

Incredibly Unpredictable B2B Viral Campaign Results: The Little Snow Globe That Surprised Everyone

CASE STUDY 01/21/2003

CHALLENGE: e-tractions sends out holiday cards to clients and active prospects every year in hopes of keeping that warm fuzzy lets-do-business feeling going through the cold winter.

Two years ago, they decided to bag paper cards and send out hipper-than-heck e-cards instead.

The creative pressure was on for two reasons:

1. Every creative shop on the planet was also sending out e-cards to look cool that year, so standing out in the crowd would be hard.
2. e-tractions had already had a big viral marketing success that year with their infamous Whack-a-Flack campaign that helped them garner massive press coverage and more than 1,500 sales prospects. (Link to old Case Study below.) Now they had to top themselves.

The goal was to impress clients and prospects, and hopefully get pass-along to press and new prospects that could build business in the new year.

CAMPAIGN: The creative team invented an e-card game entitled, "Snow Globe." (Link to sample below.)

It wasn't exactly full of traditional holiday cheer. The scenario:

While annoyingly cheerful holiday music plays in the background, little children frolic in the snow outside a cottage. If you "shake" the snow globe with your mouse, they are hurled shrieking through the air and bashed about. When they build a cute snowman, it eats them and then explodes.

It's kinda sick. It's kinda twisted. And, depending on what your sense of humor is like, it's kinda fun (or not.)

The e-tractions team knew they were taking a chance, but figured it was the only way to work. Mike Gauthier explains, "We're pretty good at viral marketing. We've done 60 or 70 campaigns for clients. The things we find to be most viral are edgy and out there."

Hoping that the rest of the world would find the card as funny as they did, the e-tractions team fired off emails to a permission-built list of a few hundred clients, friends and active prospects. They also stuck a copy of the card in the archives of their site, figuring it might come in handy for a presentation someday.

Then they sat back and waited with bated breath for the viral popularity to begin....

RESULT: It didn't. Hardly anyone forwarded it to anybody else "Try as we might," says Gauthier, "we didn't make it work. We thought it was kind of fun in a more-than-slightly perverse way, but even we have a lot to learn. It's pretty humbling."

Then (here's where the story gets wild) this Christmas 2002, two years after the original campaign bombed and everyone at e-tractions had forgotten it, it suddenly took off again.

"Sometime around Dec 6th 2002, someone found the campaign in an archive and sent it to a few people," says Gauthier who to this day has no idea who that person was. It wasn't anyone on staff at e-tractions, nor any clients he's spoken to.

This time the humor was spot on target. This time everyone who got the card immediately emailed all their friends about it. This time it viraled out of control until more than 200,000 people on three continents got it in under six weeks.

Gauthier says, "Even more impressive (or embarrassing) is that the forward a friend feature was broken as we hadn't updated it when we put out new revisions of our software. People were cutting and pasting the links and sending however they could. We even got a teary request from a grandmother who wanted to send it to her grandson but couldn't figure out how to do it."

Obviously not nearly all of the people - such as teary grandmothers - who got the card were remotely good sales prospects for e-tractions viral marketing services for which clients pay \$20,000-\$75,000.

But, even a handful of impressed potential clients can make a big difference in the bottom line. In this case, e-tractions definitely got some qualified sales leads, and one company even tried to buy them lock, stock, and barrel. (They said no thanks.)

Lesson learned - always leave your viral campaign live on the Net because these things can go on forever.

Also, if you are counting on a super-edgy campaign to impress business executives, try running a few story boards past prospects' eyes first. (You can email a couple of current clients JPEGs of your viral idea before you invest in the Flash programming, etc.) Gauthier calls it a "mini-focus group. "Because, your sense of humor may not always match your prospects' at any particular point in time.

For those of you interested in seeing the viral bell-curve as people tell others about a campaign, here are the viewer numbers for the Snow Globe. (If numbers bore you, keep scrolling down for links to the actual creative.)

12/1/2002	0
12/2/2002	0
12/3/2002	13
12/4/2002	2
12/5/2002	2
12/6/2002	10
12/7/2002	2

12/8/2002	3
12/9/2002	3
12/10/2002	30
12/11/2002	35
12/12/2002	30
12/13/2002	13
12/14/2002	72
12/15/2002	23
12/16/2002	57
12/17/2002	158
12/18/2002	555
12/19/2002	2053
12/20/2002	8313
12/21/2002	22375
12/22/2002	7605
12/23/2002	7357
12/24/2002	25883
12/25/2002	18495
12/26/2002	8865
12/27/2002	14639
12/28/2002	12071
12/29/2002	5663
12/30/2002	5416
12/31/2002	13360
1/1/2003	6845
1/2/2003	4024
1/3/2003	8330
1/4/2003	5345
1/5/2003	2559
1/6/2003	2349
1/7/2003	5421
1/8/2003	3974
1/9/2003	3010
1/10/2003	1950
1/11/2003	1670
1/12/2003	951
1/13/2003	1027
1/14/2003	1506
1/15/2003	1070
1/16/2003	911
1/17/2003	913

Total 204,958 viewers

Link to sample of Snow Globe card:

<http://www.e-tractions.com/snowglobe/intro.htm>

Our original Case Study on the Whack-a-Flack viral campaign:

<http://library.marketingsherpa.com/barrier.cfm?CID=1042>