

How to create buzz

By Jessica Werb | BC Business | September 2006



iPod, Starbucks, Adidas: names like these are the rallying cry of a whole generation of consumers. These brands have managed to capture not only the cash, but also the hearts and minds of young, hip trendsetters. And don't think it happened purely by accident. In an age where radio and print seem outdated, here's how experts create the kind of buzz that gets people talking – and spending.

Live it

Forget billboards, TV ads and radio jingles. Last June, when Vancouver-based marketing agency Inventa promoted the relaunch of Tetris DS for the new Nintendo DS, it hired people to wear construction outfits, carry enormous Tetris-shaped pieces and start a giant Tetris game. "They got consumers to join in," recalls Trina Mousseau, creative accounts specialist with Inventa. "If people experience something, it resonates with them. It's something they'll remember. The idea is to get out there and interact with your consumer directly."

Be a tease

It's a tactic any good flirt knows well: suspense is a powerful tool. Some of the most successful marketing campaigns begin with a teaser that often doesn't even mention the product in question. Inventa only revealed the Tetris DS a week after downtown Toronto was filled with fake construction workers carrying giant Tetris blocks. "It gets people going, 'What was that? Did you see that? What's that about?'" explains Mousseau.

Shock and Awe

If you were to witness a bunch of people in full ballroom regalia dancing across the intersection of Burrard and Robson in downtown Vancouver in the rain, you'd have a hard time forgetting it. And that's exactly what guerrilla marketers Smak did to get people talking about DanceSport BC's annual Snowball Classic dance competition. "You have to not be afraid of creating a stir or doing stunts," says Claire Lamont, founder and owner of Smak. It's a technique Mousseau dubs "surprise and delight." "The idea is to intercept the consumer with something different, that they're going to respond to and like."

The big event

We've all seen the ads positioned around the ice at GM Place, but how is that any different from a billboard? If you want to get involved in an event, says Lamont, go big because size matters. When Red Bull brought its Flugtag event – a flying-machine competition that travels from city to city – to Vancouver, it was completely mobbed. "They probably paid for the event based on Red Bull sales for the day," Lamont points out.

Media manipulation

If you've got people in cow uniforms riding subway cars (a little stunt staged by Inventa to promote soy milk) or cars being crushed by giant cigarettes (a Smak campaign for the B.C. Lung Association), the media are going to pick up on it. But just to be sure, send out some press releases, call up local radio stations and spread the word that something big will be going down. It could be a slow news day, which means your crazy stunt might well end up on the evening news.