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The game-changers

Craig McGuire - 21 Nov 2005 00:00

Craig McGuire profiles a handful of CMOs who've changed the way the world looks at their companies

Alan Cohen
CMO, Napster

Once the brand synonymous with the birth of the file-sharing cult, Napster was forced by the court to shutter its network - a case that was partially settled when Napster paid \$26 million to music creators and copyright owners.

Now, as the company emerges after being bought by Roxio at a bankruptcy auction, CMO Alan Cohen thinks he's got the marketing mojo to take a big bite out of Apple, whose iPod and iTunes have dominated the market since Napster's demise.

Cohen left Ogilvy & Mather to lead Napster's aggressive integrated marketing campaign launching "the world's first portable digital-music subscription service," which debuted last year with a Super Bowl ad.

"It comes down to a compelling trend we recognized: People take immense pride in the number of songs they have in their devices," Cohen says. "What's more impressive than having access to 1.5 million songs?"

The "Do the Math" campaign directly called out the iTunes unit price model and stressed the value proposition that Napster To Go offered, allowing consumers to fill and refill their MP3 players from a catalog of more than 1 million tracks for \$14.95 a month. "The original Napster was about the listener, providing access to music in a revolutionary way," Cohen says. "We are now a legal service that charges for music, but at the same time, we are very much integrated with that heritage. ... From a marketing perspective, it's exciting stuff."

The campaign included TV, print, and online ads, and radio promotions in key markets put Napster To Go trial subscriptions and compatible MP3 players into the hands of consumers.

Playing off the fill and refill concept, Napster went to four major music cities in the course of a month with the "Napster To Go CafŽ Tour" to give away free music and coffee. Napster showed the service and gave away hundreds of MP3 players and trial subscriptions to consumers who lined up for hours in advance for a chance to win. Music artists and other celebrities were on hand at each location to give out "fill-ups and refills" of coffee and digital music.

That PR-focused events formed such an integral part of the campaign was no accident, says Cohen. "It's a compelling value proposition, so we felt it needed a fully integrated marketing program," he explains.

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Tad Hutcheson

*VP of marketing and PR,
AirTran Airways*

There are two kinds of airlines: the legacy airlines, with their established fleets and routes, and complex pricing structures; and the upstarts, with their low fares and newer brands. But now there's the third kind, one that flies planes with superhuman-size Elton Johns on their bodies.

AirTran, in a bid to differentiate itself from the first and stand out from the second, hit on the third model after a brainstorm with a PR team overseen by Tad Hutcheson, comprising two in-house staffers and PR firm CKPR. The stunt highlighted AirTran's installation of XM satellite radio into its fleet - a pioneering move - and took advantage of John's part-time residence in Atlanta, an AirTran hub.

While it got plenty of splashy press, it had a serious impact on business. As an up-and-coming brand in the airline industry, AirTran is keen to partner with well-known brands - of which John is deemed one - that will raise the brand's awareness and status.

But, says Hutcheson, the biggest thing PR has done for the brand is to generate awareness of A-Plus Rewards. "PR efforts haven't just encouraged people to sign up and hold the card, but to actually [keep flying] too," he says. "The agency came up with the idea of offering 1,000 free tickets when we relaunched the website." Entries were unlimited, so people visited at all hours to play.

AirTran's biggest challenge is to get noticed in each new city it flies to. When there isn't a PR team on the ground, Hutcheson relies on operations staff who are trained at the company's quarterly business reviews.

Hutcheson uses CKPR's sister ad agency, Cramer-Krasselt, for its advertising work, and says that arrangement suits him perfectly. "That's the nice thing about working with an integrated agency - our staff is, too." Budgets have increased year on year, although the PR side is enjoying a 20% increase (on a \$2 million base) to advertising's 12% (on a \$30 million base). And some of the budget is used in unusual ways. "It cost about \$10,000 to paint Elton John on each plane," Hutcheson says. "That's typically a maintenance expense, but they said, 'We've just painted the planes - we're not paying for that!'"

Lani Hayward

*EVP, creative strategies,
Umpqua Bank*

When Ray Davis was hired as a consultant and later appointed chairman of Umpqua Bank in the mid-1990s, he had a vision of what a community bank should really be.

At the time, Umpqua Bank, based in Roseburg, OR, had a handful of branches, a modest amount in deposits and managed assets, and no clear trajectory for gaining ground in what was then a flat economy.

"Ray had been in community banking industry for some time and developed a vision as to what a bank could be," says CMO Lani Hayward. "His theory is that banks are essentially retailers selling products and services, a commodity."

Don't call Umpqua locations "branches" when Hayward is around. In 1996, Umpqua launched its Bank Store concept with the opening of a location in Eugene, OR, under the banner of the "Pretty Cool for a Bank" campaign.

Each store was designed to encourage a more communal experience. Gone were the cluttered desks, posters, and desk-bound officers traditionally found in banks. Instead, branches had computer access, coffee, and even dog bowls. They were staffed by executives who had received training by The Ritz-Carlton, more akin to retail sales than traditional banking training, including tactics of cross-selling and impulse buying.

The marketing philosophy powering these novel stunts, termed "handshake marketing" by Umpqua, is designed to create positive, engaging interactions with consumers. Key to this effort was not advertising, but methods that targeted customers in real life. The Umpqua ice cream truck toured neighborhoods with free ice cream. There were "penny for a dollar" new-store campaigns. Actors were hired to drive through the city in honeymoon cars for the "Just got joint checking" campaign.

"Everything we do is about marketing our brand, from our coffee beans to our handshake marketing to our stores' design to the way our employees are trained," Hayward says. "We absolutely believe that our brand represents our culture, which is the thing you feel when you come into our store. It must be authentic or it doesn't work."

Michele Perry

CMO, Sourcefire Network Security

When Michele Perry joined Sourcefire Network Security as CMO in April last year, the Columbia, MD, technology vendor was considered just one of many in a very crowded market.

Over the course of about 18 months, Perry implemented a marketing and communications makeover that transformed this small information security startup into a major player, acquired last month for \$225 million.

To stand out, Perry first cleaned up Sourcefire's messaging, making it more cohesive and streamlined. What had sounded like 12 different products was really a single, powerful integrated system of three products, so a rebranding effort renamed them.

"Next, we had to leverage the open-source community," Perry says, so Sourcefire created the "Snort" community.

The marketing shift also included integrated messages, award promotions, product reviews, bylined articles, and third-party product testing.

"I'd like to think there was some breakthrough marketing project or program, but it was really simply executing on the basics: clean messaging, great PR, compelling case studies - a huge challenge in the security market - and commitment to deepening analyst relations," Perry says.

Clara Boza

CMO, Kirkpatrick & Lockhart Nicholson Graham

As CMO for Kirkpatrick & Lockhart Nicholson Graham - a firm boasting more than 1,000 lawyers - Clara Boza is marking her 20th year drumming up interest in the sector.

In fact, her firm was one of the first (if not the first) law practices in the country to build a corporate-style C-suite, including a CMO post. "Our chairman, Peter Kalif, felt it immensely important that our internal structure mirrored corporate internal structures," she says.

But the firm still needed a brand. So Boza began market research, pounding the pavement and talking to clients and employees to find out what made the firm tick.

"We had a reputation as a law firm that really loved a good challenge, to solve problems - lawyers that like to roll up their sleeves," Boza says. From this, a brand emerged, ending up with the tagline, "Challenge Us."

"It captured the attitude we wanted to project and weave through all of our marketing and messaging," she says. It also played well with recruitment and retention programs.

"We also launched several internal initiatives and training programs to ensure buy-in from all relevant parties by involving designated US and UK lawyers and staff in each aspect of the program, from the selection of advertising and PR counsel to the development of the ad campaign and the media plans," Boza adds.

"It's fair to say law firms tend to take a more conservative approach to marketing, and I think a lot of progress has been made, but the greatest challenge is maintaining consistency," Boza explains. "The emphasis has to be not on just committing to marketing, but to actually institutionalize the marketing functions so that they become ingrained in the fabric of the business."

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