

Near-Sited Spectacles

Associating your brand with a mega-event is sometimes a little like the scene in the 1979 movie, *The Jerk*, where Steve Martin's character, Navin Johnson, finds his name in the phone book for the first time and declares, "I'm finally somebody!"

Yes, the appearance of your brand's name at a mega event like the Olympic Games or the next leg of Radiohead's U.S. tour might also make you feel like *somebody*. But it doesn't necessarily mean you have accomplished anything more than the marketing equivalent of having your name in the phone book.

Whether or not you truly *are* somebody obviously is a function of your relevance to your audience. Traditionally, brands buy their way into that kind of relevance through sponsorships, which can be very effective. But there is another, alternative approach that I call "near-sited spectacles."

A "near-sited spectacle" involves identifying the experiential path your customers follow around an event and then focusing on enhancing that experience.

Take the Olympics, for example. The 2008 Games will be the first Summer Games where substantial web-video viewing will be available. NBC Universal will be running a number of cross-platform marketing efforts in the U.S. for this event. The time difference between the actual competition and when it airs on television will serve as an added web driver above and beyond typical web audiences, because interested spectators will not wait for the telecast to learn the results of their favorite events.

The most important question concerns *where* your customers will be watching the Olympic Games. The answer is that web-video watching takes place most often at work. In fact, Nielson Online reported that

more than 90 percent of March Madness video viewers at NCAAAsports.com were at work, a viewing location that is great for B-2-B and B-2-C marketers alike. These viewers accounted for 80 percent of the total videos watched and 74 percent of time spent viewing.

According to a recent Harris Interactive survey of most-watched online video content by U.S. adults, "news" is the most-watched type of online video, followed by "full-length shows, movies, and sporting events," and, finally, "comedy." Based on this, it is highly likely your customers will be watching more video news and bloopers online than they will pure, Olympic content. So, while you might want some placement with NBC and The Olympics' official sites, you should also consider sites and blogs where your customers are most inclined to view news and comedy videos.

In fact, you can expect ComScore's top-10 ranking of online video properties by unique visitors to carry a large portion of Olympic content viewership. These properties, in order, are Google's sites (including YouTube), as well as Fox Interactive, Yahoo! sites, Viacom Digital, Microsoft sites, Time Warner, AOL, Disney Online, ESPN and CBS. Local news portals and blogs will have substantial traffic, as well.

THE OPTI-GRAB!

Speaking of YouTube, go to the site and search for "The Jerk 1979" to watch the movie's original trailer, in which Navin's invention, the Opti-Grab, turns him into an overnight millionaire. But the product's inherent flaw creates problems for consumers. Consequently, Navin loses a class-action lawsuit and is relegated to writing 10 million personal checks in the amount of \$1.09 each.

Just like the Opti-Grab, video on the web sometimes has issues, particularly with distribution rights, that can lead to content being pulled before the total potential audience is realized. But there are plenty of official and unofficial places to be a part

of an event's video experience. Just make sure your plans are not heavily dependent on sites that are known for posting content that ultimately is pulled.

Many of your customers will also be surfing the web while watching TV to view celebrity and athlete profiles, upcoming events, recaps and reviews, and products and services that are advertised or appear during the programming. Thinking about those associations is another way to integrate with the event broadcast more closely.

CALLING THE KARMA POLICE

To illustrate a potential customer experience pathway, consider Radiohead's current concert tour, a major event throughout this summer. I attended one of the first shows a few weeks ago. As we were walking in the front gates at Superpages.com Center in Dallas, we came across a station wagon covered in faux bird droppings with a sign on it that read, "Need a carwash? We know where the closest ones are. Superpages.com." While the vehicle was strategically placed and captured our attention, it was not an enhanced, relevant, Radiohead experience.

Going "near sited" for Radiohead actually can be pretty easy. It doesn't require naming rights to a concert venue or parking a messy car by the front gates. Google "Radiohead North American Tour." You'll see that Pitchfork.com is providing up-to-the-minute news on the tour, and American Apparel is advertising concert-appropriate clothes. In addition, eBay is on greenplastic.com offering hard-to-find Radiohead items that the band's real fans want, in language they understand.

Imagine, through some research and reference, that Radiohead, in an indirect way, could perform a jingle for you. Sound like a lot of work? Not really. Google "Radiohead lyrics" (as a lot of fans did before and after the concert), and Greenplastic.com pops up as a leading site offering Radiohead lyrics and information. Spend a few minutes there and you will find key lyrics and themes that might be used to express the relevancy of your brand.

No need to bring a camera or recording device to the concert, as pictures and video of the performances can be found on Flickr and YouTube, among other sites. Go to YouTube and type in "Radio Head Dallas." Or, search on Google for a favorite Radiohead song, such as "Karma Police," and listen and view performances and videos from a variety of sites, of all which hold tremendous potential for near-sited placement.

After a concert, a lot of fans look up the set list of the songs performed at the show on Ateaseweb.com and use the information to create playlists for their iPods. iTunes has the music and houses personal playlists for more than half of the U.S. market. There are also numerous ways Radiohead fans engage via handheld devices. Just ask—they're more than happy to show you their iPhones.

Your brand can be in all of these places with messaging that enhances the experience. Look at Superpages.com, for instance. Imagine if they near-sited Radiohead by following the fan path with their car-wash message. A few placements on Pitchfork.com, Greenplastic.com, Ateaseweb.com or YouTube with a simple message that might be something like, "Karma Police Warning, Clean Car = Good Karma. Follow us to the closest wash by clicking here."

It's easy to surmise that Superpages' click-through rate and relevant recall would be much higher than the car placed at the front gates.

Magnify mega-events through a micro-lens

Taking a similar, before-during-and-after look at the path your customers will take for any mega-event can work in your favor. Identify the audience, find the attractor, explore the interactions and build relevant communication and offers that enhance the experience. For the Summer Olympic Games, you might focus on the path for gymnastics, or international travelers interested in Chinese culture.

The miracle of going near-sited is that you can test on a very small and inexpensive scale, then expand on what works. *Voila*, you're no longer *The Jerk* at the front gate. Instead, the *Karma Police* are working for you and you've become "somebody" with a meaningful place in your customers' experience.

If you'd like more detail on going near-sited or a copy of an upcoming mega-events calendar, email me at rmason@hawkeyeww.com.

Now go out there and be somebody! ■



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