

Should Firms Swing Onto Vine?

BY GERALD FLORES

NEW YORK — There's a new way for companies to tout themselves through social media.

Vine, a mobile application that is featured on Twitter and allows users to create and share six-second looping videos, debuted earlier this year. The platform, which was the top free downloaded app in the iTunes store last month, has attracted firms such as Converse, Puma, Urban Outfitters and Nordstrom.

"We definitely see huge potential," said Puma's global head of digital, Remi Carlioz. "Vine provides us with a new format to produce content, and it allows us to feature product in a new and exciting context."

At press time, more than 40 six-second, stop-motion videos had been posted on the brand's Vine handle. Going forward, Carlioz said, there are plans to eventually integrate the app into Puma's overall digital marketing strategy, as well as leverage athlete endorsers and other assets in its Vine posts.

But for now, the label is still experimenting. "Sometimes the best strategy is to have an evolving one,"

Carlioz said. "Our strategy today is to create the best content we can and see how people are interacting with it. As we see their reactions, we'll adapt."

Marketing experts suggest that before companies jump onto Vine, they should first decide if it meshes with their consumer demographic.

"It may not be right for everyone," said brand consultant Denise Lee

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— Remi Carlioz, Puma

Yohn. "If you look at the media and suspect it could be a powerful way to connect with your customer, then it's a matter of leveraging Vine's unique capabilities."

She noted that productive ways to use Vine include creating how-to content, such as illustrating how to match an outfit with a pair of shoes, or highlighting a particular feature or technology on products.

Yohn also said content should be less about selling products and more about pure entertainment.

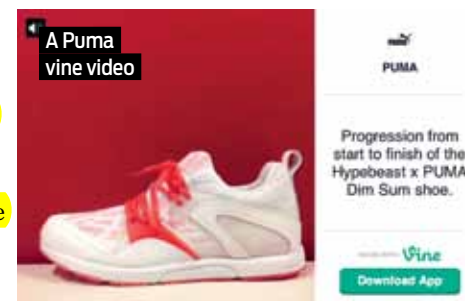
"Video is ideal for telling a story, so there has to be a beginning, middle and end — even if it's only six seconds," she said. "The mistake brands can make is thinking of Vine as a glorified print ad."

Dave Wieneke, CEO of digital consulting firm Useful Arts, recommended crowdsourcing consumers to create videos based around a particular marketing campaign. As with other social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, he explained, involving consumers in the making of Vine videos can help increase virality, as well as give brands more content.

"It's nice to show product, but it's even better to show the product in motion and being used by real people," Wieneke said.

But while he sees potential for Vine as a marketing tool, Wieneke noted the mobile app, which is currently only available for Apple products, has a long way to go before it is widely used.

"The platform is so young and there are some changes ahead," Wieneke said. "It's still difficult to use and there are some standards that



need to evolve."

New York-based sneaker boutique West NYC has been on Vine for two months and is still testing it out. Owner Lester Wasserman, who has fewer than 20 posts so far, said he came across the app when he saw high school-aged customers using it in his store.

"We're not using it very effectively," the retailer admitted, adding that one of the biggest difficulties is the time it takes to create a compelling video. "All the good Vine videos are like six-second movies that have a plot, and I'm not doing anything but showing product at this point," he said.

Wasserman added that West NYC's following on Vine is significantly smaller than on the photo app Instagram. "I know Vine is important, but I just don't know how important," Wasserman said.

Tkees Goes Global, Moves Beyond Core

BY KRISTEN HENNING

NEW YORK — Tkees is building momentum.

After a strong start in the U.S., the 4-year-old Canadian company, known for its cosmetics-inspired flip-flops, is expanding into more key doors glob-



ally. "We continue to be surprised at how many flip-flops we can sell," said co-founder and CEO Jesse Burnett.

The brand is also diversifying its product mix. Tkees is launching a closed-toe style called the Senny for fall '13, as well as a leather ballerina flat for 2014. By broadening the offering, the brand aims to further widen its reach.

"Anytime you look at seasonal footwear, there are high and low points [in terms of the selling season]," said co-founder and creative director Carly Burnett. "A lot of our growth is [geared] toward being a really successful all-season footwear company."

The brand also is boosting its core business. It will relaunch kids' styles for resort '13 to capture a larger share

of that market. "The mommy-and-me approach really works. Moms love the [product] because they can dress their little girls," said Carly Burnett.

The product initiatives are part of the company's goal to enter more top-tier retail stores. Neiman Marcus is a new account for spring. Tkees also added Zappos.com to its retail roster earlier this year and has expanded with Nordstrom.

"The brand is performing well and sits nicely with all of our flip-flop brands," said Zappos buyer Myra Taylor. "We love Tkees because they name their styles after different elements of makeup. It keeps the brand exciting and the girl coming back for more."

Hallie Rosenthal, buyer for Palm

Beach, Fla.-based Rapunzels has been working with the label since 2010. "Tkees is one of our best sellers, and their timing was great. They filled the fashion void for nude flip-flops," said Rosenthal.

Globally, the brand recently debuted at Lane Crawford in Shanghai and Hong Kong as part of an overseas push. (Currently, about half of sales come from the U.S., 15 percent from Canada and the rest from international accounts.)

As it looks to become a more competitive global player, the brand continues to rely on celebrity support from such names as Blake Lively, Jessica Alba and Jennifer Aniston.

"The Hollywood A-listers have been very important to our business because they act as great brand ambassadors," said Jesse Burnett.