

## Taking to the Streets: How a Canadian Fashion Brand is Embracing Experiential Marketing

by Kendall Donaldson on DECEMBER 10, 2012 in [DX3 BEAT](#), [FASHION RETAIL](#), [Q&A](#), [RETAIL](#)



If there ever was a time when it was easy to be a retailer or a brand, one thing is certain: these days are not it.

It has never been harder to advertise to consumers than it is today, which can be a surprising revelation given that there has never been more technology (and innovative platforms) on hand to deliver advertising in any other time in human history. But just as true is the fact that modern consumers have more tools to block advertising than ever before (think ad blocker, tv recording devices etc.) and seemingly less desire to interact with whatever does get through.

All of which leads to an important problem: how do you get the attention of a consumer that is sick of advertising AND has increasingly effective (and easy to use) technology at their fingertips to avoid it?

There is no easy answer to this question, but for retail brands in particular there is a silver lining. As I was able to witness first-hand this fall at a Cougar Boots pop-up shop, well-executed experiential marketing remains as provocative and effective as ever.

Cougar Boots is a brand you may not remember. Huge in the 1980's with its classic tan leather (and waterproof!) pillow boot, the Cougar Boots name fell out of vogue for many of the intervening years between then and now. Over the past twelve months, however, the family run business has made a dramatic go at reviving its brand and a big part of that strategy has been experiential marketing.

As a fashion blogger, I keep my ear close to the ground to see how fashion brands are marketing themselves. Back in November I was contacted by Mackcay & Co (Cougar Boots' PR team) and was informed that a "pop-up shop" would be in my neighbourhood complete with a photo-shoot contest and a transparent fitting room. On the day of, the truck was your average sized moving cube van transformed to a sleek luxury wooden world. It was no surprise that the exhibit, covered in branding from head to toe, attracted a lot of interest throughout the day. I made my way down in the late afternoon and got to explore the "pop-up shop" firsthand.



Over the next forty minutes I had the opportunity to interact one-on-one with and learn about the brand. I got to connect with the team and participate in the photo contest. Even as a jaded, skeptical consumer it was hard to deny the appeal of spending so much time with a single brand in a seemingly simple but wholly engaging interactive experience.

But just how does this kind of project get started? To get a better idea for how Cougar Boots ended up embracing such an idea, I sat down with **Hannah Gourevitch**, Account Supervisor at Blammo Worldwide, to ask just that.

**Q: So how does a project like this come to life?**

For all our clients, the process always starts with the business problem. What are they trying to achieve? What do they want to say. This information forms the basis of our strategy and is the cornerstone of any campaign. From here on in the creative fun can start! With regards to Cougar Boots, we developed a strategy that brought together three elements of their brand: their Canadian roots, the stylish boots and the fact it was a brand and product you could trust. Once we had a concept it was just about bringing the right partners on board. In this case it was Sugar Media and MacKay PR. We incorporated their thoughts and execution experience.

**Q: What were some of the difficulties you encountered in trying to get this idea across to consumers?**

I think we'd call them challenges rather than difficulties! And this is just how the creative process works – it's only through digging into a brief (and hitting a few dead ends on the way) that you reach that golden idea. At the start, usually no concept is a bad one,... and then as work continues you have to start to be a little more practical about what's going to work and what the budget will allow. Taki





**Q: What did it mean for Cougar Boots to get in front of their consumers?**

This was a really important part of the concept – being a small family run business competing with global brands such as Sorrell, Uggs etc, Cougar doesn't always get the retail attention it deserves. This means that while a lot of people have heard of the brand, they don't really know what it stands for or the quality, range and stylish nature of their products. Bringing the boots to the people was therefore crucial. But it was also about building an experience around the brand rather than just putting the boots out there.

**Q: what was the overall goal for Cougar Boots with this project?**

To launch the new line of Pillow Boots and propel the Cougar brand into the consciousness of Canadians fashionable young women.

**Q: what kind of response did you get from consumers?**

The consumer response has been fantastic – they've loved being able to try on the boots and have their photo taken. There is also a lot of excitement for the next stage of the campaign (where one participant will appear in a outdoor ad in downtown Toronto). The event has been great at bringing the brand to life – fun, cheeky, different – while also promoting a product that actually works. Retailers also loved the fact that we were driving traffic directly to their stores to buy the boots, it's been great to be able to bring them into the campaign as well.



**Q: as a Canadian Brand how important do you think it is to embrace the digital world and know your consumers, and what other ways are you doing so?**

Obviously the digital world is important in any campaign, but crucially it's about what mix of mediums is right for your business and consumers – you can't just jump to a channel because that's what is hot right now. For Cougar, however, digital played a huge part in what we did. It's where our audience lives, breathes and sleeps. With that in mind, combining digital with a real-time execution is what brought the campaign to life.