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Video nerd helps make a better choice

Results from tracking studies by Quantum Harris reveal independent video retail cooperative Network Video has boosted its brand awareness from less than 1% to about 10%, thanks to an ad campaign by Lish Brandt.

Network Video launched the campaign to differentiate itself and gain some brand awareness so it could compete against the might of Blockbuster and Video Ezy, which have larger marketing budgets. To make things doubly difficult, most of the 422 stores in the group have no Network Video livery on the shopfronts.

But Network Video is starting to get noticed thanks to a fictitious character called "Oscar," Network Video's chief videologist.

Three commercials ran for two weeks from 26 December on metropolitan TV, four weeks on regional TV and in cinemas from 9 January to 22 February.

The ads show "Oscar," a nerdy looking character wearing a brown suit and thick rimmed glasses, butting into conversations and giving his tips on the best videos. There were also radio, tram and bus ads, and Network Video sponsored some free-to-air movies.

The transit executions pose rhetorical questions, with "Oscar" giving an answer for the best video in a particular genre.

"The outtake is that Network Video can help you make a better choice," says

Duckmanton says having ads communicating that "we're the experts in video is a message more likely to be remembered than saying rent this film, particularly when the ads are appearing in cinema". And cinema advertising is an important medium for video retailers because research shows cinema goers hire videos more often than most people, according to Duckmanton.

Despite its positioning, Duckmanton argues Network Video still has "the tactical ability to come in and say we have that latest release movie too so we can get into the co-op dollars". "But older releases still account for the majority of video rentals so it is stupid to have ads promoting only the latest releases."

Network Video is leveraging its nerdy character with a range of videos recommended by "Oscar", video sleeves carry "Oscar's" movie reviews, and the client has patented the term "videologist" and given staff "videologist" nametags.

"We want to get across that we offer better advice," says Duck-manton, "it's all about developing a relationship with customers and making the stores more interesting inside. We want to remind people this is a friendly store and not a video barn, video stores have become impersonal places."

"Oscar" also appears at store openings and trade functions and Network Video is negotiating with Network Ten's Good News Week program to have Oscar give 15-second video reviews on Saturday nights.

The next stage will involve local area marketing programs targeting people moving suburbs. There will be a general mail-out once a month and personalised letters recommending movies to specific customers based on their previous selections.

Andrew Duckman-ton, brand strategist at Lish Brandt. Lines include: "Strong sexual urge?" with Oscar replying "Anything with Catherine Zeta-Jones" and "Feel like a dose of unreality? The Matrix".

To overcome the problem with the shopfronts, Lish Brandt created 24 types of point-of-sale material, including life sized "Oscar" stands to give Network Video a presence in-store.

Andy Lish, creative director of Lish Brandt, says other video chains mostly run cooperative advertising with film distributors promoting the latest release movies. But this tactic creates no clear positioning, whereas Network Video's campaign positions it as the "home entertainment experts" using the tagline "Experts in videology".

Lish developed the idea when he visited some stores and discovered Network Video store managers are quite knowledgeable about film. "Whereas places like Blockbuster employ mostly teenagers who don't really care about what they're doing. They don't really know much about the videos in store, for them it's just a job," says Lish.

Quantum Harris research shows the campaign from December to February lifted brand awareness to 10% across Australia, while in Queensland and Tasmania awareness reached 20%. In terms of demographics, awareness was highest among its primary target of 18 to 24 year-olds, at 41%. Quantum Harris surveyed a representative sample of 1,200 people, all of whom rented a video in the past year.

Prompted advertising awareness was 21% and when asked about Network Video, 29% of respondents said Network Video has knowledgeable staff, 24% said Network Video provided specialist advice and 23% said they were more likely to visit a Network Video store having seen the campaign.