



BlendTec Will It Blend? Viral Video Case Study

The viral video efforts of manufacturer BlendTec gave the company a huge return-on-investment in terms of its worldwide brand recognition and sales. There are a number of things that can be learned from this case about ways to run and maintain a successful viral video campaign.



by
Christian
Briggs
SocialLens
Researcher

BlendTec, SL-0001

Case Study
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See more by Christian at
<http://www.socialens.com/author/admin/>

Main Topic

Blendtec made smart use of \$100 and created a viral video sensation by following some simple powerful principles.

About the Companyⁱ

Founded: 1999
Annual Revenues: < \$40mil (2006)
Employees: 186

Key Issues

- Viral Video for Branding
- Low-Budget Marketing
- Alignment with Strategy

Key Lessons to Learn

- Align any campaign with brand objectives
- Authenticity is imperative
- Involve customers early and often
- Engage with popular culture
- Create Buzz worthy content

Related Research

- [“Viral Intertextuality: How To Build Viral Spread”](#) Coming Summer, 2009
- [“Viral Video Themes: Common Elements to Successful Viral Videos”](#) Coming Summer, 2009

Background

The Blendtec® “Will it Blend?” series of viral videos started when then-new Marketing Director George Wright found out that CEO Tom Dickson and the R&D team had a practice of blending up wooden boards to test product toughness. Wright had an idea to shoot video of the operation and post it online. He invested under \$100 in supplies and convinced Dickson to blend up other things on camera. 186 videos later, Blendtec’s retail sales are up a reported 700 percent, its YouTube site has 200,000+ subscribers, and it has been featured on major mainstream media outlets like The Today Show, The Tonight Show, The History Channel, The Wall Street Journal and others. Among awards, Blendtec has won a bronze Clio in 2008 (Interactive category) for their interactive efforts.ⁱⁱ

The Company

Blendtec, is the 186-employee commercial blender division of K-TEC,



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Figure 1 – In the first Will It Blend? Video, Tom Dickson blends 50 marbles in the company's break room

which is based in Orem, Utah. In 1975, Tom Dickson, the company founder, combined a vacuum cleaner motor with a rotor and stator micronetic-milling chamber in order to create the Kitchen Mill product for milling wheat.ⁱⁱⁱ The company would later develop blenders for commercial use which would again later be adapted for home use.

Business Objective

Blendtec's stated initial objective for the Will It Blend videos was increased brand awareness for their line of blenders. As a result of the campaign, however, they retail sales have increased by over 700%

Brand

In a 2008 keynote address at the PubCon conference, Wright stated that pre-videos, Blendtec was subject to the following equation:

Great products + Weak branding = Weak sales

In other words, though they produced very high quality blenders and other products which were sold worldwide, they had very poor brand awareness.

The Case

In 2006, Blendtec's relatively new Director of Marketing launched a viral video campaign in which the company's CEO blended up various non-food items in Blendtec blenders.

Approach

In November of 2006, Wright and his team purchased a white lab coat, marbles, a garden rake, a McDonalds Extra Value Meal, a Rotisserie Chicken and some Coke. Their professional in-house videographer then filmed a series of short videos featuring Tom Dickson blending up these items in the company break room, now modified to look like some sort of a cross between an infomercial set and a small-time game show.

Within five days of posting their videos on YouTube and on their own website, the videos had garnered six millions YouTube views.

To further boost the spread of the videos, Blendtec later began to purchase advertising with Google and Yahoo!, and they have carefully chosen YouTube tags in order to bring in the largest number of search engine hits.

Timeline

2005	October 30-31 2006	November 2006	Some e Time Later	January, 2009
Great products but no brand awareness	Built willitblend.com First 5 videos posted to YouTube	First 5 videos top 5m views on YouTube	Blendtec begins optimizing YouTube tags and purchasing Adwords and Yahoo!	YouTube channel has 3,013,978 views, 157,621 subscribers



Figure 2 – A Blendtec blender jams during a 2007 live demonstration

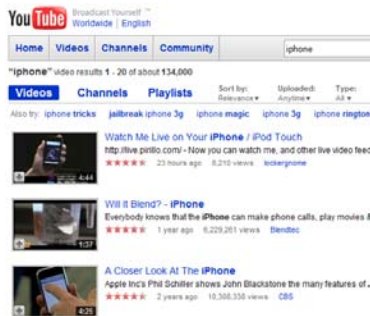


Figure 3 – A search for “iphone” on YouTube.com returns a Blendtec video as the second result

Challenges

Blendtec has had a few challenges related to the open nature of their brand. One such challenge came in the form of a failure during a live demonstration in June 2007, where the famous “rake handle” blend jammed the blender. A video captured by an attendee garnered 456,406 views and 1,582 – some positive and some negative toward the brand.

Successes

Media Coverage

- At least 10 television appearances (NBC, CBS, Fox, WGN, History Channel, Discovery Channel, etc)
- At least 10 other television publicity events (Food Network, ABC Australia, BBC World, CNBC News, etc)
- Keynote Speeches (Ad Age Idea Conference , PubCon 2008, Hewlett Packard, etc)
- Print and Electronic Media Articles (Wall Street Journal, Salon.com, Scientific American, Businessweek, etc)
- Global Media Interviews
- News Blogs
- Co-Promotionals (Nike, Google, AT&T, Weezer, Novell, etc)
- At least 10 book inclusions

Awards

- CLIO Interactive Viral Award, YouTube Awards, Ernst&Young Utah
-

Retail Sales

- 700 percent increase

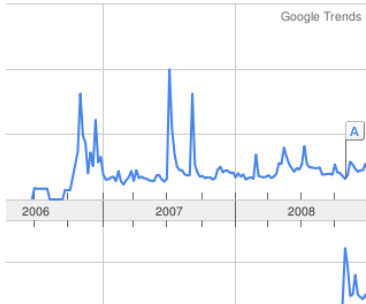
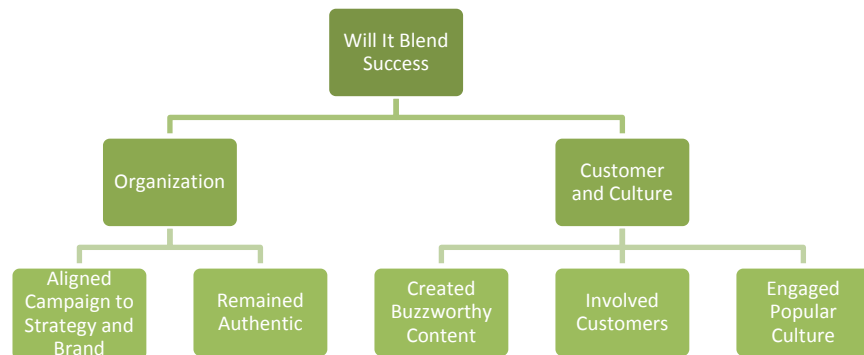


Figure 4 – Google searches for “blendtec” over time

Factors for Will it Blend’s Success

There are a number of specific things that contributed to the success of the campaign. While the one-of-a-kind nature of every product and business situation means that the Blendtec success can never be fully reproduced, knowing some of the reasons behind it can help other businesses to create their own success stories.



Aligned Campaign to Strategy and Brand

Blendtec’s viral videos and their content aligned nicely with their brand of high-quality, technically sophisticated blenders. It also supported their objective to build brand awareness.



Recommendation: Ensure that social media efforts aren’t the loose cannons of your marketing. Put them to work solving real problems.



Figure 5 – Tom Dickson blends up a brand new iPhone

Remained Authentic

Tom Dickson’s charm is not his smooth presentation style. It is his authenticity. In the post-Enron world, consumers are impressed by authentic CEO’s.



Recommendation: Consider having actual members of your company participate in social media. The fact that they aren’t polished might be more than acceptable. It might be the draw!

Created Buzz worthy Content

Blending stuff up in a blender is buzz worthy. Only a very few of us



hasn't wondered "what if?" when faced with a blender/utensil oriented kitchen activity. When someone else finally answers that question for us – and particularly when that someone does so with the world's most popular products – and in an entertaining format – we're likely to want to be the first to tell a friend – to create "buzz."



Recommendation: Buzz worthy things tap into human curiosity, of shock, of humor or love of cuteness. Find the things around a business which might arouse such emotions.



Figure 6 – A form on the website asks for suggestions for items to blend.



Recommendation: Find ways to engage the community in your process – either directly or indirectly. Blendtec does it directly through the form, but indirectly by creating a social object that people can react to and re-create.



Figure 7 – A Chuck Norris action figure doesn't blend



Figure 8 – Blendtec blender featured as part of a Weezer music video

Engaged Popular Culture

Intertextuality is a big fancy word for one piece of media drawing meaning from another. Blendtec used it extensively throughout the Will it Blend campaign. Think of how Bugs Bunny was "intertextual" in its inclusion of characters who mock Humphrey Bogart, James Cagney, Bing Crosby and others. Or think the Simpsons' myriad intertextual references to movie stars, shows and movies like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Tom and Jerry, and Soylent Green.

Will It Blend, by blending up popular items like Nike shoes, a Halo video game, a Rubik's Cube, and two different versions of the Apple iPhone, have created a strong web of intertextual references which make the videos a little edgy, but also likely to catch the attention of the various sub-communities of fans of each of the products. By then tagging their videos with the names of other high-profile items, Blendtec has also maximized the likelihood that their videos will be popular in Internet searches.

As an example of this, a search for "iphone" on YouTube.com returns the Blendtec video "Will It Blend? – iPhone" as the second result. It is tagged with the terms "will, it, blend, iPhone and



blendtec". A search for the same term on Google returns willitblend.com as the 10th overall result.



Recommendation: Consider ways to increase the intertextual power of a viral video!

Lessons Learned In Blendtec's Words

Align Social and Viral Efforts with Existing Strategy

"..just because you can do a social viral video or try to make a viral video doesn't mean you should. You have to make sure that it's in-line with your brand, with your strategy, with your goals, with your objectives, and once you line all of those up, then put that tactic into place and have some fun with it."

Companies Can Become Content Providers Instead of Content Interrupters

"..now we're finding that, with the new tools, that companies can become content producers, content producers, through free distribution channels. The world is now open for people to put out wonderful, fun, engaging messages, instead of interrupting other people's schedules through advertising."

(quotes from YouTube video interview)^{iv}

"I would just stand back, take a look at your day, and if you find something and you say 'wow, that's really cool,' maybe it is really cool. A viral campaign has be worth watching."

"We can just go out and shoot them up with a gun or run over them with a truck or do silly things like that, but to actually demonstrate the product in an extreme way has really been good for this campaign."

(quotes from YouTube video interview)^v

Innovative Ideas for Other Organizations

Blendtec found a powerful combination of factors which enabled their team to have fun producing a series of videos which were inexpensive, entertaining, and aligned with their strategic and brand goals. While the Will it Blend campaign will most likely fail as some sort of formula for viral video campaigns, there may be creative ways that other organizations can leverage their own interesting products and stories to connect with the world.



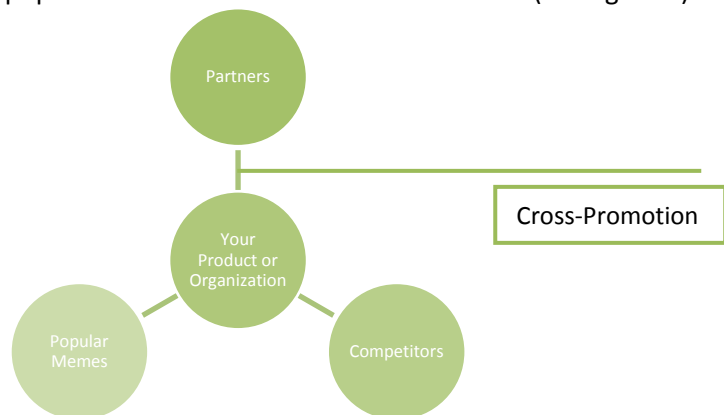
Follow a Process

Though they do not explicitly talk about a specific process, the Blendtec team clearly went through each of the following four steps along the way. Organizations who follow a general process like this (not necessarily in this order) will be able to better understand and adapt to the powerful but somewhat unpredictable world of social media and viral video.



Reach Out

There are two basic ways to reach out. The first is through cross-promotion. In the world of social media – and perhaps especially in the world of viral video, cross-promotions between an organization and its partners is not just a way to cut cost. It is a way to strengthen the “intertextual” nature of your marketing efforts – producing new networks of meaning that can be entertaining. As an example of this Tom Dickson blended up a Weezer CD on the show, while a Blendtec blender appeared on their video “Pork and Beans” along with popular Internet meme Miss South Carolina (see figure 8)



The second way to reach out is without any sort of agreement with another organization or person. This can produce new networks of meaning that can be entertaining and sometimes controversial. As examples of this, see Figure 5 of the thoroughly entertaining show where Tom Dickson blends a brand new, powered-up iPhone , or see Figure 7 of the Will it Blend show in which a Chuck Norris action figure emerges from the blender unscathed.

Terms and Lingo

1. Intertextuality – The complex interrelationship between a text and other texts taken as basic to the creation or interpretation of the text .^{vi}
2. YouTube – A very popular consumer-generated video site which is owned by Google.
3. Buzz – Hype or excitement around a person, event or product.
4. Meme – A unit of cultural meaning – often which is spread throughout a culture and which evolves over time.

For More Information

SocialLens offers a series of products and services to help your organization be smart about Social Media

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Advanced Planning Workshops	Social Media Methods
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Strategic Design Services	Social Media Industry Analyses
	Topic Reports



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ⁱ Marketing Videos Became a Hit in Their Own Right. The Wall Street Journal, p. B4.

ⁱⁱ CLIO 2009. (n.d.). . Retrieved from

http://www.clioawards.com/winners/index.cfm?page=4&medium_id=7&award_id=1&search=0.

ⁱⁱⁱ BlendTec - About BlendTec. (n.d.). . Retrieved from <http://www.blendtec.com/aboutus.aspx>.

^{iv} Zamora, R. (2008, December 3). Vanessa Zamora Interviews George Wright at PubCon Las Vegas [Video file]. Video posted to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ceZvQ2psrYk>

^v Randle, L. (2007, January 3). Talking with BlendTec [Video file]. Video posted to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eACMiXUKIHU>

^{vi} intertextuality - Definition from the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. (n.d.). . Retrieved January 18, 2009, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intertextuality>.

