MULTICHANNEL

Audi reaches mass audience as supercar in new Avengers film

April 6, 2015

Audi cars are featured on Avenger's movie posters

By KAY SORIN

German automaker Audi is highlighting its superhuman capabilities by partnering with Marvel Studios for the release of the new "Avengers: Age of Ultron" film.

The highly anticipated film is the sequel to "The Avengers," which topped box office charts in 2012 with the highest grossing opening weekend ever, and is expected to do as well, if not better than its predecessor. The Avengers: Age of Ultron will feature a number of different Audi vehicles, giving the brand an incredible amount of exposure among a diverse consumer base.
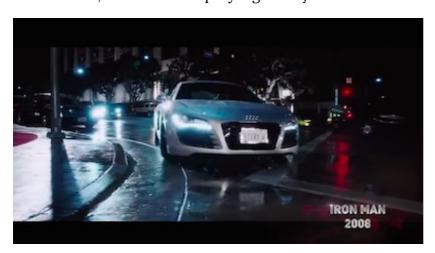
"One of the defining traits of younger audiences is that they place less trust in traditional 'brand messaging' with a greater degree of influence now accorded to channels which offer credibility and independent affirmation of what a brand stands for," said Tim Dunn, director of strategy and mobile at Isobar US, New York. "While movies are clearly a paid channel from an industry perspective, movie placement shows the product in a desirable context unachievable through other channels."

Mr. Dunn is not affiliated with Audi, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Audi was unable to respond by press deadline.

Marvel magic

Audi has a long history of partnering with Marvel Studios, and the two companies have worked together for eight years now. Audi has been showcased in the past three "Iron Man" films, with the cars playing a major role in the storyline.

Audi cars are featured prominently in the Avengers and Iron Man films

For this film, Audi will be presenting an all-new, re-designed 2016 R8, along with the 2015 TTS and the 2015 A3 Cabriolet. At this point, the cars have become familiar to fans of the series, and many are eagerly anticipating the 2016 R8's officially debut in the film.

"Superhero movies have broad appeal and all demographics are useful in generating a long-term brand narrative," Mr. Dunn said. "Fathers are the immediate target for sales, but their kids are an investment in sales that won't take place for years – acceptance and desire for a brand can be effectively embedded in these formative years.

Tony Stark has an Audi with vanity plates

"But superhero movies are increasingly appealing to women – MPAA for 2014 shows that women go to the movies more than men, and that even in the superhero category, they made up 40 percent of the audience for 'Man of Steel' and 42 percent of the audience for Iron Man 3. Sixty percent of women believe they are the key decision maker in auto purchase (Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers 2013) so casting a net over this very broad audience is a smart move."

Stark's Audi is an important element of the film series

In addition to the cars themselves, Audi is also producing original digital content to complement the films, and the automaker has shared an exclusive preview video on its Web site, which will likely get fans excited before the movie's release. Audi will also be developing a short comedic video in collaboration with Marvel that will be shared in the coming weeks.

The protagonist of the Avengers: Age of Ultron film is Tony Stark, also known as Iron Man, who is a billionaire and genius engineer, personally outfitting a supercar to help him in his quest to eliminate evil. He is an ideal brand representative for Audi, as he represents a modern superhero who is technologically sophisticated.

Audi and Marvel Studios have worked very well together in the past, and there is no doubt that this new partnership will be a success. Audi will certainly benefit from the mass publicity that the Avengers: Age of Ultron will provide.

Audi behind-the-scenes image from filming of the Avengers

Film fanatics
In addition to the Iron Man series, Audi has collaborated with other popular films. For example, Audi was recently among the luxury brands that found their way into the blockbuster film "Fifty Shades of Grey."

The film adaptation of the erotic novel by E. L. James broke records in its opening on Valentine's weekend, and will likely be seen by millions worldwide, but it has also seen criticism for what some feel is its portrayal of romanticized abuse. Even with dissenters,

an association with the film is apt to bring attention to the brands featured, giving them access to a film that carries a lot of buzz (see story).

As consumer marketing preferences change, partnerships with film and television are becoming increasingly important. Luxury brands are more likely to benefit from increased exposure created by product placement in feature films than from brand-sponsored events that reach a narrow number of consumers.

Branded sponsorships are common among luxury brands looking to attract consumers through a shared hobby or cause. Product placement in feature films, on the other hand, allows the brand to be viewed on a platform likely to resonate with more prospective consumers (see story).

Audi is at the forefront of new marketing strategies with its eager participation in various feature films. This new partnership with Avengers: Age of Ultron will likely be a successful move for the brand, increasing both publicity and new consumers.

"The enthusiasm for movie placement illustrates a smart shift towards lifestyle marketing replacing the traditional emphasis on product specifics and performance," Mr. Dunn said. "Aligning the product with desirable scenarios and characters is an efficient way to grow the brand and less risky than the high levels of investment required for creating original advertising and paid media.

"While of course it will never replace advertising, we're likely to see an increasing share of the media mix devoted to these added-value channels."

Final Take

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