

Centre Stage Branding

How many times did you hear the name "Evian" in the news last week? The stories in which you heard the name mentioned weren't about the brand Evian but the G8 summit held in Evian, France.

Coincidence? Who knows? But one thing's for sure. The concept of product placement is expanding, and use of new contexts is climbing. Get ready for a fascinating new marketing ploy that makes use of the most unexpected places: situation placement.

Do you count yourself among the millions of "Matrix" fans? If you do, I assume you've already seen the sequel, "The Matrix: Reloaded," and had a look at the game. But something you're possibly not aware of is the film crew spent several extra weeks in Sydney to capture footage you won't see in the movie. This footage was for that computer game; a piece of merchandising that creates an unprecedented link between brands and movies. It's no ordinary game. It demonstrates a trend that became clear to me when I was writing my recent book, "BRANDchild." Product placement is out. Situation placement is in.

"The Matrix" game is packed with ads, advertising messages, and brand-building statements. The usual merchandising route was abandoned and instead revenue generates from product placement in a computer game. Red Bull, which years ago placed its brand in the first Playstation game, first practiced the tactic.

It's just beginning. Movies such as "Spider-Man" pioneered the practice of starting with merchandising and product placement, then following up with a movie. Yes, you read correctly. A movie created around the brand image built in a wider communications environment.

Situation placement differs from product placement because the brand is the centre of the story. Product placement interjects the brand peripherally into an existing vehicle, like a movie.

The fascinating (perhaps scary) part of this story is increasingly more advertising will manifest itself as situation placement. Brands will appear at well-planned times, targeting well-planned

audiences with well-planned, relevant messages. Computer games are a natural environment for situation placements. Game manufacturers flocked around "The Matrix" because it's an ideal situation placement forum. Stories and brands can be built around each other.

Forget banner ads and pop-ups. They just don't coalesce with the medium. They're irritating, irrational, and free of any logical context. What you will soon produce are well-planned, well-timed, highly contextualized media plans that allow you to situate your brand's message in just the right environment.

Intimidating. But so is "The Matrix's view of the future. The difference is the film's world is about a century from now. Your world, and its demands, are here and now.



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