



Case Study

“Masks” Uncovered: The Story behind Microsoft Zune Art’s Viral Video Hit

Client: Microsoft Zune
Agency: Feed Company (Video Seeding & Outreach), 72andSunny (Program Curator), PandaPanther (Animation)
Campaign: Zune Arts “Masks” Campaign
Duration: 8 weeks (Nov 14, 2007 - Jan 15, 2008)

Summary

Zune Arts - a unique collection of downloadable art, music, and video - and part of Microsoft’s effort to highlight the social aspect of the Zune media player. Featuring the work of talented indie music and animation artists, Zune-Arts.net taps into the various forms of expression made popular by the web: icons, wallpapers, and animation video clips.

“Masks” - a “triptastic spoof on the movie 300”¹ - is one of these works, created by New York animation artists Jonathan Garin & Naomi Nishimura (PandaPanther) with oversight by Zune Arts curator, L.A. and Amsterdam-based ad and design company 72andSunny. The two-minute video depicts a “psychedelic battle with peace as the final winner.”² Or, as noted in a YouTube editorial review: “Braveheart meets the Care Bears in this stellar animation.”

Faced with the task of building excitement about this new piece of animated creative to a generation of tech-savvy, engaged - yet remarkably distractible - online consumers (age 16-25), Zune Arts turned to Feed Company, an LA-based social engagement company with proven success in seeding video and gaining brand exposure on popular blogs, video sites, and social networks.

The goal was to bring this branded content to the forefront of a primarily male-dominated animation subculture, incite a viral response among other niche groups, and ultimately spread awareness of the brand and drive traffic to the Zune Arts micro-site-- over the course of two months and in the middle of a chaotic holiday season.

About the Campaign

Feed Company embarked on a three-phased strategic plan. Phase one identified hot spots likely to be receptive to the Zune Arts campaign including culturally relevant niche media outlets, social networks, video share sites, forums, blogs, and social bookmark sites. Then, different messages were formulated to “speak” to the various key communities: art and animation, indie music community and lifestyle publications.

The second phase had Feed Company strategically packaging the video and posting it on video

¹ “Microsoft Taps Indie Cool With Zune Arts Videos” Wired, Dec 2007.

² YouTube editorial review of “Masks.” [January 2008]

share sites--- optimized by title, tags, genre, messaging, and thumbnail selection to deliver maximum views. Feed Company then initiated a focused word-of-mouth campaign in the core animation community on YouTube, which included asking key influencers in the group to contact their favorite YouTube editors and request that “Masks” be featured on YouTube’s Film & Animation home page.

The third phase shifted the focus to wider outlets by highlighting the animation’s vibrant “Make peace. Not war.” message in order to reach audiences beyond the core animation communities. This vaulted the video to approximately 200,000 views across seven to ten sites six weeks after launch. It was the impressive number of views for an animation that brought “Masks” to the attention of an editor on YouTube. They raised the video to a whole new level of user engagement when “Masks” was featured on the YouTube home page during the first week of January 2008.

Measurable Success

Over the course of eight weeks, the “Masks” campaign garnered over 850,000 video views, 3,200 comments, and 110 links to the video³, including YouTube, MySpace and other video sites.

Results of user engagement on YouTube⁴:

- Over 6,500 users marked “Masks” as a “favorite”
- The video gained “highly positive” rating from over 4,000 viewers
- 561 users subscribed to Zune Arts channel
- 50 users responded to “Masks” with their own video
- The video was featured on the YouTube homepage during the first week of January, bringing “Masks” and [user account name] “zune-arts.net” front-and-center of the site’s immense audience for a period of one week, thus increasing awareness of Zune Arts and driving traffic to the micro-site
- It was featured as a film and animation feature on all 18 international YouTube sites
- Labeled “Stellar animation from Zune Arts” by YouTube Editorial Team
- Featured on Lisa Nova (YouTube celebrity with over 75,000 subscribers) channel

Conclusion

As of March 17, 2008, over one million people have viewed “Masks” in 19 countries, from the U.S. to the U.K., Japan to the Netherlands, generating 3,500 user comments and 127 links.

The success of the “Masks” video seeding campaign depended on the strategic seeding and engagement program put in place by Feed Company. Without the proper support to catalyze interest in online groups and foster wider audience growth, “Masks” would have remained a niche animation, popular among an enthusiastic yet small online group.

³ Data from 1.14.08- 8 weeks after initial launch.

⁴ YouTube.com 1.14.08