



Eric Yaverbaum on Tappingen.com's Happening

By Heather Fletcher, senior editor, *Target Marketing*

Tap water is the new "cool" drink; some credit the lagging economy for its popularity, considering what bottled water costs. Others credit Tappingen, a public awareness project and Web site that is just happening to make its creators richer.

New Yorkers Mark DiMassimo and Eric Yaverbaum—an advertising agency veteran and a public relations expert, respectively—created Tappingen.com in November 2007 because they wanted to reduce the impact the bottled water industry has on the environment. More than 4.5 million page views and thousands of environmentally friendly bottle and tap-water-related product sales later, Yaverbaum speaks about Tappingen.

Target Marketing: Who was your original Tappingen client?

Eric Yaverbaum: Well, Tappingen was invented by Mark DiMassimo and I. ... Initially, our idea was, "Let's use our marketing brains to do something good for the planet" a year ago, and it's become topic du jour very recently. A year ago, we saw a documentary called "Garbage! The Revolution Starts at Home," and we said, "I never knew where all my garbage went." You know, I throw out my garbage. Nor did I know the extent to which bottled water stays in landfills for 1,000 years. We said, "Well, there's something that's a big waste of money. There's something that our marketing minds could do something with." ... Mark and I invested \$200,000—\$100,000 each. And we basically said, "If we can sell 39,000 bottles in one year, we would break even on all the marketing costs and we would send this great message out." Well, we sold 39,000 bottles in 48 hours. ... We had no idea. We did not expect that. Tappingen has become one of my biggest clients.

TM: What direct marketing techniques did you employ to drum up interest in Tappingen?

EY: I would say that everything that we've done has been direct marketing. I'm a big believer in accountable marketing; marketing that you can tangibly measure. So that means [direct marketing is employed] whether it's the ad campaign that we're running, whether it's the analytics that tell us where people are coming from—about like 50 percent come from just doing Google searches of our name. But the other 50 percent, we can tell exactly where they're coming from.

The program that we launched Tappingen with was to send us a message in a bottle. And every person who sent us a message got a note from us thanking them, with a link to the site. The clickthroughs on that were enormous. That was a million names to start. And when you can start with a million names of people that are highly enthusiastic about what you're doing and are partial to your perspective, those are obviously people that are potential future clients. Or, I shouldn't say clients, they're people that are going to want to buy your product.

TM: What channel did you launch in? How did you reach people?

EY: All we did was PR. That's how we launched this company. We had the Web site that we have today and PR programs. ... It was the press that drove the people to our site; otherwise, nobody would've known about us. I mean, we didn't have any money to advertise when we started.

TM: After the press drove consumers to your site, what marketing efforts did you employ?

EY: The campaign that we have right now, a quarter million people downloaded the ads. That's a quarter million new people to come to our site to download our advertising campaign and pass it around. ... People actually have these ads hanging in their offices. They feel like they're making political statements ... People download these ads and pass them around to their friends.

TM: How could a marketer replicate the Tapping marketing model?

EY: I'm not telling. You know, the thing about what we did was ... we were just very good at getting attention. ... It was already happening long before us. What I would say is that there was a fire already happening, and we came and we poured gasoline on it. So, as a business model, when you see a fire somewhere, if you can create a solution and pour some gasoline on it, you will reap the reward of that.

###