

# How to put together a multi-brand promotion...

by Bill Carmody

Okay, you've been given the task of building a multi-brand promotion, but you're not quite sure how to do it. Here's a step-by-step approach to get you started with examples from the recent launch of Visa's Shop, Click & Win game in which Visa worked with seven of the top e-commerce brands to promote the use of Visa to online shoppers.

## 1. Start With A Clear Objective

This seems obvious, but a clear objective is the first and most important step in creating successful multi-brand promotions. If your objective isn't clear, then it will be impossible for you to explain to your desired partners what you want to do and why you think they should be involved with you. Conversely, a clear objective will make all the other steps flow effortlessly, because you can simply ask yourself, "Does this support the objective?"

In the case of Visa's Shop, Click & Win promotion, Visa's objective was to promote the use of the Visa card to online shoppers. Visa wanted to promote itself online through the top e-commerce brands so that when consumers went online to shop, they would use their Visa card instead of Visa's competitors. Having this clear objective helped Visa determine what it wanted from its online partners and what it would need to give in return.

## 2. Identify ideal partners based on complimentary brands and strategies

Now that you have your objective, the next step is to determine which partners would best lend themselves to helping you satisfy your objectives. Make a list of as many complimentary partners as you can, and then prioritize the ones that are most important to your company and the promotion itself. Partner selection is significant because the right partnerships can exponentially increase your chances for success.

For Visa, making the list of e-commerce partners was simple. From the e-commerce and online shopping surveys, Visa was able to determine which Internet storefronts had the most brand recognition and would provide Visa the best opportunity to influence existing online shoppers to choose their Visa card for their method of payment.

## 3. Put yourself in your partners shoes -- What's in it for them?

Determining what you want out of the promotion is easy -- you want to satisfy your promotional objective and want to use your desired partners to help you do that. However, now you must place yourself in your partner's shoes and think what you would want from your brand if you were approached. Anticipating what your partners want from your company will help you negotiate the best situation for both parties.

Visa knew what the majority of online brands needed most: traditional media exposure. Print and radio advertising is expensive and Visa knew that most of the ".com"

companies were saving their advertising dollars for the 1999 Christmas blitz. By hosting a pre-Christmas multi-brand promotion and giving it plenty of advertising support, Visa knew it could attract the right partners to participate and create a successful promotion for both Visa and its partners.

#### **4. Make initial contact to determine interest and availability**

Once the list of partners is complete and you have a good idea of what your partners will want and what you can offer, the next step is to pick up the phone and determine your desired partners interest and availability. Often times the promotional timing is key to your partner's interest. If the promotional launch date is too close then the partner may already have committed their resources to other plans.

For Visa, the challenge was exclusivity agreements. While most online companies would be interested in a company like Visa approaching them about a multi-brand promotion, some desired partners already had exclusivity agreements with Visa's competitors and were not able to participate. However, once these companies were identified and removed from the desired list, Visa had identified seven of the top e-commerce partners who were willing to participate: Continental Airlines, eToys.com, Garden.com, MarthaStewart.com, Nordstrom, Reel.com, and Travelocity.

#### **5. Create partnership agreements and have them signed**

Now that you have initial interest from your desired partners, the next step is to put it in writing. Make sure to specify exactly what your company will be providing versus what your partner will provide. This is where the rubber meets the road in multi-brand promotions; the point in which you move from concept to reality. Once the agreement has been signed, you have the green light to move forward and make your plans literal.

It's not always easy getting the plans signed, but if you've thought through both sides of the agreement, the negotiations are much easier. This is often the point in which the lawyers want to have their say and for good reason -- these are binding agreements which dictate what must be given and provided.

#### **6. Manage the ongoing relationship throughout the promotion**

One of the most common mistakes is the misconception that the launch of the promotion is the finish line. Not only is it not the finish line, but sometimes its not even the half-way mark. If this is your first time with a multi-brand promotion, it is critical to make sure that your partners are happy. Issues and problems will most certainly arise in any promotion, and your responsiveness to these things will often determine whether or not you partners will participate with you again in the future.

In the case of Visa's Shop, Click & Win promotion, a couple of consumers experienced problems when they went to play the scratch-off game. In one case, a consumer's browser had crashed just at the very moment they were to play the game. Needless to say, this

consumer was disappointed and asked the partner if anything could be done. Visa immediately addressed the consumers concerns and issued a free game play and the consumer who had a potentially negative experience went away with a positive feeling about Visa and its partner (and sent an email back saying as much). This quick responsiveness and willingness to fix problems is one of the reasons that partners keep coming back to Visa for multi-brand promotions.

## **7. Find out what can be done better next time**

No matter how successful the multi-brand promotion is, it can always be improved. Once the promotion has ended, it is important to recap internally (and ideally with your partners) what could be improved for the next promotion. The more feedback you receive, the better your planning for the next promotion.

At the same time, successful multi-brand promotions breed more success. During the Visa Shop, Click & Win promotion, additional e-commerce brands sent inquiries asking to be included in Visa's next multi-brand promotion. In addition to Visa's current partners, Visa now has the beginnings of a list of further partners who have *asked* to be included in future promotional opportunities. Obviously, this makes the task of finding partners for the next promotion that much easier.

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