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Creative Roundtable: The \$6-Million Microsite

by Christine Champagne, January 2008 issue

Assessing the Bionic Assessment Test

How do you engage your audience and make them feel like they have to watch your TV series because they've got something at stake? Let them step into the shoes of your main character. That's the strategy that media marketing agency Fanscape of Los Angeles employed when it came up with the idea of the Bionic Assessment Test, bat-test.com, to promote NBC's updated version of *Bionic Woman*.

Built by Grow Interactive, from Norfolk, Va., the site allows users to play the role of a newly bionic person and tests their abilities in five areas, including memory, computational analysis and pace detection through brain-teaser type games. Those who score high enough - over 75 percent - are rewarded with access to exclusive content from the show.

Sadly, I only scored a lame 20 percent bionic despite long-held dreams of replacing "Jaime Sommers" and kicking some ass. "Don't feel bad. It's tough," Fanscape director of creative services Shane Rodack says with a laugh, noting that the games are designed to be challenging so people return to take the tests multiple times. "We didn't want people taking these tests once and never coming back again - we wanted people to try to beat their scores and beat their friends' scores."

Launched at the start of the fall TV season, Fanscape promoted the Bionic Assessment Test via an exclusive first-look with g4tv.com. From there, the company went grassroots, generating awareness using Digg and seeding discussions in

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various online communities and on message boards. NBC also included a link to the Bionic Assessment Test from the *Bionic Woman* show page on nbc.com.

In addition to piquing interest in *Bionic Woman* among a wide demo of males and females ranging in age from teens to adults in their 40s and 50s, Rodack says the slick, futuristic-looking site is designed to "show how dark and moody the new *Bionic Woman* series is. It's a big change from the [show starring Lindsay Wagner in the 1970s]."

What did Rich Cutter of EPIInteractiv, Firstborn's Tim Nolan and Deutsch's George Decker think after testing their bionic abilities?

OMMA: The site opens with a mini-movie of clips from the show that sets up a terrible accident scenario in which we are put in the shoes of the victim. Then we are taken to a hospital room where we find ourselves in a hospital bed being informed by unseen people that we were rebuilt using bionics. How would you rate the setup?

Nolan: I thought the video was of good quality, and it made sense to me. Good scene selection. Just bang - you're hit with this accident scenario, and a few flashbacks. And the transition from the video to the quality of the image for the testing room was good.

Decker: It was great. I like when people make use of the medium as much as they can, and I think it was set up very well. I would probably want some visual recognition of who was giving me the instructions. Where's the doctor? Where's the sound coming from? I felt lost for about a second, then I thought, *Oh, I get it.*

Cutter: I went to it twice, and I don't know if my connection was bad, but it didn't preload properly, so it was a really choppy experience. Once it loaded, and once I got in there, everything was smooth, and I got the concept. I was definitely intrigued.

OMMA: Were the games featured on this site fun and interesting to play, and was the level of difficulty appropriate?

Decker: I think they made wise choices to keep the tests short and sweet and not belabor them because if I had to spend too much time on them, I would have given up. But they were nice and quick. I only had problems understanding how to do one of them - I got zero percent on [the keyboard test]. I had no idea what the heck I was doing. I thought there was something wrong with me.

Cutter: I think they made good choices in the games. They were pretty challenging. I am a video game player, and I found them tough even for someone of my level of geekiness. I would be a little concerned with somebody who is less tech-savvy being able to get to that 75 percent level. It took me four times to get there.

OMMA: The prize for players who reach that level is a look at exclusive footage from the show. Was that enough of a reward?

Cutter: It was kind of a letdown. You go through these challenges - again, I took it four times to get to that 75 percent. Then when I got there, and it was literally like a five second clip, and it didn't even really make sense. I was like, *Is that all? Do I get more?* But I couldn't find anything else.

Nolan: Holy crap, was I disappointed. Six seconds of video, and that's it? Don't bust your hump trying to get 75 percent.

Decker: I do think that the reward for going through this should be more. To get somebody to dedicate their time and interact with your advertising, I think you want to give them a better reward for it, and I don't think seeing clips is enough.

OMMA: What payoff would you have given to high-scoring players?

Nolan: Exclusive content that may not have been in the show, and maybe something à la *Lost*, where you could have found a content-based trigger that answered a question an avid viewer of the show would have. Even behind-the-scenes stuff - maybe how they created the bionics. Something with production value. There was absolutely zero. It was disappointing.

OMMA: How would you rate the site overall?

Cutter: It almost felt like there should have been a little bit more. I didn't have a real strong connection with the actual show itself. I feel like there could have been more video clips - maybe even between the games. I was looking for other [show-related content].

Nolan: I felt like I should have had some sort of tie-in to the show - a trailer, credits, just some sort of information, especially if this is going to hit Gen Y or anywhere around there. They may not have firsthand experience with the original series.

Decker: I like what they did. I think that if I was looking at the Bionic Woman and hearing too much about the show, I would have gotten really bored, and it would have felt like a promo to me instead of getting me conceptually involved in the idea of the show.

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1140 Broadway, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10001
tel. 212-204-2000, fax 212-204-2038, feedback@mediapost.com

