

Case Study: Toyota Taps Into QR Codes And Augmented Reality

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Carmaker increases web traffic, leads with emerging mobile technologies

In May 2011, Toyota launched a campaign for the 2012 Corolla targeting an Asian-American audience. The campaign was based around a computer-generated pop star called Hatsune Miku.

Working with interTrend, Toyota's Asian-American agency, Toyota developed a campaign that would feature the new Corolla and also introduce the Japanese virtual icon to the US market. In addition to sponsoring a US Hatsune Miku concert, Toyota created a mobile program complete with 2-D barcode and augmented reality technology that drove traffic to the car company's website and social media properties.

Challenges

According to Michael Nelson, senior digital marketing manager at Toyota Motor Sales USA, the carmaker wanted to expand the conversations it was having with consumers about the 2012 Toyota Corolla. Moreover, they "wanted to be able to connect the real, traditional world with Toyota's digital world."

Using mobile to bridge that gap, Toyota worked with a QR code vendor to develop a branded mobile barcode, ToyoTag. It also worked with an augmented reality technology company to develop content that would be engaging and appealing to the younger, tech-savvy Corolla target audience. In addition to appealing to this group of potential Hatsune Miku fans, the goal was to make campaign shareable.

Strategy

In coordination with the September 16, 2011, Hatsune Miku concert in California, Toyota debuted the Hatsune Miku augmented reality experience. To view the augmented reality content, Toyota encouraged consumers to use their mobile phones, snap photos of the ToyoTag, and then, upon prompting by SMS text, download the Toyota Shopping Tool app for iPhone or Android. Then consumers were able to view Hatsune singing on a virtual stage alongside the 2012 Corolla. Part of the strategy was to "extend the engagement past the event," Nelson said.

Results

Toyota significantly increased app downloads, traffic and leads for the Corolla during the week of the augmented reality launch.

On the night of the Hatsune Miku event and the augmented reality launch, Toyota saw a 600% percent increase in Toyota Shopping Tool app downloads. After the first night's spike, app downloads continued to outperform normal download rates throughout the week. Additionally, Corolla leads jumped by 30% that week, and time spent on the one Corolla/Miku web page outpaced time spent on the entire Corolla section of Toyota.com (including customization tools, pricing pages and demo videos).

Week-over-week traffic for Corolla/Miku from September 4 to 11 increased 167%. After seven full weeks, it returned to pre-Hatsune Miku campaign levels.

Key Takeaways

Nelson advised marketers to take time to do research before embracing QR code and augmented reality mobile technology. "We walk before we run at Toyota," Nelson said. He also admitted that bystanders have asked what Hatsune Miku has to do with selling cars, to which he responded that the Hatsune Miku campaign was about encouraging consumers to try out new types of content. "It's getting the customers used to this technology in a fun way."

Next Steps

Nelson teased that over the next year, Toyota will embrace even more mobile marketing technologies. "This is a precursor to bigger, greater things that we're going to be doing as a corporation, not only with 2-D barcodes, but with technologies like augmented reality," he said.

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