the PSP wasn't for kids.

The discovery element associated with the out-of-home campaign allowed our audience to "pass" the message via word-of-mouth, blogs and bulletins, and begin a buzz that ultimately led to a mainstream audience checking it out.



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Hand-painted graffiti murals, smaller individual tags and sidewalk branding appeared on the private properties of stores, vacant walls, garages and back alleys. In New York City, iron gates were also hand-painted in neighborhoods south of 34th Street like the Meatpacking District and the Lower East Side, where the “Urban Nomad” lives and plays. To ensure the

culture, almost like online graffiti.

In order for the videos to become social currency, and allow those discovering it to take ownership of it and pass the message on to their peers, they had to be entertaining. With more than four-million views in just four weeks, dynamic peer-to-peer communication placed the videos into culture, giving meaning, credibility

media space and use the breakthrough creative to connect with our audience in a way that would change the way that they were used to consuming media. The launch of the PSP was a huge success, as we were able to break through and disrupt the category on so many levels (*see chart*).

Currently all six major studios have agreements to release movies on the UMD format exclusively for the PSP. Unlike the early days of the DVD market, where it took nine months for the first DVD movie to top 100,000 units, roughly 10 UMD movies have already sold more than 100,000 units in just six months after launch.

In fact, the UMD adoption by the movie studios is so fast that currently there are more than 150 movie UMDs available at retail, roughly three times the number of UMD video games. PlayStation exceeded its annual sales goals in just the 10 months since its launch.

In summary, consumer insight is at the heart of any brand or product’s success. The conventional methods of probing consumers in order to extract an actionable insight is as unlikely as recruiting a “virgin” focus group respondent. Actionable insights can’t be described as much as they can be observed and experienced. They are both elusive and ubiquitous, and it’s important to look at the whole picture before passing judgment.

Who knew the key to understanding and motivating contemporary adults today lay in the behavior of man leaving the cave for the “yurt” many eons ago? ■

	Convention	Disruption
Target	Kids	→ “Urban Nomads”
Product	Gaming	→ Entertainment
Creative	Color Game Footage Selects	→ B&W Graffiti
Media	One-way TV Broadcast	→ Dynamic P2P Conversation

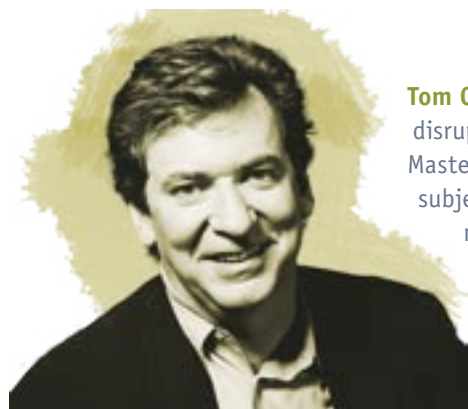
messages fit seamlessly into the surrounding environments, every single location was hand-picked, and a series of intricate negotiations took place for each execution. Despite the appearance of being off-the-cuff graffiti, all placements had the consent of the property owner.

Pass it. Just as the Urban Nomads were finding the PSP message naturally within their everyday environments, an online viral campaign was introduced. Three highly entertaining black-and-white, hand-drawn viral animation videos were created to look as if they simply bubbled up organically out of the urban

and attention to the PSP message that disrupted the conventional gaming approach of one-way communication.

Check it. Once the Urban Nomad leaders had legitimized the PSP message, the mainstream would be ready to check it out. More traditional media elements were used to convey the PSP message to a larger audience. The viral video characters were transformed into television spots with a call-to-action — to play and interact with the PSP.

Whether it was outdoor, online viral, TV or a dust-ball myspace.com page, our strategy was to reinvent the traditional



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To learn more about “Urban Nomads” or how Disruption can help your company to gain a larger share of the future, please contact laurie.coots@tbwaworld.com or 212.804.1000