



You've Got Brand!

Breaking Ground on Branding

by Mathew Georghiou

We are inundated with thousands of marketing messages every day. Our senses are flooded with everything from vivid graphics, loud sounds, and olfactory teasers. With so many channels available, getting your message out is easy, but making it stick isn't.

Advertisers are looking for more creative ways to impart their message. Initially, many thought that the Internet would be a powerful new medium, but early attempts have not delivered on the promise. Banner ads offer some benefits but are not the solution, with many Internet surfers becoming increasingly accustomed to tuning out commercial messages.

So where is a marketer to turn? To a recent technique gaining ground called "advergaming." Advergaming involves embedding an advertising message into an interactive game. Unlike serving up a basic banner ad, advergaming goes further by making the brand or message directly part of the game. For example:

- Jack Daniel's associated its brand by mapping a logo onto the pool table in a 3-D Pool game, and on and around the game interface.
- General Mills featured its cereal in a game where the player had to find and collect the cereal within a certain timeframe.
- Nike created a basketball game that not only demonstrates the performance differences of its shoes, but also enables the player to experience the shoes in action.

(Source: <kpe> Fast Forward. "Can Advergaming be the Future of Interactive Advertising?" 2001.)

By embedding a brand and/or product within a relevant activity or associating it with a lifestyle, advertising effectiveness increases significantly. According to *Fast Company*, "The banner ad is dead. Long live the advergame! America's addiction to video and computer games is leading the way to a new advertising medium with astounding click-through rates, play times, and peer-to-peer potential." *(Source: Fast Company. "Game Theory." 2001)*

According to some, advergaming offers retention rates 10 times higher than broadcast commercials; 15-45% of consumers who receive an advergame actually play it; and for an impressive average of 25 minutes. *(Source: YaYa LLC)*

Supporting these numbers is the fact that gaming is the fastest-growing segment of the entertainment industry, having exceeded the movie industry in size. According to the National Institute on Media and the Family, 92% of children between the ages of two and 17 play video or computer games. In 2000, 35% of Americans rated video and computer games as "the most fun entertainment

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activity" (TV was a distant second at only 18%). And, as gaming has become more mainstream, so has the profile of gamers, which now spans age, gender, race, and socio-economic demographics.

From Advergaming to Adverlearning

The same features and benefits of advergaming can also be applied to the learning arena, where pure gaming and entertainment are normally shunned. eLearning simulation – expected to be the next evolution in training – is shown to offer significant benefits above conventional learning approaches. But unlike pure gaming, eLearning simulation offers the player benefits beyond just a fun pastime activity. Any subject matter can be imparted through the use of simulation. And by tying that experience to a brand or product, consumer behavior can be significantly influenced – arguably more so than through any other medium.

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To visualize an example, imagine an entrepreneurship simulation where you start and operate your own virtual business inside your computer. To run the business you must price products, order inventory, hire employees, serve customers, do accounting, visit virtual bankers, lawyers, and accountants, and utilize virtual office equipment.

Imagine now that all of these activities are branded: the accounting module looks like Intuit's QuickBooks software, the bank is the Bank of America, the accountant is from Ernst and Young, the office equipment is Hewlett Packard, and so on.

You spend several hours learning how to start and run a business using this simulation and then decide to actually start a business in real life. Where are you most likely to turn for your products and services? Most likely to the brands and products with which you are already familiar – those that you have experienced in the simulation. Particularly if you have already learned how to use Intuit software or Hewlett Packard equipment. The more realistic the simulation experience is, the more powerful the brand connection becomes.

Of course, care must be taken when embedding a brand into any learning activity in order to avoid being perceived as delivering a blatant sales pitch. This can be accomplished relatively easily with proper design. In fact, it is likely that using real brands in a simulation may even become the preferred approach for learners, as it makes the experience more realistic.

When used wisely, adverlearning may well become the most powerful branding tool ever available.

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