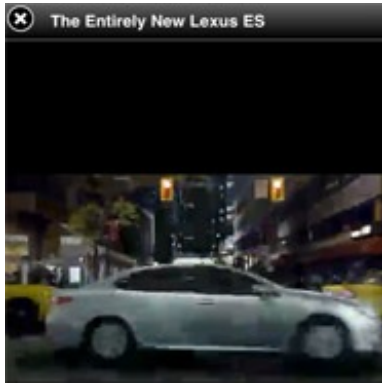


MOBILE

## Lexus taps mobile game for ES push

September 13, 2012



By RACHEL LAMB

Toyota Corp.'s Lexus is likely targeting younger aspirational consumers through ads and videos on the mobile game application Gems With Friends.

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Players can check out a video of the new ES and connect to the Lexus Facebook page through the ad. The automaker is following in the footsteps of other marketers such as Bergdorf Goodman and Nordstrom that have previously placed ads in gaming apps.

“Within the framework of the age-old adage of right place, right time, right message, advertising placements on popular gaming apps makes perfect sense,” said Scott Forshay, mobile and emerging technologies strategist for [Acquity Group](#), Austin, TX. “Establishing a presence where targeted audiences spend considerable time is basic ad placement strategy 101.

“Advertising in gaming apps ensures that not only is the audience available, they are intently engaged and more likely to see the message,” he said. “The challenge becomes determining which is the right game or series of games where the ideal audience for your product is most likely to be found and the concerns are many.

“The game player is expressly intent on playing the game, not necessarily in viewing a paid advertisement run across their screen.”

Mr. Forshay is not affiliated with Lexus, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Playing around

The placement in Gems With Friends comes on the heels of other marketing efforts for the Lexus ES, mainly a tie-in with social aggregation magazine app Flipboard to showcase the vehicle's features.

Lexus created a branded Flipboard magazine and placed ads in Esquire's Flipboard channels. The strategy is part of wider effort that encompasses traditional TV advertising, a Facebook integration, print and out-of-home ([see story](#)).

Consumers playing the game are met with the Lexus ad in-between turns.

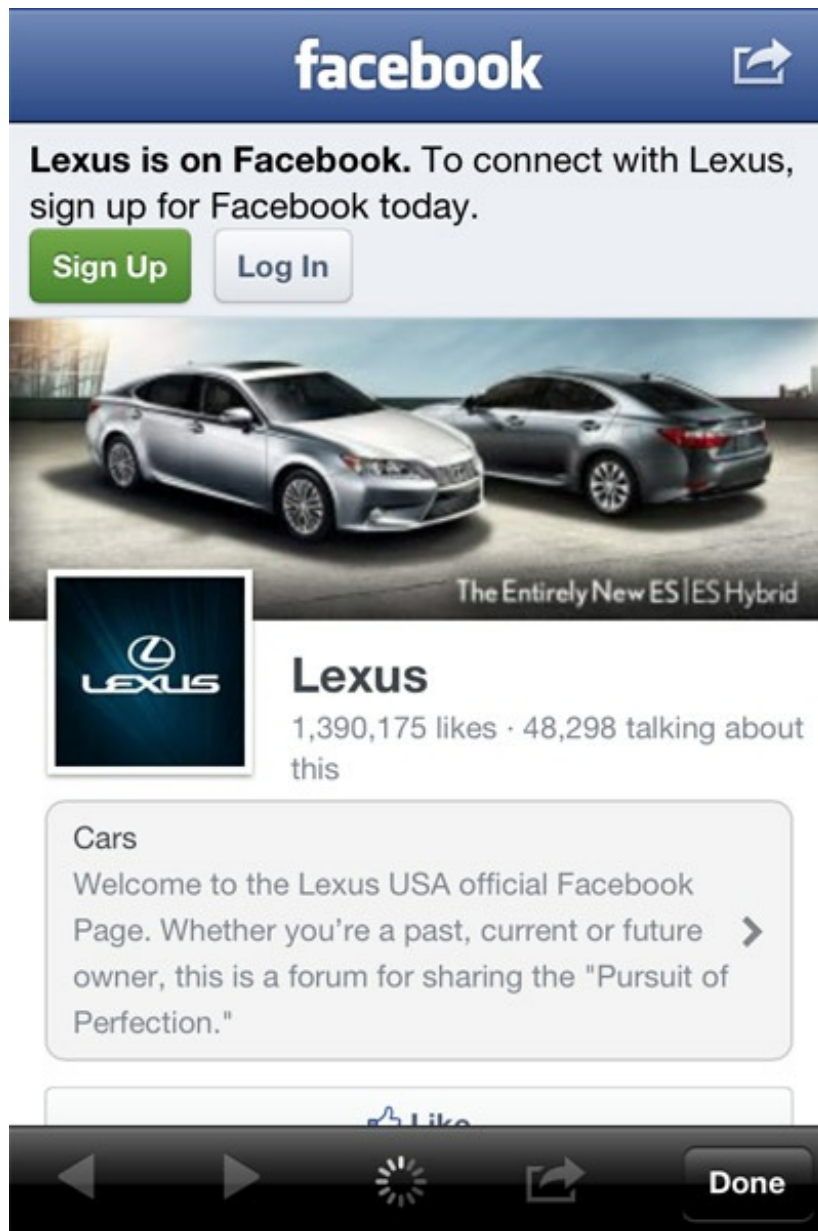


*Banner ad in the game*

A short video plays before consumers can choose to share the content, learn more information or check out the ES page on Lexus' Facebook.

“Not to paint with too broad a brushstroke here, but various studies indicate that the majority of puzzle and word game players are female,” Mr. Forshay said. “If the brand's intention is to target that audience segment, then chances are they will find a potentially receptive audience.”

“Certainly we can make high-level assumptions about the affluence of the audience, given that they are iPhone and iPad users, but targeting age demographics proves more challenging,” he said.



*Connecting to Facebook through the Gems With Friends app*

Making friends

Other marketers have been using mobile game apps to push products and promotions.

For example, department store chain Nordstrom targeted aspirational consumers through mobile banner advertisements for its Nordstrom Rack locations in the popular gaming application Words With Friends.

Nordstrom promoted a sale in its discount chain that will serve to drive consumers in-store. It also provided a location-based map so that users can find the closest Rack ([see story](#)).

In addition, New York-based department store Bergdorf Goodman used Words With Friends to drive foot traffic with a location-based banner ad promoting an in-house event.

Bergdorf's banner ad at the bottom of the screen endorsed a meet-and-greet with designer Nancy Gonzalez at the brand's store that consumers could RSVP to on Facebook ([see story](#)).

Although marketing in a game app might seem as if it could serve as good ways to get customers' attention, there are definitely some caveats.

For example, the primary driver of in-app advertising ineffectiveness is that the ad so blatantly and unapologetically intrudes upon the intended user experience, according to Mr. Forshay.

In fact, players engage with mobile games in more limited intervals on average and have little patience for more of the same from advertisers who interrupt their time.

Therefore, brands should try to make themselves part of the game experience so as to not annoy customers.

"Offering brand-sponsored bonus points or access to exclusive levels accessible only to those who view the ad, and additional perks to those who actually engage with it socially, would create a more level value exchange and give the ad additional reach across an incremental earned audience as opposed to simply an isolated paid one," Mr. Forshay said.

"That said, players have begun to realize that the price of entry for a free game is the spectrum of potential advertising and they will reluctantly accept it," he said. "Regardless, there are definite concerns about intrusiveness and an associated negative perception that brands should contemplate before delving into this space."

Final Take

*Rachel Lamb, associate reporter on Luxury Daily, New York*