



Giving A Brand Some Wings

Vivaldi Partners and Forbes have recently unveiled the top 2005 Next Generation Growth Brands, Brands that have significantly increased their average stock value in less than four years. Of course, Brands such as Apple, Google, and Starbucks are among those that offer good products and services, have created loyal consumer bases, and continually seek innovative expansion opportunities.

But guess what other Brand is also within the top ten? It's a Brand that offers only two products, is banned in some countries, costs considerably more than its competitors, and tastes like cough syrup to many of its devout consumers.

The Brand? Red Bull. With a \$1.7 billion Brand value and touted as the energy drink that "gives you wings," Red Bull has created a loyal fan base among those with a sizeable expendable income: teenagers and young twenty-somethings.

And what's interesting is how Red Bull has accomplished its success. It's not through billboards or website banner ads. It's not through its few TV spots, which, according to Fast Company, serve more to entertain than to lure consumers. And although Red Bull sponsors the extreme of extreme sports, such as air races, kite-boarding to Cuba, and cliff diving in Hawaii, they rarely send out advanced press releases or invite local media to these events. For Red Bull, mass marketing campaigns are out.

And grassroots marketing is in.

Red Bull has relied on guerilla marketing tactics to get the Brand noticed in the very congested and crowded realm of beverages. It has focused its efforts on "Generation Y," a generation of consumers who distrust the media, who love the Brands their parents hate, and who seek Brands that help mold their identity. When trying to reach consumers who are skeptical of big-business claims and celebrity endorsements, grassroots marketing might just be the next best thing for Branding success.

So what exactly does Red Bull's grassroots entail? For starters, Red Bull creates "Mobile Energy Teams" in key areas: college campuses and city centers. A core of Red Bull's consumers are college students, so the Brand advertises available jobs at many campuses. A recent Red Bull Mobile Energy Team job posting on Boston University's website was seeking someone who is bright, outgoing, energetic, motivated, and eager to "hit the streets delivering energy wherever it's needed. At work, at school, at the gym, on the road...anywhere and everywhere in search of people who might be tired and in need of energy."

The Mobile Team then hops into its sleek energy car that's equipped with its own gigantic Red Bull can on the roof. The Team does exactly what the job posting describes: they hunt down the sluggish and tired who are in need of a jolt. Red Bull also supplies the Team with cases of the energy drink to be enjoyed at parties. Who are consumers going to trust more, a blatantly persuasive advertisement that solicits consumers to buy Red Bull, or a trusted friend who loves the Brand and offers a can for free?

Red Bull has forged groups of the best recruiters: friends of consumers who hold significantly more credibility and sincerity than anything Red Bull could ever say. Red Bull's word-of-mouth and guerilla marketing tactics are city-specific, focusing on whatever is the rage in a particular city and where trendsetters go for a night on the town.

Gen Y wants to create its own personal culture and identity that expresses who they are. If Friend A is drinking Red Bull, then Friend B will drink it. And soon, Friend C and D will follow suit. Although its consumers describe it as revolting and a rip-off at \$2 for 250 milliliters, Red Bull has far exceeded the sales of beer and soda at many convenience stores like Store24 and 7-Eleven. Like a virus, Red Bull has successfully affixed itself to the anti-brand generation.

First introduced in Austria in 1987, Red Bull has had its fair share of downs. It's been banned in France and Norway over health concerns, has been linked to deaths of teenagers, and has nicknames such as "speed in a can" and "liquid cocaine." For Red Bull and its consumers, though, these downs are merely ups. Rumors that swirl around the Brand add to its mystique, demand, and popularity among Red Bull's rebellious and daredevil consumers.

Whether deliberate or not, Red Bull has stirred myths and stories about its Brand that have resulted in unshakable loyalty among its consumers. One thing is deliberate though: Red Bull's viral marketing techniques. The Brand's success proves that, despite a cluttered array of products and services, Brands can attract consumers. Perhaps, rather than spending tons on Super Bowl and interactive ads, Brands should consider going directly to the roots of their target market. Consider educating and empowering those who hold substantial credibility and who have the potential to directly influence and convince consumers.

It's proven victorious for Red Bull. And it might just prove to give your Brand the wings it needs to soar above the competition.