

## Citibank invests in content initiatives

Banking group reaches out to blog readers to take youth card to market in Singapore, writes *Sharon Desker Shaw*

Citibank is banking on the power of content in taking two new products to market in Singapore and Malaysia.

The banking giant teamed up with blog aggregator Nuffnang to launch its credit card for young adults in Singapore, and it has rolled out a mobile service to alert its cardholders in Malaysia to deals and discounts available at merchant outlets globally.

With about 3,500 bloggers in Singapore signed to its service, Nuffnang provided Citibank a platform to explain the card's features and benefits to Clear's target audience of tertiary students and young adults using content that's largely written by this demographic.

The bank asked 20 bloggers from Nuffnang's community to provide advertorial for the product based on copy points such as its no minimum income requirement, first year fee waiver, privileges at more than 600 locations such as coffee chains, music stores,



Banking on blogs... working with bloggers to reach a young adult target audience

clubs, and its one-touch biometric payment method.

The bank paid for the advertorials but left the bloggers alone to decide on the tone and content, according to Nuffnang co-founder Cheo Ming Shen. Hence postings were devoid of corporate-speak. "18-year-olds already can legally drink, smoke and have sex. What's the big deal with managing 500 buckaroos", wrote one of the

card's spending limit, while another noted: "In all, a great card with lots of added benefits. The only downside is that the limit is 500 bucks. But I guess that its only fair with the no-minimum income condition."

According to Cheo, another five per cent started blogging about the card after seeing the advertorials. Clear card's launch saw Citibank make one

of its biggest bets to date in using digital media. In addition to the blogs, it had banners on Friendster, Yahoo and MSN.

Over in Malaysia, where Citibank is one of the market's biggest card issuers, the bank has launched a free mobile shopping directory for its 1 million cardholders.

World Privileges — the first such service of its kind in the bank's Asia Pacific network — allows cardholders to download information on discounts and offers at 40,000 merchant outlets in more than 40 countries, onto their handsets.

While the downloads are free, users pay for GPRS, 3G or WAP connection charges. Citibank Malaysia CEO Piyush Gupta said the bank launched the service as it recognised that its cardholders often missed out on shopping, dining and travel deals because the information was not readily available. The bank is looking to attract 100,000 users over the next two years. ■

## Review Chin Weng Keong, Arachnid Malaysia

If you've spent any time trolling about facebook.com, you'd have realised that a sizeable subset of its population reads like a who's who of the advertising and marketing world. How did Facebook become such a hit in our cynical industry?

Does Facebook offer more advertising avenues to marketing professionals? Not really. In fact, it's only been weeks since Facebook started revealing advertising real estate. I'd venture a guess that it's really because of two reasons: firstly, a case of fortunate timing. The majority of our industry colleagues watched from the sidelines as Friendster and MySpace zipped by. They may have kept abreast as skimmers and dippers, but with Facebook,



Facebook... "appearing cooler than we really are"

they've finally come to terms with the need to dive in and experience the fuss for themselves.

Secondly, the draw of appearing cooler or more popular than we really are is just too irresistible. It's like the 1990s chat phenomenon all over again except this time the brilliant 'open' architecture allows for an infinite number of third-party apps, offering even more play value. I hope that eventually the joy of (re)connecting with friends will prevail over the inane zombie-biting and stroking of virtual pets. It's funny how even senior executives have pandered to these activities, with excuses that range from "not wanting to appear rude" to the ever-popular "research".