

Advertising goes to the dogs

October 14 2011, By Neil Schoenherr



Nestle Purina's latest commercial for its Beneful dog food, aimed directly at canines by using high-frequency noises inaudible to humans, should serve to increase the bond owners feel with their pets, says a marketing expert at Washington University in St. Louis.

"Pet owners are passionate about their pets and the commercial provides an opportunity for these consumers to engage with their 'special friends,'" says Carol Johaneck, adjunct professor of marketing at Olin Business School.

The commercial, currently airing in Austria, contains squeaks similar to a dog toy, a whistle barely heard by humans and high-pitched pinging noise.

"In today's world we see an increase of older individuals living alone

who rely on their pets for companionship and this provides a time for the owner and pet to interact,” says Johanek, who previously worked in consumer research at Nestle Purina Petcare.

From a brand perspective, this engagement “allows the end-user to build a positive image of the Beneful brand,” she says.

“The brand integrates this commercial well with its website, further building the brand identity,” Johanek says. “Understanding the importance of the pet/pet owner relationship is critical for brands in this segment, as it provides opportunities for innovative ways in which to interact with the market.”

Beneful is no stranger to this type of marketing, Johanek says, noting that the company sponsored “sniff” smelling posters in Germany last year as a strategy to strengthen the brand relationship with pet owners.

[Dogs](#) were able to sniff the scent of Beneful dog food from special posters on advertising boards in German cities while out for a walk with their owners.

“Success of online pet owner forums shows the enthusiasm of pet owners to discuss, share information and tell stories about their pets,” Johanek says. “Pet brands continuously use these techniques to gain feedback on their brand’s positive benefits relative to their competitors, strengthening their competitive positioning.”

Johanek doesn’t see the commercial as marketing to dogs, per se, but providing an opportunity for the owner to become more closely tied to a brand with their pet.

“Because the pet itself is such a strong part of their lives, this can provides a great opportunity to influence this buyer,” she says.

“Similarly, when we view ads for products geared toward household with young children it almost seems like we are [advertising](#) to the child but in fact, due to their influence on the buyer, the female head of household in this case, brands are in fact promoting to the adult purchaser. Brands that really understand the purchase influences surrounding their end-users can do this quite effectively.”

Provided by Washington University in St. Louis

Citation: Advertising goes to the dogs (2011, October 14) retrieved 15 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-10-advertising-dogs.html>

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