



Case study: The brand that went 100% digital

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Article Highlights:

- *Shoe sole maker Vibram wanted to generate awareness among hard-core trail runners*
- *The company leveraged a combined paid and earned media strategy to make a connection with consumers*
- *It takes time to identify and engage the "right" influencers, but that time pays off*

In 2009, [Vibram](#) (best known as the makers of the "five-finger" running shoe) worked with AMP Agency's integrated media unit, AMP Media, to initiate a campaign that aimed to engage core consumers across relevant online spaces and create a direct dialog with avid trail runners. For Vibram, this campaign represented a marked shift from its previous media strategy and a move into somewhat uncharted territory for the brand -- but a move it was finally ready to make.

Historically, Vibram relied on 100 percent print advertising. After three years of working with AMP Agency, Vibram took the full plunge into the digital pool by investing all 2009 funds online -- and the company currently has no plans to turn back. Through its digital efforts, Vibram was able to effectively leverage the power of the web and, ultimately, make the connection with consumers it was seeking.

The challenge

Vibram soles are a prevalent component among top running shoe brands, but the company is not well known by name for its distinct technology. The company wanted to increase awareness among hard-core trail runners about the superior performance of Vibram-soled running shoes across multiple brands in which they are a component (e.g., Saucony and Patagonia).

The company shifted its full media budget online, and, by utilizing a strategic mix of paid and earned media for the first time, the results paid off.

It's all in the mix

Vibram used a combination of digital tactics to surround hard-core trail runners with a comprehensive Vibram message across the digital spaces they frequent.

Ads ran on top running sites (e.g., Runnersworld.com and Trailrunnermag.com) to reach target trail runners at destinations where they were most likely to be considering shoe options. The company employed interactive and engaging creative that was lifestyle relevant and piqued readers' interest. Ad



placements were targeted within gear sections and trail-running shoe guides. Rich media banner creative included 60-second custom video featuring a unique magnifying glass interaction.

Over Drive W's

Exclusive for **patagonia**

1 Toe-bumper for PROTECTION

2 Asymmetrical shape to IMPROVE HEEL-->Metatarsal load transfer

3 Asymmetrical heel for A BETTER IMPACT ENERGY DISSIPATION

4 EVA pad for EXTRA CUSHIONING

Very thin bottom for LIGHTNESS WITH TRACTION AND DURABILITY

EVA midsole for REDUCED WEIGHT, SHOCK ABSORPTION AND COMFORT

Self-cleaning grooves for SAFETY

TPU studs to IMPROVE TRACTION

GRIP
TRACTION
BRAKING
CUSHIONING
STABILITY
FLEXION LINE

Product innovation and design provided by Vibram® are protected by patent and copyright law for the brands we serve and their wholesale manufacturers. Vibram® protects original designs from counterfeiting and imitations.

www.vibram.com

The brand also got social. Vibram identified a core group of trail-running bloggers and online writers and provided them with Vibram-sole Patagonia and Saucony trail running shoes for trial and review. Select giveaways to readers were also provided. Vibram gave bloggers access to company representatives for more-detailed product information and was able to directly engage and build a relationship with this influencer group. Vibram kept the conversation going throughout the trail-running season and opened doors for future interactions.

The results



The media campaign ran for five months beginning in February 2009. It garnered a total of 3.1 million paid media impressions and 100,000 social media impressions

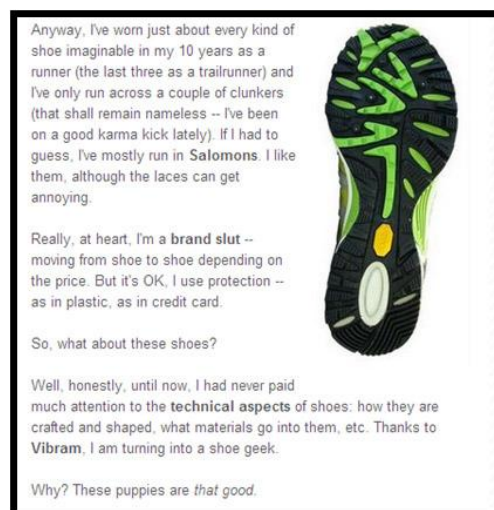
Return on relationship: Pre- and post-campaign survey results tell the story:

- Pre-campaign: 57 percent surveyed had limited brand awareness prior to campaign
- Post-campaign: 100 percent surveyed said Vibram components will play a determining role in purchase decision in the future; 100 percent surveyed are more likely to recommend and buy Vibram soled shoes in the future

Bloggers told an average of 31 others about Vibram soles, in addition to their blog reader base. Here's a sampling of their powerful words:

- "I had heard of Vibram before and have had some shoes with Vibram soles, but didn't know about all the sports related shoes they were associated with."
- "I have mentioned Vibram to probably about 50-100 people. If you own a running website everyone wants to talk to you about running."
- "I never considered purchasing a pair of Patagonia running shoes prior to this shoe test. Now, I will be giving them strong consideration when purchasing a replacement pair in the future."

Return on engagement: Consumers saw the banner message six times during the course of the campaign. There were more than 39,000 interactions with ad units (including banner, expansions, and video). Vibram-soled shoes were sampled by 24 bloggers, and 24 product reviews were garnered (including photos and/or video and testimonials).



Lessons learned



Track them on their turf: Hard-core trail runners are spending a lot of time online. They are active readers and participants on a handful of select websites and running blogs, and they turn to these sources regularly for recommendations and reviews of products. By leveraging these spaces with information relevant to this core audience, Vibram was able to get into the online conversations and convert consumers.

It's worth a try: Vibram's confidence in its technology proved to be vital in getting core consumers to start buzzing positively about the brand. Vibram had never engaged bloggers directly but found that this type of dialog was immensely powerful for brand awareness and spreading word of mouth. By sticking to a topic of expertise for the brand -- trail running shoes -- Vibram was able to lend value to the consumer conversation and was welcomed by the blogger community.

Jump in the digital pool (head first): Using a one-pool approach to surround target consumers pays off. A paid media presence increases general brand awareness and legitimacy. Social media mentions give niche consumers a reason to engage with and believe in the brand on a deeper level.

Be real -- patient: It takes time to identify and engage the "right" influencers and to cultivate meaningful relationships with them, but that time will pay off. Niche audiences are serious about their passions and might also take more time to thoroughly try a product and review it. These passionate groups can sniff out "false camaraderie" from a mile away. So be authentic, provide the most relevant information to help them make an informed decision, and don't live by a deadline.

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