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Marketing

Viral benefits - Guerilla plans a social movement for Storm Hawks

by: Kate Calder

Aug 1, 2007 | [Share](#)

As Storm Hawks settles into Cartoon Network's summer schedule, its creators at Nerd Corps have tapped a little viral marketing expertise to reach kid web mavens and generate buzz for the show on-line. Enter Fairfax, California's Guerilla PR, a seven-year-old company that specializes in creating social movements around its clients' brands.

The marketing plan it's cooked up for Storm Hawks aims to build awareness for the show in general, but also promotes a Storm Hawks Squadron flash-animated game that's online now, an MMOG bowing later in the summer, and eventually, licensed merch and a DVD. And it all hinges on targeting key kid influencers with gear that facilitates fan participation.

"We're giving them the tools they're already using to make their own fan art," says Nerd Corps president Ken Faier, referring to a battery of easy-to-access avatars, wallpapers, screensavers, trailers, videos and banners up for grabs on a back-end extranet page that Guerilla strategically positions at the fingertips of a carefully constructed database of 40,000 kids who would make trend philosopher and Tipping Point author Malcolm Gladwell proud.

Besides mining a substantial blogger list that's maintained internally, Guerilla combs blog search engine [Technorati.com](#) for kid bloggers who love action cartoons and anime and uploads short videos and trailers to a list of about 200 podcasts and RSS feeds. The company also reaches out to the directors of kid tech camps, kid computer courses and summer school programs to integrate branded content such as avatars and videos into their curriculum.

And this spring, Guerilla PR started up Gonna Be A Digital Star, its own classroom web course for kids ages nine to 18. The sessions teach kids the basics of creating and editing blogs, graphics, comic books, games and videos in a safe environment, feeding more web-savvy soldiers into the company's viral marketing efforts.

"Kids are learning how to use different tools to be more creative and empowered, instead of only using what's available to them," says president and CEO Michael Leifer. In fact, the official Storm Hawks fan club was started by a group of kid fans, to whom Guerilla was more than happy to provide images and videos. And clicking on the YouTube StormHawkers site while on the phone from his office, Leifer was pleased to see that fans had grabbed the official Nerd Corp-produced Storm Hawks shorts and created their own versions.

Getting a valid underground campaign going with a target that can turn from fan to foe on a dime takes some finesse. "The modern era isn't so much about push advertising, as it is about pull," says Leifer. "It's finding out who something would be relevant for and positioning it in a real way so they want to adopt it." For example, the company is working on setting up a co-branded site on [Graphita.com](#) where users can upload pictures of themselves and add Storm Hawks flair like armor and wigs. Contests around the effort will see kids vote for the most creative likenesses to win fun things like foam Storm Hawks planes, DVDs, t-shirts and, later in the year, coupons for Storm Hawks products.

Guerilla's first step in creating a viral campaign is going deep online to assess a brand's reputation in contrast with its intended media plan. Conversations transpiring on message boards, websites, newsletters, media portals and blogs are carefully analyzed for both positive and negative comments about a brand and its competitors. "We give the client a snapshot so they can see how to move the needle and get involved in the conversation," says Leifer. For the Storm Hawks strategy, Leifer says one of the most important things gleaned from this brand rep research was that the campaign needed to target anime-influenced groups as opposed to anime enthusiasts, who wouldn't be keen on animated series that stray

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