

Hip, cool, relevant promotions give trendy teens their 15 minutes of fame

By Connie Evener

Cory Hundley of Incredi-Roll Skate & Family Fun Center in West Allis, Wisc. and Chris Griffith of Skate Station in Sumter, N.C. are nine hundred miles and a time zone apart, but they're next-door neighbors in their approach to developing new promotions for trend sensitive teens.

The popularity of TV shows like "American Idol," "America's Next Top Model" and "America's Next Dance Crew" have inspired Hundley and Griffith to create their own hip, cool and relevant spin-offs.

"Our society is all about stardom. Everybody wants to be a star," said Hundley. "So you give them a chance at their 15 minutes of fame. That's the key, and that's what I think is the beauty of this business – having the opportunity to make so many people smile."

Griffith is on the same track. To take advantage of the American Idol phenomenon, "I re-vamped all my birthday parties last summer with the idea of giving that 15 minutes of fame." Skate Station now offers three birthday party packages: "Rising Star," "Super Star," and "Party Like a Rock Star."

"The teenagers in our market (Milwaukee) are heavily urban and Tyra Banks is just their girl," said Hundley. "America's Next Top Model is big with these girls. And whatever the girls do, the guys just follow," so late last year Hundley was hard at work planning his next

them a tag that says who they voted for," explained Hundley. "We'll declare the winner and they'll advance to the final at the end of the month." Those who voted for the winners will also get a free pass, a way to keep the voting honest.

The finals will include swim suit and evening dress competitions with a modeling school scholarship for the winner. Hundley thinks this type of promotion would work for both small and large markets. When "Star Search" was in vogue, about ten years ago, he did a similar promotion that was a huge success. As a matter of fact, its winner, Candice Michelle, who went on to a career in acting and modeling, is now known for her regular appearances with WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment.)

Griffith took his inspiration for Skate Station's first Shuffle Skate-off from the movies "Roll Bounce" and "ATL," and from BreakSk8, a jam-skating team from Kokomo, Indiana that made the finals on MTV's "America's Best Dance Crew."

"They made it down to the final four," said Griffith. "They were compet-

the floor." Unlike figure skating, there are no required elements. "It's all about interpretive movement. It's very, very creative."

Griffith began by dedicating certain sets of songs for shuffle skaters during

rink, and who don't get to demonstrate their skills before an audience.

Griffith's also planning a return of his YouTube Video Contest, challenging young film makers to produce short films – skits, commercials, documenta-



Skate Station of Sumter's "Shuffle Skate-off" not only kept kids coming back to the rink to practice their moves, but also increased sales in the pro-shop in the weeks leading up to the event.



big promotion, Incredi-Roll's take-off on "America's Next Top Model."

During the first three weeks of the month-long promotion, he'll sign up participants – male and female – as they arrive for the Friday night session. "We'll take digital photos, get releases, and put the photos up. Then we'll ask everyone attending the session to vote and give

ing against dancers, like in music videos, but they were on skates."

Shuffle skating, known as "rexxing" in California, "rubber-legging" in Florida, and as "disco" or "bounce skating" in other areas, is freestyle, "kind of half-skating and half-dancing," explained Griffith. "It can be one or two people or a group who move continuously around

his regular sessions. Before long, he said, "That's all they wanted to do," so he announced a Shuffle Skate-off, offering a gift card as first prize. For the six weeks before the contest, "the kids were practicing their behinds off, buying better skates, and buying better wheels," said Griffith.

Just as in the movie "Roll Bounce," Griffith played a couple of songs back-to-back, gave each team center stage, then named finalists based on applause level. The finalists then came back for encores to determine the winner.

Griffith thinks the promotion's success is also due to some points he first heard at a seminar a few year's ago: "Kids want to show off in a competitive arena, but without being tied down to regular after-school and weekend practices all the time, or the restrictions that come with being on the basketball or football team." When interviewed, Griffith was planning his next Shuffle Skate-off for early this year.

Griffith has also taken advantage of other pop culture trends. "Guitar Hero," the phenomenally popular music video game, will be returning for a second run at Skate Station later this year. Griffith splits his big screen and everybody watches and cheers as gamers do their dueling guitars routine. Griffith sees it as an opportunity to attract kids who wouldn't ordinarily be drawn to a skating

ries - that refer to skating and/or Skate Station itself. Participation the first time around was light, but once his customers saw the video entries, they were kicking themselves for not making their own, and begging for a second chance.

One of Hundley's favorite ways of conveying stardom is giving game winners a guest deejay spot. "The kid who won the game gets to come up and talk on the microphone. We introduce him or her, and have them read the upcoming promotions. So this little girl might be reading a promotion about our model talent search, so she's getting her fifteen minutes of fame promoting our business. Imagine you're the parent. Somebody just gave your child their fifteen minutes of fame," said Hundley. "How are you going to feel about a business that does that for your child?"

The "oldie but goodie" promotions, from Pink Night, Crazy Hat Night and Super Hero Night to games like Candy Scramble, Balloon Drop, Red Light-Green Light, and even the venerable Hokey-Pokey, are still going strong, especially with pre-teens and older folks who want some nostalgia along with their cardiovascular workout. The key to remember is that variety is the spice of life. From the trendy to the traditional, promotions are all about keeping skaters of all ages entertained, involved, smiling – and coming back.



Skate Station of Sumter's New Years Eve 2008 Party attracted all age with a Late Skate 'til 2am. The cost was \$15 plus rentals and included hats, horns, noise-makers, leis, party poppers, and AYCE pizza and drinks, after 11p.m. The theme was "Ring in the NEW Year - Live with Time Square." Heavy fog and lots of cool disco lights set the theme as guests counted down simultaneously with Time Square on the big screen, culminating in an in-rink balloon drop.



Promoting your promotion

Chris Griffith (Skate Station) and Cory Hundley (Incredi-Roll) know that radio and TV are effective in some markets. But in Sumter, N.C. and West Allis, Wisc., they've found in-house marketing the best investment of time and money. As Griffith puts it, "The best way to bring in business is to bring back business."

Here are some of the in-house techniques they use to promote their own promotions:

Use your deejay...

As Griffith noted, you have a captive audience, so have your deejay do regular announcements about upcoming promotions. When Griffith was interviewed in late December, his deejay was doing a 30-second spot about Skate Station's upcoming New Year's Party once an hour - all day, every day. "We're always advertising different skates, races, Pizza Night, our Pro-Shop," said Griffith. "You've got people there and they need to know what you have to offer."

Hundley does Power Point presentations on his TV screens and uses his MOAC system to put the promos right into his music mix to run automatically every 20 minutes.

Get employees excited about what you're doing...

"Make sure your employees understand what promotion is coming up," said Hundley. "I have employee meetings, constantly going over the details and getting them excited because if they're excited, they'll talk about it." And that peer-to-peer word of mouth is the best advertising, anytime, anywhere.

Turn visitors drawn by promotions into regular customers...

On any given Saturday, Griffith hands out at least 75 prizes. Birthday party guests are treated to an extra soda. But Griffith doesn't just hand the winner (or guest) a prize, he gives them a ticket and directions on where to take it for redemption. "No one redeems a prize without filling out all their information (name, address, date of birth) on the back of that ticket," said Griffith. With that information, Griffith can then shift into direct mail marketing of birthday parties and future promotions.

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