

# Ads from anywhere

## Agencies need to embrace consumer-generated creative. They have no choice

by Eric Blais

When music videos first became the way we watched a song, ad agencies' creative departments were quick to adopt the new genre to sell everything from chocolate bars to antiperspirant. So it was to be expected that the current fascination with user-generated content would lead to consumer-generated ads.

This is not simply a sideshow by attention hungry advertisers anxious to exploit every new trend or fad. It could well be the main event during the biggest advertising show of the year: the Super Bowl. Among the advertisers who are choosing to use amateur videos to pitch their goods and services, Doritos is definitely the boldest. Over 1,000 amateur videos were submitted and five were short-listed by judges. The results, which can be viewed by visiting [crashthesuperbowl.com](http://crashthesuperbowl.com), are impressive.

Ad agencies are all over this and consumer-generated ads might be here to stay. Some ad agency executives enthusiastically proclaim it's a sign of the democratization of media. They argue that it's possible for the uninitiated to create the Doritos Super Bowl spot because advertising professionals with the required expertise have built such a

strong foundation for the brand that anyone with creative talents can develop a compelling ad. Fair enough.

It's conceivable that the same consumers who grew up bombarded by commercials and constant digital media technology innovations have not only the ability to critique advertisements but also to create and produce them.

It's a compelling idea. It's also the thought du jour. While the concept of "mass collaboration" has been a reality for some time—think about the open

source code operating system Linux—the idea is getting a lot of attention these days thanks in part to Wikinomics, the recently published book by Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams. It tells the story of how Vancouver mining company Goldcorp Inc. posted all of its geological information about a property in Red Lake, Ont. dating back to 1948 and offered over half a million dollars to anyone who would produce the best estimates of where the

gold was. It worked. There are many more examples of mass collaboration in Wikinomics that make the case for boundary-pushing contributions by anyone with the interest and knowledge.



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Imagine doing the same with a creative brief. Mass collaboration would let agencies tap into a worldwide pool of creative folks. The upside of mass collaboration would likely offset the downside of sharing a strategy on the web. And if googling geologists can help find gold, surely there is considerable creative talent out there to craft great ads based on a sound brief.

Long before the web transformed our lives, I worked with a creative director who often told our clients that good ideas can come from anywhere. He meant it. Clients knew they would be listened to and they welcomed a more collaborative relationship with their agency. But it also left some clients wondering why they were paying us to come up with ideas if anyone could have them. What did we offer that couldn't come from anywhere? This aspect of mass collaboration shouldn't be overlooked. It's one thing for P&G to get product ideas on the web from people with relevant expertise. It's another for an ad agency to get its ideas on the web since that's basically all it sells. What happens to ad agencies when part or all their core capabilities can be outsourced? Many remember the red flags that were raised by Coca Cola's decision back in the early 90s to get its creative not from its long-standing agency McCann-Erickson but from Hollywood talent agency CAA. It was a brutal reminder that advertising creativity doesn't happen only when a writer, art director and creative director do their thing.

The advertising industry should definitely embrace mass collaboration to remain vibrant. But doing so should compel agencies to capitalize even more on their best practices and on the accumulated knowledge about advertising effectiveness. I'm sure there is no

shortage of interesting advertising ideas out there from people who would likely never get a job in this business. More than ever before, agencies should be uniquely skilled to identify the ideas that will deliver results.