

Google, Sony create online 'Da Vinci' game

April 18 2006



In a new twist on movie marketing, Columbia Pictures has paired up with Google to create a series of live online games and puzzles for fans to partake in, leading up to the release of "The Da Vinci Code" next month.

The games, which began Monday, lead to a final game on May 19, the film's release date, where one U.S. winner will receive first-class vacations to New York, Paris, London and Rome, as well as a package of electronics from Sony.

Other similar prize packages will go to one winner each from the United Kingdom and Australia.

"Fans have come to expect this kind of thing," said Dwight Caines, executive vice president of worldwide digital marketing for Columbia

TriStar Marketing Group, noting that upon the Da Vinci Code's release as a novel, author Dan Brown had a similarly interactive Web site set up.

Caines said that the types of puzzles in the online game are similar to the puzzles that characters encounter in the film.

"It made sense to build a program around that," he said. Google was a natural partner because, Caines said, "Google is designed to solve daily problems for people."

Each day, users face a new puzzle. When the puzzle is solved, they're asked a question that they need to use Google search products to find the answer to.

The first 10,000 American participants to answer all of the questions correctly are invited to compete in the final challenge on May 19, the day of the film's release. The first person to complete the final challenge will win the prize package.

"The ideas in the Da Vinci Code fit well with what Google does," said Dylan Casey, brand and entertainment manager at Google. "It's a fun and interesting use of Google's products."

Casey said that Google programmers collaborated with Sony to create the puzzles.

"A lot of our employees are really excited about this," he said. "This is the first time we've done anything like this."

Caines said that the goal was to use the Web create a relationship with fans, and have them help generate further buzz for the film.

"When we first started using the Internet to promote, some ideas were

ahead of their time," Caines said. "Now bandwidth has caught up to ideas."

He said that while viral promotion is a good tool, it's not a catchall for movie marketing.

"Every campaign tends to warrant a tailored approach," he said. "We have to build things of a scope appropriate to the movie we're marketing."

Emily Riley, advertising analyst for Jupiter Research, said that interactive games provide a solid marketing tool.

"I definitely think that games in general are a great way to get fans to interact with a product," she said. "It can create a big viral effect."

While a game like the Da Vinci Code one, which requires dedicated participation, will not rope in many casual fans, it will energize the core fan base, she said.

"When you start a dialog early on, you get people talking," Riley said. "People act as ambassadors for the movie."

According to Riley, there are two types of online game players: people who are online because they're bored and people who were doing other things when their eye is caught by a game.

"Promotional games can appeal to both, by offering leisurely games for people who are bored and quick alternatives for people who may be doing something else at the same time," she said.

Riley said that the Da Vinci Code game will have trouble picking up quick users because of the involved nature of the game.

However, "The goal is not to be played by 100 million people," she said. "The goal is to get core fans into it."

Riley said that in future online promotions, giving users the ability to create their own content will become a key component.

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