

Interrogating integration

By [Candy Dempers](#), issued by [MediaHeads 360](#)

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"Run Forrest, Run." You can picture the scene from the now classic, 1994 movie. All the emotions, the quotes and the human spirit captured by the Oscar-winning, Tom Hanks in *Forrest Gump*. It was also the first time I remember seeing a brand in a movie that stuck with me.



As the orange box is opened, revealing the iconic white sneaker with a blue line on the sole and the giant red tick, Nike entered the hearts of an entire generation of eager sneaker-wearing teenagers. Although the product placement wasn't subtle, the tie into the storyline and the purpose of the brand were a perfect match.

We've briefly looked at integration in the advertising space and it is clear that both product placement and brand integration are powerful tools for brands and products to connect with consumers. By seamlessly integrating their products or services into a storyline, brands can capture the attention of viewers without interrupting their viewing experience. The non-intrusive nature of this kind of marketing is invaluable at a time when consumers are becoming increasingly aware of (and resistant to) traditional advertising.

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With video on demand experiencing a sharp rise in subscribers in 2020, the growth trend continues and South Africa is often seen as a gateway into the rest of the continent by companies looking to invest in the creative economy. This bodes well for screenwriters and production houses as viewers continue to embrace new technology and greater internet coverage as they widen their viewing bouquet.

Continual changes in viewing technology and platforms as well as consumption habits necessitate the need to be reviewing, experimenting, and innovating in the advertising space. Audiences are attracted by content offerings and by creating an affinity to the content, the audience becomes a valuable tool. The value of engaged audiences is powerful and understanding the platforms where the affinity is built remains key in unlocking value.

There have been several instances in the last few months that have caught my attention.

The Netflix series, *Stranger Things*, has demonstrated the ability of powerful storytelling in a TV series to create engaged audiences, who can influence the use and success of a brand. Kate Bush is a musician who had success in the 1980s but has enjoyed renewed success in 2022. Ironically, Bush didn't have to do anything. Her song, *Running Up That Hill*, peaked at number three on the charts in 1985 and forty-four years later has spent more than a month at number one. The success of the song is attributed to it being used in Season 4 of *Stranger Things*. It is the viewers who loved the way the song resonated with them in the series that then lead them to search for the song on music streaming platforms and changed its trajectory completely.

Stranger Things has also influenced an entire generation of teenagers to wear Metallica t-shirts despite not being ardent fans of the rock supergroup. Metallica's song *Master of Puppets* was also used in the last series and had viewers lighting up Twitter, talking about the scene and song. Viewer affinity to the TV series has had a knock-on effect on band merchandise, with T-shirts being the number one item being snatched up.

There is a clear picture of success in the power of well-crafted content and the appropriate use of products in storytelling. Good storytelling cuts across platforms and the use of social media platforms to create a multi-faceted approach to integration cannot be ignored. Product integration requires a multi-disciplinary approach not only to the storytelling but to the platforms as well. Known for giving you 'Wings', Red Bull is a notable example of a brand that understands narrative storytelling and building audience across multi-platforms. It's all about high performance and engaging content to deliver international relevance and maximum brand impact. Their latest offering of landing an aeroplane on top of an iconic building in Dubai, certainly hit the integration bullseye!

What is clear for us as a team at MediaHeads 360 is that brand and product integration is not linear. We understand that from conceptualisation to implementation, the rules are different and not straightforward in approach. One needs to embrace a collaborative and dynamic approach and know that it is an ongoing process that evolves over time. Rather than a one-time event, successful brand integration requires a sustained effort to keep a product, brand or service integrated into the storyline and in the minds of the audience. This can involve creating new storylines or plot points that feature the product or brand and finding new ways to incorporate the brand's messaging into the overall narrative.



Mic check, one two. Pushing record on production

Candy Dempers, MediaHeads 360 5 Apr 2023



As a specialist agency, MediaHeads 360, has harnessed the mutual relationships that exist in the TV integration space and our team actively work with production teams while scripting and filming TV programmes. During each season, the use of products and brands becomes more refined as storylines develop and synergies are expanded.

Successful brand integration requires a flexible and dynamic approach that allows brands to adapt to changing circumstances and stay connected to their target audience.

Forrest Gump said that life was like a box of chocolates, you never knew what you were going to get next. Don't let that be your next campaign, work with the Team at MediaHeads 360, we'll help you find the sweet spot!

ABOUT CANDY DEMPERS

- Candy Dempers has loved all things media for twenty-three years. A sales and marketing specialist, her first love was radio and bringing brands and platforms together.
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