

Audi's *Art of the H3ist*

“Attention: If you have any information regarding the location of a 2006 Audi A3 with VIN WAUZZZ8P65A045963 please contact Audi of America at audiusa.com/A3 or call 1-866-OK RECOVER.”

That was the exhortation delivered across an expansive multimedia platform kicking off the launch of the Audi A3—*The Art of the H3ist*. An evolving thrill ride, *The H3ist* broke conventional advertising wisdom and turned its audience into participants. In the end, the effort created new and powerful conversations between Audi and its A3 audience.

In the spring of 2005, McKinney and Audi of America launched a new entry into the crowded American automotive market.

First, a segmentation study was initiated to identify, substantiate and quantify the Audi driver. The resulting targets were called “Type-I” for their intelligent, independent, innovative and influential nature.

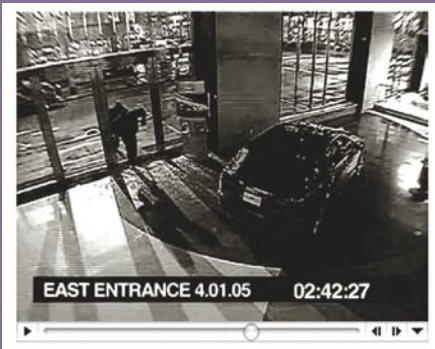
It was concluded that the most A3-receptive Type-I’s were young males (25-34) who were highly affluent (\$150K+), stylish, tech-savvy, web-addicted, extremely active, mobile and detached from traditional communications.

To add dimension to this target, McKinney and Audi looked past focus groups and conducted “anthropological digs”

into the target’s lives. Entertainment was a strong presence in their lives. Specifically, the group gravitated toward content such as *The DaVinci Code*, *Metal Gear Solid*, *24* and *The Bourne Identity*, among other similar titles.

That kind of close-to-reality content tantalized them. The complex, serial story lines involving cunning and secret alliances intrigued and absorbed them as the group often associated themselves into the stories. From this insight, we decided to invite them into an A3-centric alternate reality that put them in control. The objectives were clear:

- 1) Enable discovery of the A3.
- 2) Encourage active participation among those most likely to create viral interest.
- 3) Offer multiple entry points, recognizing different levels of desired participation.
- 4) Create an emotional connection to the Audi brand.
- 5) Translate that emotional connection into transactional interest.

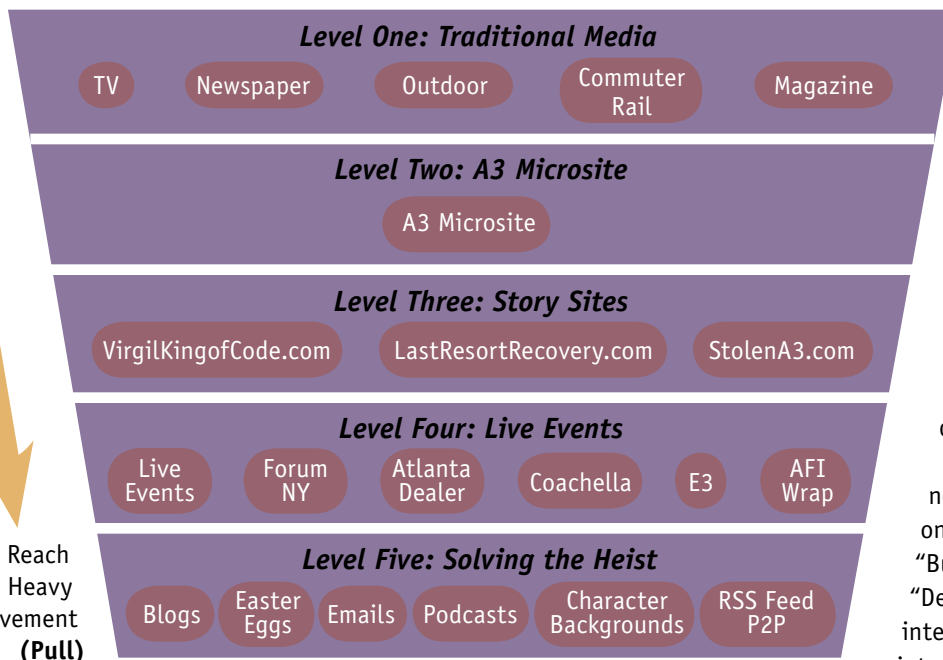


Audi and McKinney send web-addicted consumers on a thrill ride into an alternate reality—and turn internet buzz into Audi A3 sales.

by **Stephen Berkov**
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Broad Reach
Lighter
Involvement
(Push)



Pinpoint Reach
Heavy
Involvement
(Pull)

We knew that if we could impress this tight community of sophisticated, hard-core gamers with the depth and intelligence of the program, they would proselytize for Audi and the A3 to a broader target, creating the right kind of “buzz” around the launch.

The solution was to embrace the consumers’ sense of control over their environment and invite this audience into an immersive campaign called *The Art of the H3ist*—a campaign that used every possible type of media to create a 24-hour-a-day alternate reality. The *H3ist* was unprecedented in the way it blurred the line between fact and fiction: Customers didn’t just watch it unfold; they actually played a role in it.

Created in collaboration with a team of Hollywood screenwriters, *The Art of the H3ist* included plot twists, blackmail, murder, double-crossed lovers, cross-country car chases and revenge. Among other things, McKinney and Audi hired actors, staged scenes at high-profile events, created web sites for fictional businesses, involved fans in secret missions and even convinced the press to interview the actors in-character.

The program kicked off with the theft of an A3 from Audi’s Park Avenue dealer-

ship on April 1st. At the heart of the story were six new Audi A3s containing coded plans for the largest art heist in history. However, one car contained the key to decrypting the information hidden in all the others. As the drama unfolded in real time over the course of three months, the A3 literally became the most sought-after car in North America.

The results of Audi’s *Art of the H3ist* speak for themselves:

- More than 46,728,191 PR impressions were generated, including coverage in the *Wall Street Journal*, *BusinessWeek*, *Adweek*, *Financial Times*, *Advertising Age*, *Forbes.com*, *Boston Globe*, *VH1*, and blogs.

- Approximately 500,000 consumers participated in the story, and some 2,000 online discussions occurred around the heist. Fans created seven *H3ist* sites, including “Top 10 reasons to play *Art of the H3ist*,” and many A3 owners called to relate stories of how they were stopped and asked if their car was the missing car.

- Story-supporting microsites reported more than 700,000 hits within the first two weeks of the *H3ist*, with a total of about 45 million impressions generated for all of the web sites involved in this campaign. *StolenA3.com* received more than 203,000 visits, with an average stay

of five minutes; visitors spent 4-9 minutes on *H3ist* microsites, while 51 percent of A3’s microsite traffic was related to *The Art of the H3ist*.

- New car leads increased 87.5 percent through audiusa.com in the first two weeks of the launch, with 10,000-plus leads sent to dealers and 16,000-plus A3 shopping indicator actions were recorded, including 13,363 A3 quick-quote requests.

- After clicking on *The H3ist* banners, 33 percent of page views were on “buying indicator pages” such as “Build your own,” “Request a quote,” “Dealer locator,” etc. This meant that interest in the story directly translated into interest in the A3.

- The bottom line is, 30 percent of all available A3s were sold in three months, which is on track to meet aggressive sales goals. ■

Stephen Berkov is director of marketing of **Audi of America, Inc.**, which he joined in the U.S. in **October** of 2004. Previously, he was part of the management team with the parent company, AUDI AG, in Germany, as well as Audi Japan KK, the company’s Tokyo subsidiary.



Brad Brinegar is president and chief executive officer of **McKinney**, an advertising agency with clients including Audi of America, Sony Electronics, Qwest Communications, The NASDAQ Stock Market, Travelocity, RARE Hospitality, Polaris Industries and American Airlines Cargo. **Brad began his career in 1979**



at global advertising giant Leo Burnett. After taking a couple of years off to launch another agency, Brad returned to Burnett in 2000 to serve as chief executive officer of Leo Burnett USA.