

Engaging Youth is About Creating a Movement

By: Mike Doherty

Holding the attention of global youth today is more difficult than ever. A recent study found that 62% of teens are apathetic about marketing and advertising, meaning they aren't anti-brand but you have to work very hard to get them to care. After all, a brand is not just competing with other brands in the same category – they are also competing with experiences like Xbox Live, Facebook and Guitar Hero, where youth connect and challenge friends and strangers around the world.

Today there are 1.6 billion people online, 4 billion mobile phones, 250 million Facebook users, and YouTube had over 5 billion video streams in just one month. In every case, the key audience participating with these vehicles is youth. They are a valuable and massive demo, currently impacting over \$600 billion in consumer spending. At its peak, this generation will exceed the number of baby boomers in the US and globally.

This generation is creative, social and connected. They are changing the way we interact with brands and content by creating an environment for marketers that is much more interactive and connected.



To successfully engage this group, you can't advertise to them – you have to invite them to participate in something bigger than advertising. Marketers need to give young people ready

access to the content they create and enable them to participate with it, create their own and share it. They need to inspire and engage youth and then reward them for participating. For youth, public recognition has become the modern day merit badge. If done right, your marketing efforts will gain momentum and feel more like a movement than a campaign.

Creating that type of engagement is just what we've done for the International Olympic Committee (IOC). We've allowed teens to adopt and participate with the Olympic values by creating a digital campaign called "The Best of Us Challenge." Aimed at young people, the global effort is a digital social experience that invites people around the world to challenge top Olympic athletes and their peers using sport and non-sport talents via an online competition.

Through consumer-generated videos on <http://thebestofuschallenge.olympic.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/user/thebestofuschallenge>, young people around the globe have a unique opportunity to compete with top Olympic athletes, and each other, to showcase their skills. Some of the best-known recent Olympians are participating in the Challenge, including Rafael Nadal (Spain/tennis), Michael Phelps (USA/Swimming), Lindsey Vonn (USA/skiing), Natalie Cook (Australia/beach volleyball), Shawn Johnson (USA/gymnastics), Asafa Powell (Jamaica/athletics) and Yelena Isinbaeva (Russia/pole vault).

No matter what the skill—from balancing a stick for as long as possible to doing the most clapping push-ups in 30 seconds—The Best of Us Challenge encourages young people to find the best in themselves, share it with the world and then challenge each other to become better at it. Young people also have the option to create and submit their own challenges independent of the Olympians, truly giving them the opportunity to show what they do best. And participants can win a range of prizes including a trip to the Vancouver 2010 Games.

This type of experience is exactly what youth of today are looking for. It enables them to be creative, connect with others and share their experiences. In many ways, it connects the values of youth today with those of the Olympic Movement (Excellence, Friendship and Respect), by allowing them to participate directly. And it's already working. In the first weeks of the "Challenge", it's received 2.5 million video views from more than 200 countries.

Not only is it fun to see global youth engaging with Olympic athletes, engaging experiences like this provide young people with a sense of co-ownership so they feel they have a role and a voice in the movement and spirit of the Olympic Games.



About the Author
Mike Doherty

Mike Doherty is the President of Cole & Weber United. He is a marketer with over twenty-five years of experience creating effective growth strategies for a diverse group of clients. Working on both the agency and client sides of the business, Mike's passion lies in helping clients find new ways to go beyond the boundaries of traditional advertising to effectively engage customers in branded experiences.

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