

IBM's Linux graffiti

One of the best ways to generate publicity for a brand is to deploy unconventional tactics. For instance, when London nightclub the Ministry of Sound projected its logo onto the side of the Houses of Parliament, the media attention was immense. Indeed, it was considered such a successful trick that a few years later *FHM* promoted its '100 Sexiest Women of the Year' campaign with the same tactic, beaming the image of an almost naked Gail Porter (one of the contenders for the number one spot) onto the side of the historic building.

Such outlandish techniques are generally referred to as 'guerrilla marketing'. The logic behind guerrilla marketing is straightforward: if a company promotes itself in such a unique fashion it will not only be able to gain press coverage, but will also stick in people's minds and encourage word-of-mouth publicity. Furthermore, guerrilla marketing is usually cheap. When the online portal and search engine Yahoo! wanted to promote its Yahoo! Mail services, it didn't decide to invest in hundreds of magazine ads. No. It built a couple of cows.

The company took part in an event called the Cow Parade in which cows were decorated according to different themes. Yahoo!'s 'udderly moovelous' (as it put it in a press release) pair of purple plastic cows were installed with an Internet facility that enabled members of the New York crowd to send 'moomail' messages to each other. Although this tactic was undeniably 'out there', it succeeded because it was relevant to the service it was promoting. However, some guerrilla techniques have had considerably less success. For example, when IBM hired an innovative advertising agency to promote its Linux-based software, the campaign involved employing graffiti artists to scribble the words 'Peace, love and Linux' on pavements and walls throughout San Francisco and Chicago. Unfortunately, the bio-degradable chalk used to create the marketing messages turned out not to be so bio-degradable. Subsequently, IBM was charged with violation of city ordinance and had to pay a US \$18,000 fine.

Lesson from IBM's Linux campaign

Think of the legal implications of any advertising campaign. Marketers should plan and consider all repercussions for any campaign. After all, court appearances rarely help to positively boost a brand identity.