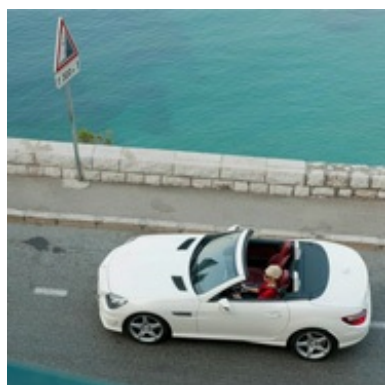


INTERNET

Mercedes pushes summer sponsorships via digital campaign

August 3, 2012



By TRICIA CARR

Mercedes-Benz USA is bridging the gap between its summer event sponsorships and digital efforts with a Facebook-based photography contest that lets consumers win a 13-month lease for a 2013 SLK250 Roadster.

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The automaker's "Best Summer" campaign spans physical and digital to highlight its sponsorships of Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Swim, the PGA Championship, Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance and the U.S. Open. Mercedes-Benz USA Facebook fans can enter the contest by submitting a photograph of their favorite summer moments that incorporate the automaker's vehicles or logo.

"We really want to be a part of our owners' and fans' lives and allow them to express their passion for the brand during one of the best times of the year," said Mark Aikman, social media lead at Mercedes-Benz USA, Montvale, NJ. "With four convertible models and an active event schedule, it is one of our favorite times of the year."

Summer shots

Mercedes-Benz USA's digital campaign is held on a Facebook application that shows its sponsorship imagery and acts as the contest entry form at <http://mbenz.us/bestsummer>. The contest runs until Sept. 10.

The automaker is updating the app for each event. For instance, it previously featured the promotional imagery from Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Swim July 19-23 that showed pieces from the Mercedes-Benz Presents Designer Vitamin A by Amahlia Stevens collection.

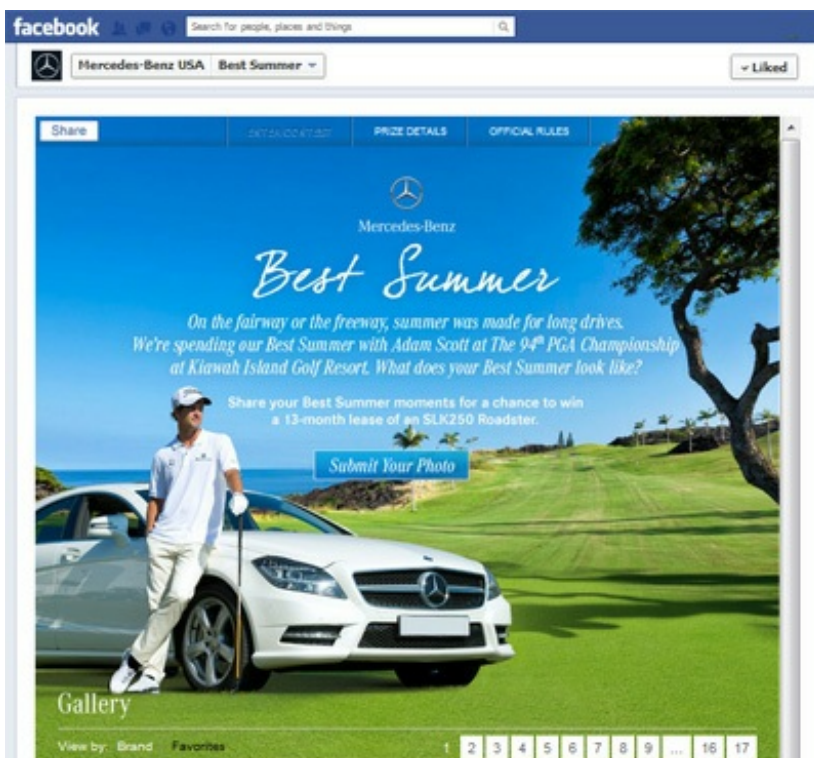


Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Swim

The app now features an image of brand ambassador and golfer Adam Scott next to the SLK250 Roadster. It also tells users that Mercedes is sponsoring the 94th PGA Championship August 9-12.

Future events that will be featured include Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance August 16-19 and the U.S. Open August 23-Sept. 9.

Users can click the "Submit Your Photo" button to reveal the contest entry form and upload an image. There is a limit of one image submission per day.



Best Summer Facebook app

Images should match the theme of the campaign – Mercedes-Benz Best Summer – and include the brand in the photograph in some way.

To enter the contest, users must write a title and description for their images and fill out their contact information in an entry form.

One grand-prize winner will receive a 13-month lease for a 2013 SLK250 Roadster. Fifty first-prize winners will receive a pair of Mercedes-Benz SLK unisex aviator sunglasses.

Below the contest entry form is a photo gallery of all images that have been submitted.

Mercedes is pushing this campaign on its Twitter, YouTube and Pinterest pages.

“Mercedes is trying to inspire its most passionate fans to share their love of the brand and their cars,” said Marko Muellner, senior director of marketing at [ShopIgniter](#), Portland, OR. “It is a smart use of social media since activating loyal customers is a great way to amplify marketing messages through peer-to-peer sharing.

“Tying the campaign into the love of summer, knowing that many folks travel more and therefore drive more, is also smart,” he said. “Since Mercedes is running the campaign across the summer and integrating many of its broader summer campaigns around Fashion Week and golf events, it will likely get a significant bump in earned impressions through fans submitting and sharing photos of their summer.

“It is also tying the contest to its 2013 SLK250 Roadster, so I am sure it will generate some interest in its products as well.”

Living the digital life

Mercedes is not the only automaker pushing a live sponsorship with a digital campaign.

For instance, BMW of North America is in the midst of a 360-degree marketing campaign to push its first-time sponsorship of Team USA at the 2012 London Olympics that includes social efforts on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

The automaker’s BMW USA YouTube page features a new section called “BMW Team USA” that contains its Olympic-themed commercial, videos of United States athletes discussing their competition routines, athlete biographies and a Twitter feed of the [#BMWTeamUSA](#) hashtag ([see story](#)).

In addition, as the exclusive automotive partner of the U.S. Open, Lexus created an online campaign for the tournament that included digital ads and a virtual golf game.

The campaign was expected to see more than 100 million impressions and 100 million social media ad impressions, according to the game organizers ([see story](#)).

The interactive elements of these automakers’ efforts increase the chances of user engagement. They also let the sponsorships spread beyond the live events so that brands get a larger ROI in terms of brand awareness.

“Facebook is a great place to inspire loyal customers,” Mr. Muellner said. “Tapping into

their passions, especially passions around your products, is a smart tactic and works really well in Facebook.

“Those that submit photos feel a closer connection to the brand and, in doing so, are sharing their advocacy with their friends,” he said. “Most Facebook users post photos, and for most Mercedes-Benz fans, I am sure they already have photos of their cars on their computer or phone, so participating in the contest on Facebook is really easy.”

However, Mercedes could up engagement in its campaign in a few ways.

“I think the campaign makes the connection visually and by updating the Facebook experience over the summer, it is solidified,” Mr. Muellner said. “That being said, the campaign could go further in integrating the themes and inspiring fans.

“More regularly updating and changing the contest theme each time would encourage new photos and drive repeat visits,” he said. “Adding more engagement features like voting and even badging makes fans more likely to participate and to return and share, and Mercedes could make the prizes even more special.”

Final Take

Tricia Carr, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York