

A Smobering Way To Quit Smoking

A new campaign from Nicorette is part viral marketing; part reality television

By Rachel Mendleson
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Fraser, a lacrosse coach from Hamilton, Ont., has been a hard-core smoker for 23 years. As one of the eight Canadians featured in Nicorette's new web-based advertising campaign, Fraser wants to quit. But as he explains in the first instalment of Smober Up, a series of 10 so-called "webisodes" that premièred on a dedicated YouTube channel in June, kicking the habit is no easy task. "I hate that I'm smoking," he tells his video diary, the upward-tilted, handheld camera accentuating the frowning in his brow, "and I'm going out for a smoke."

This kind of raw anguish is often on display in Smober Up, which chronicles the ups and downs of smokers trying to quit—as host Ray Zahab remarks in the opening segment, "with a little support from Nicorette." And according to Daniel Zeff, CEO of Evidently, the creative agency that conceived of the campaign for the Johnson & Johnson-owned brand, it's the real thing. "It's not a sort of generated, manufactured piece of reality," he says. "There's a lot of emotion...when people think about making that big decision to quit. As soon as you give people the opportunity to speak about the experience, that just pours out."

Indeed. Barely a minute into the first webisode (each runs about eight minutes), Shelley's voice breaks as she explains that she's quitting for her daughters. "I want to be a good role model for them," she



says. “I want to be stronger than smoking because I want them to be strong too.” Health concerns also elicit tears: John cries as he tells viewers that he’s quitting for his sister, who recently died from lung cancer; Jaime reaches for a tissue at the mention of her mom, a smoker with a lump in her throat.

While the personal stories do capture consumers’ attention, says Michael Mulvey, an assistant professor of marketing at University of Ottawa’s Tefler School of Management, it’s the gentle integration of the product that makes the campaign “a big departure for Big Pharma.” Though Nicorette “has a role to play” in the plot (the quitters are shown using the brand’s various smoking cessation aids), “it isn’t the hero to the rescue,” he says. Rather than being a silver bullet, it is presented as “more of a helper that’s on your side as much as other people in your social network.”

So how successful is the campaign? Though Zeff declined to comment on whether the agency has reached its targets, he says the fact that the YouTube channel has received some 100,000 views “speaks for itself.” Still, there may be room for improvement. According to Darren Barefoot of the Vancouver-based Internet market research firm Capulet Communications, rather than asking viewers to submit personal video testimonials (the site shows only four entrants in a contest to win \$300 in Nicorette products), he suggests using blogs and other social networking tools to open up dialogue and “enable us to interact with these stars of the show.”

And there is another, more immediate concern: what if the stars of Smober Up can’t quit? Zeff concedes it is possible. “You’ll have to watch and see who makes it,” he says. “That’s reality.”