

# WTF – Can you believe those Gossip Girl promos?

The goal of any promo is to get people excited about a particular show and, ultimately, to entice a viewer to tune into your station. But as any creative director knows, that's much easier said than done—especially in this multi-channel, multi-platform universe.

Then comes the CW Television Network's recent ad campaign in the U.S. for the fall launch of the new season of the show *Gossip Girl*. This particular campaign—dubbed the WTF campaign—not only got people talking about the upcoming season, but fans started lifting the promos off the network's website and redistributing them online on places like *YouTube* and *Gossip Girl* fan pages.

"We had hundreds of thousands of hits for our promos in just a couple of weeks," says Chris Donovan, senior vice

president of creative and special projects for the CW Television Network. "They're promos, but people were getting excited about them. It was like having the fan base being ambassadors for the show."

That doesn't happen often. People don't often seek out promos and pass them around. It does happen with movie trailers from time to time, but these promos hit a nerve with the show's fan base—the network's target audience.

The concept behind the promos was to show a clip from the upcoming season where more than the unexpected was happening to the characters. Then in text-messaging-style large font, the letters WTF pop up on screen. Any frequent text messenger knows what that stands for. The WTF would pop up a couple of times before it is spelled out in the end—Watch This Fall.

It was a great play on acronyms. But it worked only because the creative team at CW didn't do it to be cute, but made it fit right in with the creative direction the show was going in. Even the texting in the spots is not random.

"We came up with WTF because it works well with the *Gossip Girl* brand and the way everybody texts everybody in the show," says Donovan. "*Gossip Girl* started as sort of a high school show. The characters were all at their private high school. But this season, the characters moved on to college or their post-high school careers. And from a creative point of view, the show had a lot of turnabouts (for the characters). Characters who were on top are now on the bottom.

"So you have a character like Dan, who when the show started was the poor kid from Brooklyn going to this prep school. He graduates and goes to NYU and he's now suddenly worshiped like a god. At the same time you have Blair, who is the queen bee of *Gossip Girl*, who is suddenly at NYU and nobody knows who she is and she's fighting for social survival."

Donovan's deep knowledge of the show is perhaps a hidden ingredient to the success of the campaign. You have to know the content that you are promoting



to truly speak its language, and talk directly to not only its fans but potential fans as well.

"The way things were going (on the show) this season, where everything is now upside down (for the characters), the promos are (really saying), wink, wink, what has happened to all these people. Reaction has been just what we wanted. People are saying 'what has happened that this is happening to Blair'. The (viewer) was right there with the promos—WTF Blair. They will watch this fall."

The most successful spot of the campaign, which featured a 30, a 20 and six 10s, was a promo where Blair, who did rule in high school, runs into Dan, who was bottom of the barrel. Now in college, Dan comes by and rips off Blair's signature headband and says 'headbands are high school! WTF.

"That spot spread like wildfire virally," says Donovan. "It just happened. (Viewers) couldn't handle what was going on. It was a great tease campaign."

Because success leaves clues, the clue left behind here is next time you sit down to develop a promo or a campaign, make sure you really, really, really know the content you are promoting. Speak in the language of the characters of your content and become one with their storyline.

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