

GAME OF THRONES

Problem

How does a popular TV series build excitement with its fanbase for the new season while enticing new viewers to tune in?

Solution

Use intriguing creative to draw in both new and loyal viewers.

Background

Game of Thrones, an HBO original series based on George R.R. Martin's best-selling "A Song of Ice and Fire," showcases seven noble families fighting for control of the mythical land of Westeros and the struggle for the Iron Throne. Kings and queens, knights and renegades, liars, lords and honest men...all play the "game of thrones."

For the launch of season 3 of the successful franchise, the expectations for awareness and growth were high. The planning team recognized in a competitive market saturated with similar genre programming, there was only "one chance to make a first impression." The campaign had to be big, bold and most importantly, unexpected.

One learning from Season 2 was that viewers were fascinated with one particular story arc: "The Waking of the Dragons." There was a massive lift in social conversation and engagement spiking at any reference of these charmed creatures.



Objective

The challenge was twofold: the campaign should get existing fans excited about the return of the series and bring new viewers to the night. This meant convincing people who hadn't tuned into previous seasons and had demonstrated low intent to watch to convert now. While the core target demographic was adults 25-54, the overall goal was to bolster viewership across all demographics.

Strategy

The dragon served as a passion point for fans and as an image that could provoke a visceral reaction from a broader audience. The strategy was to use the dragon as the catalyst to curiosity - arousing core fans while enticing new ones. And so the dragon shadow was born.

For fans, the creative was a figurative and literal translation of the foreshadowing of things to come in Season 3. For non-believers, it was something that made them look twice. Media was the conduit and EVERYTHING was the backdrop.

Trying to infuse the extraordinary into the ordinary and instigate a second look from the public, a dragon "shadow" was cast over reimagined backdrops of wallscapes, bulletins, buses, shelters and newsstands. The monumental HBO headquarters building in LA, along the famous Sunset Blvd, created the illusion that a gigantic dragon was soaring through the cityscape. Its presence could be felt for miles. This manipulation of the landscape caught millions of onlookers by surprise across five cities and gener-

ated water-cooler conversation, industry buzz and unprecedented social chatter.

To set the stage for the families vying for the throne, HBO leveraged the myriad of OOH formats to allow *Game of Thrones* to “own” the medium while showcasing individual characters on his/her own unique OOH display. Each character was brought to life through station dominations, bus shelters, phone kiosks, two-sheet posters, transit media and more. The ubiquity of the OOH campaign allowed HBO to immerse its target into the storyline of *Game of Thrones* while amplifying its message throughout each market.

Plan Details

Markets: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Las Vegas, San Francisco, Seattle

Flight Dates: February 25 – March 31, 2013

OOH Formats Used: 60 Bulletins, Digital Bulletin Networks (LA), 15 Wallscapes, 20 Double Decker Super Sides, L-Side Bus Kings, King Size Bus Posters, NY Subway 2-Sheets, Transit Shelters, City Panels, Newsstands, Urban Panels, Phone Kiosks, Mall Kiosks (LA), Dedicated Wild Posting Locations, 42nd Street Station Domination

- Bulletins/Walls – 75MM OOH Impressions
- Street Level – 299MM 4 Week Impressions
- Transit – 543MM 4 Week Circulation

The planning team staged timing and orchestrated a sequential release of the dragons across the media landscape that rapidly built momentum over the weeks leading up to the premiere. OOH media plans were customized on a market basis to maximize reach and frequency while leveraging each market’s respective geography, transportation trends and media landscape.

With the objective being to reach both the existing fan base and convert non-viewers to tune in, the campaign not only went deeper into the existing markets of LA and New York by adding more impressions with traditional OOH, but also added many transit media formats. To grow the fan base, the campaign tapped into new markets where *Game of Thrones* media campaigns had never been before. OOH spearheaded the media efforts in these markets to ensure coverage among prospective viewers who were key influencers.

OOH’s role in the HBO *Game of Thrones* Season 3 media campaign was deemed so pivotal that it took on an unprecedented portion of the overall media spend, a 34 percent increase over Season 2’s OOH investment.

Results

The key to this campaign’s success was how quickly the buzz and reaction of the public, media and even blogospheres grew. With OOH and limited print kicking off the first week of the campaign, industry sources and social buzz were praising the executions within hours of the first postings, underscoring the power of “the medium is the message.” Within the first five days of the campaign (with only OOH and limited print):



- Over 20 million OOH impressions with a media schedule comprised of bulletins and walls were generated.
- There were 17 million views of the trailer.
- Social commentary generated on the show's Facebook and Twitter pages surpassed previous benchmarks set.
- The dragon shadow was touted as the breakthrough execution of the day by numerous industry sources.

The campaign generated massive reach and instigated social conversation with casual and hardcore fans clamoring to see which town or place would be "dragon-shadowed" next.

Plus, the show enjoyed a very successful premiere:

- The Dragons "un-hatched" over 14 million viewers, making *Game of Thrones* the most watched HBO series since *The Sopranos*.
- The Season 3 premiere grew the audience by over 30 percent (6.7 million from 4.2 million) and delivered gains across all demo audiences.
- Off-channel media (inclusive of OOH media) was cited as the #1 source for awareness in tracking studies, a position typically held by HBO on-channel and owned platforms, with awareness among subs peaking at 86 percent.

"Our viewership growth exceeded our expectations, and our media played a significant role in that growth. We overdelivered against all our measurement goals, as well as surpassed key industry benchmarks," underscored Zach Enterlin, svp, program advertising, HBO.

"The campaign was incredibly effective in harnessing and further amplifying the social buzz and cultural capital of Game of Thrones to reach a broader audience." – Noreen O'Leary

The HBO *Game of Thrones* Season 3 Campaign won Adweek's 2013 Media Plan of the Year in the \$10-25MM Integrated category:

<http://www.adweek.com/news-gallery/10-winners-adweeks-2013-media-plan-year-151913#integrated-10-million-25-million-3>

