

Digital Diapers

Getting A “Tough” Brand Into Video Games

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Overview

In a June 16, 2004 article for AdAge.com (“Digital Games Luring Away More TV Viewers”), Tim Hanlon of Starcom MediaVest Group stated, “At the end of the day, it's very challenging to get a Pampers box into a video game.” His point was simple, that many companies do not explore the option of marketing their brands in video games simply because they are not expected natural fits for those types of media.

The purpose of this paper is to show that statement to be misleading.

As long as an agency takes the time to understand the plot, purpose, culture, and online community of a video game, and sets as its goal to develop branded content that is relevant and valuable to those aspects, appropriate solutions can be created to market any brand inside of most video games. As long as a marketing team holds dear the concept of “relevant content,” where the modifications they make to the game add to the experience in a way that's valuable for the game players, the branding will be well received.

This is about as far from product placement as you get. It's bigger than that.

To prove this point, I have selected four of the most popular video games, and will show how the Pampers brand can be effectively positioned within those games in a way that adds to the experience of them. These games were chosen cross-platform, in that they had to be popular regardless of the game system used (Sony Playstation 2, Microsoft Xbox, PC, etc.), and they had to have been relatively new within the last three years. If the games have an online component, or if the online component is more popular than the stand-alone game, we may have opted to utilize that more popular market simply to further prove the utility and value of a well-planned branding effort in those games.

Note that these weren't “natural fits” for Pampers, which is all the more reason to pay attention to the value of technical creativity in branding within video games.

It is my contention that not only is the comment by Mr. Hanlon misleading, it's the exact opposite attitude that one should have when considering video games as a source of successful branding efforts. Pampers is not a hard brand to insert into video games: it is the *perfect* brand for just such a medium!

The unique nature and goodly image of the Pampers brand can be well served by the humorous and entertaining natures of video games. In addition, statistics show that the average age of video game players is increasing. It's not just teenagers playing video games anymore -- it's mothers and fathers. Who better to market to these people than the company that partners with them in assuring the health and well-being of their children?

Mr. Hanlon should be *begging* for a company like Pampers to explore video game marketing, not discouraging them from trying.

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Game 1: Madden NFL

Developer	Electronic Arts Tiburon
Platform	Xbox / PS2
Online Multiplayer Capability?	Yes
Type	Sports

GAME CONCEPT

Perhaps the most popular sports game for half of every year, Madden NFL is always a much-anticipated release. It is the football video game from which every other is judged. Narrated by John Madden, this game is filled with every new player and team that will be playing in the NFL.

What makes this game exciting to players is the updated statistics for each player. If one player had a bad year last year during the real-life football season,

that player will not be as good in the new Madden NFL game. This game prides itself as being the closest thing to the real sport.

In the last year, Madden NFL developed an online component, so now people can play virtual football games against each other over the Internet.

CULTURE

Madden NFL is a game where competition is everything. It doesn't matter how a player wins, as long as he or she wins. To do this, players exploit every aspect of the game in order to beat their opponents.

Memory cards are required for this game, as players will often play full "seasons" of football, but can't easily do so in one sitting. Also, players like to modify their teams, or even make their own customized team.

One popular practice in Madden NFL is that players create teams based upon their fantasy football teams. Basically, they take players from all different teams, combine them into a unique team with a personalized name, and then play the computer or other players. Many players in fantasy football leagues enjoy playing other customized teams in their leagues in this fashion.

Advertising in Madden NFL, like in real football, is expected and anticipated, not shunned.

APPROACH

Madden NFL is an advertising agency's dream! There are almost limitless ways to get a brand message into the game. Even without product placement-type billboards and logos on team uniforms, Madden has more than enough space for a marketing team to post its brand.

What is surprising is the sheer lack of overwhelming advertising in the game. Seeing as how the programmers at EA Sports do everything in their power to mimic the real NFL (including adding snow and visible breath exhalations on cold days). That common advertising methods, such as commercials, logo placement, sponsorship of different aspects of the game, corporate sponsorships of arenas, and many others are missing is almost a crime.

Because players have gotten used to a limited marketing effort by companies in Madden, the best way to approach inserting it would be through both utility and humor. Ultimately, gamers insert Madden into their consoles because they want to enjoy themselves (and preferably squash their competition while doing so). Giving them some great content, while giving them a few laughs, would be welcomed and appreciated.

PAMPERS IN MADDEN NFL

There are whole bunches of different ways to include the Pampers brand in Madden NFL that will be both appreciated and effective. Instead of sticking with one idea (or type of idea) in this section, I wanted to briefly touch upon some of these possibilities. The reason for this being that the ideas expand on their own, and only need the seed idea to begin rich conversations on them.

The Diaper Bowl

Pampers could set up a special server, or a special area on the online networks by Microsoft and Sony, where players log on during the beginning of the football season. They are then matched up against other online players, and compete in an elimination series of games. The winner of each game moves on, and the loser no longer has access to the special server.

The entire contest is covered by a special Pampers web site that lists the winners and losers, as well as information regarding the event. Ultimately, the final teams will reach the playoffs, and win the right to participate in the much-hyped Diaper Bowl. Awards and prizes will be given to the top 12 teams.

The winner gets a Diaper Bowl ring, along with his or her other prizes, just like a regular NFL player would.

The Secret Diaper Slam

Players enjoy secret codes almost as much as they love hard tackles and hits. This idea combines both!

The Secret Diaper Slam is a special code players can press into their game controllers after an especially hard tackle (or some other special criteria). When the player tackles the other player very hard, then types in the code, a secret sequence plays out where the tackling player then sits down, and puts a diaper on the tackled player to add insult to injury.

The code for this "Easter Egg" move will be listed on the Pampers web site, perhaps "hidden" within the Activities section.

This move would also work well as the "Swaddler Stuff."



When the Bucs lay down the law, the y sometimes use the embarrassing Diaper Slam, a tackle and insult in four easy keystrokes.

In-Game Commercials

In the real NFL, spectators watching from home often look forward to new, humorous television commercials. Depending upon the game and the teams involved, it's often too expensive for companies to buy this broadcast space.

By putting these commercials in Madden, these companies can afford something they hadn't been able to do before. They could be particularly effective in online games, in that they could reach a large audience, just like a real television commercial does during NFL games.

Combining this idea with the Diaper Bowl (see above) would be expected, and well worth the effort.

Pampers Messy Interviews

In-game interviews could be “built,” where a newscaster takes a moment to interview a key athlete while plays are being set up. Just like in NFL games, when a journalist interviews a player on the sideline, similar scenarios could be set up in Madden, sponsored by Pampers.

As with the commercials listed above, these interviews are designed for their comedic value. Real players could be interviewed, and past players and famous people could contribute their work to make it more realistic and memorable (such as the famous Joe Namath interview from the 2003 season).

Perhaps another interview would take place in the locker room, but instead of the players walking around in towels, they’re walking around in diapers made for cruisers, toddlers, etc.

The Pamperdome

Shaped on the outside like a giant diaper, the Pamperdome would be an optional stadium in which players could host their games. It could be either an included game element upon purchase, or something that could be downloaded later for users who have consoles with hard drives (such as the Microsoft Xbox).

And, just to avoid any problems, it would be best to not put the Pamperdome in Cincinnati.

The Pampers All-Stars

This downloadable team is an additional team of superstars who play in the Pamperdome. They’re another team for gamers to challenge and beat.

Top finishers in the Diaper Bowl get “drafted” to the All-Stars, and appear in next year’s Madden NFL on the squad.



The players talk smack, send “shout outs,” and say plenty of things to make gamers look forward to every interview and commercial.

Game 2: Half-Life: Team Fortress

(Could also apply to Counter Strike, HALO, and that genre)

Developer	Valve Software
Platform	PC
Online Multiplayer Capability?	Yes
Type	Action/Adventure

GAME CONCEPT

In this game modification, players divide into two teams, and play different types of games all focused on combat missions. From Capture the Flag to King of the Mountain, the Team Fortress addition allows players to work with their teammates towards a common goal.

All players in each game choose a position, such as medic, engineer, spy, sniper, demolitions expert, and many others. Each position has strengths and weaknesses which, when combined with the other positions on the same team, allow players to work

together and have hours of entertainment. Every game, players can change positions, game types, and even teams, which allows for endless combinations of game play.

One nice aspect of this type of game is that players can create their own maps, or game scenarios. Other players then download these maps, and play in these new “zones.”

CULTURE

Because this game modification was made for online play only, it was born into an environment where players are empowered to be creative. Often, special maps and weapons developed for the game are used in strange, and often funny ways, in order to defeat the other team.

This has led to a culture of self-rule, where players develop reputations for their abilities, and many group together in “clans,” or teams that meet regularly. Players set up special “clan servers,” where

only clan members know the password to get in and play. These teams regularly practice together (much like a soccer team in real life), and then challenge other teams in championships.

They may even log onto public servers to take on groups of people as a team.

Team Fortress online games have developed into very competitive, but very open places with humorous tones.

APPROACH

Although there could be many more slapstick type ways to approach this audience, perhaps connecting with their team-focused attitude would work best. These gamers can see the fun in more cartoon-like approaches (one game map makes it look like the players are six inches tall, and are fighting in a gigantic living room). Still, even when the games are the silliest, teamwork and team play are emphasized.

The best way to approach this audience is to pull this team-centric core to the forefront. Have Pampers acknowledge the importance of the

teamwork and team play. Even better would be to create something for the gamers where what Pampers offers can be carried throughout all the different maps and game types.

PAMPERS IN TEAM FORTRESS

The Pampers brand would appeal to both the competitive and humorous natures of Team Fortress by utilizing a strategy used for years by small business owners:

They should “sponsor” a team.

Just like a local law firm or insurance company may sponsor a little league team, Pampers should sponsor a Team Fortress clan. This would be an event-based marketing strategy whereby players are invited to log on to a special server and compete. The best players would then be selected for the Pampers team.

Proven Solutions

This strategy uses proven marketing methods that allow for all types of media (such as broadcast and print ads to publicize the event, and Interactive marketing to support the event).

The best part about this solution is that it would support the serious culture of the game and it's players, and provide a humorous approach to stimulate the more jovial nature of the game. Players would find the idea hysterical, yet jump at the chance to win their spot on the prestigious team.

The Team Uniform

To further support the value to the players, Pampers would in turn provide the team server space to practice their games, and develop special files for them to download that will let them appear in “team uniform” when playing against other teams. Instead of simply being on the red or blue team, the Pampers National team members would appear to other players as wearing special uniforms (that can't be downloaded anywhere other than the special server).

Effort Required

The development of these special files is relatively inexpensive in terms of both cost and time. A graphic designer could draw the uniforms for use in the program, and a programmer could write the code to instantly build it into the game. Running the server could be something done by someone in the IT department at the client site, and would require minimal time and attention.



Obviously a better graphic artist would be used to design a better uniform, but you get the idea with this one.

The Time Is Right

Team Fortress has waned a bit in popularity simply because it has been out in the public domain for a long time. Luckily, the company that developed Team Fortress is in the process of developing Team Fortress 2, a long- and much-awaited response to the first smash hit. Deciding to go forward now would allow time to contact the developers so that they could build the necessary “space” into the game, allowing an easier process to build in these solutions later.

Having Pampers build the first National team would encourage many other companies to do so. It would not just attract much media attention; it would open up a world of copycat responses from other companies, and may even open up a national cross-brand competition.

Game 3: Ratchet & Clank

(All Games In This Series)

Developer	Insomniac Games
Platform	PS2
Online Multiplayer Capability?	No
Type	Action

GAME CONCEPT

This game is a combination of action, puzzle solving, and humor. The missions are separated by funny short movies that mock the universe in which the game takes place. Ratchet is a dog-like being that is a mechanical genius. Alongside his robot friend Clank, the two use many crazy weapons, gizmos, and

gadgets to defeat evil creatures trying to destroy planets.

The key features to this game series are the weapons and gizmos that Ratchet uses. When the second Ratchet & Clank game came out, the new weapons were featured.

CULTURE

This game is not for online play. It is a one-player game that challenges the player to remember clues, explore the nooks and crannies of every world, and to abuse Ratchet's overwhelming firepower.

Players are drawn to the crazy weapons, and ridiculous gadgets Ratchet finds, buys, or makes along the way. As the game goes on, it becomes much sillier while becoming more challenging. The addition of each new weapons and gadget invites hours of new exploration and "test driving."

The game has plenty of "space," in that in any given scenario, there's more to do than necessary for the advancement of the game. Because of this, there are many "points" to the game. One may complete each scenario, or simply go hunting for more "money" to buy bigger and better toys. One may also earn extra points for simply using new gadgets in interesting ways.

APPROACH

This game revolves around humor and gadgets. The best way to build value while including brand is to build something funny *and* useful.

There are many gadgets and weapons, and because of this, it would be valuable to the players to get a new gadget that reflected the Pampers brand. As long as the new gadget was something that would be helpful, and would be funny to use or watch, the target audience would more readily welcome the brand presence.

PAMPERS IN RATCHET & CLANK

A clear and simple way to include the Pampers brand is to replace the gadget The Hydrodisplacer with some kind of futuristic Pampers diaper.

In the game, the Hydrodisplacer is a gadget used to temporarily drain pools of water. Ratchet then runs around with the device, and can fill empty pools later on. Basically, the hydrodisplacer is used to absorb large quantities of water, and then relocate it to somewhere else.

Instead of using a gun-shaped Hydrodisplacer, Pampers could offer the diaper-like Pampers Hydrodisplacer 3000. It would be a futuristic diaper with which Ratchet could absorb great pools of water. Then, he'd run around with this gigantic, squishy diaper until he found an empty basin into which he could empty it.

Secret Diapers

In creating this gadget, Pampers would then have perhaps the most direct branding of their product possible, while providing something very valuable for the game player. In addition, making this gadget something that's somewhat difficult to find or achieve would add to the buzz that would be created by gamers wanting to get it.

By either making the diapers a hard-to-find gadget, or by making them very expensive to buy in the game, they would follow the successful formula utilized for precious items in the game.

Cross-Marketing

Like with the other recommendations in this paper, marketing this development in the game would be something easily done with any media type. Most likely, since it would be breaking new ground in this game, it's more than likely that the buzz generated by the discovery of this product placement would come as free advertising, what with gaming magazines, web sites, and television shows broadcasting the news of it.

In addition, it's very likely major news stations, papers, and web sites would pick up the story simply because it's funny, opens up a new "side" of the Pampers brand, and is a unique style of marketing.



Ratchet's bulging diapers lets the player know he's got a "full diaper," should he need to fill a basin to help complete a part of the game

Game 4: EverQuest

Developer	Sony Online Entertainment
Platform	PC
Online Multiplayer Capability?	Yes
Type	Role-Playing

GAME CONCEPT

This role-playing game is the first serious foray into creating a 3D version of the incredibly popular MUDs (Multiple User Dungeon) of the 1990's. MUDs were text-based Internet games, back when people used telnet protocols to call networks more than they used HTTP (the most common, and practically standard, Web protocol).

Based on fantasy games like Dungeons & Dragons, EverQuest has exploded into multiple continents where dragons, magic, and power still rule the world.

Players can be good or evil (or simply self-aligned), and spend their time fighting monsters and each other, and traveling through a gigantic, very detailed world.

There are literally thousands of users walking around at the same time, and players can venture with their friends (and even family -- real or not!) as they explore and grow their "characters."

CULTURE

Players spend much, if not the majority of their time interacting with other players. EverQuest is like a combined adventure game, IRC chat room, and role-playing game. Though one could simply wander off by oneself to fight legions of monsters, people spend more time doing things in groups, such as exploring, fighting, and simply hanging around talking.

The content of their world is very important to the players. They take their fantasy very seriously, and would be offended by even light commercial branding.

A unique aspect of EverQuest's culture is the maturity of the players. Because players are "in character" in the game, a mature, adult mentality pervades.

APPROACH

Any overt branding, such as using the Pampers name, or utilizing virtual billboards, would offend the majority of the players. Players want new lands, monsters, weapons, magic items, and adventures. They want to meet new people, and experience new things. They want their characters to learn new skills, and to become better with the ones they already have.

In order to capture this audience, Pampers needs to develop relevant game content that is *not branded*. Subtle branding themes could be inserted without problems, but the degree to which they interfere with the culture and spirit of the game would be one measured with the most critical of eyes.

PAMPERS IN EVERQUEST

The way to capture the attention of the players of EverQuest is to simply give the players exactly what they want, without trying to directly brand it. Instead, the players should be redirected to a heavily branded environment (such as the Pampers web site, or a Pampers-sponsored one) where something valuable relating to that content, or the content itself, can be obtained.

Learning From The Happy Meal

McDonald's has great success in driving traffic to their stores and web sites by simply putting valuable content to specific audiences there. For example, Star Wars fanatics the world over rushed to McDonald's stores back in the 1980's to purchase Star Wars glasses. Children recently flocked to the stores to purchase Happy Meals, so that they could obtain the included Lilo & Stitch figurines.

Neither the Star Wars nor the Lilo & Stitch brands were modified during these promotions. McDonald's simply became the place to get the objects the targeted audiences desired.

Pampers should use this approach, in that it should develop new online material for EverQuest that can only be found and/or unlocked at the Pampers web site, or a co-branded Pampers-sponsored site.

The Advantage of the PC

Because EverQuest is overwhelmingly a PC-based game, each player stores the game on his or her computer. As updates to the game are made, this local copy of the game is modified to include the new material.

Pampers could create a special patch file that can be downloaded only from the Pampers site. This file would then automatically install itself on the user's computer, automatically updating the game to include the new, valuable content. It would be a one-time event that could have tremendous cross-marketing capability and traffic potential.

Testing New Worlds

Pampers would have to decide how much they would like to spend, but a simple "test run" of this market would be to create some kind of semi-unique item for the game.



Players love the gigantic world, and even choose the clothes they wear!

Perhaps it would be an item that would help the players run faster (players spend a good deal of time simply walking around in the game), but it could be used in conjunction with other items that increase speed to have an overall cumulative effect. Players would simply visit the Cruiser page on the Pampers web site to find the directions to this item on EverQuest.

Another idea would be to create an item that keeps certain creatures (perhaps baby versions of big, nasty monsters) from being aggressive with nearby players. It could be worn, and would act like a charm that would make the monsters ignore them (unless, of course, the player walks right up and bothers the creature).

Building New Worlds

If Pampers liked the return on the investment, it could consider building a special adventure, complete with special new creatures, items, and areas. Players would then find the co-branded Pampers site useful for information on these new areas, found only at the co-branded site.

Perhaps the map to this area can only be found at the Pampers web site, or the map would be mailed to the players if they mailed in so many proofs of purchase.

Summary

Agencies and marketing groups should not be limiting their use of video games as a possible marketing medium. Video game themes, cultures, and audiences are as varied as all of the activities, cultures, and people in the world.

Finding the appropriate video game in which to market a brand shouldn't consist of simply identifying games that have an "easy" fit for a brand. Rather, video games should be chosen to target gamers who reflect criteria normally used for any other advertising medium, such as age, sex, annual earnings, and others.

The most important step then comes in determining how that targeting audience would best appreciate the brand inclusion to their specific game. In this paper, everything from direct, overt branding and product placement to removed, covert branding was used. All of these solutions meet the needs of their markets, but more importantly, provide valuable content to the gamers such that the gamers *will actually try to increase their viewing and use of the branded materials!*

So many other interactive methods could have been employed as well. From building a whole new video game, such as a football game co-sponsored by Vince McMahon's XFL league (much like Midway's NFL Blitz, only the game starts with an XFL mad dash to jump on the Pampers box to determine initial possession), to a full web site of online games dedicated wholly to the brand (such as the Diaper Olympics, just in time to coincide with the 2004 Olympics -- imagine the "Dirty Diaper Toss," and the "Squishy Sprint").

The last, and perhaps most crucial "hidden" factor about video games, is that, to date, most articles only discuss the American versions of the games. These games come in many other languages, and don't need much additional code to make branded efforts work in every version of the game. Maybe a Japanese audience would respond differently, or even more positively, to some of the ideas presented here? Maybe a Japanese version of an online game like EverQuest would find direct branding more favorable?

The only thing that is limiting video game marketing today, it seems, is simply the hesitance upon the part of agencies and groups to simply explore their options. What is confusing about this is that articles are bombarding all the trade magazines talking about how interactive is eclipsing television and radio in terms of market share, yet nobody seems to be doing anything to enter this new space, save for only the smallest of business forays. The ideas listed in this paper were based on games and a brand that were considered "tough to fit." If the "tough" ideas look this good, imagine what the easy ones will look like.

NOTE: For updates, further examples, and ideas related to this article, please visit:

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