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## Trident Finds It Hard to Go Viral

*Campaign Based on Fake TV Show Fails to Catch On With the Web-Savvy*

By EMILY STEEL

Some brands, like Dove soap and Levi's jeans, have created a lot of buzz with online videos so compelling that millions of people shared them with friends or posted them to their favorite Web sites. But so-called viral marketing is a tricky business, as is clear from the campaign for a new Trident gum touted for its ability to strengthen and rebuild teeth.

Trident launched the product in May with a conventional ad campaign. Then, two months ago, seeking to make a splash with Web-savvy young people, it started planting online videos that featured fictional brothers Jerry and Wendell Tucker from rural North Carolina, testing the strength of Jerry's teeth.

In one video, Wendell tries smashing a bowling ball against his brother's face, to no effect. In another, Jerry uses his teeth to rip an axle from a car.

The videos were posted on the Web site for what purported to be a new television show called "That's Not Fake," hosted on the site by comedian Martin Mull. The Web site for the fictitious show, which was created solely for the campaign, bills itself as the go-to site for "debunking, exposing and undermining" fake online videos.

In the show's "investigation" of the Tucker brothers' videos, it exposes them as a hoax, ostensibly because Jerry used a "performance enhancement" to strengthen his teeth: Trident's new Xtra Care chewing gum.

To drum up interest, the ad agencies working for Trident, a brand owned by London-based Cadbury, sent emails to dental hygienists and to bloggers who are fans of Mr. Mull, and posted comments about ThatsNotFake.com on online dental forums and TV Web sites.

In recent weeks, Trident also has bought online and cable-TV teaser ads to promote its fake TV show, including four separate commercials that ran on cable channels MTV, MTV2 and Spike, among other networks.

The Trident campaign is one of a growing number aimed at reaping low-cost publicity from the Internet. Marketers regularly ask their agencies to create such campaigns, industry executives say.

In doing so, they hope to follow in the footsteps of such viral successes as the Evolution campaign for Unilever's Dove brand -- whose message was that all women are beautiful -- and Levi Strauss's viral video of people doing black flips into their jeans. But for every Internet sensation, many more fall short of the mark, showing how hard it is to predict what will capture consumers' imaginations.

It's tough, but not impossible, says Kirt Gunn, managing partner of Dandelion, a firm that creates videos and other brand-sponsored entertainment for the Web. Trident worked with Dandelion and WPP ad agency JWT to design the campaign.

"This kind of work is a real science. ... It is a myth that you just put something out there and hope it makes a lap around the Internet," Mr. Gunn says.

Trident says it is premature to speculate on the success of the campaign because it is still in progress. Dandelion says it considers the effort a success thus far, pointing to internal statistics showing the videos have generated more than two million views. But some in the ad industry are skeptical.

"I would love to tell you this [campaign] is a home run, but it is not really getting any traction," says Pete Blackshaw, an executive vice president at Web-measurement company Nielsen Online.

Nielsen tried to gauge the traffic to ThatsNotFake.com, but it said unique visits to the site fell below its minimum reporting threshold of 460,000. Views of the videos on Google's YouTube, the largest online-video site, totaled 32,000, a "modest number relative to your typical winning viral campaigns," Mr. Blackshaw says.

Other signs of success were also lacking, Mr. Blackshaw says, including a "fast and furious" pickup of the videos by influential Web users spreading them to personal blogs or social-messaging sites like Twitter.

Digital marketing experts point to a few stumbles by the Trident campaign. First, they say, its idea of promoting fake videos on the Web site of a fake TV show drew attention to doubts about the Internet's credibility, undermining the brand's message. And unlike the successful Levi's video, Mr. Blackshaw said the technical quality of the videos and caliber of the acting was too high to be mistaken for an amateur effort.

Dandelion says the videos were shot with a \$300 camera to resemble home videos. Trident says it didn't mean to deceive consumers; it meant to be ironic and funny in building the campaign around a fake TV program.

Trident could still modify the campaign, opening it up to solicit more consumer feedback and encouraging audiences to submit their own videos, marketing experts say. They say it could also drive traffic to its stealth campaign through some traditional advertising.

But the company says it isn't looking to modify the campaign at this point, and views it as an experiment. "We use other traditional mediums as part of our marketing mix, and embrace testing and using new and innovative mediums as a means to reach new audiences.," a Trident spokeswoman wrote in a statement.

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