

# B2B GOES GUERRILLA

To add fizz to the staid world of B2B PR, some agencies are borrowing a trick from the consumer arena, says **Alex Blythe**

'If you can get someone to smile at your brand then you'll sell more of it.' So says Belinda Lawson, managing director of business-to-consumer PR agency Lawson Dodd. When she promoted Nando's chicken restaurants recently, she got actors in chicken suits to walk the streets of London.

She believes it was more effective than a pure media relations strategy would have been: 'Local papers are well read, but to make an impact you need to be in them for several weeks running and we just couldn't see that happening. The brand is all about fun and our approach reflected that.'

This tendency for consumer PR to focus less on traditional media and more on stunts was christened when *FHM* magazine projected a naked image of Gail Porter onto Parliament in 1999. More recently, smoothie maker Innocent Drinks gave away free drinks in the receptions of local businesses, and Maryland Cookies 'crash-landed' a giant replica cookie into Trafalgar Square.

## Crossing the divide

This technique is working so well in the consumer arena that practitioners in the traditionally formulaic B2B sector have taken note. B2B comms is usually associated with rolling out press releases, researching forward features, finding speaker opportunities, setting up roundtable events and attending trade conferences – but this is changing. When Dan Winter became head of press at The Sci-Fi Channel, for example, he decided traditional B2B methods would not be enough to deliver the growth demanded by the company's owner, GE.

'Our major problem is that people think we only screen *Star Trek* and are



Take cues from consumer: London Mayor Ken Livingstone is pursued by a Nando's chicken in Lawson Dodd's B2C campaign

went out into media buyers' offices and re-enacted scenes from films we were showing on the channel, such as *Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars*. It was participatory and fun, and most importantly it began to reverse the perception of our channel among an important business audience.'

Some argue that B2B comms has to take this route because the business media have become so difficult to penetrate. The problem, according to former *MediaWeek* editor Tim Burrows, is that publications no longer want to print business stories that read like glorified advertorials. 'This is tired PR,' he says. 'Other ideas are much better at getting a brand mentioned.'

He adds that creativity does not necessarily need to involve physical stunts: 'Usually this sort of guerrilla PR ends up in the diary pages. To get elsewhere in the magazine takes more thought. Specialist agencies understand the media market and so come up with good ideas – such as for a de-

August.One Communications is an agency that is embracing this change, and has developed a methodology, which it calls the 'Web of Influence', whereby a brand's potential customers

## GUERRILLA TIPS

Mantra director Rebecca Blinston-Jones offers her top five tips on running a non-media B2B campaign

- 1 Be prepared to educate** B2B marketers are getting keener on guerrilla tactics, but are often unclear what they mean by it
- 2 Accept lack of control** It is almost impossible to target guerrilla marketing in the way that most B2B marketers want to
- 3 Have a plan** Guerrilla stuff might be seen as cool, but there must still be clear reasons for doing it
- 4 Don't expect to get it cheaply** Guerrilla campaigns are rarely free
- 5 Get over the media obsession** With guerrilla marketing, coverage is

are identified. These might include government, internet firms and membership organisations. Once the audience has been identified, a campaign strategy can be formulated.

August.One says it developed the methodology after realising that businesspeople were also consumers. Managing director Sophie Brooks explains: 'Just because someone is a business buyer doesn't mean they don't read *Heat*, use Motley Fool or visit a David Lloyd leisure club. Everyone is getting more and more resistant to traditional media-based messages and we need to work harder to get into their world. Any company that hasn't woken up to this fact is going to find it hard to survive.'

## Justify the means

As with any innovation, this style of B2B comms has its critics. Most advocates accept detractors' arguments that this type of PR costs more than sending out a few press releases. They

## CASE STUDY: TELFORD SHOPPING CENTRE

Towards the end of 2003, Telford Shopping Centre employed Primal PR to interest retailers in units. Primal managing director Ivor Peters knew he faced a challenge: 'The centre's catchment area is affluent Shropshire, but few retailers based in London would have that image of Telford.'

While he did get news and features coverage in *RetailWeek*, *Estates Gazette* and *Property Week*, as well as regional and general business media, he also went directly to retailers. He spent many months in one-to-one presentations with retailers, showing them the 'upmarket' centre and delivering research that revealed the demographic of the average shopper.

After a while, however, Peters realised that he needed to physically take retailers to the centre. He chartered the



Carnival: entertained potential buyers

Orient Express for a day and hand-picked 200 individuals to join the train. During the two-and-a-half-hour journey to Telford, the hosts had an excellent opportunity to detail the benefits of the centre. When

the party arrived in Telford, Primal had converted one of the available units into a VIP suite and arranged for an extravagant 'carnival' to pass it through-out the day.

'I didn't want to do the usual thing of booking a room in Mayfair for a couple of hours of sandwiches and small-talk,' explains Peters. 'This allowed the buyers to see the store first-hand, to look at how busy the car park was, to see the type of people shopping there, and ultimately to shift their perception of the place.'

The result of the activity was 17 expressions of interest.

activity has to be directed towards the strategic goals of the campaign. Furthermore, guerrilla PR can be difficult to integrate with other marketing activity, and runs the risk of sending out mixed messages. Failure to meet objectives will at best waste resources, and at worst confuse the audience.

There is undeniably a greater element of risk with this approach to B2B PR. It is wise to take note of any legal or health and safety restrictions before going through with a guerrilla stunt. Elemental PR director Tim Gibbon adds: 'PLCs tend to be sceptical of anything that deviates from the norm, and would be reluctant to try anything that might be a little risky.'

Perhaps those larger brands still find it easy to gain editorial coverage in the business media, and so have little need for these new methods of connecting with customers. A growing number of smaller companies, however, are finding that the media are not the only way to reach a business audience. If, at the very least, they are bringing humour into B2B PR, and putting a smile on a few more faces, then it can only be a good thing. ■

Even still, not everyone agrees with Brooks' assertion that the consumer purchasing model translates well to its business equivalent. Richard Rawlins, head of PR at marketing agency Gratterpalm, says: 'Although guerrilla activity within a B2B campaign may be refreshing, humour or shock tactics alone will not be enough to sway the cynical business market. It is essential that the campaign also conveys the selling points and business benefits of the product or service.'

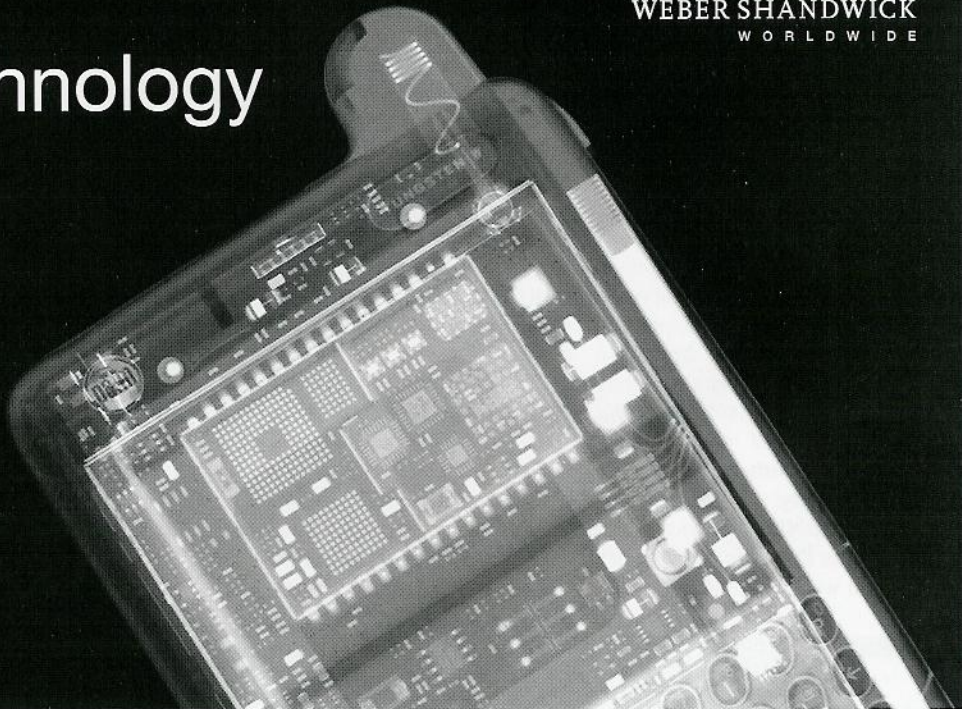
So, is guerrilla B2B PR something that agencies should be doing more of? Some complain that too often it is about creativity for creativity's sake, and few would disagree that PR

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Richard Rawlins, head of PR, Gratterpalm

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