

THIS YEAR'S GRAND EX AWARD WINNER PUT MOUNTAIN DEW'S BIGGEST FANS IN COMPLETE CONTROL OF ITS EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

THE FLAVOR OF LOVE

It's been five years since *Time* magazine named "You" its person of the year. And since then, the spirit of consumer empowerment has shown no signs of slowing down.

While many marketers have preached the benefits of "turning the brand over to consumers," one brand has been rather busy turning its entire marketing mix over to them. For Mountain Dew, consumers aren't just a target audience—they're the brand's chief marketing officers.

The original DEWmocracy campaign took the R&D process out of corporate headquarters and engaged consumers in the co-creation of actual product. The campaign launched for the first time in 2007 when fans were invited to vote online for one of three new berry flavored Dew options (Supernova, Revolution and Voltage). The raspberry-citrus Voltage won the battle, while Dew broke new marketing ground and officially ushered in the age of the consumer.

That ground was shattered once again when the brand created a sequel program that amplified online activity using social media and revved up the entire program's reach and frequency with an upgraded offline experiential marketing campaign. The combination of the two proved unstoppable—especially for this year's Ex Award judges, who were thrilled to hand Dew and handling agency Motive the 2011 Grand Ex Award.

Dubbed DEWmocracy 2: Collective Intelligence, the effort kicked off in July and for 12 months, utilized Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and live engagements to help guide and shape not only the flavors of the new Dew, but the actual marketing mix. Consumers suggested, voted and selected the campaign's web look, product packaging, graphic design, advertising, event campaign strategy and more. "The core of DEWmocracy 2 was giving real Mountain Dew fans the opportunity to work collaboratively with

us, so fans were responsible for every part of the campaign development, from the flavor to the name to the advertising," says Matt Statman, founder of Denver-based Motive.

The first phase of the program narrowed the field of flavor variations to just three. The next phase became the foundation for one of the industry's greatest integrated experiential programs—the DEWmocracy 2 Flavor Campaign.

The three flavor options included the strawberry-pineapple-flavored Typhoon, a citrusy flavor called White Out and a lime-based Dew variation named Distortion. Once on the shelves, Dew's Flavor Campaign, a three-pronged national sampling tour driven entirely by consumer feedback and suggestions, kicked off. Consumers campaigned and voted online and at Dew events across the country to elect one flavor into the permanent product lineup. The winning candidate, White Out, was announced last summer. The winning strategy leveraged the power of crowdsourcing to let consumers speak for themselves and in the process, brought an entire campaign to life.

"The grassroots portion of DEWmocracy 2 tapped into the collective power of hardcore fans," says Mountain Dew brand director Brett O'Brien. "We set out to evolve immersive, experiential marketing, and to be the first brand to link a large-scale grassroots program with consumer choice."

Fans drove it. Dew delivered it. And here, we break down the Flavor Campaign.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Deep fan engagement and collaboration has long been a core value for Mountain Dew. The brand's 2007 Green Label Art project, for instance, gave 12 emerging artists the opportunity to design a 16-



PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER LANE

MOUNTAIN MEN: Dew brand director Brett O'Brien (left) with Motive founder Matt Statman



ounce aluminum Dew bottle. Fans voted for their favorites and the winners saw their designs on store shelves for a limited time. A more recent offshoot of the DEWmocracy campaign is another fan initiative called the Dew Labs Community: a private, online forum where 5,000 of the most passionate Dew fans can contribute feedback to the company, share ideas and riff on what they want from

their favorite soda brand.

Indeed, Dew lovers are some of the most rabid, loyal and enthusiastic consumers in the world. (Editor's Note: I once tried to convince my college roommate to go cold turkey on her daily Dew addiction and still have the scars from her Lee PressOn Nails to prove it—J.H.) The Flavor Campaign does not depart from the



GRAND EX AWARD

brand's heritage and willingness to engage openly with its tribe. It lets consumers take an active role in determining where "their" products are going.

The Flavor Campaign's ultimate stroke of strategic savvy was its ability to hand over control to fans to create a true sense of personal investment. Consumers today already feel like they're in control—their blogs, YouTube videos, Facebook comments, ratings and reviews can spread like wildfire and affect mass opinion with just a few keystrokes. And consumers know it. So Dew went for it with a simple mantra: "Let it rip. You tell us what you want and we'll make it happen for you." The move reinforced the target audience's already heightened sense of control and gave them a stake in the brand they love. For new fans, they got a taste of the brand fanaticism through existing Dew lovers and felt like they got to take part in the ownership of a new brand offshoot.

"The whole backbone of this program was that consumers are driving everything. So when we created the experiential tour, it was just about dissecting it; every element of it from where we go to what we do to how it happens, and saying, 'OK, if we had to put [all event] decisions in the hands of consumers, or if we had to let consumers decide how that went down, what does that look like?' That's what drove all of our program mechanics, start to finish," says Statman.

The resulting Flavor Campaign was part "get out the vote" national political rally and part "Road Rules" challenge. Three teams of four brand ambassadors, each representing—and evangelizing—one of the three flavors, set out across the country in branded mobile vehicles filled with samples and real time iPad voting stations to stir up as much grassroots support and votes for their flavors as they could. Rather than a typical political campaign, Dew threw Flavor Rallies that spoke to the Dew community and represented the brand's unique personality in each market. There was very little pre-planning—each event was first sketched out in loose terms and then fans online helped the teams via "social routing" to determine what the right kind of activity would be based on the flavor and the local audience.

Each team was responsible for executing a series of 25 different activations. Dew laid out the challenge, and it was up to them to figure out how to activate the local communities to boost engagement and rock the vote. Activities included "Dew Goes Pro," where the



team took over a local sporting event. One team went to a Seattle Mariners game and spent some of its marketing budget on tickets so fans could take over an entire section. The group wore t-shirts representing their flavor and the Mariners put the team's name on the Jumbotron along with a directive to go online and vote for that flavor. While another team, Team Typhoon, was traveling the Southeast, fans told them that the Durham Bulls were doing a throwback game at an old stadium where they hadn't played in 35 years. Dew's brand ambassadors called up the team and were invited to participate in the game's festivities, including throwing out the first pitch, shooting t-shirts out of canons during the seventh inning stretch, sampling Dew and gathering votes at the front gate—all at no cost to the brand, one of the benefits of a consumer-powered, impromptu activation strategy.

The "Say I Do" challenge asked each team to find a couple that would get married under a banner of their individual flavor (several couples took them up on it). "Neighborhood Takeovers" involved canvassing with campaign signs, banners and door hangers. Find a "Dew HQ" (Dew Headquarters) asked the team to find a cool cultural spot, like a retail store or boutique, where they could put a mini fridge for their flavor, hand out samples and serve as the official voting headquarters. The team would pull into town, go online and say, "Guys, we need to find a Dew HQ in Denver, where should it be?" Fans would recommend sneaker shops, BMX stores and other Dew-friendly venues and rally behind their favorite spots. If the team didn't have any contacts, sometimes the fans would make the call for them. The Dew brand team often found itself standing shoulder to shoulder with fans to plan and execute the events. "They literally became this really cool, empowered grassroots army that got us into everything," says Statman.

Other challenges included music-themed activations, like one that got a local dj to promote a Dew flavor-themed night, complete with glow sticks in the soda's signature color, and others that connected the team with local indie bands. Campus takeovers also had local students providing the teams rare access into the dorms; some even lined up free venues where the team could host tasting events, and then helped pull it all together.

And in true political campaign fashion, one challenge had the teams lobbying fans to get the endorsement of a local political figure. The Mayor of Raleigh-Durham supported team Typhoon; a city

GRAND EX AWARD

commissioner in Nebraska got behind another flavor. And each of those endorsements came to fruition because a fan made it happen.

FEVER FOR THE FLAVOR

The on-the-ground activations created a snowball effect, picking up momentum both online and off, as each group traveled across the country. In the end, each team logged more than 25 different interpretations of the same challenge in 69 cities based entirely on what the fans wanted them to do. By the time voting wrapped on June 14, more than 2.9 million votes had been cast and 60,000 samples had been distributed. The winner, the citrusy-flavored White Out, was announced on June 15 and hit store shelves in October. Sales spikes were immediate.

Dew could not have achieved this level of live engagement and leveraged its fans' spirit of collaboration had it not been for the

campaign generated more than 1,200 pieces of digital content.

Dew's unconventional mix of brand ambassadors were also key to the success of the multimedia content and the campaign. The brand selected its three teams of four through a series of casting calls that purposely skipped the resumes of more experienced road tour managers and instead looked for Dew fans, first and foremost, with a skill for guerrilla marketing. "What we needed were people who are really smart, savvy marketers in and of themselves, really entrepreneurial, really scrappy, really got the whole concept of grassroots marketing," Statman says.

Each team had a lead, a social media expert and a multimedia content expert who could shoot and post video and photo content on a daily basis. The video footage was kept raw to give it a more organic, less produced feel—more in keeping with the Dew target's lifestyle and tastes.



combination of live and digital. Mountain Dew's Facebook page has more than 4.7 million fans, 267 discussions, almost 2,000 photos (many contributed by fans) and a separate page for Mountain Dew Green Label, a creative community sub-site for art, music, sports and entertainment content with an indie flavor. While the numbers are impressive, the more important metric is qualitative—Dew is active on its Facebook page and regularly posts requests for feedback from its fans.

The Flavor Campaign teams were able to tap into a vibrant community that was primed and ready for live engagement (hello, brands that still don't understand the value of a robust social media community—are you getting it now?) "They were used to communicating with Dew on a regular basis online, so when we said, 'Hey, we've got a program on tour, three teams, each with team captains and they're going to be talking to you guys via Twitter, microsite and Facebook,' they embraced it. Because they already had that foundation from a relationship perspective in communicating with consumers," Statman says.

The Millennial Male target isn't an easy get in the CPG market, but Flavor Campaign managed to utilize all of its channels to create a line of communication that could start at any point—online or offline—and continue in perpetuity without feeling forced. Each team had a flavor-specific microsite with live chat functionality and dedicated Twitter and email accounts. They became the forum for multimedia content from the road that included status posts, daily vlogs from each team, event and activation photos and videos, written diaries and uncensored video and photo content from fans that the team campaigned with along the way. The cam-

To measure the program's effectiveness, the Dew team broke down each type of engagement and looked at all the dynamics to determine if there was value. They assessed what form of engagement it took, how long the engagement lasted and what kind of platform or springboard the engagement facilitated to further communications or conversations. "How deep was *this* form of engagement, how long did *that* engagement last, what was the viral component of that whole [activity], and then how did that conversation either take us into a deeper form of engagement on-site, where did it take us in terms of a digital conversation, or, have we heard from these characters later on," Statman says. "And the answer to that was yes, we did."

Mountain Dew turned over an entire marketing mix to consumers and watched all levels of the purchase funnel accelerate and increase. The consumer base grew as product flew off store shelves. Brand affinity levels rose as millions of consumers turned into millions of Dew brand managers. And in the end, the ROI was through the roof.

"Motive provided the grassroots teams with the ideas, resources and motivation to create campaign buzz and channel that energy into social media sites that extended the reach of their efforts," says O'Brien. "DEWmocracy 2 took brand engagement to a new level."

The program broke ground on a new model of community engagement that's not just for the Millennial Male, but for all consumer marketing *in the new millennium*. Constant online engagement married with customized, authentic offline face-to-face marketing is indeed the new formula for marketing contact. **EM**

—Jessica Heasley