

Bethesda Softworks uses the innovative Branded Video ad format on the AdMob network to unleash the trailer for its new game Dishonored



At a Glance

Goals

- Raise awareness of upcoming launch of brand-new game Dishonored
- Stimulate excitement through different touch points to coincide with trailer release

Approach

- Employed new Branded Video mobile ad format
- Used just two assets in creation of ad
- Ran ad on AdMob's network of apps over 12 days

Results

- Produced 13% user interaction with the ad unit
- Raised awareness among target gaming audience
- Total in-ad video view time was 93,555 minutes

Background

Founded in 1986, Bethesda Softworks is a developer and publisher of interactive entertainment content. With a broad portfolio of PC and console games in role-playing games and first person shooters, Bethesda's major franchises – including Fallout, The Elder Scrolls and RAGE – are distributed worldwide. In an original world envisioned by Half Life 2 art director, Viktor Antonov, in Dishonored you are cast as Corvo, a bodyguard who is framed for the Empresses murder. Thrust into your role as a Supernatural assassin, you must seek revenge against those who betrayed you. Dishonored is published by Bethesda and released on 12th October 2012 on Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.

Challenge: Game on

Bethesda wanted to create excitement around the release of the Dishonored announcement trailer, but faced a challenge. "Dishonored is a brand new IP into the gaming market, which itself is struggling within the tough economic conditions and the tail end of the current console lifecycle," explains Russell Ball, senior account manager for Bethesda's media planning and buying agency, Target Media. "So we faced a challenge, as it's not another sequel or part of an established franchise. The game is developed by Arkane Studios (Dark Messiah of Might and Magic, contributors to Bioshock 2) and published by Bethesda Softworks (The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, RAGE, Fallout New Vegas), so we have a rich gaming heritage to build on. We needed to educate the hardcore gaming audience who we're sure will love Dishonored and its unique gameplay."

With a visually stunning announcement trailer, Russell and his colleagues began to craft a plan for establishing Dishonored in a front-of-mind position among the game's target audience. "It's a slightly different audience to the people who pick up the big franchises. You've got the more mainstream gaming audience, who buy four or five titles a year, whereas we're trying to hit a more committed audience who buy a game once every month or potentially every couple of weeks. They're tech savvy and have probably got both PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. The strategy was to target the early adopters, because we have to build up awareness in the key demographic early on."

Approach: Make some noise

To stimulate interest, Target Media knew it had to bring Dishonored to life, and video immediately emerged as the most effective way to accomplish this. "What we've generally been moving towards over the past couple of years is investing more money into video, because that's where we can showcase the unique gameplay and capture audience imagination," Russell says. "Also, people tend to share videos with others. Video has become a much bigger focus for us on all our campaigns."

Given the early phase in the Dishonored lifecycle, assets included some static images and two versions of gripping trailer, using a rich media ad format made perfect sense. "It's a brand-new game," Russell observes. "The best way to showcase what it's about is through video. The trailer was so captivating, it was important to use it to visually excite people."

Meanwhile, the team understood that the target audience of early adopters and committed gamers were also likely to be heavy users of smartphones

“This is a high-impact format which can generate a high volume of views in a short space of time.”

-- **Russell Ball, Senior Account Manager, Target Media**

and tablets. “Smartphone penetration in the UK is now over 50%, being driven by younger male audiences. Combined with tablet uptake, particularly the iPad, there’s a tangible gaming audience for us to reach out to.”¹ Target Media required an ad unit for showing video on mobile devices that would have a huge reach and impact among potential consumers of the game.

Solution: New game, new ad unit

Google’s Rich Media Designs for Mobile are new templates to make it easy for advertisers to create ads using existing assets and then implement them across platforms including mobile and tablet. Target Media seized the opportunity to use the new Branded Video format to create buzz around Dishonored.



Branded Video allowed Target Media to embed a video creative within a brandable interactive backdrop. The clip could play with full inline video and audio, meaning that when the video plays, the user can view it in place rather than being redirected outside of the ad to the native video player on their device. The Target Media team used a short 20-second version of the game’s trailer featured on a backdrop incorporating an image of the mask worn by the game’s protagonist. By using just these two assets, the cost and turnaround time of the custom ad unit was kept to a minimum.

The aim was to get the maximum number of targeted views for the short trailer whilst also driving users to click to Bethesda’s YouTube channel to watch the full four-minute version. Target Media opted to run the ad on the AdMob network, which provided the perfect platform to reach an audience of gamers when they were on their mobile devices. Covering over 300,000 apps in 150 countries, AdMob is one of the largest networks of mobile applications and sites in the world. In this context, the interstitial video gave the ad unit extra impact and the custom background image successfully leveraged the Dishonored brand. The timing of the AdMob campaign was coordinated with desktop efforts to complete a powerful multi-screen approach.

Results: Watch and learn

“Because of the huge reach that AdMob could offer, we delivered millions of impressions and clicks through to YouTube in quite a short space of time,” Russell reveals. Over the 12 days that it ran, the Dishonored campaign recorded a 13% click-through rate to the four-minute trailer on m.youtube. “With AdMob, it was really, really cost effective. We had a low CPM, and when you work it back to cost per click it was extremely cost effective. We had a strong click-through rate, so as a campaign it really delivered.”

But Russell insists that the positive outcomes don’t end with the numbers. To create excitement around a new product requires multiple exposures to the brand over time so that awareness can become embedded. Mobile display ads using video provide an ideal way to reach consumers across different touch points. “It’s vital for any AAA release that as soon as the title is announced, that the user is rewarded with as much content, especially video, through until its release. These gamers are incredibly loyal to publishers and their games, and we must never become complacent to that fact.”



1 TNS research shows that as of Jan/Feb 2012, UK smartphone ownership had reached 51%