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ADVERTISING

Unauthorized Campaigns Used by Unauthorized Creators Become a Trend

By NAT IVES

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NOT long after the chief executive at Coca-Cola, E. Neville Isdell, began saying that the company needed to improve its marketing, a group of experienced hands in the ad industry decided they might be able to help.

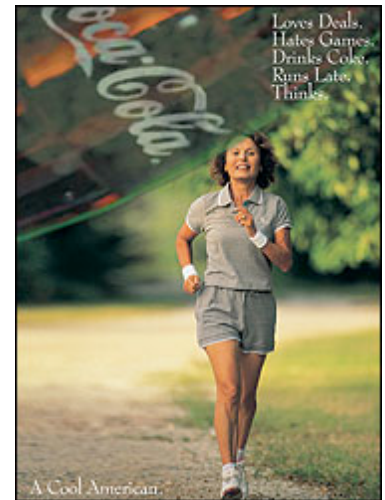
Soon a collective of creative types from many industries delivered their response, including a new campaign, brand promise and commercial for Coca-Cola using the theme, "A Cool American."

If Coca-Cola - or its agencies, including Berlin Cameron/Red Cell in New York, part of the Red Cell division of the WPP Group - were intrigued, they gave no signal.

"We weren't aware of it or involved in it," said Kelly Brooks, a spokesman at Coca-Cola in Atlanta.

Coca-Cola is not the only marketer dealing with marketing it did not ask for. New ads and ideas for campaigns are increasingly popping up without client or agency involvement, whether online, on television or metaphorically nailed to boardroom doors.

Various people with diverse motives are behind the proliferation of vigilante marketing. They are freelancers and fans - even agencies - looking for accounts, and they have shown up this year to advertise or try to advertise products as they see fit.



An unauthorized Coca-Cola print ad featured "A Cool American."



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George Masters of Irvine, Calif., who teaches Web design and graphics to high school and community college students, said he created a 60-second animated commercial for the iPod Mini music player partly because he likes making animation with graphics. But he also said that some measure of evangelism was involved.

"I'm having a lot of fun when I'm sitting at my Mac and creating these pieces," Mr. Masters said. "I always choose subject matter I feel strongly about as well. My iPod and Power Mac are the tools that are empowering me in the first place."

The unauthorized commercial, in which a bright little iPod Mini zips around to the song "Tiny Machine" by the Darling Buds, received wide exposure online, and notice in magazines like Wired and on advertising blogs like AdRants. It is available at www.gomotron.com, where Mr. Masters displays some of his motion-graphic design portfolio. [Apple Computer](#) has not asked for the commercial to come down, Mr. Masters said, declining to elaborate on any interaction with the company. Teresa Weaver, a spokeswoman at Apple in Cupertino, Calif., declined to comment.

There are also agencies and creative executives working on what might be called superspeculation, like the team at Vaughn Whelan & Partners in Toronto. It does not work for Molson, but nonetheless created a commercial for Molson Canadian beer and put it on television in October.

"I had an idea that I'd actually been fostering for some time that was perfect for this brand," said Vaughn Whelan, president and creative director. "My goal was to get one hour in their boardroom and show them five years of advertising, so they could see the future."

The 60-second commercial, which was an effort to move away from typical beer marketing, showed a bike messenger fighting to persuade the Canadian government to let him deduct his daily food costs as "fuel" on his taxes. It ended with the line: "Respect. It's a Canadian thing."

Wary of potential legal issues, Mr. Whelan consulted with several lawyers and informed Molson executives before the spot appeared. After it ran twice, as planned, Mr. Whelan said, "They gave me a letter saying take it off the air." (Like the unsanctioned iPod Mini commercial, however, it drew the kind of added exposure that publicists call "earned media" - free exposure in the news pages of newspapers like The National Post in Toronto and The New York Post.)

Molson, which had been conducting a review for a creative agency, last month named Zig, another Toronto agency, as creative agency of record in Canada for Molson Canadian. Messages left at Molson headquarters in Montreal were not returned yesterday.

But Mr. Whelan said he had attracted interest from foreign brewers, which he would not identify.

The most freewheeling of the do-it-yourself advertisers may be the advocates of Firefox, the free Web browser published by the Mozilla Foundation, a nonprofit group that helps develop open-source software with volunteer programmers.

Rob Davis, a Firefox user who had no business connection to Mozilla, said he sent an e-mail message to a Mozilla member this summer to gauge interest in a plan for a newspaper ad financed by donations.

The return e-mail message read something to the effect of, "This is great, we're really



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busy, go figure it out," said Mr. Davis, an account director at Haberman & Associates in Minneapolis. "I took that as a yes."

After 10 days, a Web site devoted to the project collected donations, either \$10 or \$30, from 10,000 people, enough for a two-page ad that appeared last Thursday in [The New York Times](#).

"Efforts like this are only going to grow, especially as you see them being strong fits with products where there is an excited and energized base of users," Mr. Davis said.

The group that sent Coca-Cola its unsolicited campaign has kept at it, posting suggestions for companies including [Mitsubishi Motors](#) North American and [Alltel](#) on [www.MadisonAveNew.com](#), a Web site operated by Harry Webber, the founder of Smart Communications in Los Angeles.

"If Madison Avenue is no longer the evangelist for creative thinking in America, then somebody has to take up that cause," Mr. Webber said. "That is the calling of all creative people, not just people who work for ad agencies." Mr. Webber has another motive for wanting to see Coke sales rise: he owns stock in the company. But he is a longtime agency creative executive as well, who helped develop, among other campaign themes, "I am stuck on Band-Aid."

James B. Twitchell, professor of English and advertising at the University of Florida in Gainesville, agreed that the cultural power of advertising made it hard for creative people to ignore. "If I want to be creative, that's the place I'm going to go," he said. "It's not so much that I want to sell the product, or even care about the product, but it's where our shared storehouse of stories is."



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