



Coke Zero hopes to ride 'Avatar' hype

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"Avatar," James Cameron's latest big-budget movie, won't be widely released until Dec. 18, but Coca-Cola Co. has already spent months pushing a grassroots effort to connect its Coke Zero brand to the film.

Coca-Cola decided to partner with "Avatar" because, much like "Quantum of Solace," it should do well with Coke Zero's target customers, 18- to 24-year-old males, said Chip York, Coca-Cola's director of worldwide entertainment marketing.

Movie sponsorship deals can be an effective way for brands to reach consumers, said Dean DeBiase, chairman of Reboot Partners, a group that advises companies on management and marketing issues. It's hard for other forms of advertisement to match movies in terms of engagement, he said.

"It provides an opportunity for being topical, for being relevant in a very unique setting that traditional advertising can't provide," DeBiase said. "Top movies generate interest, buzz and news and a brand can gain shared equity from this association, often before, during and after the movie release windows."

The buzz will be diminished if the movie flops, but brands usually aren't damaged by a poor box-office flop, he said.

"Should the film prove to be a box office success, then there is a lengthened period of time for the brand to receive return on their investment beyond in-theater presence, including joint in-store and online promotion as well as social media buzz" DeBiase said. "If the film fails, that return is hampered, but consumers don't tend to associate the failure with the brand."

Don't look for Coca-Cola in the movie, though. A product placement didn't make sense, York said. Coca-Cola tries to fit products where they would naturally occur, and it was hard to figure out the right place or package for a movie set 100 years in the future, he said.