Forum Video: SaskPower's Winning Combo of Analog and Digital Marketing

By Joy Herbers
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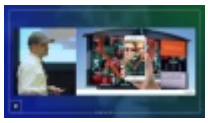
At E Source Forum 2017, Todd Lazurca, manager of communication services at SaskPower, talked about blending analog and digital content to create experiences for customers. According to him, "experiences are the foundation of our lives—and they're the foundation of the conversations that we have." Those conversations have helped SaskPower generate word of mouth among its customers and encourage them to embrace shared experiences within their community. Lazurca explains:

> So everything that we're doing is laying the groundwork so that they've got this foundation of knowledge, this emotional connection to past experiences and experiences that the larger community has had so that they look to their peers as the trusted source and as who they should model their behaviors after.

This video excerpt from Lazurca's Forum presentation describes a few of SaskPower's successful experiential marketing safety campaigns.



The impetus for SaskPower's experiential marketing initiatives

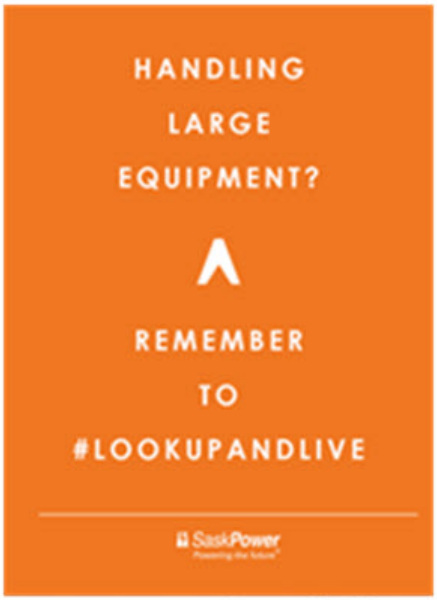
In 2013, the government told SaskPower it needed to do a better job of telling customers how it was using their money. So the utility ran a traditional ad campaign to educate Saskatchewanians about the services SaskPower provides to residents. Six weeks later, the government came back and said, "You need to pull that campaign because the public thinks it's costing too much money."

After briefly panicking, SaskPower collected itself and asked, How do you connect with 528,000 customers' hearts when you're not on their minds? For Lazurca, the answer was experiential marketing. The utility wanted to build something that allowed its customers to be part of the process of generating and distributing electricity.

The Power to Grow campaign

SaskPower launched its Power to Grow campaign by hitting the road and setting up physical and augmented reality stations across the province. Stocked with iPads and other interactive technology, the pop-up tents provided an immersive experience where customers talked about their shared history, learned about energy supply options, and connected with their personal power consumption. The crews toured for three years, reaching 61,000 customers in 100 communities.

SaskPower Look Up and Live



Source: SaskPower

The Look Up and Live campaign

But what do you do if you don't own the experience? How do you get in on the conversation? According to Lazurca, you need to elevate the experiences that people are already having. For example, in 2016 in Saskatchewan, 975 accidents occurred where farm or construction equipment made contact with power lines. SaskPower needed to get safety messaging to farm and construction workers, but these groups tend to be insular and remote. So the utility developed analog content (including posters, apparel, and air fresheners) as well as digital content (including videos and social media outreach) to connect with

these customers. SaskPower knew that if it could engage with farm and construction workers in humorous, sentimental, and creative ways, it could create word of mouth and earn trust.

The utility developed its Look Up and Live campaign to remind farm and construction workers to be mindful of power lines and other utility equipment as they do their jobs. The first place the campaign collateral showed up was in porta potties at construction sites. In the portable toilets at multiple construction sites, the utility placed bright orange SaskPower posters with the tagline “Handling large equipment? Remember to look up and live.” Says Lazurca:

> We put it in the one place we knew we were going to get multiple visits and it wasn’t going to interfere with their ability to do their job safely. … Suddenly ‘Handling large equipment? Remember to look up and live’ takes on a whole other meaning.

SaskPower regularly attends agricultural events and, rather than stand at a booth in the exhibitors hall, utility reps seek out farmers and ranchers where they’re doing their work: in the livestock barns. To initiate authentic conversations with them, SaskPower staff hands out air fresheners that these ag customers can hang in their noisome workspaces.

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As a purely analog experience, SaskPower dispatches safety ambassadors to travel to farmers markets and county fairs to talk with the public about the experiences they’re having with electricity. Using conditioning and association techniques, the ambassadors tie SaskPower's message to what is already an emotional experience for customers. Digital content often springs from these interactions, as many of the stories that the ambassadors uncover are retold as part of the utility’s Powerful Stories video series, which is available on the SaskPower YouTube channel. According to Lazurca, the utility’s experiential marketing initiative is “as much about building brand equity as it is about selling the product, the belief, or the action we want [customers] to perform.”

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