Old Spice and E*TRADE Ads Provide Lessons in Viral Marketing

Contributed by Millward Brown
Friday, 02 April 2010
Last Updated Friday, 02 April 2010

New Research from Millward Brown Reveals that Fewer than One in Six TV Ads Achieve High â€œViral Viewingâ€• Online

Fewer than one in six video ads achieve high viral viewing*, according to new research from Millward Brown, one of the worldâ€™s leading research agencies As part of this research, which involved analyzing 102 ads, Millward Brown created the Creative Viral Potential (CVP) pre-testing metric that helps agencies and marketers predict viral success prior to launching an ad or video.

To demonstrate the power of this new predictive framework, Millward Brown analyzed eight recently successful TV ads that became viral, including the Old Spice â€œThe Man Your Man Could Smell Likeâ€• and the E*TRADE â€œMilkaholicâ€• ad.

The study uncovered four essential components to viral success: the Awareness Index (a measure of branded engagement that has long been used by advertisers to predict the success of their TV advertising); Buzz (which identifies whether an ad is likely to generate pass-along); Celebrity (the profile of a celebrity when used in an ad); and Distinctiveness (a measure of originality).

â€œThere are many factors that drive viral viewing, including a high Awareness Index and level of TV advertising support, both of which were an essential part of the viral success of many of the ads we tested,â€• said Nigel Hollis, Millward Brownâ€™s Chief Global Analyst who will be presenting the findings of this research at the ARF Annual Convention on March 24 in New York. â€œThis research clearly shows that creativity is mission-critical to getting people to watch your video online.â€•

â€œAs an advertiser, your chances of a major viral success are relatively low, but itâ€™s a prize worth aiming for, and our new validated pre-test metric makes it an easier target to hit,â€• added Duncan Southgate, Millward Brownâ€™s Global Innovation Director.

Other ads that Millward Brown measured include those from Audi, Snickers, Walmart, Coca-Cola, Carlâ€™s Jr., and Google Nexus One, the main drivers of which are detailed in the chart below.

â€œThree of these ads had only average branded engagement scores among the general population, but have achieved viral success by appealing very strongly to a specific target audience,â€• said Southgate. â€œAudi is targeting green consumers Carlâ€™s Jr. is appealing strongly to men, and Google Nexus One is targeting a youth audience. However, others including the Old Spice, E*TRADE, Snickers and Coke commercials have managed the rare trick of having strong branded engagement, being distinctive, and yet still appealing to a broad audience.â€•

Millward Brownâ€™s Top 10 Tips for Viral Advertising

1. Be realistic, only a few ads make the big time
2. Creativity rules: a distinctive and engaging ad is a necessity
3. Donâ€™t forget, an ad must leave some impression related to the brand in order to be effective
4. Consider whether a celebrity will fit your brand and enhance an adâ€™s viewing potential
5. Consider an ideaâ€™s campaign potential; is it more than a one off?
6. Seed widely: The more broadly seeded a campaign is, the more people it will reach, irrespective of the pass-along rate.
7. Seed well: Different media placement strategies may well be required based on the nature of the target audience.
8. Make the ad easy to find â€“ use simple naming, and consider paid video search
9. Integrate with other media efforts
10. Cross your fingers!

Research methodology
Millward Brown analyzed data on behavioral viewings from YouTube for 102 ads (31 UK and 71 US) in February 2010, all of which were tested as finished films using Millward Brownâ€™s Web-based Link methodology and using the new Creative Viral Potential metric.

The total number of views on YouTube was divided by time on site to create a â€˜views per weekâ€™ measure which ensured a fair comparison regardless of how long the ads had been on YouTube.

Link pre-test measures were then compared against the views-per-week measure to identify the type of ads that are most likely to â€œgo viral.â€•

*High viral viewing volumes defined as greater than 1,000 views per week in the UK and greater than 5,000 views per week in the US.

The full findings of the CVP validation exercise are due for publication in the peer-reviewed International Journal of Advertising later this year.

About Link
Link is the worldâ€™s leading advertising pre-test. Over 60,000 Link for TV tests have been conducted since its launch in 1989.

The new validated viral prediction measures come in two guises: the viral potential of TV ads can be assessed using Link for TV, and online-only viral ads can also be tested using our dedicated Link for Digital Video methodology.

The full Link family includes Link 360 (for campaigns), Link for TV and other methods for print, outdoor, digital, radio, cinema ads and packaging. All of the above are available as LinkSelect studies â€“ for cost-effectively comparing multiple executions.

17th MarchÂ 2010