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- LOS ANGELES TIMES

ADVERTISING

## In Wireless Competition, Mockery Is the Latest Style

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Alltel depicts its rivals' spokesmen as dwelling in a "Man Cave."

By JANE L. LEVERE

Published: August 7, 2007

WITH growth in the wireless market slowing, [Alltel](#) is turning to a sophisticated online campaign to maintain and expand its customer base.

And perhaps not surprisingly for the country's fifth-largest national wireless service provider, Alltel is not shy about taking on its competitors directly.

Last year, the company introduced ads that featured characters who

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personify its four largest rivals. They originally resembled individuals who appeared in the campaigns of its rivals, like Catherine Zeta-Jones, then the spokeswoman for T-Mobile, and the “Can you hear me now?” character for [Verizon](#) Wireless.

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Last fall, Alltel changed that concept somewhat, substituting four nerdy sales guys, each representing a different competitor, for the look-alike characters, all of whom serve as foils for a chipper, wholesome character named Chad representing Alltel.

Alltel took the idea of poking fun at its rivals one step further with the introduction last weekend of an elaborate Web site that features the “Man Cave,” the sales guys’ secret lair ([www.officialmancave.com](http://www.officialmancave.com)), and a [MySpace](#) page, [www.wirelessthugz.com](http://www.wirelessthugz.com), dedicated to a group of rappers who represent the sales guys’ imaginary alter egos.

Created by Campbell-Ewald Digital — part of Campbell-Ewald, which is owned by the [Interpublic Group of Companies](#) — the Man Cave is meant to be a 1970s-style lair, hangout and dungeon for the sales guys, said Iain Lanivich, the agency’s associate creative director. It seems evocative of a hangout recently introduced for the Geico caveman characters ([cavemanscrib.com](http://cavemanscrib.com)).

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The Man Cave rooms include a “man-brary,” with an assortment of books and magazines, game of darts and hidden entrance to a phone lab, where the sales guys dissect Alltel gear. Its kitchen contains a refrigerator with movable word poetry (also a Geico feature) and a bikini-clad poster girl, Candy Graham, who comes to life, while the “man-lounge” is a den with a telescope to spy on Chad in a nearby Alltel store.

ADVERTI

Mr. Lanivich said the Web site alone contains more than 80 videos and 50 links, some of which let visitors unlock content like exclusive discounts on certain purchases made on Alltel’s main Web site. The den also has an interactive bulletin board where Web site visitors can post their names and comments.

Wanda Young, Alltel’s director for interactive marketing, said the company is focusing on the Internet because “the chance to market in a different way is required in a media-fragmented society. We have to engage our customers in places where they are.”

The Internet also gives the wireless service provider a way to “illustrate the difference between Alltel and its competitors,” she said.

In a slowing market, that difference takes on greater importance.

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Scott A. Ellison, who follows mobile and wireless communications for IDC, said the number of new wireless service subscribers added in the United States peaked in the first quarter of last year, at 6.2 million; in the first quarter of 2005, the number of new subscribers was 5.7 million, while in the first quarter of this year, it was 5.3 million.

“The industry now considers 2006 as the high-water mark in terms of net subscriber adds and expects to see steady, although not dramatic, declines in net subscriber growth going forward,” he said.

According to Thomas Weisel Partners, at the end of the first quarter of this year, Alltel, which is based in Little Rock, Ark., and went private in May, had 12.06 million subscribers, compared with 26.02 million for T-Mobile, 53.64 million for [Sprint](#), 60.72 million for Verizon and 62.22 million for AT&T.

James D. Breen, an analyst with Thomas Weisel, said it was vital for Alltel and its competitors to differentiate themselves.

“As the networks for all wireless companies start to be similar in terms of quality, the main differentiator is going to be the image of the brand more so than the actual product delivered,” he said.

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“With the iPhone, [AT&T](#) has the hip [Apple](#) brand, and T-Mobile has always been very focused on a younger demographic,” he said. “Alltel seems to be trying to go that way, appealing to a younger demographic.”

Alltel is advertising the Man Cave nationally on 30-second spots on cable networks like MTV, Spike, Comedy Central and VH1. It is also advertising the Man Cave in daily and alternative newspapers and on billboards in 11 cities across the country, including Charlotte, N.C.; Cleveland; Greensboro, N.C.; Oklahoma City; Phoenix; and Tampa, Fla. Print ads feature a picture of Chad, tied up with rope and his mouth taped, as well as the Man Cave’s Web address.

According to Ms. Young, the campaign is aimed at wireless customers who are considering switching providers. It “puts us into their constellation,” she said.

Alltel executives declined to discuss spending for the new campaign, which they describe

as the “largest interactive marketing initiative” the company has ever done.

According to TNS Media Intelligence, Alltel spent \$160.6 million on all advertising last year and \$47.2 million in the first quarter of this year. Of that, it spent \$7.3 million on Internet advertising last year and \$4.5 million on Internet advertising in the first quarter of this year.

Mr. Ellison of IDC called the Alltel campaign a “very creative and compelling way to engage younger male mobile users, a customer segment that is going to be even more important as mobile subscriber growth begins to slow.”

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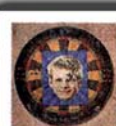
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By JANE L. LEVERE

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# Alltel website takes interactive campaign into man cave

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Alltel Wireless

Wireless carrier Alltel's interactive "man cave" website has characters that represent rival telecoms.

By [Theresa Howard](#), USA TODAY

NEW YORK — After being displaced for a time by images of the style-conscious metrosexual, more macho males seem to have regained a place in the world of marketing and media.

In June, cable's DIY Network premiered *Man Caves*, a five-episode show in which the hosts help guys convert a room into a male sanctuary, with putting greens and giant TVs. In February, Geico launched the Cavemans Crib website, where visitors can hang out, listen to music or read magazines.

Now, Alltel, the No. 5 wireless carrier, has created [www.officialmancave.com](#), an interactive animated site. The site builds on Alltel's TV ads that portray its four biggest rivals as dorky "sales guys."

The T-Mobile, Sprint, Verizon Wireless and AT&T characters were introduced in cable ads last year. They were used to launch Alltel's "My Circle" plan, which lets customers call 10 selected friends on any network or land line for free.

The characters moved online this month and continue the quest to figure out the appeal of Alltel service and express their venom for its handsome, blond spokesman, "Chad."

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"The sales guys have been working well for us, and consumers like how the storyline is going," says Wanda Young, director of interactive marketing. "This is a way to differentiate ourselves from the competition. It's fun, it's cool, and we've really explored the depths of their personalities."

The site — including a man lounge and manbrary — has layers of links and images, include 50 videos and 50 hidden hot spots that lead to another level.

Many click-through spots reward users with playing cards that may have codes for online offers or may include codes to unlock another hot spot.

"This has been a fun project," says Iain Lanivich, vice president and associate creative director at ad agency Campbell-Ewald, which created the site and also recently built an online *Transformers* promotion for General Motors.

Though the campaign appears to be focused on young men, Alltel says women are not being left out.

"Women like (the characters). ... This is not a knock-out machismo site," Young says.

"Everyone can relate to these guys and feel sorry for them in some ways," Lanivich says. "There's something for everyone."

The site includes a "whiteboard" where users can post messages and forward them to friends. Use requires registering and providing e-mail addresses — giving Alltel avenues to market and offer incentives.

"As the fifth-largest carrier, we always have to be smarter about our business," Young says.

The Little Rock-based company, which in May agreed to a more than \$27 billion deal to be taken private by two equity firms, also tries to be smart about media buying. Alltel, which sells service primarily in non-urban areas of 36 states, is using cheaper cable ads rather than network TV to promote the website.

The buying strategy and use of the Web are a smart use of ad dollars for a company such as Alltel, says interactive marketing expert Brad Berens of iMedia Communications, an industry trade publisher and event producer. "You can do a year's worth of branding and engagement for \$2.6 million or less; that's less than the cost of a Super Bowl ad."

Berens says the success of the site "is an issue of execution. If it's a good execution that let's people choose their own adventure without becoming overwhelmed or frustrated, it's good. If it's a bad execution, it could end up alienating users and not serve the brand."

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## Alltel: From TV Pitchman to MySpace Buddy

*October 08, 2007*

By Aaron Baar

**CHICAGO** One year ago, as Alltel was winding down a campaign using celebrity impersonators to skewer its larger telecom competition, the company's agency, Campbell-Ewald, created a MySpace page for Alltel spokescharacter Chad, a handsome 28-year-old blond guy. The intention was to counter the TV campaign's mock trial, which was told from the point of view of the competition.

But a funny thing happened when Chad hit cyberspace: He became popular, registering more than 3,500 friends on his MySpace page as of last week. "We noticed that people were following along with the story," said Iain Lanivich, digital creative director at the Interpublic Group-owned agency. "After we set up the MySpace page for Chad, people were finding it organically with every TV spot we came up with."

As the shop set about developing the second phase of the campaign, which depicted a bumbling crew of fictional salespeople from Alltel's competitors trying to subvert Chad's (and Alltel's) messages and product, they also wanted to devise a way to capitalize on Chad's newfound Internet popularity. Thus was born the ManCave, an Internet site positioned as the place where Chad's nemeses devise their schemes.

"We wanted to make sure our story had evolved to make sure our marketing took advantage of social networking," said Wanda Young, director of interactive marketing for the Little Rock, Ark.-based wireless company.

The Web site, which can be accessed through Alltel's home page as well as [www.officialmancave.com](http://www.officialmancave.com), is an extensive rendering of a basement (belonging to one of the competitor's parents). Intended to be more than a one-note site, the ManCave has three rooms—a "Man Lounge," a kitchen and a "ManBrary"—with more than 50 clickable hot spots that lead to videos of the competitors devising schemes or a game that uses a photo of Chad as a dartboard. The site also includes a game in which cards collected from *Dungeon Masters Eternal Quest*, a fictional version of *Dungeons & Dragons*, can unlock additional videos, promotional codes and other offers.

"If you're going to launch something like this, it better be better than the last thing," Lanivich said. "We pushed Flash technology as far as we could. We really wanted to give people a reason to come back."

Although Young wouldn't provide official figures for hits on the site since it launched in mid-August, she said the average length of time a user spends on the site is "well over six minutes," and far exceeds the time users spend on other Alltel sites.

And it's been achieved with only minimal promotion. The agency re-edited some of its traditional television spots to include an unauthorized interruption from denizens of the ManCave. The agency also posted an item on Chad's MySpace blog about the site, and sent out an e-mail blast to users who had posted comments on Chad's site. Later this month, the company will promote the site through a music promotion via the nemeses' rap group, Wireless Thugz, which also has a MySpace and ManCave presence.

In a category that's heavily skewed toward hard-sell promotional efforts, the ManCave is decidedly softer. Young admitted that's by design, but noted there are areas that make a more obvious Alltel sales pitch, such as a Spywall of the provider's promotional



offers and a Phone Lab where the nerds dissect its new phone offerings.

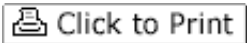
"We're constantly replacing offers and promotions on the Spywall and in magazines [on the site]," Lanivich said. "All the latest phones are on the shelves."

Still, Lanivich considers the ManCave to be more of a "branding exercise," the results of which may not be seen for quite a while, especially given the standard two-year contract terms of most cell phone companies. "You're either looking for a new phone right now, or you're not looking for one for another two years," he said. "It's really almost a test. So far, everyone's been really pleased with what's going on."

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## NEWS

August 17, 2007

## Alltel axes dorks for macho men

By Michael Estrin

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Alltel, the nation's No. 5 wireless carrier, has launched an interactive campaign targeting "real" men and shunning wimps, according to a report in [USA Today](#).

[Officialmancave.com](#), Alltel's interactive site, builds on the carrier's TV campaign portraying its four biggest rivals as dorky sales guys. The web campaign depicts Alltel's rivals rooting around the basement apartment of Chad, the handsome spokesman for the carrier. As the Verizon and Sprint sales guys move around the quarters, their macho-man credentials are further called into question.

"The sales guys have been working well for us, and consumers like how the storyline is going," said Wanda Young, director of interactive marketing. "This is a way to differentiate ourselves from the competition. It's fun, it's cool and we've really explored the depths of their personalities."

Locations within the Mancave include a "man-brary" and a man lounge feature 50 videos and 50 hidden spots that lead to other levels. Users are rewarded for clicking at different locations within the Mancave with playing cards that have codes for online offers.

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## IN FOCUS



How Coke was rewarded for its BT plan



## Alltel ad campaign pokes fun at rivals in online 'Man Cave'

BY BILL W. HORNADAY

Posted on Monday, August 6, 2007

URL: <http://www.nwanews.com/adg/Business/197849/>

Welcome to the Man Cave.

It's the latest evolution of Alltel Corp.'s My Circle ad campaign, where the "geek squad" from cell-phone rivals AT&T, Verizon, Sprint Nextel and TMobile typically meet self-defeat as they try to keep happy-go-lucky Alltel sales character Chad from spreading call-plan flexibility throughout the wireless world.

Now they have a psuedo-secret base — basement, that is — where they can plot against Alltel and all for which it stands. But the entrance is online.

That marks a milestone for the nation's fifth-largest wireless carrier — if not advertising in general — as the Internet will serve as the primary medium for what is "by far" Alltel's largest interactive campaign to date, spokesman Dale Ingram said.

"The earlier ads did a good job in positioning our brand. That's why we're continuing the story line," said Wanda Young, the Little Rock-based company's director of interactive marketing. "At the same time, Internet behavior is changing through broadband penetration and YouTube. So we're taking people where they can learn about Alltel in different ways than ever before." Young describes the Man Cave as an "anti-Alltel" Web site that presents a story line through the eyes of the "sales guys" from the other companies.

"From their 'evil lair' they'll be able to disrupt every element of media — TV, outdoor ads, print ads, even our corporate Web site," she said. Starting today, such "disruptions" will tease visitors into the Man Cave — the basement of the AT&T character's home (where he still lives with his mom ) — which was introduced in previous commercials.

In spots to air on channels including VH 1, ABC Family, USA Network and Comedy Central, as well as major networks, Alltel ads will appear to be "hacked into" by its rivals from the Man Cave, enticing its exploration through [www.officialmancave.com](http://www.officialmancave.com).

Once inside, visitors will encounter interactive areas such as the Man-lounge, a Man-brary, a phone lab, a kitchen and a Spy Wall, where a click of a mouse can trigger more than 50 activities that include skits, allowing users to write messages or post e-mail, or throw darts at a board with Chad's photo over the bull's-eye.

There is also a “confessional” room where the characters relay their innermost feelings about Chad — and each other.

“The big guy from Sprint is shallow as a kiddie pool and smells even worse. And he’s always saying ‘Power Up.’ What does that mean ?” says the AT&T character during one confessional visit.

“I hate companies that say something that sounds cool but, when you think about it, really doesn’t mean anything... Oh, I gotta go ‘ raise the bar. ”

Since hiring Michigan-based Campbell-Ewald as its lead ad agency in 2005, Alltel has frequently poked fun at competitors with whom it also has business ties. Through roaming pacts with each company, Alltel lays claim of offering its 12 million customers the nation’s largest wireless network in terms of geographical spread.

A forerunner of the Man Cave was a viral Internet campaign last summer in which Chad stood accused in a mock trial of putting people into his My Circle network without their permission. My Circle allows customers to make free calls to any 10 numbers on any network.

At the end of the campaign, Chad was found guilty. But a MySpace page launched for Chad during the effort has since attracted more than 2, 500 “friends.”

“Every time we do a new spot, people communicate with Chad as though he were a real person,” said Iain Lainovich, vice president and associate creative director at Campbell-Ewald. “So when something happens in the Man Cave, people can discuss it there or within the new Web site.”

This time, even Chad’s archenemies will have a MySpace page, where their hip-hop group the “Wireless Thugz” will debut a music video titled Rollin In Da Man Van. The Web page address is [www. wirelessthugz. com](http://www.wirelessthugz.com).

While humor is longtime staple of productive ad campaigns, it is no guarantee — Internet or not — of long-term success, said Shanker Krishnan, an associate professor of marketing at Indiana University’s Kelley School of Business.

“Sharing a laugh can be a lot more persuasive and I think it creates awareness. It does a great job of cutting through the clutter,” he said. “At the same time, there is a down side. Does the consumer come away with a positive impression of the brand ?”

One example Krishnan cited was a recent ad for Bud Light in which comedian Carlos Mencia teaches a classroom of immigrants how to order beer in English.

In part of the ad, the immigrants are urged to say “no speak English” if someone asks for a Bud Light. At the end of the ad, one immigrant struggles through his thick accent, saying “Bood Light” instead.

“Sure you create a laugh. But are you also alienating part of the market ?” Krishnan



asked. "Those are the sorts of things you want to make sure you avoid as you go forward."

In Alltel's My Circle campaign, the Sprint Nextel character is overweight and described by Lainovich as the "lazy guy" in the group.

But Alltel and Campbell-Ewald have taken steps to avoid insensitivity, Ingram said.

"It's a physical attribute only and is never used as part of a story line," Ingram said. "We're very aware that sensitivity is an issue, but we don't feel we've ever crossed the line based on testing customers and our own reviews. We don't intend to make his weight a factor in any way."

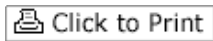
As more and more Americans gain access to online content, the Internet will play an greater role in how corporate America gets its messages to the public, Krishnan said.

But he advised that people shouldn't expect the Internet to become a dominant advertising vehicle, despite its ability to deliver text, sound and video into a single presentation.

"It's not going to replace any medium. But it will be one of several that will shape our perceptions about products," Krishnan said.

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## ALLTEL EXTENDS SPECIAL OFFERS TO MAN CAVE VISITORS

If you don't know who the "sales guys" are by now, you must be living on another planet.

The sales guys are characters created by wireless carrier Alltel to represent competitors Cingular/AT&T, Verizon, Sprint Nextel and T-Mobile. The four chase Chad, the Alltel rep in the company's current TV ad spots, plotting behind-the-scenes to thwart Alltel.

And now, a new Web site, [OfficialManCave.com](http://OfficialManCave.com) reveals the secret lair of the sales guys. The "Man Cave," as the characters dubbed it, provides a variety of video scenarios with click-on prompts that extend the plot line of the TV ads. Visitors get rewarded for time spent on the site with special Web-only offers for discounts on Alltel cell phones and accessories.

"We try to take it deeper on the Internet, where people have more time to get involved with the characters," said Wanda Young, director of interactive marketing for Alltel. "We know people are really engaged with the story line."

Alltel conducted focus groups and other audience research that indicated the anti-Alltel sales guys have developed a following of viewers who are curious about what kind of stunts they're going to pull next.

The TV spots, running since June 2006 on VH1, ABC Family, Comedy Central, USA Network and other cable networks, portray the characters as endlessly frustrated at Alltel's service advances, particularly with Alltel's "My Circle" feature, permitting a 10-person calling circle with customers on any wireless network.

Click on the right icon in the Man Cave, and you could gain access to a confessional section where they reveal their inner anti-Alltel selves. The story line extends to the main page of the Alltel site, where it appears the conspirators have hacked their way in and posted their own video.

"We expect it to have a broad appeal," Young said.

Alltel is hoping to reach consumers in a particular state of mind: those disposed to switch wireless carriers, although the site could appeal to a slightly younger group, she said.

Changing offers – available only online – and a seemingly endless stream of video sub-plots, are aimed at drawing consumers back for more product information, while they play games and catch up on the quartet.

Alltel will gauge the effectiveness of the site, under development for the last five months, by click-through numbers and rates of purchase for the Web-only offers.

For more coverage on interactive marketing

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## Alltel Spoofs Competition

By Brad Smith

WirelessWeek - August 06, 2007

The fifth largest carrier in the United States, Alltel Wireless, picked up its tongue-in-cheek advertising assault on its competition today with a multimedia ad campaign.

For some time now, Alltel has run an ad campaign that features four "sales guys" for AT&T, Verizon Wireless, Sprint and T-Mobile USA who try to disrupt the intentions of a clean-cut character named Chad who represents Alltel. The new campaign, on the Web and TV, takes the campaign further by linking games, videos and music.

The center piece of the campaign is a fictitious Man Cave ([www.officialmancave.com](http://www.officialmancave.com)) in the basement of one of the sales guys' mother's house. The four gather there to plot against Chad. There also is a site for the "Wireless Thugz" on MySpace which features a music video called "Rollin in Da Man Van."

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- ☐ Great, it will change the landscape for all phone.
- ☐ It will do well initially, but then falter.
- ☐ It will do as well as any other new handset.
- ☐ It will do ok early, but the high price will keep sales down.
- ☐ Slow sales until the price comes down.
- ☐ Other