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The Big Idea Series ...Article 2

BMW USA and BMW Films...What's the Big Idea?

By Peter L. Klinge, Jr.

How is it that BMW is in the movie business? They make sports cars that move you from point A to point B with fast acceleration and sure stops...right? Well, that's part of it. But the bigger idea is that BMW represents a unique and exhilarating driving experience a la "the ultimate driving machine".

Context and Experience:

In this context the driver controls the machine and thus the experience of how, and where he or she moves down the road. A few years ago, BMW's Z Roadster sports coupe shared action hero status with Pierce Brosnan's James Bond character.

The car was equipped to handle all manner of road obstacles and then some, and left emblazoned in moviegoers brains that BMW is the most technologically sophisticated and exhilarating automobile that one can own. The BMW brand offers the ultimate sense of personal fulfillment and driving satisfaction.

Now in 2001, BMW's North American marketing director and his management had the vision to expand on this sense of a customer's driving satisfaction by establishing BMW Films. The campaign effort was acknowledged in June 2002 at the Cannes Advertising Festival with a Gold Cyber Lion. Ironically, the judges had a hard time classifying this as

advertising so they put the campaign in the Internet category.

This is a series of five well-crafted film shorts, 5-8 minutes each, by talented feature film directors that viewers download at www.BMWFilms.com. The directors are known to knowledgeable film goers which add to the idea's appeal, i.e., John Frankenheimer, Ang Lee, Madonna's hubby, Guy Ritchie, Wang Kar-Wai, and Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu. Web viewers can see original film shorts that present strong character roles in compelling action storylines.

The BMW and the series hero, *the driver*, are one in demonstrating the important role the car plays in helping the characters in such stories as the Ambush, Star, and the Powder Keg.

The viewer quickly realizes that there's a difference in this BMW machine from a stodgy AMC Gremlin as it executes fast turns, stops and generally outruns the antagonists.

Vision, Leadership, Teamwork:

The vision that the BMW and agency leadership shared was that the BMW brand is an individual adventure and means of self-expression. By hiring accomplished film directors and actors, the leadership team understood that to communicate the BMW experience they needed people on the team who could create a compelling story that viewers and potential brand buyers could accept.

The teamwork necessary to juggle the egos that would create the story concept is a critical challenge. BMW

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management, the variety of directors and production personnel, and the agency had to form a cohesive team.

The film shorts communicate far better than a standard TV commercial would in exhibiting what BMW ownership represents.

The use of the Internet allows BMW to communicate more personally and emotionally with interested buyers, and provides a depth of content about the various models.

Snapshot on why this is considered a big idea

This is a big idea for BMW because it demonstrates a strong creative understanding of how to use the Internet to great advantage and convenience for BMW customers and prospects. BMW is able to accelerate the sales process through this interactive story approach.

Positioning

BMW Films offers the best expression of “the ultimate driving machine” short of actually putting the customer in the car during these action scenes. For both current BMW owners and prospects it’s further validation as to why they own or want a BMW.

Consumer statement: “ I really do (or could) enjoy driving from point A to B in this car, but just in case I need it, it’s good to know that my BMW has something extra...”

Wow, some extra!

Pros

- Strong creative storyline involving the BMW brand

- Positive commitment to vision; leadership allowed talented directors to create a strong story that viewers could buy into.
- Use of the Internet medium enables communication of the brand story, and a higher degree of personal interactivity and information access than print or television could offer.

Cons

- A potential teamwork problem if BMW hopes to continue with the BMW Films idea. It is unusual that an agency, marketing client, and feature film directors will collaborate on a commercial brand project. Agency personnel pride themselves on conceiving ideas for clients. The necessary involvement of the film companies can make agency people feel slighted or the marketing client think he/she is a film producer.

Consequently, the team could break down and the agency/client relationship can become strained if the leadership doesn’t exercise wisdom and humility. Something Hollywood is in short supply of.

- The level of interactivity and e-commerce flow could be improved. Basic vehicle information can be expanded to include how to and where to buy features, pricing, etc. For example, I’m into the brand after seeing Alejandro’s film and while I’m here I want to check out the cars; maybe I can buy one.

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A really big idea is enduring and improves the product or the business process. It's evolutionary as product improvements are introduced and consumers adjust their buying tastes.

Marketing plays a critical role in presenting customers with product or brand values that create sales. BMW and its agency share a responsibility and opportunity in creating value for one of the most expensive and considered purchases a consumer will make.

BMW will assume some risks because the effort involved will take them further beyond current media convention. On the other hand, if their marketing is not aggressive, then the BMWFilms.com event will be just another blip in consumers' minds that will blur with millions of other car ad messages they see.

The author, Peter Klinge, Jr. is a marketer of 20 years experience in film production, and advertising and communications with a background in the packaged goods, soft drink, and technology industries.

Peter is currently President of Klinge & Associates Idea Marketing Consultants ©. His organization's mission is to help companies to grow sales and strengthen customer relationships through the development and implementation of Breakout Ideas™. From 1997 to 2003 Peter held various senior posts with Euro RSCG Worldwide, most recently as chief marketing officer and global business development.

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Disclaimer: Source references include review of the BMWFilms.com site, and *AdAge's July 23, 2001 article, "BMW and Fallon's Web films widen horizons

Opportunities

- Develop a BMW theme park attraction or driving school sponsorships for BMW owners and prospects. Experience the ultimate driving machine for yourself.
- Present BMW Films trailers on theater screens to promote the BMWFilms.com.
- Create and integrate more car model content into the Web site to further the e-commerce flow and sell opportunity for the brand.
- Quantify/qualify the leads from site visitation for future direct marketing selling opportunities.

It will be interesting to see if BMW continues to expand on this idea beyond a one-time campaign event. The thought that this is an idea that is "reinventing advertising" as quoted by Fallon's creative chief* is not significant. From this writer's point of view reinventing advertising is not the main client business challenge to solve.

However, changing the way marketers do business with customers is. BMW started something that transcends a simple media effort targeted at an Internet audience.

If BMW has the vision and commitment to expand on the premise of BMWFilms.com they will consider how to infuse their brand positioning into all aspects of the customer service experience.

BIG IDEA SERIES: A THREE PART SERIES

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for entertaining ways to brand”, by Anthony Vagnoni. “The ultimate driving machine” is believed to be a previous campaign tagline owned by BMW.

To the best of the author’s knowledge all of the information and content presented in the article entitled “BMW USA and BMW Films What’s the big idea...” is written from source material in the public domain. Further, his point of view, observations and insights as to the BMW team’s vision, positioning, the campaign’s pros and cons, and opportunities are based on his own experience and conclusions supported by the aforementioned source references.

The Big Idea Series is a concept written by the author Peter L. Klinge, Jr. as a series of management and marketing articles that reviews the role of communications and marketing in advancing product innovation as outlined in his first article, “What’s the big idea... finding the way to tap consumer desire”, July 31, 2001.