

You are here: [US](#) > [News](#) > [NGTV has fun with marketing strategy](#)

NGTV has fun with marketing strategy

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Randi Schmelzer PR Week USA Oct 22 2007 01:55

It may enjoy being silly, but the network's appeal nets serious respect from its promotional partners

No Good TV has positioned itself as a defender of free speech, "an amusement park for the mind," and "the world's largest producer of uncensored celebrity news." Arguably, it's all those things. But for movie studios, record labels, and a host of highly targeted consumer brands, the online entertainment network is first and foremost a gateway to the ever-elusive 18-34 male.

The site - NGTV.com - launched officially last July, and exists in what co-president and head of programming Kourosh Taj calls a "paparazzi-free" zone. Swapping mean-spirited gossip for boobs-and-booty gags, it's a destination where fans - in particular, hard-to-reach males - can "connect with celebrities on an intimate, personal level," he says.

Though NGTV's "uncensored" celebrity interviews have a bachelor-pad, Howard Stern sensibility - profanity, raunchiness, and on-set cocktails are the norm - at the network's crux is an "unbelievably celebrity- and publicist-friendly policy," Taj adds.

It's this concept that drives both the site's programming strategies and its entertainment-industry outreach, says Amber Eyerly, account supervisor at NGTV's AOR, JS2. "The humor is irreverent," she says, "but it's all business-driven."

NGTV's objective, Taj explains, is "to build trust and a relationship" with studios, celebrities, and their representation, to establish [it] as a reliable, safe promotional partner.

From its tagline, "Putting the F-U back into fun," NGTV would seem a natural fit for promoting demo-targeting movies such as *Superbad*, *Spider-Man 3*, and *Halloween*, as well as musicians like Korn and Akon. But it can also serve as an effective channel to introduce viewers to independent films, or "older adult celebrities to a younger audience," says NGTV director of marketing Ron Hebshie.

In the past few months, for example, featured segments have included bawdy interviews with Kevin Costner, Jackie Collins, Robin Williams, and even a trio of foul-mouthed puppets from *Avenue Q*. Watching them kid around with Carrie Keagan, the network's busty blonde host, helps make them "more relatable," Hebshie explains. "It's a hanging-out-with-your-friends kind of thing. It lends itself to trust."

In addition to promoting films, TV shows, music - and now, theater - NGTV also incorporates product integration into its programming mix. This summer, it teamed with Microsoft Xbox for "Game On ..." a series of segments in which celebrities played the beta version of *Halo 3* prior to its September release. Among the stars who filmed segments - as verbally uncensored as the rest of NGTV's content - were cast members from NBC's *Heroes* and *Chuck*, and San Diego Chargers tight end Antonio Gates.

While the Xbox marketing partnership provided an excellent opportunity for NGTV to reach out to gaming and college media, "we're trying not to show up in all the obvious places," Eyerly notes.

To that end, NGTV is positioning Keagan - its VP of programming, as well as lead on-camera talent - "as someone who can talk about what's going on in popular culture," Eyerly says. Keagan already has several panel appearances scheduled, and is set to embark on a New York media tour later this month.

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While securing these kinds of engagements will likely strengthen Keagan's relationships within the entertainment industry, they will also provide NGTV antagonists an opportunity to question the network's unorthodox format. Could its edgy, profanity-peppered approach be detrimental to brands and stars, some of whom either don't "get" it, or prefer not to go blue for publicity's sake?

"The majority of people understand that this is tomfoolery," says Taj. Viewers who aren't comfortable with the NGTV concept tend to be those who haven't seen it, he explains. More importantly, if a celebrity, studio, or rep has any problem with how they've been portrayed, the network will immediately edit the material in question.

It's all in good fun, Eyerly concurs. "Companies can know that we aren't going to rake their product over the coals."

So far, the strategy seems to be working: A key element in the network's strictly viral-driven consumer PR efforts has been leveraging the power of YouTube to generate awareness and traffic for the NGTV site. Since July, its branded YouTube clip views have rocketed from around 50 million to 100 million, says the company, and NGTV is currently the video-sharing site's fifth most popular partner channel. Perhaps an even bigger testament to its increasing popularity is the fact that NGTV is now being adapted for TV, by Endeavor, 3 Arts Entertainment, and executive producer Robert Morton.

Still, as far as Taj and Hebshie are concerned, the minds of viewers and marketers alike are opening more every day.

"We're just being silly. The more you watch, the more you learn about nothing," Taj laughs. "But somewhere out there we connect with people."

At a glance

Company: No Good TV (www.NGTV.com)

Chairman of the board: Gene Simmons

Co-presidents: Jay Vir, Kourosh Taj

Headquarters: Beverly Hills, CA

Revenues and latest earnings: Privately funded

Competitors: MTV.com, Maxim online, NationalLampoon.com

Key trade publications: Variety, Hollywood Reporter

Comms budget: Undisclosed

Marketing Team

Director of marketing: Ron Hebshie

Marketing services agencies: PR: JS2, Los Angeles

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