

CAMPAIGNS *Website Relaunch* : Webshots paints a different picture of its business' value

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Amid the ruins of the dot-com bust, the three cofounders of Webshots were able to buy back the company they had started. One week before their bid was accepted, they found that they needed help with the PR surrounding the reacquisition.

Because Webshots was already an established photo site, people were familiar with it as a source of desktop backgrounds, but they were essentially unaware of its full potential.

"We wanted to take something that was being used by consumers and create a story around it, a business around it, and a category around it," says founder and co-CEO Narendra Rocherolle. With the clock ticking, they called S. Neil Vineberg, president of Vineberg Communications, for assistance.

Strategy

With such a short period of time to work with, Vineberg decided to establish Webshots initially among business and trade journalists so as to build the perceived value of the brand. By leveraging the media's interest in Webshots as a leading photo space first and then letting the public follow, Vineberg could guide the campaign's direction more precisely.

Another issue was that the number of users of any given website were measured by Nielsen/NetRatings,

and Webshots' metrics were still bundled in with those of Excite@Home, its former parent company. Furthermore, a photo site's metrics were determined by the number of photos it sold. While Webshots lagged in this category, the number of its photos being transacted and posted was in the billions, higher than any other photo site. "If we wanted to establish Webshots, we had to convince journalists and analysts that the metrics used to measure success in the photo-site category needed to be the soft-image transactional volume and membership metrics," says Vineberg.

Tactics

Vineberg pitched the story of Webshots to the media, selling it as a tale of three founders who had made money in the internet boom and wanted to buy back their brand. Vineberg also launched a trade campaign to compel the media to redefine its success metrics to take into account the techniques and strengths that Webshots was using to build its customer base. "We wanted to

suggest to analysts that there might be a different way to look at the market," says Vineberg.

Results

By playing up the humanitarian aspects of the story, Vineberg secured several high-profile national placements. Nielsen/NetRatings issued a report just ten months after the start of the campaign that ranked Webshots as the number-one photo sharing site, and the media as a whole redefined its concept of a photo space. "They were spot-on in seeing the emerging focus of the industry and really articulating that direction," says Rocherolle.

As for Webshots' customers, the behind-the-scenes changes went unnoticed, but the added publicity doubled customer subscriptions to 24 million within a year. With the new metrics in place, Webshots saw that its customers were staying on the website longer than any other photo site, which reflected in the advertising. Not only did Webshots suddenly find itself leading the category that it

had indirectly created, but it found itself with a huge lead over competitors.

Future

Now that the business community has a better idea of the importance of imaging networks and clear standards for measuring their impact, the growth rate is tremendous. The introduction of camera phones and the ever-increasing popularity of digital cameras has solidified the need for photospaces, and Webshots hopes to remain at the forefront of web media properties.

"There's a lot of emphasis on other things beyond post and print, and Vineberg really took a look at the landscape and gave us something that we can grow our business into," says Rocherolle.

PR team: *Webshots (Redwood City, CA) and Vineberg Communications (Westhampton, NY)*

Campaign: *Webshots relaunch and positioning*

Time frame: *December 2001 to December 2003*

Budget: *About \$220,000*

For more information:

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