

Doritos Couples With Only MTV for Flavor Launch

Mini Branded Dating Show Attracts More Than 13 Million Microsite Views

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NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- In the past few weeks, Frito-Lay's Doritos has quietly achieved online product-launch metrics most marketers would kill for. A microsite for its new Spicy Sweet Chili chips has garnered more than 13 million page views and nearly 200,000 unique visitors in its first few weeks, with an average of 34 minutes spent on the site.



Doritos' microsite for its new Spicy Sweet Chili chips.

If those numbers seem to you to come out of nowhere, perhaps it's because you're not an MTV viewer. The network is the sole media outlet Doritos is using to promote its new flavor, which had a soft retail launch in late February. Although a national media campaign will roll out this summer, MTV viewers will be the first to get a taste of the product's offerings next month during the premiere of "When Spicy Meets Sweet," a short-form original series co-produced by MTV and Frito-Lay. The show will consist of 18 60-second episodes that will air during commercial breaks of MTV's Friday-night dating programming for three consecutive Fridays each month starting in April, as well as online.

The mini miniseries' concept is nothing new: a dating series that pairs couples by taking an opposites-attract approach. It's the distribution model that's unique, and it's one Doritos has championed for the past two years, beginning with its "Crash the Super Bowl" campaign in 2006, one of the first to marry user-generated web content with the reach of national TV. The brand took over the highly trafficked companion site to MTV's "Next" dating series, nextornot.com, and used it as both a casting couch for potential spicy or sweet daters and a forum for generating buzz around the show.

Listening to fans

The results already have Rudy Wilson, director of marketing for Doritos, touting the project as a success. "One of the things we love about Doritos is we believe in our fans. We asked them to

participate in our brand for two years, and they get it," he said. "With 16- to 24-year-olds, their interests evolve. For me to sit here and say, 'This is what we want to do for the rest of the year,' would not be productive. We always want to allow them to let us know what they like."

Although new media has become a larger part of Doritos' budget (the brand more than tripled its online ad spend to \$2.2 million in 2007), TV is becoming an increasingly important outlet for its ad messaging. According to TNS Media Intelligence, Doritos more than doubled its 2006 spending on network TV to \$7.56 million last year, with an extra \$7.32 million going to cable. That's why Mr. Wilson has a national ad campaign planned for the Spicy Sweet Chili chips later this summer, after new episodes of the MTV miniseries wrap up in June.

Kristin Colonna, associate director of national TV for Frito-Lay at media buyer OMD, helped orchestrate the deal and felt strongly about the importance of taking a single-channel marketing approach for the launch of the Spicy Sweet Chili flavor. "When Doritos seeks out the means by which to market their products, we're looking to offer an authentic experience," she said. "It behooves you to really partner strongly with one vehicle and focus on creating a really intense experience around that. It would be a dilution of your efforts to do more than that at first."

The MTV model

MTV, plagued by its viewers' fickle commercial-viewing habits, has successfully made branded entertainment and integrations a major part of its on-air business model in recent years. While its commercial breaks average a loss of 13% to 15% of the total viewership, the network is making ad-break retention a top priority going into this year's upfront. Yet MTV remains one of the few networks, cable or otherwise, with the resources and infrastructure to accommodate a unique marketing request from a brand like Doritos.

"To recognize we can help with the launch of this particular brand was a high compliment and also a recognition of Spicy and Sweet's brand story," said Tim Rosta, MTV's exec VP-integrated marketing. "This was a unique example of how we can all work together to create a marketing paradigm and really connect to an audience."