



## **THE NEW 30 SECOND SPOT: LITERATURE REVIEW OF USER GENERATED COMMERCIALS**

**By  
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May 2007**

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As long as there have been companies, there has been marketing of their products. Whether informally through word-of-mouth or directly through advertisements, one of the primary objectives of a firm is to maximize exposure of its products in order to increase its sales. As media has evolved, so has the packaging of these messages: from newspapers to radio to television, companies have continually shaped their advertising to best fit the most effective medium available.

The most recent evolution of advertising is the effort to capitalize on the social media movement. As technology has simultaneously empowered connectivity and overwhelmed its participants, information has become both a commodity and a nuisance. The daily bombardment of advertisements has desensitized consumers to the traditional campaign to the point that they now expect the extraordinary as an everyday occurrence. Companies thus face a new hurdle in marketing their products: not only must they persuade the consumer that their product is worth buying, but they must first convince that consumer that their advertisement is worth his/her limited viewing time.

A primary purpose or goal of user generated, or “customer-made” commercials (see Visual Exhibits for working definition), is for the firm to better engage its customers. Dove, for instance, has invited women to create their own thirty second commercials to launch the new Dove Cream Oil Body Wash Collection (see Visual Exhibits for illustration). The commercial, which will air during the 79<sup>th</sup> Annual Academy Awards on February 25<sup>th</sup>, will likely garner widespread attention. Beyond the novelty of being created by a non-professional, the idea is very consistent with the Dove brand heritage of embracing real women in its advertising. Extending this tradition and allowing a real woman to create a commercial lends an inherent credibility to Dove’s positioning in a fresh and innovative way.

Converse, a sneaker company popular with a younger demographic, applied a similar approach when it launched a campaign to attract homemade content. By allowing its consumer target to advertise its product, Converse actually ended up with content closer to the hearts and minds of its customers than some of its prior professional attempts. After 1,500 submissions, several of which were so successful that they were later adapted for television, Converse has established itself as one of the early success stories in the user generated commercial arena.

In addition to cementing customer loyalty and revealing latent trends, requesting customer generated content can also help build brand awareness. The Tate Britain, in an effort to attract more visitors, is running a “Write Your Own Label” campaign where visitors can submit suggestions for painting descriptions; its theory is that by allowing everyday museum-goers to describe works in everyday terms, the museum will become

more accessible to a larger audience. Danish Vores Øl ('Our Beer' – see Visual Exhibits for illustration) has taken the concept one step further: in addition to allowing customers unlimited access to its design and branding elements for viral marketing, it also allows customers access to the brew's recipe. Customers can adapt the formula under a Creative Commons license, but must share the proceeds with the firm.

Despite the numerous examples of successful user-generated experiments, there are perhaps as many counterbalancing concerns and cases of "backfire." Chevrolet introduced a Web site in early 2006 that allowed customers to add words to existing video and music clips to create custom commercials for the 2007 Chevrolet Tahoe; the goal was to tap its most loyal customers' imaginations and have them act as ambassadors for the brand through viral marketing of their creations. Instead, critics of the brand used the forum to append taglines such as: "\$70 to fill up the tank, which will last less than 400 miles. Chevy Tahoe." and "Our planet's oil is almost gone. You don't need GPS to see where this road leads." Views of the negative responses far outweighed their positive counterparts.

A recent study by Screen Digest, the media analysis company, also found that most big advertisers are reluctant to allocate any significant budget to user-generated content (*note*: it currently accounts for just 15% of the total online video advertising budget). Peter Chernin, the president of News Corporation, commented: "We do not see big advertisers advertising with YouTube or MySpace. They have concerns about the content ... and there is no scarcity value for the content ... so there is very little ability to monetize video advertising on user-generated video."

The contention between user involvement and the unpredictability and unreliability of users' messages is just one of the issues for user-generated commercials:

- *User compensation*: will user-creators continue to develop content for status, fun, and prizes, or will there be a fundamental shift in the advertising value chain where these amateur creators demand a portion of the campaign proceeds?
- *Valuation*: how should advertisers measure and budget for user-generated content?
- *Content management*: will the content creation process open the door for new intermediary advertising shops, or will advertisers learn to develop this skill in-house?
- *Political and grassroots process*: is there potential for user-generated commercials to influence the political election process?

Although there are more unanswered questions than available answers, the trend of user-generated commercials and content looks to continue strongly into the future. Regardless of whether it is contained to the Web, it is in the interest of all stakeholders in the current advertising value chain to keep close attention and to draw notes on how best to continue shaping the ever-changing advertising tradition.



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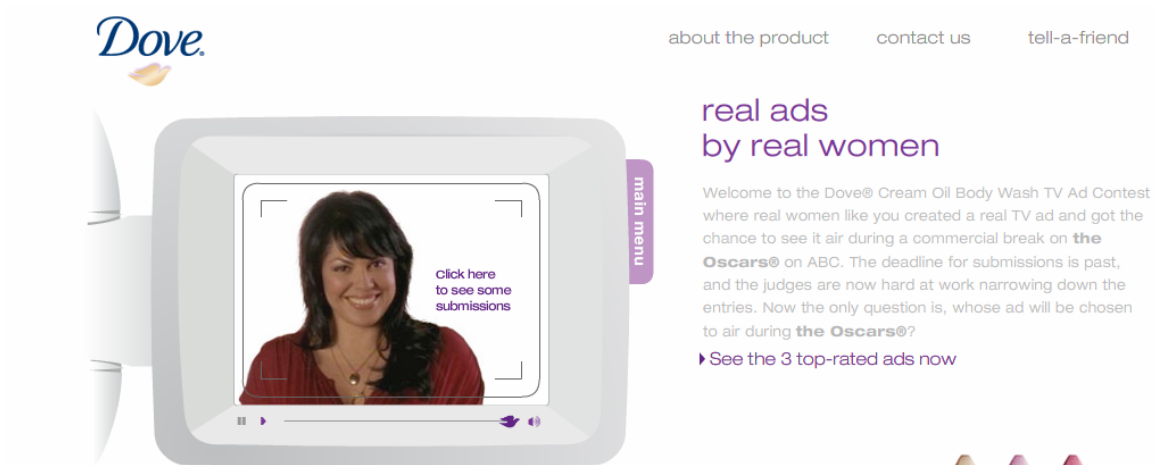
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