

How Brands Use Entertainment to Effectively Advertise Products A Case Study in Branded Entertainment: BMW's "The Hire"

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Advertising: The Art of Persuasion

In its simplest form, advertising is the art of persuasion, and the ways in which advertisers communicate with consumers continues to evolve as new technologies and innovations emerge. Throughout the years we have seen a plethora of different advertising techniques used to influence, persuade and ultimately motivate audiences to take action. Whether it is encouraging consumers to buy a product or support a cause, advertisers have proven to be quite creative over the years. We have seen traditional commercial advertising, product

placements and billboard ads to more modern modes like mobile marketing and social media campaigns; however, no matter which strategy advertisers decide to employ, we know one thing is for sure—the advertising industry is in a constant state of transition. This fact is music to the ears of all advertisers as it encourages marketers to be inventive with their campaigns. In an extremely creative and challenging field, advertisers are always looking for ways to be bigger and better than their competition.

The historical timeline of advertising clearly illustrates how the industry has evolved over time. An **infographic powered by Infolinks** shows these changes and specifically indicates when certain techniques were introduced. Here are some of the more interesting points:

- **Outdoor Advertising in 2000 BC** – Some claim Egyptians invent outdoor advertising
- **Print ads in 1472** –The first print ad is created in England; the ad was a handbill announcing a prayer book for sale
- **Billboard ads in 1835** –The rise of billboard ads coincides with the invention of automobile fuels

- **Product placement in 1873**- Jules Verne’s novel mentions transport shipping companies, making this mention the first ever product placement
- **Direct marketing in 1892** –Sears sends out handwritten postcards
- **Celebrity endorsements in 1905** –Fatty Arbuckle promotes Murad cigarettes
- **Commercial ads in 1941** –The first commercial ad airs promoting the Bulova Watch
- **Contests & Giveaways in 1950s**- Advertising through contests becomes popular; one brand that used this technique included Dial soap
- **Banner ads in 1994** –HotWired launches first banner ads from AT&T, Sprint, MCI, etc.
- **Mobile ads in 1997** –First mobile ad launches; a Finnish news provider offered free news headlines via SMS sponsored ads
- **Online video advertising in 2006** –YouTube launches and the birth of video advertising including in-video ads, participatory video ads and pre-roll ads begins
- **Viral marketing & social interaction marketing in 2007 & 2008** – Twitter’s real-time, global community allows for fast and time-efficient advertising; Facebook introduces ads that specifically target users’ social interactions
- **Online marketing in 2011**- Becomes number 2 in terms of budget priority among advertisers

Branded Entertainment: An Interactive Experience

Creativity and originality are the cornerstones of great advertising, but how do advertisers effectively communicate their messages when it is so easy for consumers to opt out of or ignore the more conventional marketing techniques, like commercial advertising? Today, we are seeing an increasing convergence of television and the Internet, which allows users to easily pick and choose what content they are exposed to and when. This generates even more difficulty for advertisers to reach consumers.

The digital age presents a unique challenge for advertisers where they are forced to find innovative ways to counter consumers’ increasing abilities to ignore advertisements. If marketers want to effectively and efficiently reach their target audiences, they need to be creative. One way in which marketers accomplish this is through branded entertainment. Simply put, branded entertainment is when products are integrated into entertainment properties and high levels of user-engagement are required. The whole concept of branded entertainment is to sell products while entertaining audiences. One great example of branded entertainment is illustrated in BMW’s “The Hire.”

Case Study: BMW Presents “The Hire”

In 2001 and 2002, BMW released a series of consecutive short films called “**The Hire.**” The series, which consisted of 8 films, featured famous filmmakers and starred several A-list celebrities. Clive Owen starred as the “Driver” and different BMWs are showcased throughout the films.



Other A-list celebs featured in the films included Madonna, Don Cheadle, Mickey Rourke, Adriana Lima, James Brown, Forest Whitaker and Stellan Skarsgard, among others. The films, which were directed and produced by some of Hollywood's best, were the first introduction of a complete fusion of advertising and entertainment.



This type of branded marketing is purposed to entertain a specific niche audience, i.e., BMW and car enthusiasts. What is unique about this approach to advertising is that consumers had to seek out the content themselves. According to the **BMW blog**, the publicity and marketing outcomes of the film series were highly successful. BMW sales increased by 12% in 2001 from the previous year and the movies were viewed over 11 million times in just four months. This number is quite remarkable

when it's put into perspective, especially since YouTube wasn't even around then and the idea of viral marketing was in its infancy. As the films gained considerable traction in popularity, BMW made the decision to produce DVDs for customers who visited certain BMW dealerships.

This example of branded entertainment shows how companies like BMW take advantage of using entertainment to sell products. Branded entertainment advertising is set-up to put entertainment first, even before product promotion. Such a concept of prioritizing entertainment may be successful for the mere fact that consumers hate to feel like they are being advertised to. BMW's "The Hire," employed branded content the right way. The films were created with a story in mind first, and subtle branding second.

The Future of Advertising

As we move from generation to generation, we will continue to see advertising evolve. There is no question that marketing in the digital era is challenging; however the introduction of technological advancement and digital innovation is never-ending. Therefore, it is imperative that advertisers adopt such innovations and adapt their marketing strategies accordingly.

Branded entertainment allows advertisers to own their audiences by producing original content that truly entertains. With the entertainment factor at the forefront, consumers are more willing to accept advertisements, and like in the case of BMW's short films, are more willing to actually seek

the content out. It is this type of creative intuition in advertising that assists in selling products to consumers.

Ambush: First Episode of “The Hire” Series



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