

'Phoenix' soars into Second Life

Virtual avatars credited with boosting film's Imax 3D showing

By Gail Schiller

NEW YORK — A virtual marketing campaign for "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix" engagements in Imax theaters that transformed Second Life avatars into "buzz agents" for the movie is getting credit as the main impetus behind Imax breaking all of its boxoffice records.

In a campaign run by This Second Marketing Llc., a relatively new agency that specializes in brand marketing in Second Life, about two dozen avatars were recruited and paid real-world wages to act as virtual street teams, handing out free virtual promotional items and engaging fellow avatars in discussions about the film at Imax theaters.

Dressed in white futuristic-looking outfits with the Imax logo and a cube with the "Phoenix" Imax 3D poster floating above their heads, the buzz agents distributed

virtual 3-D glasses, Imax T-shirts, directors' chairs with the Imax logo and virtual movie tickets. Only the virtual movie tickets had a real-life use, with all 300 available redeemed for Imax "Phoenix" tickets via a link to Imax's Web site.

According to Imax and This Second Marketing, about 15,000 unique avatars engaged in conversation about the Imax "Phoenix" and accepted promotional items during 840 total hours of street marketing efforts in the week surrounding the Warner Bros. Pictures' film's July 11 opening. The campaign logged more than 25,000 individual Imax brand interactions when including all conversations with Second Life avatars, many of which occurred on more than one occasion.

"As far as everyone can tell, this was the highest one-on-one branded interaction ... that ever took place on Second Life," said Greg Foster, chairman and presi-



More than 15,000 avatars discussed the "Harry Potter" film before its bow.

dent of Imax Filmed Entertainment. "Reaching 15,000 people in exactly the demographic you're shooting over seven days is sort of hitting the marketing bonanza."

Foster said Imax's market research indicated that the Second Life campaign "closed the deal" for many of the moviegoers who went to see "Phoenix" in Imax theaters.

"A huge proportion of our opening-weekend tickets came from advance Internet purchases, and a large number of those people came from interacting on Second Life," he said.

"Phoenix" led Imax to its largest worldwide opening at \$9.4 million, its biggest first-week total at \$11.6 million and its largest second weekend at \$3.9 million, the company said. The film reached the \$10 million mark faster than any other Imax DMR release. (DMR is the company's digital remastering technology that allows it to digitally transform any conventional motion picture into an Imax film.)

Foster said the campaign helped Imax reach its target 12- to 34-year-old "techie" demographic that is a "a little bit more illusive these days in terms of coming to movies."

According to Joni West, president of This Second Marketing, the Imax campaign was more effective than those implemented by other marketers who have just created "islands" in Second Life without any marketing or advertising campaigns to get people to go there.

"Some companies have built islands, and they've expected people just to show up, which is not a realistic expectation in Second Life," she said. "For Imax, we decided to go and bring the brand and the story to the people." ■

Reveille, Volvo buckle up for Web ride

By Gail Schiller

NEW YORK — A new Web series produced by Reveille about a driving school instructor starring Craig Robinson of NBC's "The Office" and Volvo's new C30 hatchback premieres Aug. 15 on MSN.

Reveille came up with the concept for "Mr. Robinson's Driving School" and took it to MSN, which signed a first-look deal with Reveille about 18 months ago. MSN then pitched the idea to Volvo, a long-term advertising partner typically interested in innovative online marketing campaigns.

Volvo signed up to finance the show, its first Web series in the U.S., and is using it as the lead marketing initiative for its new C30 four-seat hatchback, which is likened to the Mini Cooper and aimed at a younger market than most of Volvo's vehicles.

The Swedish automaker was involved in the earliest stages of the show's development, with the producers working to integrate the C30's marketing themes and



Robinson

Owens, managing director, co-head of domestic television and head of digital at Reveille. "The car is integral to Craig's mission and his heroic journey, and that journey is ultimately to prove he's the best driving instructor in town. It made sense that his sidekick would be his car."

Owens said Robinson names his car and commiserates with it during the series, mirroring some of the themes of Volvo's C30 campaign, which focuses on style, performance and individuality. "We integrated aspects of Volvo's marketing campaign into themes for the new show without bastardizing the concept or jeopardizing the story," he said. "Volvo put no

"attitude" into the series.

"MSN put Reveille and Volvo together and we jointly developed the concept and the show," said Howard

restrictions on us in terms of the kind of content we could make."

MSN director of U.S. branded entertainment Cameron Death said the show wasn't produced until Volvo, MSN and Reveille sat down and "jointly defined what the show is. It's the unique way we're putting great content together with great brands."

As it does with its other shows, MSN is also featuring a number of interactive elements tied to the show, such as a game that allows viewers to take a driving lesson with Robinson in the C30 and the ability to leave Robinson a voicemail or deliver a voicemail from him to a friend. The funniest voicemails left by viewers will be integrated into future episodes.

Owens said that despite Volvo's deep involvement in the series, neither Reveille nor Robinson believes that the show comes off like an ad. "It still feels to us like it's a very funny and smart show, and I think Craig feels the same way," he said. "We don't feel like it's a commercial."