

The Situation Placement Game

Situation placement creates a brand image in the consumer's mind around an initial product, and then builds follow-up products around the constructed notion. The technique makes brands the raison d'être of those follow-up products. Your product becomes the hero, enhancing a story rather than simply appearing as an added element without any effect on the plot, as is the function of product placement. But how do you engineer this for your own brand? How do you secure space for your brand in a computer game? How do you manage to have your brand featured in a popular song or placed centre stage in a hit movie?

Before embarking on such an enterprise, you need to consider and understand what you want to get out of it. In contrast to traditional "above the line" marketing, it's almost impossible to measure the effect of the situation placement approach -- at least in the short term.

The good news about situation placement is it still, despite having been around for some time, is considered to be a new idea. Marketers still don't know how to handle it, and film studios, composers, and particularly game developers still see situation placement as

a revenue-generating product-placement exercise.

There are no fixed prices for this, either. Fees for brand appearances are decided on an ad-hoc basis. It's all pretty immeasurable. Tell me what price you'd pay to have your brand sponsor the equipment handed out in "The Matrix" games? Tricky, eh? No one really knows, so it's possible to get good value out of this type of marketing effort.

My experience tells me if your brand is one that appeals to kids or tweens, at least 10 to 15 percent of your budget should be dedicated to "underground" branding with situation placement as one of the main activities. Focus less on the result, as it's almost impossible to assess, and jump on this opportunity very quickly by securing a fabulous price for the situation placement.

Your next step is to determine where and how to place your brand and brand message. Again, the approach is slightly different to what you might be accustomed. Try to think of your brand as the hero by extending its characteristics and benefits into a story. For example, Red Bull, which gives you energy, also earns you extra points in the game in which it features. Nike might be the hero by optimizing players'

skills and vanquishing other competitors.

Identify the unique characteristics and advantages of your brand, and then place your brand in a story that allows it to emerge as the hero, the helper, and a focus point of some type. Forget online banner ads or logos on walls... viewers forget that stuff. What people don't forget is the personality your brand takes on at the centre of a logically composed situation. People remember if your brand is the chief protagonist of a story, game, or event, one that makes the story more relevant, helps you win the game, or is the reason for the event.

Finally, think outside the box. Contact game suppliers, even if they're based in Japan or Korea. Often, the farther away your potential partner is from your own territory, the better price you can secure. Think about ways of placing your product no one's come up with before. There are so many opportunities in situation placement, and the more creative you are, the lower the costs will be.



The success of a situation-placement campaign is determined by your ability to leverage the space you have dedicated to it. But the space is not limitless, and the demand for its creative use is increasing. So you'd better be quick -- before the game is over.

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