

# campaign

## GIVE THEM SHIRLEY TEMPLE

Seventy-five years after turning to the curly haired child actress for comfort, people again need something to lift the gloom. Through digital, brands can give them just what they are looking for.



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In 1934, a cute little curly haired cherub bounced on to US film screens, singing *On The Good Ship Lollipop* and single-handedly saved Fox Films from bankruptcy. Remember that 1934 was the height of the Great Depression, when *Brother, Can You Spare A Dime?* was the most popular song around, when labourers waited cap in hand in the soup kitchen for a handout.

Yet those who did have disposable income were spending it on a media

experience that would take them away from the world outside and let them dream for a while.

The impact of *Bright Eyes* and the other films in which Temple starred was so great, so important, that a phrase has been coined from it. The Shirley Temple Effect describes how, during tough times, people have turned to affordable entertainment to take their minds off the doom and gloom of their everyday existence. Toys, for instance, have been

documented as selling well in a recession and Barb's latest figures show that viewing of commercial television channels was up in February by minutes a week on the same month last year.

So what does this mean for digital and for the brands digital practitioners represent?

It won't have escaped your attention that we are now officially in recession, but brands still need to reach people where they are and represent themselves effectively.

Digital offers three key advantages over other media that enable us to capitalise on the Shirley Temple Effect and make it relevant to 2009. First, it is based on content; second, no one property is in control of the platform and, third, it is a medium that almost demands conversation.

Advertising has always been about making an emotional connection one way or another, even if it's purely giving you security in knowing that you are buying the best.

But when we introduce sustained storytelling, we can augment that emotional connection. Who goes to the effort of understanding their

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customers more than brands? Channeling that expert knowledge into the creation of genuinely entertaining content creates the opportunity to embed brand values in people's lives and loves.

At one level, we're not suggesting anything more revolutionary than the old Procter & Gamble production unit soap operas. But add to that the ability to include the interactive and conversational elements that the digital space both offers and demands, and clients will quickly appreciate the unique opportunity to develop lasting relationships of value to the consumer and the brand.

There are, of course, good and bad ways to deliver content, particularly for a UK-focused campaign. The more subtle and overarching the brand involvement, the more effective the involvement will be. Early content models such as "Where Are The Joneses?" ([www.wherethejoneses.com](http://www.wherethejoneses.com)) placed the commissioning brand, Ford in this case, in the background and limited explicit mentions only to stings at the end of content episodes. Yet Ford was one of the most talked-about brands in the blogosphere during the run of the comedy. Later models such as "In The Motherhood" (<http://itm.abc.go.com>) in the US are slightly more overt about the involvement of the telecoms company Sprint and Unilever's Suave shampoo brand, but, again, the content takes centre stage and has been so successful that it has moved from online only to become a primetime show on ABC.

It's quite obvious that "In The Motherhood" could have been a television show in its own right, but then there would never have been the opportunities for Suave and Sprint to engage real mums in the creation of episodes through the submission of their own experiences and storylines. In the gift economy of the internet, the more you give, the higher your currency is raised – and it's far easier to devise truly entertaining gift experiences when you are in control of the platform they are given on.

Put it this way: if you want to put an ad on a television channel, there is no choice but for brands to buy space. That's money that could go into making great content. If you are lucky or your client has allocated enough within the budget, you may be invited to create a restricted microsite on that channel's web presence which will afford you more opportunities to engage with your audience. But if you want to put your own film content on that microsite, well, that might require a little more time; and time, as we unfortunately know, is money.

On the other hand, if you want to engage your users in a multiplayer online immersive drama, or invite them to submit storylines for a soap opera that you film and host on your own platform, with a site and conversation unrestricted by any other competing brand, well, that's a far more efficient and effective way to allow your brand into a very intimate space with them.

It is this conversational and personal element of digital that provides the greatest opportunity. The myth of the Depression is that the films produced by the Hollywood studios were all glamour and escapism. But that only represents half the story. Many films spoke to the audiences of the sadness outside, and gave them the opportunity to imagine their own struggles up there on the screen.

Digital does this more effectively than any broadcast medium. And that is the difference that will make it so valuable. Unlike broadcast media, digital can turn us all into Shirley Temple, from those who simply engage in reviewing and critiquing our digital experience, to those who actively create and upload new stories and assets.

If we can recognise this and devise entertaining experiences that reach audiences where they are and in modes acceptable to them, we will deliver far more value to brands than can ever be achieved through broadcast messaging alone. And we can mostly achieve this because of, and not in spite of, the straightened economic climate.



Where the conversation goes depends on how you ignite it

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