

# Scion Speak

**O**ur business objective was simple: Ignite love and passion for Toyota Scion “culture” among existing owners, and let these like-minded fans spread the word.

We accomplished that goal by creating “Scion Speak” as an online social-networking tool that allows Toyota Scion owners to meet and communicate with each other in both the online and real worlds.

We started from a very personal level because StrawberryFrog’s own Monica Svetak is not only our resident ethnographer, but also a Scion owner herself. She knew, just from driving around in her car and interacting with other drivers, that the Scion owner is part of something special.

As one Scion enthusiast put it: “It’s more than just a car, it’s a community and an outlet for you to be creative.” Or, as another said: “Scion’s like a cult without the Kool-Aid.”

More than anything, the Scion brand stands for personal expression. So, we developed a virtual language of hundreds of design symbols that Scion owners could use to express themselves. For example, Scion Speak symbols can communicate what kind of music you’re into, what type of relationship you’re in and where you’re from.

To see how this works, visit [scionspeak.com](http://scionspeak.com), where you will be offered a series of tools to use these design symbols to customize your own coat-of arms — or crest — to declare your lifestyle and interests. Your personal crest can then be adhered to or painted onto your Scion, uploaded to your Facebook or MySpace page, or emailed to your social network of Scion fanatics.

StrawberryFrog creative director Chaz Mee explains: “If you are thinking about making something people can customize that represents who they are — a digital fingerprint — then a crest makes sense. Crests can be broken into different elements; they have the

most flexibility in terms of design and customization options. Plus, crests felt right for the audience, like a personal tattoo of their personalities and passions.”

But while inviting Scion owners to express themselves by designing their own crests is the basis for the campaign, this was only partially the reason it has become so successful. The main reason is that we understood the “rules” of creating a killer social-media campaign.

We started by inviting the culture into the creative process. We let them take ownership of the idea. Then, we engaged a respected graffiti artist — the former creative director of Kid Robot — to create the design symbols and bring their visions to life.

In other words, we did something most brands wouldn’t dream of doing:

We handed it all over to our consumers. We furnished them with tools. We let them play with those tools. We let them talk about it online and spread the word, months before the official campaign launched. We let them take pride in it.

Then — and only then — did we open the floodgates and launch Scion Speak campaign. The point is, you don’t create an authentic social-media campaign. The culture does.

## DEFINE THE “SOCIAL STRATEGY”

To date, social-media marketing is usually a failed concept because brands engage in practices that are alienating to users, and do not provide useful services to them. Social-media marketing also tends to fall between the cracks because it is so new and it is not funded properly.

In addition, social-networking activities sometimes fail because they do not define the social strategy ahead of executional considerations. Following are some tips on how to develop a social-media marketing strategy, citing examples based on our experience with Scion.

## The art of creating a social-media campaign for Toyota

Define the key social behaviors of your target online. Where are they socializing? What are the social habits, (e.g., Forrester has social-networking consumer profile segments such as *critics*, *spectators*, *sharers*, etc.) online?

For Scion, the target audience was *creatives* who use social-networking tools as a means to express and showcase their creativity and individuality among their peers.

Identify your brand's social behavior and objective in the social space. How should it socialize with your target? What is the brand's primary purpose in the social network? Facilitating self-expression? Listening? What is its role at this social party and what useful tools can it create to facilitate this?

One of Scion's key values is customization. Therefore, Scion had to bring these tools for passionate self-expression to social party. This was identified as the brand's role in the social context.

Create social-media content; don't advertise on it. If you're not providing content, ensure that you are providing a useful service. Social media helps people manage their social lives. It enables them to do something they are already interested in. It gives them the tools to allow for this. Social media provides a service — information, connection points, etc.

Brands need to figure out how to become part of the service, provide their own service or just limit their level of annoyance on the playground.

They'll listen to your marketing message if you're providing a service because people aren't interested in advertising *per se* — they are only interested in what it can do for them. Call it *utilitainment*, interactive digital or whatever you want — your brand idea has to have a purpose.

#### SOCIAL-MARKETING TRAPS

Too often, marketers and brands violate basic rules of social media. Facebook faced a revolt because it was never meant to be a platform for marketing — its purpose was 100 percent social. Brands and advertisers constantly forget this in their desperation to chase consumers down every dark alley and try and corner them into submission.

With Scion, we ensured that we developed Scion Speak in collaboration with the Scion enthusiast audience. In fact, we used some of the leaders of the existing online Scion communities to help us to develop the Scion design language. We also ensured that this brand site was designed for purely social and expressive purposes and did not feel like a corporate or money-generating venture.

Be careful you're not duplicating established social communities. If your audience is using a strongly established community (i.e., recipe sharing), why create a duplicate, marketing-based branded version of the same community? Why would your target leave the existing community for a branded version of the same offer?

Because there are hundreds of existing Scion communities and socializing sites online, we knew from the start that we had to create a totally new kind of social tool for Scion owners so that it would be relevant and frequently used.

Don't hijack consumers' social networks. At the least, marketers should be invited into the social culture. But even better, marketers should create their own culture that consumers want to join. They should also be mindful of

forcing friends to endorse products among their peers. Users should be voluntary brand ambassadors, not an enforced sales force.

For Scion, the best evidence of success is the happiness of the car owners themselves. As Lynnley Browning reported in *The New York Times*: "At least some Scion owners who have created their own coats of arms seem pleased with the results. A Scion driver, writing online as *Monsterslovecandy*, created a design that included a harlequin pattern, crossed wrenches and a phoenix, and wrote on a fan website: 'I think it came out freaking sweet.'" ■



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