

Nicorette backs reality webisodes

by Barry Walsh
From RealScreen.com
July 12, 2010

Creative communications agency Evidently, with offices in Toronto, Los Angeles and London, has teamed up with Johnson & Johnson brand Nicorette for Smober Up, a 10-episode reality web series currently featured on [YouTube \(www.youtube.com/smoberup\)](http://www.youtube.com/smoberup).

The series, wholly produced in-house by the agency's Toronto office, features eight Canadians who, for varying personal reasons, have decided to take the plunge and get "smober" (the Urban Dictionary defines being "smober" as "being nicotine free and no longer smoking"). Hosted by ex-smoker and marathon runner/motivational speaker Ray Zahab, the eight participants undergo a series of healthy challenges to illustrate what smoking has done to their bodies, and, of course, integrate Nicorette products such as the Patch into their efforts to quit.

Evidently CEO Daniel Zeff says that while the docureality format provided the best way to integrate the brand's needs with entertaining content, no current reality program provided a template for the web series.

"This wasn't developed with any other show in mind at all," he says. "We don't have any 'losers' in this. If you watch through to the end, the point is not to tempt people to fall off the wagon - it's about winning for yourself."

Evidently VP-head of planning Marisa May Caple says the agency pitched the client on the project after completing a couple of short films for the brand and feeling the potential to incorporate more real stories into the messaging remained unexplored. "We were feeling that we were really just scratching the surface in terms of stories to be told about people who are quitting," she says. "Talk to anyone, and they know someone who's quit or is trying to quit. There seemed to be a richness that was untapped."

After hosting an open casting call in Canada, Evidently narrowed down the participants to the eight featured in the English-language version of the series (for French-speaking Canada, there's a web series featuring two Francophone participants). The "characters" include Fraser, a lacrosse coach who

has been smoking for 23 years, and John, who is compelled to quit after losing his sister to lung cancer. "What we were really looking for were smokers who were interested in quitting and also those people who we thought would have really interesting and inspirational stories," says Zeff. "We thought it might be a struggle to find those really compelling stories, but it was a gift of riches."

As for bringing the brand into the content, Zeff says Evidently takes an aggressive stance against "shoehorning" a brand into entertainment, and incorporating Nicorette products into a series about kicking the habit was a purely logical fit. "[Working brands into content] can be very liberating creatively if you start from the right point of view," he maintains. "If you start with the right team in place and at the right moment, then you have an incredible opportunity to do something that's every bit entertainment-first and also delivers to the brand's objectives. The key is to integrate everyone involved from the get-go, and to keep your eye on the audience all the way through."

Episode four debuted today (Monday, July 12), and the series concludes in late August. As for any other plans for the format, including taking it to broadcast, Zeff says, "Everything is being considered."