

June 12, 2006

ADVERTISING

Mixing Diet Coke and Mentos Makes a Gusher of Publicity

By SUZANNE VRANICA and CHAD TERHUNE
 June 12, 2006; Page B1

What do you get if you mix Mentos mint candies and Diet Coke?

- A. a science experiment
- B. a liquid mess
- C. a marketing coup

For Mentos, at least, the answer is a resounding C.

Hundreds of amateur videos have flooded the Internet in recent months showing an oddball experiment: people dropping the quarter-size Mentos candies into bottles of Diet Coke. The combination results in a geyser of soda that shoots as high as 20 feet into the air.

"It's a funny thing to do," says Sidney Shapiro, a 26-year-old student in Israel, who posted his film on Google Video last month.




Messrs. Voltz and Grobe and their fountain on Epybird.com

The popularity of the videos -- Mentos says it has found some 800 online -- is producing a gusher of free publicity for the candy maker, a unit of Italian confectioner Perfetti Van Melle. "We are tickled pink by it," says Pete Healy, vice president of marketing for the company's U.S. division. The company spends less than \$20 million on U.S. advertising annually. He estimates the value of online buzz to be "over \$10 million." The company is considering striking a marketing deal with the two men responsible for one of the more elaborate videos -- using 101 two-liter bottles of Diet Coke and 523 Mentos to create a dancing fountain like the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas -- posted on EpyBird.com¹, Mr. Healy says.

Coca-Cola Co. is much more blasé. "It's an entertaining phenomenon," said Coke spokeswoman

DOW JONES REPRINTS

 This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit: www.djreprints.com.

- [See a sample reprint in PDF format.](#)
- [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

Susan McDermott. "We would hope people want to drink [Diet Coke] more than try experiments with it." Coke could use some extra buzz right now. Sales volume of Diet Coke in the U.S. was essentially flat last year, as consumers switch from diet sodas to bottled water and other noncarbonated drinks. But Ms. McDermott says that the "craziness with Mentos ... doesn't fit with the brand personality" of Diet Coke.

Despite Coke's "Who needs it?" attitude, the phenomenon shows how brands can take on a life of their own, particularly on the Internet. Mentos' Mr. Healy points out that Coke-Mentos experiments have been around for years, but they have been given a new jolt by the newfound fascination among young people to create video content and share it online.

Many companies that have spent years and millions of dollars nurturing a brand aggressively try to retain control of how it is portrayed in public. Last year, FedEx sent a Tempe, Ariz., man a cease-and-desist letter demanding he take down his Web site that showed furniture -- such as a desk and chairs -- made out of FedEx boxes. "The FedEx brand is one of our most valuable assets," says Howard Clabo, a FedEx spokesman. "In this particular instance, we simply asked that the violator stop using our brand for their personal benefit." The site was down for a brief period but reappeared earlier this year.

For Mentos, however, the video buzz offers an opportunity too good to pass up. The candy maker is considering hiring the Eepybird.com duo to do demonstrations of their fountain trick -- perhaps even as the opening act for a music-concert tour, says Mr. Healy.

The men, Fritz Grobe, a 37-year-old professional juggler, and Stephen Voltz, 48-year-old lawyer, from Buckfield, Me., belong to a local theater company called Oddfellow theater. They got the idea after seeing a less sophisticated version online, and "We wanted to make it bigger and better and turn it into something theatrical," says Mr. Grobe.

After experimenting with different combinations of sodas and candies -- establishing that Mentos and Diet Coke produced the most spectacular effect -- they posted their film on EepyBird.com, a site they operate, on June 3. By last Friday, more than 800,000 people had watched the video on Revver.com, a broadband-video site. The pair say they have also had calls from several late-night talk shows, including CBS's "Late Show with David Letterman."

"It's all very exciting, it's been a whirlwind of attention," says Mr. Grobe. "We would be happy to help Mentos," adds Mr. Voltz.

What's the chemistry behind the geyser? San Diego chemist Neal Langerman suggests the answer lies in the higher level of carbon dioxide in diet sodas than other sodas and the porous surface area of a Mentos. Mr. Langerman, the past chairman of the division of chemical health and safety at the American Chemical Society, said similar results wouldn't be achieved with an M&M, for instance, "which is really solid." Diet Coke has more carbon dioxide than Diet Pepsi, he says. Coke wouldn't comment on the comparison.

Write to Suzanne Vranica at suzanne.vranica@wsj.com² and Chad Terhune at

chad.terhune@wsj.com³

URL for this article:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB115007602216777497.html>

Hyperlinks in this Article:

(1)

JAVASCRIPT:OpenWin('http://www.EepyBird.com',", '600', '450', 'na+me+lo+sc+re+st+', true, 0, 0, true);void("")

(2) <mailto:suzanne.vranica@wsj.com>

(3) <mailto:chad.terhune@wsj.com>

Copyright 2006 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our [Subscriber Agreement](#) and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com.