Behind the Campaign:

Ask Troy-Bilt

This campaign is the recipient of an ANA REGGIE AWARD.
Ask Troy-Bilt

Consumers have become more reliant on emerging technologies to handle schedules, customer service, and shopping. So how could Troy-Bilt, a lawncare brand, capture attention and drive engagement among millennials who integrate technology into almost every aspect of their lives?

Instead of sticking with traditional marketing tactics, the brand decided to embrace current trends and engage with consumers on their terms.
“We know homeowners have questions throughout their journey in the yard and need a source of ideas and know-how they can rely on for help. The Troy-Bilt brand gives us permission to be a source of ideas and know-how, instead of just a lawnmower company. Artificial intelligence and voice technologies enable us to be there for them online, in aisle, and at home.”

Mark Bachmann – Partner and Chief Client Officer at Marcus Thomas
Key Campaign Elements

When it comes to yard care, all homeowners have questions. However, millennials seeking information and assistance are different from past generations, often relying on social media for help and turning to brands for guidance. **To demonstrate its in-depth experience to an audience segment aptly dubbed Yard Enthusiasts, Troy-Bilt decided to make it easy for homeowners to get answers to their questions quickly and efficiently.**

The brand hired agency Marcus Thomas to help create “Ask Troy.” **The campaign had three main objectives:**

- Differentiate Troy-Bilt by focusing on what the brand stands for, rather than product features and specs.
- Demonstrate and personify the brand promise: “We Won’t Let You Down.”
- Create a mutually beneficial value exchange between Troy-Bilt and Yard Enthusiast consumers.

“Just prior to this campaign, we conducted the largest-ever multigenerational study of DIY consumers. The insights relating to millennials (we called them the Do-it-With-Me group) turned out to be incredibly informative: millennials use multiple sources of information (blogs, reviews, lots of tech, peers), and they hate being condescended to. These learnings help us feel very confident about our approach.”

**Mark Bachmann** – Partner and Chief Client Officer at Marcus Thomas
Bringing the Campaign to Life

Troy-Bilt first engaged with in-market consumers, targeting them with an integrated campaign powered by IBM Watson that ran digital ad units on Weather.com.

A conversational chatbot that leveraged machine learning and natural language processing provided consumers with an opportunity to start a conversation about Troy-Bilt products. The chatbot was a convenient and modern way to help consumers conduct research on which mower would best meet their needs.

But perhaps the most innovative element of this multifaceted campaign was the voice marketing component, the first of its kind for an outdoor power equipment brand.

Troy-Bilt created a specialized Alexa skill that recommended the best days and times for homeowners to maintain their yards by leveraging the following data points: Weather.com’s forecast for their local area, the homeowners’ personal calendars, and other pre-defined preferences.

By simply asking, “When should I mow my lawn this week” Alexa quickly identified days and times in the homeowners’ calendars that didn’t conflict with other obligations and eliminated the chance they’d get caught in the rain.
“We believed in the concept, shaped it with deep understanding of what the customer values and with our client’s brand promise. The technologies and partners – Watson Marketing, Alexa skill, and the Facebook chatbot – are new, but the technologies are sound, which made for a fairly straightforward undertaking. This experience also helped us build a capability upon which we can create in the future.”

Mark Bachmann – Partner and Chief Client Officer at Marcus Thomas
Campaign Results

The company is leveraging advanced AI for product recommendations in Watson ads, providing always-on shopping assistance with its Facebook chatbot, and combining multiple data streams to help consumers find time to mow with its Alexa skill.

Over a 90-day trial period, the Ask Troy campaign’s digital ad units garnered 43,486,273 impressions (22,645,062 desktop and 20,841,211 mobile), exceeding IBM Watson Ads benchmarks for mobile-branded backgrounds, user inputs, and Google rich media interaction rates.

Troy-Bilt achieved deep 1:1 engagement via its Facebook chatbot.

The Alexa skill was a totally new touchpoint for Troy-Bilt customers to engage with the brand. Engagement with the skill was strong.

Facebook Chatbot conversations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>total users</th>
<th>sessions</th>
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“The results so far are promising and there will no doubt be more use of voice technology as consumers continue to adopt the trend.”

Mark Bachmann – Partner and Chief Client Officer at Marcus Thomas
Did everything go as planned regarding the campaign development and execution? What starts, stops, or pivots did you experience?

The concept of a mow scheduler (i.e., the function of the voice assistant) was actually pitched to the client nearly four years ago as a mobile app concept. It was ultimately never pursued in that format, but everyone (client and agency) saw the value in the idea. We kept pushing on the idea until the intersection of voice technologies aligned with the concept and provided a great opportunity for us to take this service to market. That’s an approach we take with clients overall – even if something isn’t pursued upon the first (or second) recommendation, we often come back to solid insights or concepts as we develop subsequent campaigns.

What role does company culture play when it comes to leveraging innovative marketing ideas?

Our culture is all about building brands from the experience up (not just the message down), with ideas that go beyond just ads. It’s 2020. People expect brands to be experienced, not spoon-fed. We look for places, times, and methods that create meaningful ways to bring our brands and customers together. You can’t do that today without a great emphasis on technology.
“This was an integrated team made up of traditional creative team members, UX designers, a digital strategist, a digital producer, and the production partner Wildebeest in Los Angeles.”

Q: Had Troy-Bilt leveraged voice-activated technology previously? How did the brand react to the idea of creating an Alexa skill?

A: This was the first time the brand embraced voice-activated technologies. But Troy-Bilt does have a history of experimentation and welcomed our recommendation.

Q: Can you describe the process for creating the Alexa skill? How long did it take and what skillset did the folks working on this project have?

A: This was an integrated team made up of traditional creative team members, UX designers, a digital strategist, a digital producer, and the production partner Wildebeest in Los Angeles. We used a rapid prototyping approach to test and fail quickly as we worked through multiple iterative solutions.
Do you have any advice for marketers learning about the ways voice technology can elevate their marketing mix?

Perhaps the most important thing about using voice technology (or any technology, for that matter) is to start with the idea of filling a need. Regardless of the platform, technology or tactic, brands need to deliver value to real people, not "consumers," in the form of utility, emotional value, or a little of both. We didn’t start with the idea of using voice technology; we started with fulfilling a need of the people we wanted to develop and foster a relationship with, while living up to our brand purpose. Then, we decided voice would be the best way to deliver this experience. Not the other way around.

“Regardless of the platform, technology or tactic, brands need to deliver value to real people, not “consumers,” in the form of utility, emotional value, or a little of both.”
SOURCES


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