

MSN case study:

Thinking outside the box helps attract record TV audiences

Taking the story online thickens Shortland Street plot over holiday hiatus

Campaign overview

Viewers of New Zealand's most popular weeknight TV soap, Shortland Street, last year were gripped by a late season cliffhanger. The explosive finale saw evil surgeon Ethan Pierce shot and left for dead by an unseen assassin, proposing a list of suspects. But with the Christmas break approaching, TV2 wanted to maintain suspense and drive talkability over the holiday hiatus.

With agency Starcom Worldwide and Aim Proximity, the strategy went online, launching a microsite hosting additional 'webisodes' and homicide investigation files providing clues and heightening the sense of reality shrouding the unfolding plot. TVC promotion provided broad level support, however an online media partner was essential for reaching the online audience. Requiring a flexible media partner with true national reach and a younger, female biased audience, Starcom partnered news and entertainment website msn.co.nz, which each month attracts 2.8 million customers.

MSN solution

Run-of-site advertising. A series of medium rectangle and leader board advertising placements on MSN's news, weather, sports and entertainment pages.

Execution

A five-week campaign, run-of-site placements carried the hook: Do you know Ethan Pierce's killer? An accompanying photo of Ethan provided a more visual prompt. Click-through transferred browsers to the Shortland Street microsite where they could view additional videos and a body of evidence.

Results

Over the campaign period, MSN run-of-site advertising recorded a total of 1.37 million impressions, capturing over 9,000 click-throughs – approximately 0.67 percent and well above the industry average. Combined with TVC and tvnz.co.nz promotion, overall campaign results were startling, attracting over 62,000 unique visitors who generated 681,000 page views on the campaign microsite. The upshot saw a 30 percent increase in television viewership, from the last 2008 episode to the opening episode of 2009.

Lessons

Spend a little and reach a lot. For less than \$10,000 the five-week online campaign remained highly visible to a large national audience.

Content characteristics of news and entertainment portals deliver more top-level browsing vis-à-vis pure news sites, potentially generating more impressions and advertising exposure per-user, per-session.

Reaching a large national audience online precludes many local online media properties in a small country like New Zealand. They simply don't offer sufficient audience numbers to support a national campaign. MSN New Zealand, with two million-plus people using its network each month, offers the audience critical mass required by big campaigns.

Terri Youngman, Starcom Worldwide: "MSN works hard to deliver on all briefs. Despite our modest budget they put together a great deal which allowed us to have an external online display presence which, in other circumstances, we may not have been able to do."

