

YouTube Contest Pays Off For Novartis

Novartis Consumer Health marketers working on the Excedrin brand came up winners with a YouTube video contest that was designed to build brand awareness.

BY MARK TOSH

» The marketing team working on the launch of Excedrin Express Gels had a goal in mind when they decided to develop a YouTube video contest to tie in with the launch of the new pain-relief product in September 2008 – building awareness for the fast-acting product. At that time, almost unbelievably, no other brand in the OTC or Rx drug space had sponsored a YouTube contest, according to Google (which owns YouTube), but there had been other YouTube contest efforts, including a notable effort for Post-it Notes from 3M, that drew notice from consumer marketers.

Not wanting to miss the opportunity to get involved with social media, marketers at Novartis Consumer Health (which represents roughly \$4.5 billion in OTC / health-care sales last year for parent pharmaceutical giant Novartis) knew they had to move quickly and smartly to take advantage of this marketing opportunity.

“We had recognized for a while – and Rod Spady [head of global interactive marketing and Web officer] has done a great job with interactive marketing – that social media is playing a larger role within consumers’ mindsets,” Eric Fehling, a senior brand manager for Excedrin, told *OTC Perspectives* in a recent interview. “We’ve seen some great promotions on YouTube... and we viewed YouTube as a great outlet to get to our consumers, as well.”

The timing of the contest, the creative development and the execution plans were all built around the October 2008 launch of the new



Rodney Spady (left) and Eric Fehling anticipate that Novartis will build on the success of its YouTube video contest that coincided with an Excedrin product launch in the fall of 2008.

product, Excedrin Express Gels [which are available in two formulations, Extra Strength Excedrin (with acetaminophen, aspirin and caffeine) and Excedrin Tension Headache (with acetaminophen formulated with caffeine)]. Working within this compressed time frame during the summer of 2008, the marketing team knew it would be a quick turnaround of 2 ½ months to get the contest up and running.

THE SPEED CHALLENGE

And they wanted to create a contest that also tied in with the fast-acting formulation of new Excedrin Express Gels (headache relief starts within 15 minutes, according to Novartis). The rules of the video contest, or “Speed Challenge,” were designed to play up the fast-acting aspect of the Express Gels and offered a \$15,000 first prize to the person who submitted a video of

themselves performing an “amazing feat of speed.” (For more details on the rules of the contest, see related story on page 12.)

Excedrin Express Gels shipped to customers during the end of August / beginning of September timeframe, and the marketing plan was designed to start media exposure about four to six weeks after the ship date, in order to make a big impact for the new pain reliever. “This is a revolutionary form within the category and for our business,” Fehling said of the Express Gels. “So we really wanted to make sure this was a big splash and we wanted to catch consumers at every touch point in digital. This was very important to us.”

Spady, who oversees the digital marketing activities at Novartis Consumer Health, said that of the digital marketing options his team considered, the social media effort on YouTube fit the strategy behind the

product very well. "Eric's team looked at this and said they wanted to have an online presence and we want to really engage our target audience," he explained. "We wanted to make sure that we got as wide a view of the awareness aspect as we could, in a way of speaking, by using some type of media that would fit the brand and fit everything about Excedrin Express Gels. We looked at social media and social media was perfect fit for it. It fit perfectly in terms of speed, which lines up with the brand claim, and also [in terms] of a wide audience which is what all of us were looking for."

The complementary impact of the YouTube campaign would be to achieve a "viral" aspect of the contest. "The best way to go viral is using social media, and it worked very well with this campaign," Spady added.

Working with Boomerang, Spady also wanted to ensure that they had the right search-marketing strategy in place, and that the Excedrin brand site had a "very strong call to action, a coupon call to action," he noted. The design of the Excedrin channel on YouTube was intended to encourage consumers who visited to come back via an incentive program. This was done by using a bracket-style voting system for the user-generated videos that drew voters back to vote in successive rounds, or to see how their selection was faring.

WORKING WITH GOOGLE

Google marketers worked with the Novartis Consumer Health team to create the contest, and the digital advertising agency Boomerang also played a key role in getting the campaign completed in time to coincide with the Excedrin Express Gels launch.

The contest drew more than 250 user-generated videos. The winning entry, submitted by Lucas Ridley of

Georgia, a hang glider with a penchant for online video contests, showed Ridley gliding through the sky in what looks to be a race against a hawk or other bird. His entry was judged to be the best following a series of online voting match-ups that allowed the contestants to recruit votes for their videos.

Novartis also came up a winner in the contest, according to Fehling and Spady.

"I won't get into specific numbers, but definitely awareness was high on our list," Fehling said in the interview. "Impressions also were extremely important to us. This was all about broad reach and awareness for Express Gels." The contest also included an online coupon that could be downloaded and measured. "We really looked for success from a variety of measures," Fehling noted, "and not just whether people did go on YouTube and view the videos. But did that transfer them to the Excedrin.com home page? And did that then translate into coupon prints, and did those prints translate into redemptions? We really looked at it in a multi-faceted way to meas-

ure the intended success," he said.

While declining to provide specific results of sales or market-share gains, Fehling said the YouTube campaign was an overwhelming success.

"It exceeded substantially all of the metrics," he said. "Google has done a lot of these programs with other companies on YouTube, and we used them to help benchmark and set up our expectations. In the end, it exceeded our goals on just about every level.... We were extremely pleased with the results."

Spady also noted that one element of the campaign's success was something that Novartis did not have to pay for – the viral aspect. "We achieved the viral target, which was really a bonus. We had people who put up videos on the YouTube channel page, and they also went over to Facebook and created Facebook pages to get people to come and vote for them. They either went to Facebook or they hit blogs, so we got that viral out there."

One contestant's blog drove 20,000 people to the YouTube.com channel for Excedrin.

Blogging for votes in the Speed Challenge

Wednesday, November 12, 2008

Vote For Me !!!

Feel free to email friends and family this:

It's a little after midnight and voting just started to pick the finalists for the Excedrin Contest. Go to: <http://www.youtube.com/excedrinexpressgels> and click the VOTE tab, search for me 'alta8bird' and check the thumbs up icon next to the video! Voting ends this Sunday the 16th, then if I make it to the top 8, there are 4 rounds of head-to-head voting.

Check back here or on the youtube page to see if I make it to the top 8 because when my round comes up, there are only 3 days to vote for each round. One vote per person per day is allowed and you don't need a youtube account to vote! Thanks for your help!

— Lucas Ridley of Trenton, Ga.



PROMOTING THE CONTEST

One of the keys to the success of the contest was the marketing plan and promotion that Novartis put in place. In addition to promoting the contest on the company Web page, it was promoted via Internet advertising such as banner ads. To kick off the contest, Novartis also utilized a "takeover" of the YouTube home page on the weekend of the product launch, Spady said.

A lot of the [online] ads drove consumers to the contest page within the Excedrin channel on YouTube, he said, noting that it was truly a fully integrated marketing plan both online and off-line. "But the key to success, and the reason why the YouTube contest was successful, was the homepage takeover."

Spady noted that, as of early September, there were about 180,000 views on the Excedrin YouTube channel. Since the contest ended, an additional 20,000-25,000 views have been achieved even without new content.

Rod explained, "It's altogether, it's integrated. Because what happens is you can have them both feed a call to action to one another. So from the print ad that we would put into a magazine, there's going to be some type of URL or domain name pointing to something as the call to action. So it could be a call to action of both because they are all going to interchange. We understand that our consumer, our target audience, is not going to stop reading magazines, they're not going to stop watching television, they're not going to stop listening to the radio and they're not just going to solely rely on their computer or a mobile device. So it all has to tie in together as an integrated marketing strategy."

However, while the social media trial for Excedrin has been a success, Fehling noted that the overall mar-

keting plan is still built upon the idea of media integration. "Each media channel can build off the others in such a way that social media will not be done in isolation from television or print advertising. The most successful marketing campaigns will be synergistic and will have the same look and feel in order to work most effectively."

RATING THE EFFORT

While awareness was a key goal of the YouTube contest, the bottom line is always the bottom line – sales results. Success with sales, too, appears to have been an outcome of the YouTube effort. "Awareness was what we were looking for," Fehling said. "but I can tell you also that our sales at launch exceeded all of our expectations.... Now, launch-to-date – it's been roughly a year since Express Gels have been in the market – it's exceeded what we were expecting, both from a sales and a share standpoint. It's tough to nail down what was driven by YouTube versus TV versus the FSI versus everything else. [The YouTube contest] was a very integral part of the launch campaign and the marketing mix we had in play at the time," he added.

Looking ahead, Fehling said he believes there will be more social media campaigns in future Excedrin marketing plans. "I don't want to get into specifics... but we're looking at all different social media aspects and how we can utilize that within Excedrin to drive our message to our target consumers. We see the YouTube example as something that's succeeded.... There's plenty of other [social media options] that we're examining. Expect to see some more Excedrin playing within the social media sphere."

Spady added, "Let's face reality – everybody is mobile today. In the past, you had the time to look at TV or time to read the newspaper.... Because consumers and healthcare professionals are more mobile, we have to be mobile. Everything is about speed. We have to constantly keep engaged and get the information out, and understand what consumers are thinking and provide them the right call to action. This is not only to drive brand awareness, but to drive trial and conversion. So social media is going to be a major part of our digital strategy moving forward." <<

Rules for the YouTube Speed Challenge

Sponsored by Excedrin Express Gels

The Contest:

- Make a short video about an amazing feat of speed by you or someone you know
- Submit your video and you could win the grand prize of \$15,000
- Submission period is Oct. 15 – Nov. 11, 2008
- Grand prize winner is announced on Jan. 9, 2009

Viewing and Voting:

- View the videos for creativity with speed and give a thumbs up or down
- Voting to determine the Final Eight will take place Nov. 12-16, 2008
- Starting November 20th through December 10th, come back every three days to view and vote on the Final Eight videos

The Sweepstakes:

- Click on Sweepstakes tab for your chance to win a Flip video camera
- Enter as often as once a day per e-mail address
- Prize drawing is every three days through Dec. 10th