



# MARKETING

Wanda Kenton Smith

<< INSIGHT

## Is Grow Boating's dog spot barking up the wrong tree?

The Grow Boating industry meeting in Miami was refreshingly different. Gone was the endless parade of talking heads and lengthy speeches of the past, replaced by well-rehearsed talk show "guests" in fast-moving TV-style bits. Thom Dammrich showed spunk and panache in the starring Leno/Letterman role as he "interviewed" guests about the Grow Boating initiative. It was a fun way to conduct a meeting and a welcome change of format.

The biggest post-meeting buzz centered on a new dog commercial in the Discover Boating campaign. Apparently, research of boat owners uncovered a high degree of dog ownership, so one of the creative concepts that emerged was to bring the favorite family pet to a starring role in the print and TV campaign. Reportedly, dogs were first pitched by the agency as part of the print campaign, and the marketing committee response was favorable enough to next-step the production of a TV spot.

The resulting creative execution was put to the test, costing the industry a beefy \$25,000 to \$50,000 for 600 online responses. The results, according to NMMA VP marketing and communications Carl Blackwell, was a top score of 78, well above the recall testing average and, interestingly, higher than the existing "wave" spot in the inaugural campaign.

I admit to being an absolute fool for my lovable golden retriever Kasie, who digs nothing more than a day on — and in — the water when we go boating. However, as much as I have a personal connection with my beloved pup, I have a hard time connecting the dots. If I wasn't a boater yet ... and I just happened to own a dog and catch the spot ... would that scene make me leap off the sofa to call or go online to order the Discover Boating DVD? Would I consider buying a boat so I could take my dog cruising? If I wasn't a boater, but fit the, ahem, "dogographic profile," would that spot really create the emotional motivation necessary to nudge me into action? Hmmmm ...

The TV spot and print ads will run in equal rotation with the original "wave" creative. From a TV perspective, I would suspect it might do particularly well on Animal Planet and could spark some excitement among a dedicated viewership of animal lovers, but it's hard to predict how well it might resonate elsewhere, like on Fox News or the Weather Channel. Unfortunately, I learned there is no tracking mechanism in place to distinguish performance results by

individual TV spot, only by the aggregate, so it will be impossible to drive down actual, quantifiable results. I believe this is a woeful oversight: There should be some type of direct link between established prospects and their televised point of origin so we know whether Spot's spot is spot-on, or not.

I'm not convinced the new dog creative will wag the prospect's tail and propel him to unleash a new passion for boating. Don't get me wrong: I'm all for including Fido in the creative surrounded by adoring families. I've done this myself dozens of times, using cute pooches in scenes for boating ads, video and print collateral. But with funds being tight, I'm just not convinced I'd bet on the hound as the focal point of one of only two key brand communication and messaging vehicles for television.

Blackwell claimed the test results were too strong to ignore. If going to the dogs works, I'll be the first to stand up and take a licking for wet-nosing the concept. Personally, I believe we should focus our brand messaging on the strong family and generational connection, while incorporating furry friends as an part of the storyline, but not the solo act.

On a more positive note, I was happy to learn that the National Geographic Channel, CMT and the Weather Channel will be airing some added-value (free) boating-related segments in conjunction with the negotiated buy. Anytime you can wrestle free airtime to deliver and reinforce your message, it's a big win.

Another bonus: as part of the print media buy, 18 million business reply cards have been negotiated as added-value to run in the May issues of all paid magazines — except Men's Journal, where it will run in April. The BRC offers readers a free Discover Boating DVD and is ultimately designed to promote increased leads. We desperately need to build up our prospect pipeline, and a potential pool of 18 million in our targeted media is terrific.

The "biggest wow" of the year, however, is the free production of a really fantastic, four-minute mini movie titled "Good Run," under-

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Would I consider buying a boat so I could take my dog cruising?

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written through a grant provided by General Motors and produced by a multi-award-nominated Hollywood cinematographer. The short film is beautifully executed, capturing the life of an aging boater as he passionately views snapshots from his boating adventures over time. Now here is a powerful emotional connection; I'm pretty reserved, but I had to choke it back, big time. My only complaint is that the film lacked any sailing coverage, excluding an important segment of the market from promotional participation.

NMMA staffers and the campaign's ad agency are distributing this film through viral (word of mouth on the Internet) marketing, in addition to serving as bloggers. In the film's first weekend of online posting, more than 5,000 visitors checked out the movie on YouTube, said Blackwell. Other distribution portals have been added to the mix since early March including Yahoo, MSN and Google Video, along with Discoverboating.com, GrowBoating.org and 23 of the NMMA's boat show Web sites. The motherlode for distribution is a database of 3 million potential boaters through a highly targeted rental list, plus the existing prospect database of 300,000 generated from last year's Discover Boating campaign. Other targeted outlets include boating-specific blogs and boater forums, where participants will be invited to see the movie, then encouraged to spread the news through their own personal network. Also, industry stakeholders are being asked to include a link to Good Run on their own sites. I encourage everyone who has the decision-making ability to do so!

This innovative marketing tactic delivers the ideal mix of high impact and quality production at low cost, and is an exciting new vehicle to deliver the boating message. Viewers can rate the movie and provide commentary, with a link provided to Discover Boating. At least in this instance we can get direct feedback, plus track the linkage between viewers and those who request the DVD. This viral marketing campaign doesn't have a shelf life, hence will continue to grow so long as there is sufficient online traffic being driven to the various viewing portals.

Speaking of online traffic drives, this year will see a ramping up of Internet advertising. Some 180 million banner ad placements are under way on more than 400 Web sites, and keyword advertising on search engines including Google, Yahoo and MSN has been pumped up and will continue year round — a major enhancement from the previous campaign. Discover Boating is again being advertised during the live NCAA Basketball Tournament, which last year captured the largest live event in Web history, tracking more than 30 million individual video streams. Another added-value bonus is the Boat Selector Tool which will be incorporated into AcuWeather.com; ESPNOutdoors.com; OutdoorLife.com and Weather.com.

The Discover Boating momentum continues. Let's hope we've got something to bark about when the numbers roll in.