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Building a better broadcast package

Craig McGuire - 16 Oct 2006 11:00

Craig McGuire gets to the nuts and bolts of what should go into a compelling pitch.

Developing a VNR that turns a news producer's head is increasingly challenging. So what you use and how you use it makes all the difference.

For the recent Palm Treo 680 launch, A&R Edelman distributed a package that was nearly as multi-functional as the new smartphone itself. "It was for a product launch targeting a modern, hip audience," says Caroline Fogleson, AE at A&R Edelman. "So we typically shoot three or four scenes to demonstrate the device's uses and features."

B-roll featured a professional checking her Blue Tooth connectivity in a stylish Bay Area conference room. Another clip trailed a male model listening to MP3 clips while strolling in a San Francisco park - a venue chosen for its similarity to European environs. In fact, the package was produced in several languages for multiple-market distribution.

Rounding out the package were screen shots and other footage demonstrating the Treo 680's new features. In addition, select outlets received loaned review devices to increase the chance the product, in some form, would reach the air.

The VNR itself should be brief, running no longer than two minutes, and have shorter segments that can be pulled out and accompanied by no more than seven minutes of b-roll.

There are many ways to structure a package, but only one way to lead. "Fred Friendly, legendary president of CBS News, had a rule to always put your best shot first," says Jack Trammell, president of VNR-1 Communications. "So if your package is about a man being shot out of a cannon, don't lead with a b-roll outside the circus tent."

Who should be on film? "The CEO or main company spokesperson should talk," says Bryan Woodruff, director of broadcast services at CCNMatthews, parent company of Market Wire. "If the company wants a second person on camera, it should be from a third-party endorsement."

Last month, Market Wire worked with Research in Motion on a package heralding the launch of the BlackBerry Pearl.

"A package includes several visuals - close-ups and wide angles, plus pushes and pulls," Woodruff advises. "And don't shoot b-roll like an epic film or commercial. Footage should look like the news stories newsrooms normally air."

Christiane Arbesu, VP of production at MultiVu, suggests selecting independent third parties, as it did when producing a January spot for Exubera, the first inhaled insulin to get FDA

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approval. As well as recruiting Sherwyn Schwartz, MD and director at the Diabetes & Glandular Disease Clinic, two type-2 diabetics were used. The female patient featured in the VNR gave testimony on Exubera's benefits. The male patient was shown demonstrating the product and was also featured in the sound bite and b-roll sections.

Sometimes "regular" people are as compelling as experts. Since the Treasury Department tapped Burson-Marsteller in 2002 for a five-year, \$55 million push promoting the introduction of new currency, Burson pros and Treasury officials have fanned out across the US each time a new bill debuts.

"With the first \$50 bill, we bought an American flag from a small business owner. He was an entrepreneur and immigrant with a great story to tell," says Andrew Nebel, a Burson director. "And we spent the first \$20 bill at a street vendor in Times Square. These are the stories news producers love."

Selecting restricted areas or remote locations often appeals to news producers with limited budgets, says Michele Wallace, SVP of client services at Medialink, which recently produced video for a tech company. It intended the video to reach TV newsrooms around the time of the fashion industry's fall gathering to review spring collections.

This included video from an exclusive fashion show organized to feature innovative, wearable garments that flashed messages or were designed with vivid patterns and multi-colored surfaces, she says. It also included individual interviews with a fashion designer and a scientist, which enabled TV stations to use it for either a consumer-lifestyle or tech piece.

Producing footage producers can't easily shoot isn't limited to exclusive locations, adds Les Blatt, multimedia manager at Business Wire, who spent 30-plus years at ABC News.

"With animation, you can do many things you can't do with film, like show how a complicated product works or recreate a medical procedure," he says. "Let's face it, few producers will air actual open-heart surgeries during the dining hour."

Technique tips

DO

Have a credible spokesperson who is comfortable on-camera
Offer unique material and exclusive settings that a news producer can't easily replicate
Offer a wide range of visuals and natural ambient sounds

DON'T

Run too long. And never lead with anything but your best shot
Overproduce an epic or be too promotional
Obscure the source. Clearly disclose the identity of the company funding the package

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