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Promoting *Lost*. New Strategies and Tools of Commercial Communication

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Introduction

Today, Television show audiences have abandoned their once small screens and moved viewing episodes on their personal computers. With this simple change, the spectator has become independent from schedules and programs imposed by the TV broadcasting systems in their country. This way, the new spectator does not have to wait for a TV channel to buy the emission rights of a specific TV show, but rather he can directly access it through the net a view every chapter in a simultaneous fashion, very close in time to when the episode itself is being broadcasted on TV. This new option equates to an elimination of spatial-temporary boundaries and the globalization of contents. Thus, any TV show is conceived as an entertainment product, accessible to anyone, anytime, from almost anywhere in the world, and above all, in a completely free way. As a consequence, language boundaries have become diluted as well. The new spectator accesses the content in its original version; thanks to subtitles which are frequently elaborated by the TV show's fans.

Despite the fact that this study specially focuses on the analysis of the new advertising strategies that *Lost* has developed within the Internet, it is important to note that in the past some fan communities had already discovered the possibilities of the net as a communication and informational exchange forum. Jenkins (2009) noted at the beginning of the 1990's how the first Internet users used this tool, still limited in that time to the university and research community, in order to discuss cultural products, like TV shows. *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-1991) specifically stands out in this sense, since not only did the show become "an ephemeral as well as a powerful sociological phenomenon" but it also was "the first TV show raised to an artistic category by critics and academic researchers [...] opening a new era in TV studies [...]" (Cascajosa, 2005: 42). Therefore, despite the fact that the academic study of TV shows is an important line of research nowadays, their fans' substantial role in this endeavor should also be taken into account.

For this reason, Jenkins's chapter called "Do you enjoy making the rest of us feel stupid? Alt.tv.twinpeaks, the Trickster Author, and Viewer Mastery" can be conceived as the first academic approach to the fan culture from an online setting. *Twin Peaks* shared with *Lost* the delight of creating enigmas with multiple interpretations which promoted discussion and dialogue among its followers. Nevertheless, while *Twin Peaks'* online community was a minority due to the limited development of the Internet at that time, *Lost* emerges as the result of a massive use of the net and the 2.0 web in the 21st century. In this sense, Jenkins states that "I now see Alt.tv.twinpeaks as an early example of what Pierre Levy would describe as a knowledge community or a collective intelligence" (2006:116).

Thus, any study about *Lost* should not obviate the decisive influence of its fandom within the Internet. As Cascajosa notes:

the development of new technologies, specially the Internet and DVD, has contributed to the burgeoning moment of the current Television drama. The fan communities, traditional since they contributed to prolong the *Star Trek* series at the end of the 60's, have become global entities where TV shows admirers, from the US, Singapur, Argentina or Spain, can discuss about their favorite program, access information about the plot in advance and, sometimes, they even analyze programs under an unusual scrutiny (2005: 13).

To put it in other words, the Internet and the 2.0 tools have made fandom visible, transforming it into a global phenomenon. As a matter of fact, no TV show, cultural product, or brand can live on the margin of the Internet.

At this point, it should be clarified that the transformation provoked by the interactive communication was not started with the 2.0 web, the social networks, nor the Internet. From our point of view, it should be understood as a slow and progressive changing process which has been ignored by some sectors throughout a period of time. This shift has taken place in several levels. On one hand, not only has the technological change allowed for the creation of new means of communication, but it has also modified the preexistent ones, thanks to the digitalization of their contents. On the other hand, the social transformation has favored the users to acquire an active role in their interaction with enterprises and institutions and said modifications refer to both audiovisual companies and the commercial communication realm.

The power of the *prosumer*

It is becoming increasingly common to find examples that show the power of the user, favored by new technologies of communication, especially through the Internet and social networks. This aspect shows the fact that users have become relevant elements within the communication process, who are not limited by their addressee function, but rather they take a more active role. The user is currently defined as *prosumer*, a person who doesn't limit himself to the mere enjoyment of a consumer society, but he also contributes with his own values and proposals, so that others can participate with his lifestyle. The *prosumer* refers to a new kind of consumer who has moved away from the content attitude presented by the traditional client. The term was coined by Toffler in his book *The Third Wave*, and it refers to a new individual within the "Global Village" who does not limit himself as a consumer but he provides other goods or services in return to the net (Toffler, 1980). The evolution of the term, provoked by multiple perspectives from other tendencies which study the implications of the *prosumer*, has resulted in its current definition, presented in this article. According to the study conducted by the advertising agency Euro RSCG, Prosumer Pulse 2005, "the *prosumer* is a proactive person, thirsty for information and opinions, who actively shares his point of view and experiences with the others". The *prosumers* are people with a leading and persuasive capacity who live the brand in an active way and who desire to share their brand experiences with others, regardless of whether they are

positive or negative experiences.

Paralleling, the so-called User Generated Content (UGC) which “refers to the collaboration systems where the user does not limit himself to sail among the information produced by other, but he turns into a producer” (Delgado & Jiménez, 2007: 945) has emerged. The tools of social software (blogs, social networks, *podcasts*, *wikis*, sites with videos and pictures, etc...) in which concepts such as interactivity, immediacy and interpersonal communication play a substantial role, have favored said tendency. This way, “new formats and strategies in which the advertising message is integrated within the conversation that the new consumer maintains through the Internet emerged. Thus, the main goal of new advertising is not just to attract the consumer to the message but to establish a one-to-one dialogue with him, by placing this promotion in his new spaces (blogs, social networks)” (Lozano & Hermida, 2010: 3). It consists of the generation of a direct conversation with the consumer, making him a participant of the community around the product or service: “when transforming clients into followers, into ‘fans’ of your brand, the main goal is to manage that they commit with you, that they live an experience with consumption” (Cortés, 2009: 16).

For this reason, the TV channels, like any other brand or company, have been forced to adapt to those technological and social changes. This way, they have had to renovate the advertising strategies used in promoting their programs, including those tools appearing with the burgeoning of the web 2.0:

But this year TV-marketing gurus are looking beyond their own airwaves and employing some nontraditional tactics. With broadcast viewership in decline, the networks can no longer depend solely on promoting their new shows with their own on-air promotions, as they need to reach people who aren't watching TV. TV executives insist on-air promotions will remain as important as ever, but admit they're also employing some nontraditional tactics. Of all the networks, ABC has been forced to be the most creative, given its ratings have lagged behind the others. For the first time, the network has hired a handful of specialized marketing firms with experience of launching products to specific target markets (Atkinson, 2004).

Marketing for TV series

Before moving on, it is necessary to clarify some important aspects concerning the definition of the TV fictional product which affect its promotional strategy. Firstly, in regard to the nature of the TV show itself, it can be said that it is a product with commercial purposes. So to speak, a specific TV network or studio sets up a project with the aim of producing an interesting audiovisual content which attracts spectators (cable-TV networks such as HBO or Showtime) and/or announcers (TV networks). *Lost* is a TV show produced by ABC Studios (the previous Touchstone Television), Bad Robot Productions and Grass Skirt Productions and it was designed to be aired on the American TV network ABC. Nonetheless, not only should *Lost* be conceived as a commercial product, but, like any other TV show, it has to be understood as a cultural or artistic product created by a specific author. Despite the fact that the authorship is still a vague concept within TV studies, Jeffrey Lieber, J. J. Abrams and Damon Lindelof can be considered the authors of this TV show.

Secondly, the consumption of a TV show is not limited to its viewing. Thus, *Lost*, for instance, is divided into sections per seasons and the viewer can review them anytime thanks to the digitalization of contents on the Internet, video settings (DVD, Blu-Ray), new mobile settings (iPhone, iPad, iPod, PSP) or even through the numerous replays of the TV show or its downloading from platforms like iTunes. In this way, the TV show is transformed from its debut into a cultural product which belongs to the collective imaginary and which can be reproduced as many times as the viewer desires (Lozano & Hermida, 2010: 5). In much the same way as it happens with the consumption of a cinematographic product, (Kerrigan, 2009: 10), the consumption of *Lost* goes beyond the mere viewing of the TV show, since spectators visit several websites and blogs which present analysis of the episodes, as they discuss with other viewers and as they even produce other TV series or related products (spin offs, comics, videogames).

Thus, whereas the first goal of an advertising campaign from a TV show is the same as the rest of consumption sections (i.e. to inform about a new product and make it attractive for the consumer), the promotion should succeed in “retaining their [...] viewing over time” (VVAA, 2006: 5). In other words, the goal is to cultivate the spectator’s loyalty.

Promotional strategies of *Lost*

Along its six years of broadcasting, *Lost* has developed an extensive collection of promotional tools which are difficult to classify; they range from the traditional promotions of the TV show made by the channel to the creation of Alternate Reality Games, such as *Lost Experience*.

Not only was the show a global phenomenon, becoming the fastest-ever selling American television series since its launch on ABC in 2004, it also functioned as a multi-purpose franchise. Sold to over 200 countries worldwide, the series was designed to travel across a range of ancillary markets and media platforms. Together with the array of books, toys, trading cards and merchandise commonly associated with high-budget products from the American entertainment industry, *Lost* was made to translate across technological formats (Grainge, 2009: 2).

Thus, this analysis specially focuses on the study of the new tools and advertising actions officially sponsored by the TV channel which originally broadcasted the show in the US, ABC. In this way, the promotional tools made by other TV channels or countries are excluded from this study, as well as most conventional formats. The different advertising practices are categorized according to the season where they were developed. Therefore, and attending to pragmatic reasons, the first and second season have been excluded from this analysis since the TV show mainly used conventional strategies during this period of time.

In much the same way, it is important to note the difficulty of categorizing some advertising tools in just one season, since they have been used during the six years that the TV show has been aired. This is the case of the official website, which is one of the main promotional means of the TV show and one of the reference points for the *Lost* fandom. Thus, in addition to the promos and videos related to the show, other settings such as the Official *Lost* Podcast, where the producers Cuse y Lindelof answered the fans’ questions, was found within the official website. Likewise, the web included other settings such as a complete guide of episodes; a biography of the main characters; a time line to better understand the details of the story; the *Lost Book Club*,

where the novels mentioned in the show were collected, information about the official magazine; a *Sawyer's nickname generator*, which generated a personalized nickname for the user using some basic personal data which had been previously introduced; and the *Lost Store*, the official store which sells products related to the TV show. The store includes a variety of products, from DVDs to t-shirts, mugs, and calendars.

In conclusion, not only did the official website work as a promotional tool for the show, where information about the show itself and its characters was provided, it also worked as a website which, at the same time, included different advertising tools shared a similar goal; to turn *Lost* into the most mysterious, interesting and striking fictional TV show ever.

Third season (October 4, 2006 to May 23, 2007)

One of the most important strategies in promoting the TV show appeared after the ending of the second season. "It's a hybrid between content and marketing," Mike Benson, ABC Entertainment's senior VP-marketing, said of "The Lost Experience". This way, *Lost Experience* constitutes itself like a game for the show's fans which combines the fictional and diegetic world of *Lost* with the spectator's real world. This kind of game, known as an Alternate Reality Game (ARG), can be considered a parallel experience to the actual viewing of the show. "ARGs regularly require comunal puzzle-solving; for instance, some require players to scour a web page's code for embedded clues, translate passages in obscure languages, refer to ancient history or folklore, or engage in careful freeze-frame analysis" (Gray, 2010: 200).

The key to these kinds of strategies essentially lies within the idea of breaking the boundaries between the fictional component of the show and the reality itself. For example, both the Oceanic Airlines official website (Oceanic-air.com) as well as the Hanso Foundation website, stand out among those sites created in order to build up the universe developed within the game, since they presented as real companies.

While the introduction of Dharma and Hanso may have emerged in response to storytelling needs, it had a pleasing side effect of now allowing the series to support a brand of its own—a fictional institution that could serve as an intermediary, an interface, between the story world of the show and the corporate world of sponsors and consumers [...] Ultimately [...] these institutions gave *Lost* a connectivity to the realm of global institutions, that however fictional, enabled the series to bring down the diegetic boundaries between narrative and marketing [...] By tying its fictional institutions to those of reality, *Lost* was able to refit narrative television for integrated marketing in the age of reality TV, moving brand integration outside of the fictional and into a space sponsors could control (Johnson: 19, 26).

In addition to the creation of these websites, several objects and documents belonging to the diegetic universe within the show were transferred to the real world. On one hand, the manuscript read by Sawyer in the island, from the novel *Bad Twin*, was finally published by the publishing company Hyperion (property of Disney and, consequently, property of ABC as well). The publication of the book, which was supposed to be written by Gary Troup—one of the passengers of the Oceanic 815 flight—, was announced in the web Thehansofoundation.org, and it is conceived as one of the main promotion actions of the first phase of *Lost Experience*. On the other hand, Apollo Candy, a fictional chocolate bar brand which appears frequently in the show,

organized several PR actions in specific cities within the US where they freely distributed those chocolate bars. These events did not make a reference to the TV show itself, and they were exclusively focused on the promotion of the Apollo chocolate bars, as if they were real products.

In spite of the fact that the information provided within these promotional actions are not considered as canon by the authors, they are welcome by the spectators, who understand them as an extension of the TV show itself, so that they can be connected to the universe within the island and its characters during the breaks between seasons.

Experiencing *Lost* outside of television, therefore, simultaneously meant moving *inside* its narrative world. The fictional institutions Hanso and Dharma, not fictional characters or narrative threads, enabled viewers to experience everyday life as part of the *Lost* hyperdiegesis—not just in the digital realm, but across a range of mediated experience (Johnson: 21-22).

After the sixth chapter of the third season, *Lost* was interrupted for three months. Before the premiere of the second part of said third season, the first official videogame of the TV show was launched: *Lost: The Mobile Game*, created by Gameloft to be set in iPods and cell phones. The videogame focused on the revival of the events which took place during the two first seasons and the first chapters of the third season through Jack Shepard's eyes, the main character of the show. However the videogame did not present any new information though.

During the end of the third season and the beginning of the next one, ABC channel decided to approve the creation of a series of mobisodes or episodes for a mobile setting where the fictional universe of the show was extended. The so-called *Missing Pieces* were two-minute episodes which were firstly seen by Verizon-Wireless cell phones; they were included within the official website six days later. These mobile productions were conceived as episodes whose main function was to entertain the spectator with new contents while the fourth season was being produced. Afterwards, said mobisodes were included as extras in the fourth season DVD. "Lost: Missing Pieces received an Emmy Award nomination in 2008 for "Outstanding Special Class - Short-format Live-action Entertainment Programs".

Fourth season (January 31, 2008 to May 29, 2008)

With the beginning of the fourth season, the second official video game was released, *Lost: Via Domus*, this time developed by the company Ubisoft Montreal for game console and PC. The video game presents the story of a new character, Elliott Maslow, who is also a survivor in the island. *Lost: Via Domus* uses some of the recurrent places and characters in the show, as the Dharma Initiative, and reveals some of the mysteries surrounding the show. Although both Cuse and Lindelof have declared that the video game cannot be considered as canon it must be understood as an extended experience from the original show, since it offers a new point of view of the main plot in the island.

It is also interesting to emphasize the promotional campaign that *Lost* developed in billboards to advertise this new season. Thus, instead of promoting the show, these billboards acted as an Oceanic Airlines Company advertising, referring to a fictional content related to the show. Some of these billboards, distributed in the different home towns of the characters of the show,

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were modified with graffiti referring directly to the new ARG of the show, *Finding 815*, which had as a main subject the discovery of the remains of the Oceanic Airlines plane from the previous season. The ARG, like *Lost Experience*, led to the creation of several fictional websites, for instance flyoceanicair.com.



Fifth season (January 21, 2009 to May 13, 2009)

In order to better advertisements this season, ABC used an innovative promotional strategy which integrated images from the fifth season in the new music video of the band The Fray, called "You Found Me." Although this formula is quite common in the cinematographic industry, where fragments of film are included in the video clip of the band composing the sound track of the movie, the video for The Fray meant a different experiment. First of all, the song by The Fray did not belong to the original sound track of the show. Secondly, this video was aired for the first time during a commercial break of another ABC show, *Grey's Anatomy*, covering, therefore, the space normally destined to television promos, instead of its habitual space. In this video-clip promotion it could be seen, for the first time and during a brief moment, the logo of the fictitious airlines company Ajira Airways. After this clue, the fans of the show, anxious to get information about the new season in advance, looked for the website of the company on the internet, which still exists today (07/12/2010). Unlike Oceanic Airlines or Hanso Foundation websites, the creation of Ajira Airlines website was exclusively intended as a promotional device of the fifth season of the show, not as a constitutive element of an ARG. The web proposed adventure packs including trips related to the fictional universe of the show. Likewise, the slogan of the company was the same of the fifth season: "Destiny calls"



Before the opening of this season, the ARG Dharma Initiative Recruiting Project also appeared. This ARG proposed again a game that mixed reality with fiction. Therefore, a new stand of the Dharma Initiative company was created in the Comic Con in 2008 to recruit new employees among the participants of the event.

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During this period between seasons, the official web of the show incorporated a new section allowing the users to choose among a series of six e-cards to send friends through email: “Whether you want to tell someone you’re looking forward to the future or miss where you once were, *Lost* e-cards are the ideal way to get your message heard” Some of these postcards made reference to the main theme in the fifth season, while others promoted the touristic side of the island as if it was a real destination.

Sixth season (February 2, 2010 to May 23, 2010)

During the break between the fifth and sixth seasons, ABC and the scriptwriters of *Lost* created a series of webisodes called *Mysteries of the Universe*. Disguised in the form of a mockumentary, aired in 1982 and devoted to the investigation of conspiracies and secret societies, *Mysteries of the Universe* analyzes and studies diverse clues related to the Dharma Initiative. In this way, by means of several signs, testimonies and recordings, and, as if it were a real document, the show reveals to spectators some of the mysteries presented in *Lost*. The series consisted of six parts and was aired through the official web of *Lost*, apart from being included as extra content in the DVDs of the fifth season.



Previous to the opening of the sixth season, and in a very similar way as the preceding ARGs, the projects of Damon, Carlton and a Polar Bear and *Lost University* also emerged. The first, initiated in the Comic Con in 2009, proposed the search of a series of clues which, once discovered and correctly solved, lead to the website where several posters made especially for the show could be purchased. Regarding the second project, the premise consisted of proposing to the spectator the possibility of registering as a student in the *Lost University* in order to choose any subject and attend the classes dealing with the mythological world surrounding the show. In this manner, it referred more to an interactive multimedia experience, since it did not mix, as the previous ARGs, the fictional world of the show and reality. In order to put this experience into practice, *Lost* used the new profile 2.0 incorporated in the Blu-Ray disc of the fifth season. The new profile 2.0, better known as BD-Live, allows, by means of the connection to the Internet, the downloading of additional content, as extras and cell phones ringtones, together with the option to include games that interact with other users.

Moreover, a series of Oceanic Airlines advertising spots were distributed during the Comic-Con in San Diego in 2009 as a promotional means for the last season. These advertisements celebrated thirty years of the company with no plane crashes, a clear reference to flight 815 in the show and to the disturbing ending of the fifth season.

Finally, during the broadcasting of the last season, ABC started up a contest where spectators could participate creating their own promo of 35 seconds in order to advertise the season finale of the show. The spectators could produce the promo by means of their own resources or using the ABC's Flash-based online "mash up" editing tool placed in the official website of the show. The winning promo, "Convergence", by Sam Balcomb, aired on TV on Tuesday, May 18, 2010 during "What They Died For" earned its creator a trip to Los Angeles to attend the series' special finale party on May 13, 2010.

After the show

Since the show ended, *Lost* has continued developing advertising strategies allowing the prolongation and extension of its consumption permanently. The following are the most important strategies.

On October 18th in 2010, DK Publishing published the *Lost Encyclopedia* as a compendium of 400 pages intended to work as a sort of official companion to the series. The spectator can find many new images and detailed summaries about each character, place, or mythical object of the show.

When the series was over, on August 21th and 22th, an official auction of the show (*The Lost Auction*) was organized allowing fans to bid for their favorite objects that appeared in the show. The auction was managed by ProfilesinHistory.com, and took place in the Barker Hangar in the Santa Monica Airport.

In order to promote the purchase of the sixth season in DVD and blu-ray, the creators of *Lost* produced a small episode of nearly twelve minutes, *The New Man in Charge*, which was intended to work as an epilogue of the series, offering some answers to the fans of the show.

Conclusions

Starting from the selected and analyzed set of tools, a series of generic strategies characterizing the promotion of this series throughout its different seasons can be identified. Later, these strategies have been used by other shows as well. It is interesting to emphasize that these strategic lines coincide with the new tendencies in advertising communication that other sectors have been developing during the last ten years. In conclusion, as it has been mentioned before, the main goal is to channel the conversations of the fandom in a positive way in order to cultivate the spectator's loyalty, which is a key concept to hold the attention on the series during the periods between seasons and even at the end of the show's production. The generic strategies mentioned here are three: personalization, participation, and creation of contents or advertainment.

For participation we understand an active attitude of the user, who happens to be the center of the communicative act, giving credit mainly to the interactive capacity of the Internet and the expansion of the 2.0.web. In this way, many of the promotional devices have favored the participation as their main objective, by means of commentaries or active search of information in or beyond the internet. Although these actions are sometimes encouraged by contests or prizes, the truth is that most of the time it is an unselfish participation, from a material point of view.

Regarding personalization, the capacity of individualization within the internet allows not only the personalization of messages, but also of the personalization of products and services. Moreover, several applications and games emerge allowing to personalize the contents according to the tastes and preferences of the fans of the series. These kinds of applications become an excellent strategy of viral communication when they give the opportunity of sharing this information in social networks.

However, the most successful strategy for the creators of *Lost* is the elaboration of parallel entertainment contents, which is known as advertainment. As Martínez Sáez states, this term “wants to design those messages resulting as a hybrid between publicity and entertainment” (2003: 57). Therefore, the brands, marketing, and publicity agencies have applied the mechanisms of the entertainment industry to create a truly interesting content intended to attract the *prosumer* (Ramos, 2006: 39). Thus, some brands have elaborated fictional short movies, videogames or even applications for cell phones with this intention. Nevertheless, it is interesting to emphasize how a TV series – *Lost* in this case- a cultural product already implying entertainment by itself, uses these kinds of creative mechanisms and apply them to self-promotion. In this sense, *Lost* can be considered a brand which needs the mechanisms of the advertising industry to cultivate the spectator’s loyalty. As already stated, for instance, the creation of contents was the strategic key of one of the most successful campaigns, *Lost Experience*.

These strategies do not have to be independent from one another, but, as already seen, they combine and work together in most of the cases. Thus, certain promotional devices can use the creation of content and require, at the same time, the participation of the spectator, like the *Lost Experience*. Finally, it is important to highlight that these strategies would not make sense without the planned integration of the media, which turns out to be fundamental in achieving the synergy between the different media and advertising formats used. So to speak, it is not only about being creative in contents but also in the combination of media and formats used in an advertising campaign. In this sense, we consider that *Lost* has intelligently combined media and formats to achieve the desired combination, developing perfectly well designed campaigns of conventional mass media.

As a final summary, we can affirm that *Lost* has not only modified the habits of conduct in the reception of TV series, but, in addition, according to the study presented in this work, *Lost* has also shown an innovation in the use of new advertising strategies in the sector and the transformation of the conventional devices used presently. With this aim, the creators of the

promotional campaign of *Lost* have not only understood the importance of the implications of the fandom of the show in advertising actions, but they have also converted the internet in the strategic center from which each and every one of the advertising devices start.

Thanks to these strategies, *Lost* has become a brand which continues being advertised even after the conclusion of the series. It cannot only be considered a commercial product, but in addition it must be seen as a cultural product that has been inserted in the collective imaginary and that continues generating conversation in the network today. For this reason, the authors of this work consider that *Lost* has marked a new era in the promotion of TV series.

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