

Web Ads Can Lure You In

Appeared in the Chronicle Herald April 3, 2006 There is a new breed of advertising causing marketers to rethink the rules for consumer participation. It has been dubbed Consumer Generated Media, or CGM. It allows online audience members to create brand-controlled content - and other like-minded individuals to view it - essentially interacting and reinforcing their relationship with a brand.

The content can vary in format from something as complex as creating a video commercial or customizing a downloadable ring tone for a mobile device, to a blog, or online forum. This type of online interaction allows consumers to connect with brands in ways not possible only six years ago. The www.chevyapprentice.com marketing campaign enables digital surfers to create their own 30-second TV commercial complete with text overlays and soundtracks. A few years ago, I worked on a web-based campaign for Molson Canadian. Users designed their own snowboards with a flash-based application, and they were displayed in an online gallery for judging. The winner won his or her own custom-designed snowboard as the prize. This triggered numerous highly creative and Molson-brand-controlled submissions (and one very happy snowboarder). These initiatives show how marketers are breaking tradition by establishing a more credible and meaningful relationship with their customers. By encouraging consumers to express their creative ideas and concepts, they build strong brand loyalty through other touch points.