



July 2008 Case Study

Meijer and Vitrue Get Students and Community Creative and Excited

Background

With more than 250,000 square feet of space at each of its 250 store locations, Meijer is the originator of the superstore concept and sets the standard for thinking outside the box to successfully take a concept to the next level. The company will mark its 75th anniversary later this year and, in holding true to its history of innovation, Meijer established a technology panel to discover, research, and test new media and marketing strategies as they become adopted within the marketplace.

Marketing Challenge

Having already run an online contest on a third party video-sharing site, Meijer came to Vitrue to explore creating and building its own independent online community. Meijer felt that although they had created an entertaining promotion with the contest, the content and creative input did not generate the viral excitement for which they had hoped and ultimately failed to drive sales back to the brand. Concerns also abounded over issues with authenticating contest votes and viewing results, adjacent content, and a general lack of a branded environment.

So Meijer turned to Vitrue, seeking to define benchmarks appropriate to gauge success and project mandates based on results from the previous user-generated video contest they had run.



The project benchmarks for success were:

- 60 entries
- 131,000 complete views
- 23,000 visits

The project mandates included:

- Control over branded and adjacent content
- Control over program management
- Increased relevance between the concept and the brand
- Increased focus on a younger target demographic audience
- Quick deployment
- An environment that encouraged consumer creativity
- Viral distribution elements to drive participation

Solution

Vitruue worked with Mark Brewster, Meijer's Manager of Broadcast Planning/Production and Video Services, to develop the solution. To increase participation, Brewster wanted to target a younger audience already comfortable with social networking. Developed by Vitruue, Meijer launched the "Meijer Brand 'Make Your Own Video' Contest," a three-month program that offered prizes of up to \$5,000 to both schools and individuals.

As a motivator, he wanted to enlist teachers to use the project within the class curriculum. By targeting creative arts classes, Brewster hoped to engage a younger audience in hopes of securing lifelong customers. Though schools were the main target, the public was also welcome to join in a parallel "for fun" promotion.

Meijer Approach

With limited available advertising funds and a short turnaround period, Brewster determined that sending targeted e-mails would be the most cost-effective distribution. They contacted school principals and counselors who then forwarded the message to the instructors they thought would be good candidates. Not only did word reach the teachers Brewster had anticipated, but the viral nature and ease of Vitruue's distribution brought in responses from classes they never expected.



“You can’t choose what is viral. The consumer does that. We wanted a creative environment and the freedom for our consumers to tell us what is worth sharing and what isn’t.” -- Mark Brewster

With a desire to make the environment as open and creative as possible, the only guidelines were that the video must include one of the following ideas:

- Value - How the Meijer Brand product saves money
- Quality - Has the same or better ingredients
- Taste - Tastes as good or better than other brands

Videos were judged by the following criteria:

- How well the video motivated others to try a Meijer Brand product
- Originality and creativity of concept
- Overall appeal - how well the video targeted or spoke to the Meijer audience

Results/Immediate Impact

Although Meijer used the results of the earlier contest as a benchmark, they knew this standalone contest reliant on existing Meijer advertising channels might suffer in terms of traffic and participation. “We felt that if we got 60 entries, we would be doing better than expected.”

	Third Party Video-Sharing Contest	Vitruue Promotion
Number of Entries	60	368 (240 of which were accepted as appropriate material)
Average Time Spent on Site	N/A	Over 6 minutes
Number of Complete Views	131,000	132,435
Number of Visits to the Contest Page	23,000	357,569

However, the success of the Vitruue promotion was soon clear. In fact, even after the close of the contest, the site still received close to 1,000 visits a week.



When the first videos were uploaded, momentum snowballed and word about Meijer and the contest spread in the halls, classrooms, and beyond, truly harnessing the value of word-of-mouth marketing and social media.

The return on investment figures were also excellent and are still getting better.

“When we looked at total investment against return, the cost came out to be pennies a head. This was much more efficient than our typical direct marketing efforts.”

Alongside the hard figures of dollars and cents is the generation of goodwill and public perception.

“We received letters from parents that kids were going into school to work on the project even during their Christmas break. We heard from teachers that the project fostered teamwork and focus. One letter said that everyone was a winner, it was such a good experience.”

Going Forward

This was a win-win for both parties: Meijer discovered the advantage of collecting the assets' viral statistics and Vitruue used this feedback to implement new features in its product line. On the heels of this successful contest, Meijer is currently planning to implement Vitruue's social media into their long-term community and Integrate the technology into their annual promotional calendar. “The only way to learn about social networking is to experiment and see what you find,” Brewster said. “Then you apply what you learn to your next project.”

