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Beyond the 'Man your man could smell like'

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The impact of Old Spice's "Man Your Man Could Smell Like" campaign -- the "viral" video sensation that featured former NFL player Isaiah Mustafa seducing viewers while blowing apart the laws of physics -- still echoes through the halls of every marketing department in Minnesota.

Now that Procter & Gamble's body wash brand has retired Mustafa, it's possible to assess just how much Old Spice exploded the old rules of marketing in a YouTube World. As Advertising Age asked: "is Old Spice the brand your viral video could look like?"

To recap Old Spice's blockbuster: the surreal, special-effects-laden TV spots, featuring a bare-chested Mustafa, were posted to YouTube and augmented by use of Twitter and Facebook. The success of the campaign, created by Portland agency Wieden+Kennedy, was startling: a total of 40-plus million views on YouTube, with Facebook fan interaction soaring by 800 percent and Twitter followers up by 2,700 percent. Old Spice enjoyed a 107 percent increase in body wash sales within 30 days of campaign launch.

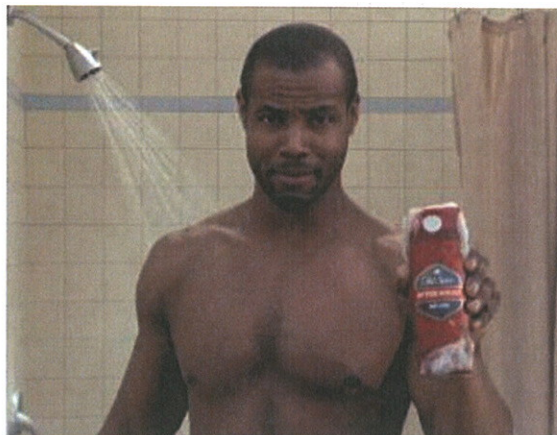
So what can your company learn from what Mustafa called a "life-altering, society-changing" interactive campaign?

Embrace the chaos of user-generated engagement. Of the first 1.4 billion impressions generated by "The Man Your Man Could Smell Like," much was generated by consumers who created hundreds of "answer" videos. Procter & Gamble's attorneys didn't send cease-and-desist letters when parodies of the spots appeared -- they accepted comments as the price of opening online conversations. Consider that the campaign's final video generated 537 dislikes as well as 20,000 likes; many corporations would find 537 thumbs down to be unacceptable and kill the campaign.

Accept that online video isn't free. Inc. Magazine's recent article, "Translating Viral YouTube Video Into Sales," detailed two campaigns -- neither of which cost more than \$1,500. The magazine suggested that your video program could be created by "some creative college students." Oh, please. The fact that your CEO's teenager can edit a YouTube video has fooled some companies into believing that online campaigns are "cheap" marketing. In fact Mustafa's talent fee, the agency's creative costs and TV advertising exceeded the total budget available to most marketers. Virally shared campaigns aren't cheap. But why would you expect them to be?

Recognize online video is a channel, not a strategy. Agency executives pound their heads in frustration as clients ask them to "create a viral video." It's your customers who decide if your video content is worth sharing with friends, not your agency. Start by asking your agency to create a "big idea" that's strategically smart for your brand, and which could use online video as a new channel.

Be willing to make fun of your own product. It's rare for a marketer to have the chutzpah to mock their own products. Yet have you seen the "Will It Blend" videos, in which a blender devours everything from a McDonald's Extra Value Meal to a Chuck Norris action figure? BlendTec recognizes that using its product to create a Chicken and Coke cocktail is goofy. The result? BlendTec's videos have reached 200 million views per month, generating a 500 percent increase in product sales.



Isaiah Mustafa, an actor and former pro football player, starred in a series of Old Spice commercials that became a YouTube sensation.

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Understand that digital doesn't replace traditional. Although championed as a digital success, the Old Spice campaign was launched via a traditional TV spot during the SuperBowl. It was then turbo-charged with a PR campaign, followed by ad buys on "American Idol." The "killer app" for 2012 marketing isn't online video, it's the integration of YouTube with other tactics.

Be brave enough to let a campaign evolve. Perhaps the most powerful component of the Old Spice campaign developed when the campaign morphed as Twitter comments flooded in. Old Spice responded by producing 186 tailored "answer" videos in which Mustafa responded to Tweets from famous (Demi Moore) and everyday citizens.

Trust your agency. AdWeek revealed that Apple's "1984/Big Brother" Super Bowl TV spot for the Macintosh, the most beloved TV ad of all time, almost didn't air. Of the ad's first showing to the Apple board, an agency employee recalled: "When the lights came up . . . most of the board members were holding their heads in their hands, shaking them ruefully. Finally, the chairman said: 'Can I get a motion to fire the ad agency?' Steve Jobs stuck with the agency, ran the spot once and Apple hasn't done too badly since. The trust Procter & Gamble had in Old Spice's agency is staggering: You don't think it was risky to have a half-naked African-American man speaking directly to the viewer's girlfriend about what you smell like?"

Stay true to your brand heritage. Even as the "Man Your Man Could Smell Like" challenged old paradigms, its online campaign retained elements from older, traditional TV commercials. One example was the use of the Old Spice whistle in the videos, a wink to the product's nautical legacy.

Old Spice's innovative use of video has already influenced campaigns such as the Dairy Queen "So Good It's Ridiculous" videos filled with shaving bunnies.

Blogger Matt Muir sums the challenge up this way: "If it's not funny, or shocking or creepy or moderately sexual or cute, or 'have-to-watch-through-my-fingers-it's-so-embarrassing,' it won't go 'viral.'"

It will take courage for marketers to develop campaigns that are true to their brands, rather than merely mimicking the sweet-smelling success of Isaiah Mustafa.

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