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Widget Marketing

1. The Lowdown

Branded widgets are the refrigerator magnets of the decade. These compact, portable little software applications—from video players to countdown clocks to weather forecasts—are inexpensive to distribute, free to the user, and often distinctly useful. They can live in a privacy capacity such as personal portals, wikis, private blogs, or publicly in areas such as social network pages, Web sites and public blogs.

There are two kinds of widgets: lifestyle and functional. Lifestyle widgets are used primarily for marketing purposes in viral marketing campaigns. For instance, an Obama badge is a lifestyle widget that can be placed on his supporter's personal page. A StyleSlam widget on Bebo.com allows one to make an avatar that resembles the creator and dress it up. Most of the Facebook applications are lifestyle widgets. There are thousands of applications ready to appeal to a wide variety of interests. Functional widgets help users interact with the brand in a relevant and useful way. Examples include Google maps, clocks, converters, ANA insights widget, Travelocity's widget that searches best rates for flights, hotels and car rentals, and RSS readers.



2. Why Do I Need to Know About It?

The popularity of widgets is growing rapidly—brands looking to form direct relationships with customers should consider using a widget strategically—and tactically to market to prospects and existing customers. One of the reasons widgets have become so widespread is that Web audiences have become more fragmented—consumers are spending more time on niche Web sites rather than portals—and marketers recognize the need to distribute their content more broadly. The direct benefits of widgets include:

- **The ultimate expression of brand affinity:** Widgets are often displayed in a highly-visible social space such as Facebook, a blog, etc.
- **Deliver relevant information on the fly:** Widgets deliver information quickly, in real time.
- **Insert a brand into a user's interactions with their friends:** The right widget creates interactions between people. A brand that is properly integrated into that widget becomes part of the social interaction.
- **Keep your brand top of mind.**

Recipe for widget success

To do well, branded widgets must engage users often, be useful, authentic and simple, and target the right audience. Although widgets have a rapid adoption at the outset, they have a short shelf life—it is very challenging to maintain a user's interest over a long period of time. The applications with the longest life tend to be those where developers constantly add valuable new



features to entice users to return. The applications must also allow users to customize their brand experience. Another way to create a successful widget is to join forces with an already-popular application. One of Slide.com's most-popular Facebook applications is SuperPoke, a communication tool that allows people do everything from send virtual hugs to throw virtual objects at friends. Samsung Electronics sponsored a tool that lets users throw a picture of an HDTV at pals.

3. Marketing Case Studies

Ford Sync

Ford Sync, Mediaedge:cia and Mindshare won the best widget of the year at the 2008 OMMA Awards, targeting 16-to 25-year-old serious video gamers to promote the company's voice-activated Sync technology. The team collaborated with comic book artist Jamie Hewlett to deliver widgetized games like Phantom Fury, Hyper Bunny, Ghost Hero, and Space Jumper to provide interactive entertainment that's engaging to the target audience. Ford envisioned fun games that were easy to share, creating a link between the user and the Ford brand.

Nike

Nike created a NikePlus customizable widget that utilizes the syncing power of an iPod to record personal workout data, connecting runners around the world, and making monitoring goals and challenges easier.

4. The Thing to Remember Is...

Widgets must have clear campaign goals in order to determine an execution strategy. Suggestions for executing goals more effectively:

- DON'T improve reputation on a mobile phone.
- DON'T collect data or content on the desktop.
- DON'T generate leads in personal Web space.

As the popularity of widgets grows, so does their potential as a source of revenue. Ads on social networks are expected to rack in \$1.9 billion in 2008. Despite their growth, there are legitimate questions that remain about the future development of the widget advertising market. There are currently no standards for widget marketing, and the industry is still trying to figure out the best ways to track ad performance and ROI. In the meantime, you can start exploring customizable widgets via new platforms such as Clearspring (<http://www.clearspring.com/>) and Widgetbox (<http://www.widgetbox.com>). Both provide marketers and publishers with a set of tools to transform Web content and applications into widgets, syndicate widgets easily across multiple platforms, and provide a robust analytics to track the spread of widgets in real time.

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