

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/case-study-coca-colas-global-campaign>

In their quest for an authentic viral campaign, the global soft drink giant gave \$50,000 to seven teams worldwide, one of whom created the Coke Happiness Machine. Stanford GSB Professor Jennifer Aaker, shows this popular YouTube video, and talks about how this small investment had big payoff for authenticity, connection, surprise, meaning, and global appeal.



Transcript

This is Coca-Cola.. So let's say you're out there in the world and you say, "I get how this works for Sameer.. I get how it works for Robert.. I know where to go for resources.. But I've got a brand, or I've got an idea, and I want to spread it.. I want it to go viral." I just wanted to tell you a small case study about Coca-Cola which had an idea.. And they had a single-focused goal.. They really wanted to connect with teenagers globally with the flagship brand, with Coca-Cola.. And they wanted to do so through digital media.. That was their hypothesis is that 'we're not going to be able to connect with individuals globally unless we do it through digital media'..

Now most companies at this point would say, "OK, we've got our \$350,000 marketing budget.. Go give it to our marketing team.. Go make your viral campaign." But instead of doing that, what they did was they divided the world up into seven teams and they said, "We're giving you \$50,000 each.. And so you guys are all going to get the single-focused goal and try and make an authentic, an organic viral campaign.. You're not going to engineer it.. You're not going to SEO this thing.. You're going to have it authentic and organic." And what's interesting is that six out of the seven groups failed in a sense that nothing really took off.. And that's a very healthy, normal statistic.. That's why rapid prototyping and failing faster is oftentimes sort of an MO that many people here in the Valley and in other places are taking on because it allows you to start experimenting.. The winner, though, of this was the Coke Happiness Machine..

And I'm just going to show it to you.. Let's see.... So I tell you this story because.... Let's see.... Forrest, will you come put it up? Thanks.. I tell you this story because even though they only spent \$50,000 on that video, and they hid it in college campuses not dissimilar to Stanford at finals time and when people were really depressed, and they had these hidden cameras and everything came out and it was all very authentic.. It was authentic.. It was a surprise.. But they designed it with a large part of the dragonfly model in mind.. The result, in two weeks--and it was organic search..

Just one tweet out, "Share the happiness, spread the video." No engineering the virality.. It was all organic.. And they wanted that.. They know they can engineer it, they know that they can figure out how to push things out.. They wanted it to be natural.. And so it was two million views on YouTube in two weeks.. It was global.. Fifty percent of viewers were outside the U.S.. and 70% of the blogs were not English.. Ninety-five percent of the blog posts were positive comments, which, as you know, is unheard of..

"I'm a Pepsi drinker.. I might make the switch." And there's some evidence to even suggest that it was tied to actual choice and preference.. What's so interesting, I think, about this story is that they had a lot of footage, like 12 hours of footage, and they sliced out the personal smiles.. Like, you smile and they would have cut that, right? They took it when the four of you were smiling together and that you were sharing the Coke.. And so this emotional contagion, the shared emotion that spreads--I mean, you guys should have seen your faces.. You were all laughing and you weren't even there.. And this idea, the single-focused goal, and being able to grab attention through unexpectedness and feeling like, "Oh, I could be there," and telling a story and enabling stories to be told, they didn't architect it for the last wing that well, which is enable action not as much as the Old Spice guy whatever it is--those of you who had answering machines or phonemates or whatever, voice messages with the Old Spice guy, you made it your own.. There's a lot of campaigns that allow you to make it--really? Honestly? All right.. I'm letting you off the hook this time.. But if I hear one ring, I'm diving in..

Somewhere over there.. You guys are unnoticed.. Are you still deep-breathing? Yeah? OK.. So this idea of how do you enable action, and it's led to a big campaign around Open Coke or Open Happiness, I believe.. And there's a lot of companies right now that are doing a great job in making things open, including OpenIDEO, which is I think a beautiful initiative...