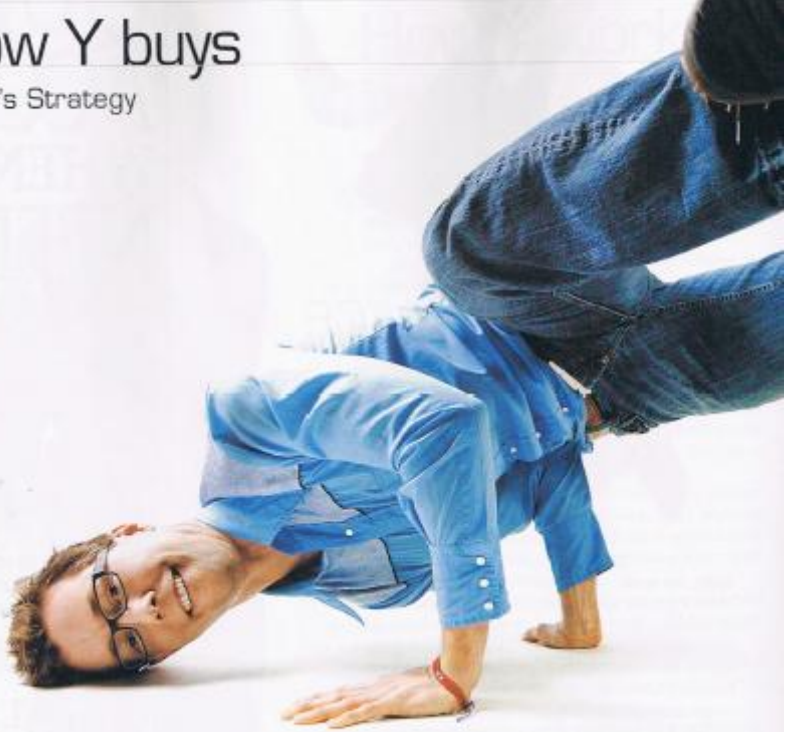


How Y buys

Smak's Strategy



Kevin Foster is selling something, but he's not really a salesman; more accurately, he's the ad. The 27-year-old video-game designer is partying at the trendy Caprice Night Club in downtown Vancouver, sporting a prominent moustache, a tight-fitting suit and a bright patterned shirt with generous lapels. Foster has been growing the moustache for a month, along with some co-workers at Action Pants Inc., to promote the annual "Movember" fundraising campaign. They and their mustachioed Canadian compatriots helped raise \$46,000 for prostate-cancer research, and this is their '80s-themed victory bash.

During November, Foster says he explained the campaign to about 50 people who asked him about his out-of-date facial hair. His 420-some Facebook friends also got to see weekly updates as his upper lip filled in.

But Kevin, doesn't that mean your moustache just transformed you into a walking billboard?

"Exactly," he admits, with a laugh. "I'm doing it because it's a great cause."

The international campaign's Canadian effort was organized by the Vancouver marketing company Smak, and this is what they do: publicity stunts, guerrilla advertising, experiential marketing. It's all about getting your audience to take part in the ad and then pass your messages along, says Smak co-founder Alan Bedingfield. Young

people respond especially well to messages they get from their peers, he explains, which is what makes the charming Kevin Foster such an effective billboard.

"They're savvy. They understand when they're being marketed to, so we've got to do it in different ways that involve them," he says. "Then all of a sudden it's them being pulled into the advertisement willingly, as opposed to us trying to force-feed it down their throats."

So how does it work? Well, consider when Smak scattered a bunch of unmarked, empty fridges around Toronto, leaving the city perplexed until news stories revealed that it was all about the city's struggling food banks. Or the time they hired topless young women to hand out sample sex products at Granville and Robson streets to create a buzz around North Vancouver's O'My Products Inc. The passersby become part of the act. Bedingfield says, and if they're impressed by the experience, they'll pass the message on in a you-won't-believe-what-I-saw-downtown-today kind of way.

"If you give this group of people a positive experience, they're going to talk about it and remember it for a long time," he says.

MEDIA TARGET: Kevin Foster (above and right) became a walking billboard by growing a moustache

SMART SELLING

Understanding Y

Successful marketing to Generation Y begins much like any other marketing adventure: by understanding the audience. So what do we know about Gen Y? Anne Sutherland is president of Toronto-based consultancy New Thinking and author of *Kidfluence: The Marketer's Guide to Understanding and Reaching Generation Y*. "The key thing we know about Generation Y is that it starts with them," she says. "It's different from every other generation." Gen Y has had a say in every part of their upbringing, she explains, and they want the same in their consumption.

They know you

Gen Y is more media-aware than any other generation, Sutherland says. "They get it. You sit in focus groups with them and they're talking about marketing and positioning and branding. They get it. They know what you're trying to do." So instead of trying to fool them, show something authentic. Take Dove's popular *Evolution* video, for example, which shows just how much physical and digital tampering goes into a model's glamour photo, revealing the fantasy behind the beauty industry's images.



Let them change you

Marketers shouldn't treat Gen Y as mindless spectators, but should allow them to inspire and manipulate messages, Sutherland says. For example, a successful Florida anti-smoking campaign started off by talking to teens about the negative health aspects of smoking. What they learned, she says, is that young people were most incensed at the idea that they'd been lied to by tobacco companies. Organizers then flipped the campaign around under the slogan "Truth."

In praise of old media

Marketing to Gen Y isn't about billboards versus Facebook or TV versus YouTube, Sutherland stresses. The debate isn't this-or-that; it's more-and-more. For example, young people still watch TV ads, she says, they're just far more critical of them than older generations. "But the same things work as well," she says. "Smart, clever, simple, funny, impactful, emotional advertising still works in the same way it always has. It's just that they have so much more that captures their attention." ■