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## Creating a win-win scenario

Craig McGuire - 4 Jun 2006 23:03

### Running sweepstakes and contests can be a solid brand-promotion vehicle.

Everybody loves to win. And with advancements in technology, you don't need to send Ed McMahon to ring everyone's doorbell.

New Line Cinema is currently collaborating with online community TagWorld on a contest where one lucky unsigned band will have its song appear in the upcoming Samuel L. Jackson film, *Snakes on a Plane*.

For New Line, it is another channel to expand media coverage of the film beyond typical movie reviewers. For TagWorld, launched late last year, the partnership will help promote its fledgling brand.

"Everyone loves a good contest," says Paula Gould, PR director for TagWorld. "If the reward for the contest is good, then people are more apt to participate."

Technology has made sponsoring promotional contests a cost-effective option.

Heather Goss, senior account manager at Northlich, recently organized a grassroots contest for Stand, Ohio's anti-tobacco youth movement.

Project SUSO (an acronym for "stand up, speak out") was a statewide scavenger hunt where teams competed against each other in anti-tobacco challenges to win prizes.

The campaign featured a micro-site serving as the central hub for communications. A blog allowed for sharing contest photos and highlights. E-mail reminders kept participants informed of deadlines, necessary materials, and upcoming activities. Online newsletters were distributed, while an online leaderboard updated team progress.

Further interest was generated when the winning team traveled to New York with stops at MTV and *Good Morning America*.

"The possibility of winning is too intriguing for most to ignore," Goss says.

A contest can be recurring, too. The US Virgin Islands Hotel & Tourism Association last year began offering a sweepstakes online every quarter, awarding hotel accommodations and other prizes.

Each targets a different niche market. So far, the group has held sweepstakes for romance, adventure, family, and girlfriends. Its next offer, *Spa*, starts this month.

"Our goals are to get people to visit our consumer site, but [also] collect a database of opt-in consumers [for] targeted offers," says marketing director Luana Wheatley.

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The responses have increased with each offer. The last one, Girlfriends, yielded a database of 5,000 consumers.

"With the opt-in choice, we know who we can send information to and not become an annoying marketer," Wheatley adds.

If the primary purpose of your contest is to familiarize new audiences with your brand, it is not necessary to force participants to buy anything. Considering that as part of its marketing operations, the Arizona Lottery sponsors a contest where everyone is eligible, not just those who purchase tickets.

The Lottery's Gold Mine site draws about 500,000 hits a month to sign up for prizes, including a recent giveaway of a NASCAR Pace Car to promote the Arizona Lottery 125 race and scratch-off-and-win tickets.

"The overall goal is to move beyond your regular consumer base who are already familiar with your products," says Christina Borrego, associate director of PR at Riester-Robb, the Lottery's AOR. "Because the money produced by the lottery goes back into community programs and services, it is important for us to reach this audience, many of whom do not purchase tickets."

Attorney Joy Butler warns of legal pitfalls, as federal and state laws regulate contests, sweepstakes, and similar promotions.

"The danger zone for the PR pro unfamiliar with these laws, is setting up a promotion that is actually a lottery, as lotteries are illegal unless operated by a state," she says. "You can charge money for participation, select winners based on chance, or award a prize to the winner. You can't do all three."

If any element of chance creeps into your contest, such as a blind drawing to break a tie, you risk running a lottery, she adds. Your rules should clearly explain the skills on which participants will be judged. Most states allow contests to charge people money to take part, but you must check.

### Technique tips

#### DO

Establish rules that neither deceive nor confuse contestants

Make a distinct correlation between the contest and the brand

Capture information using an opt-in strategy that will help power future efforts, but don't make the process onerous

#### DON'T

Make your contest activities offensive or select prizes that are inappropriate to even peripheral audiences

Lose sight of your objectives or your target audience

Forget to check your state's laws governing contests and sweepstakes

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