



MEDIA RELEASE
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SMIRNOFF'S ORIGINAL THINKING SCORES GLOBAL ACCOLADE

SECRET AGENT CAMPAIGN HELD UP AS WORLD'S BEST PRACTICE

The world's largest spirit maker Diageo has awarded the New Zealand marketing team for Smirnoff Vodka its most prestigious annual global marketing award, the President's Award for Original Thinking. The ground-breaking experiential campaign, which sparked thousands of Kiwis to sign up as secret agents and build an unprecedented ambassador base, saw off competition from countries around the world.

The 2007 campaign became a Kiwi cult, with secret agents challenged to join an espionage organisation and undertake a range of bizarre missions in order to gain kudos and win a coveted place at an underworld gathering. The espionage organisation was driven via a website, with continuous contact maintained with agents through SMS, secret mail drops, chalk messages on pavements and a variety of other communication methods.

Simple in concept, but complex and meticulously time-intensive in roll-out, the Nikolai secret agent recruitment drive became a huge hit with Smirnoff's core market. The excitement it generated led to Smirnoff brand owners Diageo to acclaim the campaign for creating '500% more word-of-mouth impact than our best European campaign on record.'

The campaign was described by brand owners Diageo as 'a brilliant idea, seamlessly executed into market. More importantly, the campaign delivered outstanding business results in volume, profit, and market share.' Smirnoff average volume sales per month grew 29% versus year ago and propelled Smirnoff to be the most adored brand amongst 18-24 year old in both the Vodka full strength market and Total RTD market. (*TNS Nov 2008*)

Gretchen Borja, Smirnoff Brand Manager of New Zealand marketing and distribution agent Lion Nathan, added, "By winning the President's Award for Original Thinking against campaigns from across the globe, New Zealand is now at the forefront of global marketing excellence for Smirnoff. Our campaign will be widely shared and will be cited as global best practice. This campaign shows what true alignment of ideas and imagination between client and agency can achieve."

The Nikolai campaign was masterminded by suit Friday O'Flaherty and creative Hadleigh Averill, when they worked together at WRC and who now jointly handle Smirnoff's experiential work in the NZ market as Running With Scissors and The Agent C.

Averill says the campaign's popularity can be attributed to the escapism it provided. "We facilitated a space for people to develop an alter ego and bring it to life in the real world. It's a platform that fuses the virtual and real worlds into a cinematic spy-world experience."

O'Flaherty pays tribute to Lion Nathan's courage in backing the Nikolai concept. "It was a real departure from conventional marketing and a brave move for the Lion Nathan team. It's a tribute to their imagination and commitment in taking a really unusual creative idea to market.

"The energy this campaign created just blew us all away. It generated its own force field – we had Smirnoff eagle emblems appearing all over the place. The lengths some agents went to, in order to demonstrate their commitment, was astonishing," he added.

The evolution of the Nikolai platform continues this year in a unique and engaging way. Now, in phase two of operations, the organization attempts to rally agents together to effect positive change on a grand scale. It's a big idea and it continues at www.theno.org.nz.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About the campaign

All agents were tasked with executing covert spy-like missions, some of which saw the Smirnoff eagle emblem seen in many high profile places. From the walls of Parliament Buildings to the heads of statues and the rooftops of the Auckland CBD, the brand logo was carried onto the streets of New Zealand in a staggering array of enterprising and imaginative exploits.

Fronted by subversive Russian playboy, Nikolai – Smirnoff itself was never identified, but most agents worked out the connection during their missions. This intellectual challenge sparked brand interest and loyalty when they eventually pinpointed Smirnoff – resonating with their youthful cynicism about overt advertising messages.