

Fight rumour with rumour

MONTEVIDEO, ARGENTINA: Danone countered a vicious viral attack on its Actimel yogurt brand in Argentina by fighting rumours with - other rumours. As marketers struggle to find new ways to protect their brands from social media onslaughts, Danone is re-writing the playbook with its Creator of Rumours (Creador de Rumores) digital effort.



A few months ago a viral e-mail circulated in Argentina, directing people to a web page that described supposed facts about Actimel, such as that the probiotic yogurt brand was addictive, destroyed the stomach's natural flora and could harm children's' health. Other blogs quickly picked up the story, and the damaging stories were soon the top ones returned in online searches for Actimel.

First steps...

Initially Danone used traditional means to fight back. "The first step was to react, responding to all bloggers and websites who posted news about Actimel with the wrong message," said Andrea Fogarolli, brand manager in Argentina for Actimel. As a second step Danone aired a commercial that directly addressed the malicious email.

In the TV spot, Daniel Mainatti, a popular young investigative journalist, walks through a park surrounded by families playing with their children, and talks about the yogurt brand: "You can trust Actimel. Anyone can have it. It's always good to have an Actimel."

Fighting rumours, with rumours

Actimel then went one step further and employed the services of digital agency Sinus, with a campaign encouraging people to go to a new rumour-creation website called creadorderumores.com. At the site, visitors can generate rumours, and a list of friends to send the link containing the rumour and a photograph of the sender. The site includes a sample rumour - Argentine woman wins a free 10-day shopping spree at the world's best malls - followed by the takeaway message: "Don't believe everything you see on the internet. I'll show you how easy it is to spread a rumour about you."

"What we were trying to do is show people how easy it is to lie and deceive on the web, and how careful we, as

consumers, must be to get truths about brands," said Sebastian Garcia Padin, owner of Sinus. "What the Creador de Rumores is doing is telling people 'Be careful'.

Users can't go too wild with the rumours, which can only be about themselves and must be selected from a limited number of pre-written choices, and accompanied by a headshot. You can tell the world you've won the lottery or a trip to the World Cup in South Africa, are romancing a supermodel, or embarking on a rock-star tour with a British band. This reporter chose the first option and generated the rumour "Patricio won the lottery," formatted as the front page of a newspaper.

In the first month of the campaign, more than 40 000 people visited the site, and more than 100 000 individual false rumours were created and sent.

Danone said the initial viral slurs about Actimel being harmful didn't hurt the brand's sales, but declined to disclose any figures. Industry experts estimate Actimel has about a 5% share of Argentina's yogurt market - but close to 80% of the probiotic segment - and sales of about US\$2 million (about R14 million) a year.

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