



TOYOTA



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SOCIAL SUCCESS FOR TOYOTA: IQ HYPERMILING TEST REACHES 105 MILLION PEOPLE

OVERVIEW

During 2008-09 iCrossing UK, a global **digital marketing agency**, ran a programme of social media activity for **Toyota GB** to help raise awareness of its iQ city car. This integrated initiative combining agencies glue and Brandwidth, was based on a core blog (www.toyota.co.uk/iqblog) and a series of activities designed to create word-of-mouth referrals that drove traffic to the blog and generated interest in the car itself.

One of these activities was a bold experiment to drive the car to as many cities in the UK as possible on one tank of fuel. So, in January 2009, two members of iCrossing's Content & Media team undertook a **'Hypermiling'** road trip in the iQ that was comprehensively covered through in social media spaces.

The hypermiling attempt reached over 105 million people worldwide and 3.7 million people in the UK alone as a result of coverage on high profile blogs, including Wired magazine, and led to a 200% uplift in traffic to the iQ blog.

OBJECTIVE

The Toyota iQ is a car for 30-40 something city dwellers. This is a younger and more fashionable demographic than Toyota's traditional UK customer. The iQ social media campaign had to appeal to this demographic and had two main objectives.

The first was to raise awareness of the iQ and its attributes among hard-to-reach but influential environmental, automotive and technology blogs and to connect directly with people who use social media platforms such as Twitter and Flickr.

The second objective was to increase the visibility of information about the iQ brand in the results of major search engines via links and traffic back to the 'This is iQ' blog. Influential blogs are ranked highly by Google and other search engines as authoritative sources, meaning that links and traffic from these sites have

a more positive effect on the rankings of recipient sites. As a result, mentions and recommendations on social media sites can have a significant influence on a brand's overall online profile that is above and beyond the simple value of the blog's own readership.

THE PROGRAMME

The overall iQ social media campaign was based around the idea of marketing activity being driven by strong editorial output. The nature of social media means that one-way, product-led interaction simply doesn't work.

With this in mind, the iQ blog is written by journalists rather than marketers. The content is designed to appeal to readers and to contribute to existing online conversations around cars and fuel efficiency. For this reason, it was vital that a proportion of the content on the blog was exclusive and unique; it needed to be based on good stories that other users of social media would want to read about, comment on, link to and write about.

The hypermiling attempt was developed by the iCrossing team as a way of creating exclusive editorial content that would grab reader interest while highlighting one of the key attributes of the vehicle, its fuel efficiency.

The attempt saw two of iCrossing's 'This is iQ' bloggers attempting a 500-mile road trip in a Toyota iQ, all on a single tank of petrol. The trip would take the two drivers to 18 UK cities and every step of the journey would be shared through social media

The drivers reported their journey on the iQ blog, reported their status on **Twitter** and uploaded photos to **Flickr**. Their position was tracked via a Google Maps mashup using the GPS function on an iPhone. Given that the activity had a clear editorial rather than marketing focus, all of the creative output to these social media sites was presented in a deliberately 'lo-fi', human and non-commercial manner.

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"What makes Toyota's effort interesting is it doesn't feel like it was scripted by suits. The hypermiling challenge contains an element of mystery that draws in readers. The bloggers acknowledge there's a chance the stunt may fail, and the appearance of a "whatever happens, happens" attitude from Toyota conveys the company's confidence in its product — something other car companies don't have the stones to pull off."

Alongside progress reports from the driving team itself, further interest was generated via word of mouth. iCrossing's social media team contacted high profile blogs to point them in the direction of the 'This is iQ' blog which contained all the information they needed to find out more and write about the activity. This 'light touch' approach meant the team generated additional links and traffic back to Toyota's site from all coverage of the attempt.

OUTCOME

On the drive, the car exceeded its official combined cycle figure of 65.7mpg, reaching 71.6mpg.

In terms of coverage, the hypermiling activity resulted in 64 blogs, including Wired, the New York Times and Treehugger, reporting the attempt with Toyota reaching a potential audience of over 105 million readers worldwide and 3.7 million in the UK alone.

Traffic to the iQ blog increased by more than 212% and, just as importantly, the origin of incoming traffic fundamentally changed. Whereas visitors were previously arriving predominantly from search engines and the Toyota website, traffic directed from third party sites rose from 15% to more than 50% of traffic

– representing a 32-fold volume increase in referrals. These readers were also likely to be high value, being pre-disposed to view iQ in a positive light because of the independent advocacy of the editorial coverage

The Twitter channel was also effective. While overall users numbers were relatively low, reflecting the emergent nature of this platform, the levels of interaction were impressive, with 'followers' contacting the driving crew with hints and encouragement along the way.

Beyond these numerical success metrics, the hypermiling attempt meant that Toyota had succeeded in reaching new audiences – readers of influential blogs who might not have otherwise visited Toyota's site.

It also enjoyed a high level of advocacy because the challenge element of the Hypermiling campaign – and the fact that the car was good enough to meet it – have led to universally positive editorial coverage. Toyota will also continue to benefit from the long term impact of the activity because links from influential blogs will remain and continue to deliver tail traffic to support natural search rankings.



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