

BRANDS

Teaming-up with the brands

A series of activities in Cannes underline the growing crossover between brands and the entertainment content industry. Gary Smith reports

BRANDS@MIPTV is a day-long programme of sessions and events which brings brands together with professionals — for example MCNs — towards mastering online and other content strategies. A highlight of the programme is the Brands And Online Video Summit, on Tuesday at the Martinez hotel.

Underlining the importance to brands establishing themselves as credible suppliers of genuine entertainment, Mattel's chief content officer, Catherine Balsam-Schwaber, outlines the company's strategy: "It's really about creating a three-way match between the consumer, the content and the platform, because different content performs best on different platforms. When we think about longer-form programming, direct-to-consumer opportunities are the best way to deliver that kind of format," she says. "When we're thinking about regularly scheduled programming and 22-minute series, those are most likely best on a more traditional television platform."

But sometimes content is created for the wrong platform. "Serialised content on YouTube doesn't perform as well as it does in a direct-to-consumer environment or on a television platform. Raw, more organic, authentic content performs better in that environment," she says. "Making sure we match

the content to the platform is an area where Mattel is evolving, along with our overall content strategy which includes a faster iteration of content, as well as how we connect digitally with our consumers in order to offer content that is appropriate."

Ultimately, though, it's about connecting with customers in ways that classical advertising rarely does: "A major focus right now is that we are taking big steps to optimise our ability to connect with our consumers at every touch point." Balsam-Schwaber says. "Our goal is to deliver content experiences to kids and parents, wherever they are, that draw on the power of our brands and create deeper engagement with them. Whether that's theatrical, direct-to-consumer, television series or rapid-development digital content, we are going to play in all of those spaces."

It is widely recognised that brands have been making content for a very long time, but Mattel was among the early adopters: "Mattel has been creating and supporting content for much of its 70-year history, going back to the early days of the Mickey Mouse Club, the iconic television programme of which Mattel was an original sponsor," Balsam-Schwaber says.

"Through the years, it's fair to say Mattel focused primarily on creating great play experiences and



The second episode of JW Marriott's *Two Bellmen*, set in Dubai

FEATURE



The Postcode Millionaire

on content secondarily. Today, however, we have a renewed commitment to creating and distributing content that enhances play experiences and drives deeper engagement with our celebrated brands.”

Other early adopters include tyre manufacturing company Michelin. The prestigious — and international — Michelin-star system came about when the company created its Michelin Guide in 1900, its *raison d'être* being to encourage people to get in their cars, hopefully ones fitted with Michelin tyres, and seek out the fine culinary establishments featured in the annual publication. “And even before that, UK bread-maker Hovis created cycling maps in 1899, in the hope that cyclists would devour their healthy bread in order to fuel their efforts,” says Andrew Canter, global CEO of the Branded Content Marketing Association (BCMA), an industry partner with Brands@MIPTV. “And then in the Twenties brands such as Palmolive and Colgate created soap operas. At its best, branded content is a very powerful way to communicate, but for it to work, brands need to have a strong idea of what problem they are trying to solve by using branded content. They need to have a firm grip on why more standard forms of advertising aren't working. But in this space, even missteps can be beneficial, because what consumers really want is honesty and authenticity, so if you make a mistake put your hand up and admit it.”

Unsurprisingly in this data-driven era, it is the proper use of data that lies at the heart of successful branded content: “Any content-based campaign has to be based around data and insight and there are some great recent examples of branded content including P&G's Always #LikeAGirl, Honda's The Other Side, Virgin Media Business' Pitch to Rich #VOOM, Guinness' Sapeurs, A Small Section Of The World by Illy Cafe, Chipotle's Farmed And Dangerous, Pedigree's K9FM (a radio station for dogs), GE's Six Second Science, Patagonia, The

Journey by Coca Cola — and finally there's Red Bull of course,” he says. “Red Bull has done an exemplary job in terms of the quality of the content and how they have used the various platforms to get every kind of content form out there, from six-second vines through to long-form films. I'd also point to Coke's The Journey as being a very fine piece of work.”

Paris-based advertising agency Les Gaulois — part of the Havas Group — is another MIPTV industry partner and has focused particularly on the MIP Content Club, an area which brings together brands and content creators towards the goal of creating “media-brands”.

“The current approach is to consider all forms of communication with the public as content: advertising campaigns, videos on social media or consumer magazines,” says Les Gaulois president Elisabeth Billiemaz. “The real challenge is to devise and produce everything, keeping to the same concept, but with different types of dialogue according to where it is to be diffused — TV, social media, outdoor, events.” She adds: “We're managing a huge range of content for the brands. Participating in MIPTV means committing ourselves to this goal of creating media-brands, by providing them with the necessary resources to start a new chapter in the relationship between brands and clients, whilst also preserving the DNA of the brand.”

JW Marriott's globally acclaimed forays into content making are equally exemplary with short films Two Bellmen and French Kiss, plus the TV series Navigator Live, proving that it is possible to be engaging and connective while also being unashamedly promotional — but in the best sense of that much maligned-word: “Beyond the numbers of views, it was really great to see the comments,” David Beebe, Marriott's vice-president, global creative, says. “People clearly understood that it was an 18-minute advert, but they still watched it all

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Mattel's Catherine Balsam-Schwaber



BCMA's Andrew Canter



The Swedish Postcode Lottery's Ase Ericson

the way through. Consumers remember that and appreciate the fact that it's not a hard sell. On top of that, by leveraging the available technology we can create a situation where we are scaling content to build a community through loyalty programmes and that in turn drives commerce."

Beebe points to French Kiss as a particularly strong driver of new business: "We launched a package offering customers the chance to stay in that hotel and experience the iconic sights in the film," he says. "And the package offer drove 500,000 stays in that hotel. It's the same with our online magazine Marriott Traveler, which features local writers talking about a city that they know well, so it's authentic and useful and inspiring to curious travelers. It is not a branded publication but of course there are booking opportunities in there and it works. There were 7,200 rooms booked through the magazine in 90 days. But everything we do is inspired by the original Marriott establishment which was a root beer stand in Washington DC, founded in 1927. After a successful first summer the winter came and root beer was no longer an option, so our founder started searching for easy to make hot meals, and that's how Marriott's customer-centric ethos came about."

Sweden's Postcode Lottery has been producing successful primetime content for the last decade, but the Dutch Postcode Lottery from which Sweden's operation sprang, has been doing it for much longer: "The Postcode Lottery started in Holland 25 years ago and they always created content around it," Ase Ericson, head of TV & live events for the Swedish Postcode Lottery, says. "Ever since we started we have been looking both to make deals with broadcasters and to work with them to create something special. So far we have done 900 episodes of The Postcode Millionaire, which uses the Who Wants To Be A Millionaire format, as well as that show's extremely popular Swedish host, Rikard Sjoberg. The show features a branded Lottery segment introduced by Rikard who also appears in all our advertising, from mail-shots through to the show."

The Lottery has now created its own game show and app called Odd One Out: "We worked together with

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Catherine Balsam-Schwaber

production company ELT to make a show that has been running since January. And it has been very successful, getting 27% audience share in its slot on TV4. In fact it did better than Postcode Millionaire so we're delighted, and a second season has now been commissioned," Ericson says. "And the app has been downloaded well over 220,000 times. It allows people to play along live while the show is on air, as well as to play whenever they wish. We are also really happy that the new show has skewed younger than Postcode Millionaire. Odd One Out attracts a much bigger audience in the 19-40 demographic, whereas Postcode Millionaire's viewers leaned much more towards the 50+ segment."

The app is also proving to be very popular with people aged 15-30: "Even though we aren't sure if they also watch the broadcast show, the aim of the app was to bring in a younger audience and so we're very happy with the results," Ericson adds. "We wanted to make a show that would enhance the app experience and it has worked well enough that we are now starting to sell adverts to third parties within the app, which in turn means that we are considering creating and selling a premium, ad-free version. But I think Odd One Out will be our last project for linear TV because it's so much more effective and, to be quite honest, much more fun, to create online projects that can then be cross-promoted, for example, through Facebook, Instagram and YouTube."