

The Fun Theory

The Stockholm-based advertising agency, DDB, employs some of the best, most creative marketing tools in the world. In this article, read about “The Fun Theory,” a unique and effective marketing campaign for Volkswagen developed by DDB, which uses the tool of the viral video to spread the message that environmentalism can be fun.

In late 2009, DDB Stockholm launched “The Fun Theory” campaign, an initiative to get people to change their lazy behaviors – and ultimately how they feel about environmentally friendly cars. How does this work? DDB has created some of this year’s most successful and effective viral videos to show how “green” behavior can be fun.

Only in the last ten years or so have companies begun to harness the marketing power of what is known as the viral video – a video that becomes popular through internet sharing, typically through media sharing sites like YouTube or Albino Blacksheep. Oftentimes humor is the vital component to making these videos catchy. Whether the videos provide humor, wit, surprise, or sheer entertainment, the key to their success is their voluntary and rapid distribution among a wide variety of Internet circuits, generating thousands of views.

Great viral videos are hard to come by, but with “The Fun Theory” videos, DDB seems to have hit the nail on the head – and surprisingly, not through humor or shock impact, but rather through the sheer uniqueness of taking everyday mundane behaviors and making them fun. “The campaign has just started up with a number of experiments

in which the theory—that fun can change people’s behavior—is tested in various situations,” says DDB Stockholm creative director Andreas Dahlqvist. In each experiment, the test is to see whether people will alter their simple, everyday behaviors, to be more environmentally friendly if such behaviors are made to be more fun.

One of the videos documents the Fun Theory being tested on a staircase in a Stockholm subway station that was converted into working piano keys—an attempt to convince commuters to take the stairs instead of the escalator. Another test uses sound effects to make the proper disposal of trash a cartoon-like experience. The idea is intriguing, and the results even more so: apparently, turning a set of subway stairs into a real-life piano make people 66% more likely to use them! For this reason, the videos are highly entertaining, and their Internet sharing has soared, some having accrued over a million hits on YouTube.

The positive reactions to these “being-green-made-easy” videos cause us to forget that these are actually part of an ad campaign. No wonder viral videos take their name from “viral marketing,” which is also known as “word-of-mouth” or



“stealth” marketing: the videos are shared and the marketing occurs on its own. In the Fun Theory videos, the brand placement for Volkswagen is as subtle as it could possibly be – a simple VW logo which appears at the end of each video. And yet, with the videos spreading around the Internet like wildfire, the logo makes an understated yet collectively powerful impression on consumers. The video makes its way among hundreds of thousands of viewers – and along with it, the positive associations for the VW brand. Sounds like the definition of a perfect brand campaign.

As viral videos have grown more popular, the entertainment industry is looking for more ways to profit from the phenomenon. Recently on YouTube, a couple posted a video of their wedding procession to Chris Brown’s song “Forever”. Sony, the rights holder to the song, was able to capitalize off of the success of the video by offering “Click-to-Buy” advertising, which allows users to purchase the song by clicking on a black bar that appears during the video. According to YouTube, although the song was a year old, the video renewed the songs popularity and it reached #4 on iTunes and #3 on Amazon’s music list.

Capitalizing off the success of viral videos is a powerful strategy for companies and marketing firms, and it has been made possible by the proliferation of video and internet technologies in recent years. With the explosion of camera phones, for example, amateurs are shooting videos with their cell phones and uploading them to the internet. In addition, the availability of cheap video editing and publishing tools allows video from mobile phones to

be edited and distributed virally both on the web, by email or website, and between phones by Bluetooth or MMS.

In the Fun Theory campaign, the consumer enables the marketing process in more ways than one. In addition to the sharing of video media, a contest also encourages Fun Theory website visitors to upload their own applications of The Fun Theory. A prize of 2,500 Euros will go to the creator of the winning experiment, decided on by a panel of Swedish experts in behavioral science and environmental issues.

DDB has taken the lead in an ever-evolving, highly integrated market by brilliantly combining advertising, technology, environmentalism, and behavioral science. The key to the Fun Theory success is that these videos are not only a marketing tool; they are creating mindfulness among consumers with positive societal implications. As the Fun Theory grows in popularity, the hope is that so too will the general tendency toward environmentally friendly behaviors among consumers, and ultimately, the demand for green cars produced by VW. “Volkswagen’s answer to the theory will be presented at a later stage on a separate website amongst other media,” says Dahlqvist. “The site will display their whole range of environment technologies and cars—many, many fun ways to do something for the environment.”

Happy viewing.

