

Microsoft's Cultural Connection



One of Microsoft's most successful marketing campaigns started with a bold, social experiment conducted in the skies over tiny Willow Springs, Illinois — the most average of average American small towns. On October 31, 2006, copies of Microsoft Office Accounting 2007 fell to earth, each attached to a tiny parachute. With it a message: use the software, free of charge, to help bring your amazing business idea to life.

Soon, one local resident, armed with a big idea and inspired by his newly discovered business tool, did just that. A series of documentary films made their way onto a number of websites, chronicling the unlikely business success story of Kyle Boné and his amazing invention, *the anti-shirt*. Unlike any shirt the planet had ever seen, *the anti-shirt* was designed to reverse the dreaded farmer's tan.

A crazy idea? Could it work? Millions of people followed Kyle's journey online, as he ascended from humble suburban guy-next-door to full-fledged fashion phenomenon. The story was further authenticated on his website, *theanti-shirt.com*, and on his MySpace page, where fans flocked to read his daily blog updates.

Of course, the whole thing was nothing more than a fictionalized tale. Or was it? Several advertising agencies actually solicited *the anti-shirt* business.

For Microsoft, Kyle's story was just the beginning — the tip of the big-idea iceberg. Even while *the anti-shirt* story was still unfolding, Microsoft set out to find the best new business ideas in all of America.

In previous years, Microsoft's traditional advertising campaign had sometimes yielded traditional

results — something the company was unwilling to settle for with Office Accounting 2007. With aspirations set high, Microsoft teamed up with StrawberryFrog, and together we set out to spark a broad, nationwide cultural movement.

First, Microsoft and The Frogs (as we're often referred to) set out in search of what we appropriately refer to as a *cultural connection*, using a process designed to find a meaningful connection between the social and cultural context as a whole, and the culture of a product/brand.

In this case, our process uncovered the insight at the heart of small business and among all entrepreneurs. Microsoft embraced this process as fundamental to the success of their latest launch of Office Accounting.

Two insights led to the campaign breakthrough: First, the realization that we live in a world where big ideas are increasingly seen as the business currency-of-choice. And second, the insight that every entrepreneur — *everyone* for that matter — at one time or another, believes they've got "the big idea." With that, Microsoft knew who they needed to talk to, and knew what they needed to say.

Millions of Americans join a huge, social experiment.

It was summed up with the simple phrase, *ideaWins*.

As a warm-up act, Kyle Boné provided plenty of engagement, and proved that even a technology giant like Microsoft can have a surprising sense of humor. But the overall strategy called for a deeper approach. Having cracked the idea on the qualities that define small business culture, the next task was to create actions, events and communities that drew people into this culture.

Mass communications — TV ads, huge out-of-home posters, print and digital ads — amplified Microsoft's message to a wider audience. Then, Microsoft activated word-of-mouth with public relations and content placement. They created ownable media in online and offline channels to continue the conversation. And then when people were ready to buy, the team used direct marketing and promotions.

Microsoft knew that to have any real credibility with its business target, it had to do more than surprise and entertain. It had to, as they say, walk the walk. So that's exactly what they did, figuratively, and literally.

In mid-November 2006, Microsoft set out to find the best undiscovered business ideas in all of America. They set up an engaging web sight, *ideaWins.com*, and used both on-line and off-line media to draw people to the site, where they could submit their big ideas to a virtual live host.

Meanwhile, "The ideaWins National Tour" crisscrossed America, inspiring people to "get onboard" and submit their ideas. To the best new business idea

FrogLogic: 3-Step Model



READY

- › Workshops
- › Habitats
- › Experiences
- › Trends



SET

- › FrogBrief
- › Frog+Client Collaboration
- › Evaluation+ Validation



LEAP

- › Cultural Movement
- › Implementation
- › Global Traffic
- › Accountability

would go free retail space in New York for a year, plus plenty of support from Microsoft to get their businesses off and running.

The cultural connection was made. During a two-month period, more than two million people visited the *ideaWins.com* web site, and Microsoft gathered submissions of thousands of business ideas.

As for the accounting software? More than one million downloads were recorded off the *ideaWins* web site — more than twice the original goal. By every measure, the communication plan has proven to be a cultural movement with all the right moves. Now comes the hardest part — sifting through thousands of new business ideas to find the very best one. The winner will be announced on national television. And then we'll be able to follow the winner in an online documentary about building a small business.

What could possibly be sexier than small-business software? The unstoppable power of a big idea. With that thought in mind, Microsoft began a cultural movement as big as America itself, using the power of old and new media alike. ■



SCOTT GOODSON is founder of **StrawberryFrog**, an agency in New York and Amsterdam, with clients such as Asics, Coca-Cola, Microsoft, Miller Brewing, Panasonic, Unisys and Sam's Club. Scott can be reached at scott@strawberryfrog.com