

Web Ads With a Twist



Now Online: Something in between
BMW Films and recycled TV spots

Reprinted from Adweek
December 15, 2003

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As throngs of spectators gathered at the 18th hole of the Ritz-Carlton Golf Club in Orlando, Fla., Buick spokesman Tiger Woods offered Bill Stapleton some advice. "Breathe," a grinning Woods instructed the amateur golfer, one of four vying for a 2004 Buick Rainier in a closest-to-the-pin contest.

Stapleton maintained his cool despite the 90-plus-degree Columbus Day temperatures. "Once they drew my name, and it was my turn to take the shot," he recalls, "I don't remember being nervous at all." Moments later, Woods was high-fiving and handing the SUV's keys to the 30-year-old Locust Grove, Ga., native, the only contestant to land the 140-yard shot on the green, 44 feet from the mark.

Four months before, Stapleton had logged on to Buick's Web site after seeing an ad on The Golf Channel that teased, "Twenty-nine unsuspecting golfers. Four Buick Rainier SUVs. And one Tiger on the prowl." On the site, he watched a documentary-like five-minute film shot in May in which camouflaged cameramen captured Woods challenging a group of amateurs for the chance to win a Rainier.

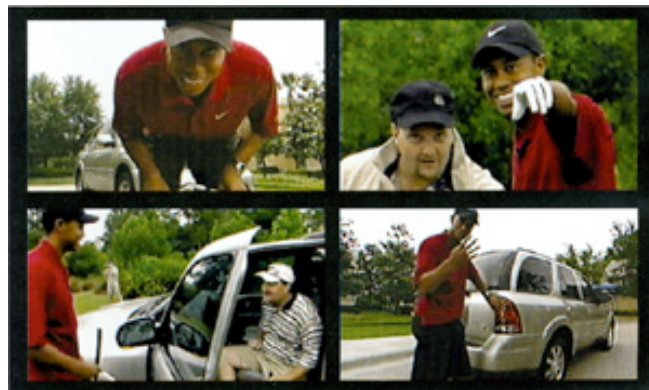
"I thought [the short film] was great," says Stapleton, a 16-year golfer with a 7 handicap who grew up in the shadows of Augusta National, home of the Masters tournament. "It was clever how they had surprised the golfers and how people didn't catch on that it was set up. ... It made me wonder what it would have been like to be there." He was there for the second contest, beating out the 280,000 others who registered at the site in a bid to compete.

Stapleton belongs to an estimated 19.8 million households with high-speed Internet access. Marketers, searching for alternatives to the TV commercial, are taking note. Most aren't ready to spend the money it takes to create original online content, à la BMW Films or Anheuser-Busch's True Films, and instead have just been posting their TV commercials on their Web sites. Now some, like Buick and Pepsi, are spending a little more and adding modestly budgeted short films, outtakes and behind-the-scenes footage, much like the extras that come with movies on DVD.

"Agencies don't necessarily have the flexibility right now to go off and start from scratch with the Internet," says Allie Savarino, svp of marketing at New York tech company Unicast, which in April introduced a full-

screen Superstitial, or 15-second, commercial-quality online ad format. "But there's a very big difference in repurposing television, which is what some people are trying to do, and in enhancing television."

As the adoption of high-speed Internet connections grows – PricewaterhouseCoopers projects that it will jump by 27 percent to 25.2 million households next year – so does the ability to seamlessly deliver high-quality, TV-like creative executions on the Web. "It's a new channel for the types of powerful messages that have worked for decades – being born at a time when the traditional channels for delivering commercials seem



Tiger Lets Loose: McCann wanted more than 30 seconds to show the lighter side of Buick spokesman Woods, so for the 'Tiger Trap' campaign, a Web short showed him challenging amateurs to a game for a chance to win an SUV.

to be deteriorating," says Mark McLaughlin, president of MARK Consulting & Ideas, a six-month-old New York marketing and media consultancy that counts Yahoo! among its clients.

The Web offers interactivity and freedom from the restrictions built into a TV commercial, along with the tantalizing prospect of knowing whether each consumer is zapping or interacting with a message. "It looks like TV with a direct-marketing measurement," says MSN chief media revenue officer Joanne Bradford, adding that accountability should also raise the bar creatively. "People like to watch entertaining

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commercials. It challenges me to prove that advertising can move the needle."

The strategy, says Peter Galio, account director at Buick's digital-marketing agency, independent shop i33 in Detroit, is to use TV to move consumers online. Once there, they should get "deeper content that is complementary – but it has to offer more," he says. "It has to go deeper than the 30-second spot." The Web was seen as the hub from the start of the "Tiger Trap" campaign, he explains. "If you get them to the Web, you have your own programming channel, and you can control the content, and you can widen that content way beyond 30 seconds," he says. "The Web was ... really the only place that could serve up this short-film-like experience."

Interpublic Group's McCann-Erickson in Troy, Mich., hatched the idea three years ago in response to Buick's request for a watercooler-worthy Internet program. How better to grab people's attention than to show a side of Tiger that's hard to capture in 30 seconds, thought McCann creative director Tom Parr. "He's so different than when you see him on TV," explains Parr. "He's this funny guy who clowns around. I always wanted to get that on film."

McCann and director Steve Chase did that with the film and, later, behind-the-scenes footage of Woods rehearsing. "It's literally a peek under the covers," says Parr. In three months, more than 2 million people visited the "Tiger Trap" Web site to watch the film and the voyeuristic extras.

"The 30-second or even 60-second version of the ad is not enough for the fan," says Mike Heronime, director of creative services at Pepsi's interactive agency, Tribal DDB in Dallas. "We have a lot of valuable content – not just in the television commercial, but in everything that's wrapped around that, in terms of the B-roll footage and all the behind-the-scenes content. Frankly, I think that's more interesting to fans than the commercial itself, because they feel they're getting a little closer to the personality behind the performer."

For "Carmen," Spike Lee's 60-second Pepsi spot starring Beyoncé Knowles, creatives from Spike DDB documented the seven weeks preceding the shoot. A dedicated section on the Pepsi World Web site included the storyboard, lyrics and time-lapse photography of set construction, among other details about the spot, which debuted on the Oscars.

Pepsi also ran online-only interviews with some of the stars from BBDO's Pepsi Twist Super Bowl spot that paired the Osbournes with the Osmonds. "You had Florence Henderson talking about what it's like working with Ozzy; Jack and Kelly talking with Donnie and Marie about what's on their iPods," explains John

Vail, director of digital marketing and media at PepsiCo, who says the site streams more than 250,000 commercials each month.

Of course, having celebrity endorsers like Ozzy, Beyoncé or Britney Spears on board doesn't hurt. "If it's the association with Britney Spears that helps you sell more Pepsi, the association is cemented if someone experiences it on the Web by getting an experience with that star that they can't get anywhere else," says McLaughlin, whose interactive experience includes stints as president of Foote, Cone & Belding's FCBi in New York and as managing director of Havas' Euro RSCG Circle in New York.

Consumers crave this kind of fly-on-the-wall perspective, says Vail, citing focus groups from the late '90s that expressed the desire "to see what it's like over the director's shoulder."

There are creative limitations, however, when it comes to picking up what's left on the cutting-room floor. "What we're looking for is something that feels unique and exclusive, and that's pretty hard," says Heronime. To get that B-roll material, Pepsi enlists Dogmatic, a New York production and design company.

"You really have to worm your way onto the set," explains Michael Santorelli, owner and executive producer at Dogmatic, which also shoots behind-the-scenes Web footage for Victoria's Secret. To secure what he needs, Santorelli says, he makes friends with the assistant director and keeps the cameras rolling every second. "You never know when those moments are going to happen."

Other advertisers and agencies are just starting to anticipate their Internet needs during preproduction. As it prepares to shoot the next round of "We've been waiting for you" commercials for the Air Force, GSD&M is working with Omnicom Group sibling Tribal DDB so the i-shop can request the footage it needs for extra features on the Web. "It's for synergy with what we're doing with our television-with the TV, all we want them to do is go to the Web [to get more information]," says Brian Born, creative director at the Austin, Texas, shop, which will be posting extra footage on the Internet for the first time.

As well as bulking up their own sites, advertisers are running commercials on publishers such as Yahoo! and ESPN.com. Those sites also offer ad-supported broadband video services; the latest entrant is Microsoft's MSN, which launches MSN Video in the first quarter. News, sports, music and entertainment programming will be interrupted every five or six minutes with 15-second video ads.



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In a Superstitial ad for Disney's Finding Nemo, Web surfers can opt to watch a trailer, enter a sweepstakes or visit the film's Web site. Similarly, an ad for Viagra uses footage from a TV spot in which an upbeat man is greeted by office colleagues who ask, "New haircut? New shoes? Did you get a promotion?" Created in-house by Pfizer, the online ad also lets consumers take a sexual-health quiz, find a physician or get more product information.

"What the creative team has done, they've taken a television asset that's familiar and reinforced it," says Unicast's Savarino, whose company provided the technology for the Viagra and Finding Nemo ads. "Then they combine that with things that will allow them to demonstrate how effective this medium can be."

Another broadband technology is offered by Maven Networks in Cambridge, Mass., whose software allows advertisers to combine the visual benefits of TV with the interactivity of the Web. 20th Century Fox and Virgin Records recently used Maven to promote the November debut of Master and Commander and Ben Harper's new CD, respectively. Consumers can download Maven's desktop software to watch full-screen, DVD-quality trailers, interviews and behind-the-scenes footage of the Russell Crowe movie, as well as buy tickets and find showtimes.

"The Web is a lean-forward experience – we've all been conditioned to interact with things," says Maven CEO Hilmi Ozguc. "It's important to enable a broadband video experience to be interactive."

By Ann M. Mack

