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Alltel Spoofs Itself in Online Ads, But Not Everyone Gets the Joke

By ANDREW LAVALLEE
August 3, 2006

In advertisements on hundreds of blogs, visitors are being encouraged to join a lawsuit against Alltel Corp. over a new discount-calling plan from the regional cellphone company. The plan, called My Circle, allows Alltel customers to designate up to 10 phone numbers that can be called for free, regardless of the cellphone carrier they're affiliated with.

"Have you been added to an Alltel My Circle without your consent? Join our class-action lawsuit and let our experience help to recover your losses," reads one version of the ad.

The content of the ad seemed controversial and worried Walter Olson when it was submitted to his popular legal blog, [Overlawyered](#). He recalls that when he first saw it, he thought, "It'd be the first time I'd have to reject an ad."

Then Mr. Olson did some online digging and discovered that the ad was a spoof, part of an elaborate marketing campaign designed by the Little Rock, Ark., cellular company. The ads link to a Web site for the [People Against My Circle Foundation](#) – also an Alltel creation – while [another faux site](#) carries play-by-play reports from the court battle.

Ads promoting the phony lawsuit against Alltel have been running on hundreds of blogs, including [Overlawyered.com](#).

executive for [Apple Computer](#) Inc., says he initially rejected the ad when it was submitted to his [blog](#). He only agreed to run it after a representative for Blogads, the blog-advertising network that is distributing the ads, contacted him to tell him the campaign was satirical. "It's

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But the ad campaign may be too clever for its own good: Some bloggers have refused to carry the ads about the lawsuit, and others have been hesitant. Many blog visitors, meanwhile, have expressed confusion over the ads in online forums, with some asking: Who's Alltel? (The company isn't well known to consumers outside the states where it offers service.)

Guy Kawasaki, a venture capitalist and former marketing executive for [Apple Computer](#) Inc., says he initially rejected the ad when it was submitted to his [blog](#). He only agreed to run it after a representative for Blogads, the blog-advertising network that is distributing the ads, contacted him to tell him the campaign was satirical. "It's

very hard to tell it's a spoof," Mr. Kawasaki said. "I don't know a lot of people who want to participate in a class-action suit."

While most of the ads play it relatively straight, the sites they link to are full of absurd details that give away the joke. Many of the ads feature Edward Maxwell Von Houten, a fictional attorney for the People Against My Circle Foundation, or PAMCF. The attorney's earlier courtroom wins supposedly include lobbying for greater dress-sock elasticity and suing his mother's obstetrician for giving him an "innie" belly button ("One day I calculated that over the course of my lifetime so far, I'd spent nearly 18 weeks cleaning lint out of my navel," he writes on PAMCF's Web site). He rails against My Circle, accusing Alltel of encouraging long, rambling calls among friends.

The spoof continues on the news site for the trial, where faux reporter Claudia Lake offers updates. "Chad," a Dell-dude-type spokesman featured in Alltel's local television commercials, appears in court on behalf of the carrier, and the site features artist renderings of the proceedings. Chad also has [a page](#) on social-networking site MySpace where he asks for support during the trial. He has racked up more than 300 linked "friends," though judging by the comments they've posted, many appear to be Alltel employees. "Fun site, keep it up, from the best financial service call center in Alltel," reads one. Another says "major kudos from the Panama City, FL retail team!"

The double takes inspired by the ads and fake Web sites are intentional, says Brian Clark, chief executive of GMD Studios, one of the marketing companies that worked on the Alltel campaign. "We frequently provoke sort of unexpected responses," he says. "That curiosity is a great way to start a relationship with the audience." He says the ads have been running on about 400 law, humor and entertainment blogs since early July.

The idea to center the ads around a trial came from the string of corporate-malfeasance lawsuits recently in the headlines, according to Ed Dilworth, an executive vice president at Campbell-Ewald, another marketing firm that worked on the ads. As for any confusion, he says: "This is so overtly, obviously a spoof that it's just not a concern. The general consumer gets it from the get-go."

But even some of Alltel's top brass were fooled. Frank O'Mara, Alltel's executive vice president of marketing, saw one of the ads while reading a legal blog. "I called someone and said 'Are we really doing this?'" he says. "Turns out I approved it."

"I think that's the point," he adds. "It's got to be unexpected to a large portion of the population that come across it." (Alltel is no stranger to offbeat ad campaigns: Its TV spots have poked fun at T-Mobile pitchwoman Catherine Zeta-Jones, and Verizon Wireless's "can you hear me now" guy.)

Part of the disconnect over the My Circle ads may be that Alltel, which at 11 million wireless subscribers is the fifth-largest carrier in the U.S., has generally focused its advertising on the Midwest and Southern states where it offers service.

Still, the campaign, which the company says cost about \$30 million including TV spots, has succeeded in generating buzz. The spoof Web sites on the lawsuits received about a million unique visitors in July, Mr. O'Mara says. The campaign will conclude on Aug. 9, when the verdict is announced.

What's more, confusion about the ads is also feeding online discussion about them. "If people are getting duped by it, so be it, but obviously Alltel's getting their message across," says Matthew Cerrone, who carries the lawsuit ads on his [blog](#) devoted to the Mets baseball team. Overlawyered's Mr. Olson says 1.5% of his visitors have clicked on the ads, a rate that is

"remarkably high" for his site. "They clearly got their money's worth on advertising with me," he says.

Write to Andrew LaVallee at andrew.lavallee@wsj.com

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August 3, 2006, 9:06 am

Alltel's Class Action-tisement

Posted by Heather Won Tesoriero



What started as an online ad that spoofs class-action lawsuits has left many people scratching their heads and making serious inquiries into the ads, [reports](#) a story on WSJ.com.

"Have you been added to an Alltel My Circle without your consent? Join our class-action lawsuit and let our experience help to recover your losses," reads one version of the ad, which appears on hundreds of blogs. The plan, called My Circle, allows Alltel customers to designate up to 10 phone numbers that can be called for free, regardless of the cellphone carrier they're affiliated with.

Thinking the Alltel Corp. ad was too controversial, popular legal blogger Walter Olson of [Overlawyered](#) thought he'd have to do a blogging unthinkable: reject an ad. Then Olson did some online digging and discovered that the ad was—ta-da!—a spoof, part of an elaborate marketing campaign designed by the Little Rock, Ark., cellular company. The ads link to a Web site for the [People Against My Circle Foundation](#) — also an Alltel creation — while another [faux site](#) carries play-by-play reports from the court battle.

While most of the ads play it relatively straight, the sites they link to are full of absurd details that (one should think) give away the joke. Many of the ads feature Edward Maxwell Von Houten, a fictional attorney whose earlier courtroom wins supposedly include lobbying for greater dress-sock elasticity and suing his mother's obstetrician for giving him an "innie" belly button ("One day I calculated that over the course of my lifetime so far, I'd spent nearly 18 weeks cleaning lint out of my navel," he writes).

Ad exec Ed Dilworth worked on the ads and says, "The general consumer gets it from the get-go." That said, even some of Alltel's top brass were fooled. Frank O'Mara, Alltel's executive vice president of marketing, saw one of the ads while reading a legal blog. "I called someone and said 'Are we really doing this?'" he says. Well, conceded O'Mara: "Turns out I approved it."

Read more: [Global](#)

Permalink | Trackback URL: <http://blogs.wsj.com/law/2006/08/03/alltels-class-action-tisement/trackback/>

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ABOUT THIS BLOG



WSJ.com's law blog focuses on law and business, and the business of law. Peter

Lattman is the lead writer. Peter joined The Wall Street Journal Online from Forbes Magazine. Before becoming a journalist, Peter worked on Wall Street and as a litigator at a New York law firm. The blog also includes contributions from reporters and editors at The Wall Street Journal and Dow Jones Newswires. Have a comment? Write to lawblog@wsj.com.

AdvertisingAge®

Snore: Another Viral

By [Ken Wheaton](#)

Published: July 21, 2006



While doing our blog rounds this morning, we came across an ad on the blog of [Ann Althouse](#) for a supposed class-action suit against Alltel's My Circle calling program. The ad, aside from featuring the preposterous legal claim, has a professional photo of what appears to be a professional old coot.

On a personal level, we're getting fed up with ridiculous viral efforts (see the billboard post below), yet we bit. We found ourselves at the site of [PAMCF](#), the People Against My Circle Foundation. Yawn. Snooze. We will admit, though, that Edward Maxwell Von Houten [is our kind of guy](#)--a crank that mocks friendship and urges litigants to do it "for the children ... Or the puppies, kittens, dolphins, or whatever other defenseless creatures elicit an emotional response from you." Further digging finds a [Support My Circle website](#) and a [MySpace site](#) for "Chad," the "dude" from the TV spots.

We're trying hard not to venture onto Garfield's turf here, but our first reaction to this was "How silly." Our second reaction, of course, was to click on the first ad (smart targeting, we guess, by running the ad on a law-related blog). Subsequent reaction: concern that there are some consumers out there gullible enough to fall for this mixed with concern that Alltel would green-light something so cheesy. Then again, the whole effort seems so obviously over the top that we don't hold any grudges. Besides, campaigns can't be measured simply by the effect on the consumer. There's something to be said for building employee morale, and a quick look at the comments on Chad's MySpace page shows a lot of Alltel employees joining in the silliness. (Then again, maybe they were forced to by management!)

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Overlawyered

Chronicling the high cost of our legal system

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ABOUT THAT "JOIN MY CLASS ACTION SUIT" AD

I was getting ready to turn thumbs down on the BlogAd in the right column, the one that looks like it was placed by a class action lawyer soliciting clients. (Reader comments welcome: *should* we turn down ads promoting litigation?) Then I took a closer look at it...

Posted by Walter Olson on July 6, 2006 09:58 AM | [Permalink](#)

TRACKBACK

TrackBack URL for this entry:
<http://overlawyered.com/cgi-bin/mt/mt-tb.cgi/1825>

COMMENTS

alltel really went all out on marketing for this circle plan :)

Posted by: Steven | [July 6, 2006 10:49 AM](#)

I say if a trial lawyer is willing to put an ad on overlawyered then let him. Every click (presumably) costs him money while earning revenue for the site. It would be interesting to see how the many overlawyered visitors who are fed up with the excesses of the legal system treat an ad they know costs a trial lawyer \$ every time they click it. It almost sounds like a stress killer.

Posted by: Jkoerner | [July 6, 2006 11:50 AM](#)

Actually, the way BlogAds works, I don't think it costs the advertiser any extra sum when a visitor clicks. That aside, I'd hope our readers are a grown-up bunch who would scorn to click from such motives. Maliciously choosing to inflict expense on someone just because you're mad at them is an unworthy idea whether the expense-infliction consists of dragging them into a lawsuit, putting a cherry bomb in their mailbox, or bleeding their ad budget through click imposture.

Posted by: Walter Olson | [July 6, 2006 02:00 PM](#)

Please, turn down all ads from attorneys! Like yeast infections and other forms of mold, attorneys proliferate when you feed them. They must "incite" new cases to maintain their bloated lifestyles. Why helpthem grow?

Posted by: Alan Thompson | [July 6, 2006 07:58 PM](#)

I think the juxtaposition of an ad drumming up litigation with one that sells "murder consultants" is quite poignant, even if unintentional. Shakespeare would be proud.

Posted by: Brian P. | [July 6, 2006 08:32 PM](#)

It seems to me that the site may very well be a hoax, more as Steven alluded to,

Overlawyered.com explores an American legal system that too often turns litigation into a weapon against guilty and innocent alike, erodes individual responsibility, rewards sharp practice, enriches its participants at the public's expense, and resists even modest efforts at reform and accountability.

Blogads

JOIN MY CLASS ACTION SUIT



Have you been added to an [Alltel My Circle](#) without your consent?

[Join](#) our [class action lawsuit](#) and let [our experience](#) help to RECOVER YOUR DAMAGES!

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Increase / decrease font size
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GREATEST HITS

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Overlawyered

Chronicling the high cost of our legal system

August 03, 2006

MORE ON THOSE ALLTEL ADS

Wall Street Journal reporter Andrew Lavalley takes a thorough look at those buzz-creating "join the class action against Alltel" ads that have been running here (see right column) and on about 400 other weblogs (see [Jul. 6](#)). He quotes me and mentions this site at both the beginning and end of the article, and the graphic that runs with the article is none other than a screen capture of Overlawyered's front page with a blowup of the ad. It's in a section ordinarily available to WSJ subscribers only ("Alltel Spoofs Itself in Online Ads, But Not Everyone Gets the Joke", [Aug. 3](#)) but seems to be temporarily available to non-subscribers [here](#). (& [WSJ law blog](#))

Posted by Walter Olson at 12:27 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBacks \(0\)](#)

UPDATE: MICHAEL JORDAN LOOKALIKE DROPS SUIT

Updating our [Jul. 8](#) item:

The Northeast Portland man who sought more than \$800 million from Michael Jordan and Nike founder Phil Knight because he said he was tired of being mistaken for the famous basketball player is giving up his defamation lawsuit....

Vada Manager, Nike spokesman, said no payment was made to [Allen Ray] Heckard to get him to drop the lawsuit.

"It's fairly simple," Manager said Monday. "He finally realized he would end up paying our court costs if the lawsuit went to trial."

(Holly Danks, "Man throws in towel on Jordan lawsuit", The Oregonian, [Aug. 1](#)). For more on the principle that costs should follow the event -- and not just in cases as wacky as this one -- see our [loser-pays](#) page.

Posted by Walter Olson at 12:23 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(1\)](#) | [TrackBacks \(0\)](#)

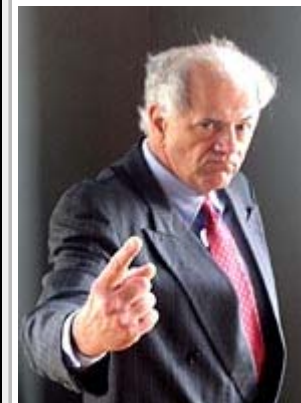
UPDATE: DIET-BOOK AUTHOR DROPS SUIT AGAINST COKE

The Coca-Cola Co. can rest easy: diet-book author Julia Havey has withdrawn her lawsuit (see [Jul. 17](#)) charging that one of the company's product loyalty campaigns encourages kids to consume so many soft drinks that they could die. Havey declared herself satisfied that a Coke spokesman told the press that

Overlawyered.com explores an American legal system that too often turns litigation into a weapon against guilty and innocent alike, erodes individual responsibility, rewards sharp practice, enriches its participants at the public's expense, and resists even modest efforts at reform and accountability.

Blogads

CLASS ACTION UPDATE!



The *prosecution has rested*, and we are most certainly victorious in *our suit* against Alltel. Some *class action litigants* are going to be very happy about that, and *someone named Chad* isn't.

Now we just have to wait on the *pesky jury*.

[Read More...](#)

made to promote Alltel rather than a real suit.

Posted by: M-S-A | [July 7, 2006 12:19 AM](#)

Um... I can't see any ads. Are you hiding them?

Posted by: Randomscrub | [July 7, 2006 09:54 AM](#)

I also don't see any.

Posted by: Pat W | [July 7, 2006 10:11 AM](#)

For some users (depending on the vagaries of individual monitors, software, etc.) the entire right column of links displays below the main text column, rather than on the right. On the other hand, if you can see the other elements of the right column (Greatest Hits, Search, Categories, Archives, etc.) but can't see the two BlogAds, then there may be some problem with your system not picking up remotely served content from the BlogAds site.

And of course if you're reading through an RSS feed, you won't see the ads at all unless you come on over to the site proper: <http://www.overlawyered.com>.

Posted by: Walter Olson | [July 7, 2006 10:25 AM](#)

"Please, turn down all ads from attorneys! Like yeast infections and other forms of mold, attorneys proliferate when you feed them. They must "incite" new cases to maintain their bloated lifestyles. Why helpthem grow?"

I could not agree more, serious or junk, it's still junk for this site!

Posted by: TC | [July 8, 2006 02:34 AM](#)

Walter,

Please consider installing "blocking" software to make it impossible for people who can't tell a joke when they see one to read OL.

On the other hand, since I had to waste at least 1.203 minutes of my valuable time discovering this fact (and I already use Alltel) I will have to sue you for \$8.42.

Sorry, but if I have learned anything here, it's the more frivolous the lawsuit, the more likely of its success.

BaDaBump

PS - Congrats on the nice mention in Reader's Digest

Posted by: Bumper | [July 8, 2006 04:53 PM](#)

POST A COMMENT

If you have a TypeKey identity, you can [sign in](#) to use it here.

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[Ads by Goooooogle](#)**ALLTEL PROMOTES CALLING PLAN BY SUING ITSELF**

gagging idiots and somehow lead to anarchy. There's even a **SECOND SITE** that follows the so-called class action suit.

Alltel is running a blog ad campaign created by **CAMPBELL EWALD** with site development by **GMD STUDIOS** which promotes a fake **CLASS ACTION SUIT** against the company's My Circle calling plan. The ad points to a page on which an Edward Maxwell Von Houten claims he and many others have been added to Alltel's My Circle plan without there consent. Some witty copy turns the tables and makes the argument that paying to call your friends is better because it will eliminate turning people into

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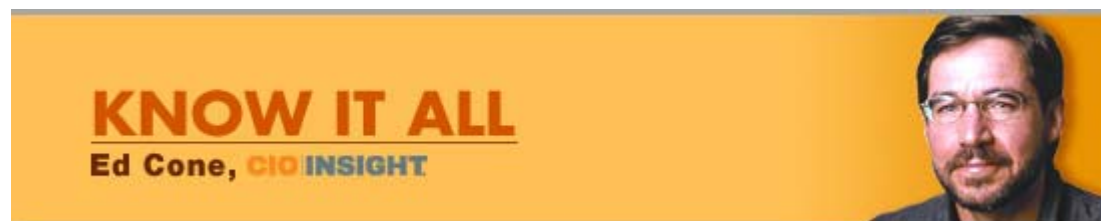


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Funny business

They say a joke doesn't work if you have to explain it, but that doesn't seem to be the case with Alltel's web-based campaign about a fake lawsuit.

The ads and [related websites](#), including a MySpace [page](#), deal with a phony lawsuit against the cellphone carrier, which is alleged to make calling too cheap and easy.

Today's Wall Street Journal [reports](#) that the campaign is confusing many people, including some of the bloggers asked to run the ads. The article, placed prominently in the print edition and made available for free on the web, explains the joke and of course provides extensive publicity for Alltel and its services.

Mission accomplished.

posted on Thursday, August 03, 2006 11:37 AM by [Ed Cone](#)

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08/01/2006

People Against My Circle

Alltel is running a blog ad campaign which promotes a fake class action suit against the company's My Circle calling plan. The ad points to a page on which an Edward Maxwell Von

Houten claims he and many others have been added to Alltel's My Circle plan without their consent.

Some witty copy turns the tables and makes the argument that paying to call your friends is better because it will avoid turning people into gagging idiots and somehow avert anarchy. There's even a second site that follows the so-called class action suit.

Anji Barton

08/01/2006 in [This is viral](#) | [Permalink](#)**TrackBack**

TrackBack URL for this entry:

<http://www.typepad.com/t/trackback/5567668>

Listed below are links to weblogs that reference People Against My Circle:

Comments

The Editors Blog

The thoughts of three generations of CHICAGO MAROON Viewpoints Editors



Thursday, August 03, 2006

Bizzare class-action lawsuit ad


You might have noticed this weird ad all over the blogosphere, the WSJ ran a story on it today:

But the ad campaign may be too clever for its own good: Some bloggers have refused to carry the ads about the lawsuit, and others have been hesitant. Many blog visitors, meanwhile, have expressed confusion over the ads in online forums, with some asking: Who's Alltel? (The company isn't well known to consumers outside the states where it offers service.)

Guy Kawasaki, a venture capitalist and former marketing executive for Apple Computer Inc., says he initially rejected the ad when it was submitted to his blog. He only agreed to run it after a representative for Blogads, the blog-advertising network that is distributing the ads, contacted him to tell him the campaign was satirical. "It's very hard to tell it's a spoof," Mr. Kawasaki said. "I don't know a lot of people campaign was satirical. "It's very hard to tell it's a spoof," Mr. Kawasaki said. "I don't know a lot of people who want to participate in a class-action suit."

While most of the ads play it relatively straight, the sites they link to are full of absurd details that give away the joke. Many of the ads feature Edward Maxwell Von Houten, a fictional attorney for the People Against My Circle Foundation, or PAMCF. The attorney's earlier courtroom wins supposedly include lobbying for greater dress-sock elasticity and suing his mother's obstetrician for giving him an "innie" belly button ("One day I calculated that over the course of my lifetime so far, I'd spent nearly 18 weeks cleaning lint out of my navel," he writes on PAMCF's Web site). He rails against My Circle, accusing Alltel of encouraging long, rambling calls among friends.

Seems like an ad agency tried to be a little too clever. But it might have been just the right amount of clever. No one ever clicks on those ads, but because the ad was so weird and got some press we are all talking about Alltel now.

Posted by [Alec Brandon](#) at 8:45 PM | [Permalink](#) 

No comments

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CLASS ACTION
UPDATE!



The prosecution has rested, and we are most certainly victorious in our suit against Alltel. Some class action litigants are going to be very happy about that, and someone named Chad isn't.

Now we just have to wait on the jury.

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[The American Thinker](#)

ALLTEL AD SPOOF. MAYBE JUST A LITTLE TOO CLOSE TO REALITY.



An online ad campaign is urging users to join a lawsuit against cellphone carrier Alltel over a new discount calling plan. It turns out the ads are a spoof created by Alltel, but not everyone gets the joke: Some Web site owners refused to run

the ads, thinking the legal tussle is real.

"Have you been added to an Alltel My Circle without your consent? Join our class-action lawsuit and let our experience help to recover your losses," reads one version of the ad. The ads link to a Web site for the [People Against My Circle Foundation](#) - also an Alltel creation - while another [faux site](#) carries play-by-play reports from the court battle.

More at [WSJ.com](#).

07:42 AM in [Advertising](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

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Humor And Buzz In Online Marketing

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Can humor ads create buzz, and, more importantly, SELL? The Alltel ads are definitely generating buzz, both in the online and offline worlds. According to the WSJ article, [Alltel Spoofs Itself in Online Ads, But Not Everyone Gets the Joke](#),

“In advertisements on hundreds of blogs, visitors are being encouraged to join a lawsuit against Alltel Corp. over a new discount-calling plan from the regional cellphone company. The plan, called My Circle, allows Alltel customers to designate up to 10 phone numbers that can be called for free, regardless of the cellphone carrier they’re affiliated with. ”

The article says that the ads are so good, that not everyone realizes that it is a spoof, and not an actual thing.

At the end, though, the absurdity of the web site itself gives the joke away:

“While most of the ads play it relatively straight, the sites they link to are full of absurd details that give away the joke. Many of the ads feature Edward Maxwell Von Houten, a fictional attorney for the People Against My Circle Foundation, or PAMCF. The attorney’s earlier courtroom wins supposedly include lobbying for greater dress-sock elasticity and suing his mother’s obstetrician for giving him an “innie” belly button (“One day I calculated that over the course of my

lifetime so far, I'd spent nearly 18 weeks cleaning lint out of my navel," he writes on PAMCF's Web site). He rails against My Circle, accusing Alltel of encouraging long, rambling calls among friends."

Alltel ads seem to be generating blog posts and lots of Internet buzz for them. Can you come up with a humorous campaign to generate buzz for YOUR business?

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This entry was posted on Friday, August 4th, 2006 at 3:53 pm and is filed under [Internet Marketing](#), [Online Marketing](#), [Business and Marketing](#), [Business Articles](#), [Online Advertising](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can [leave a response](#), or [trackback](#) from your own site.

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AUG
03
2006

Alltel runs clumsiest (but funniest) ad campaign ever

Blogads

CLASS ACTION UPDATE!



The prosecution has rested, and we are most certainly victorious in our suit against Alltel. Some class action litigants are going to be very happy about that, and someone named Chad isn't.

Now we just have to wait on the peckp innr.

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The average blog addict must ignore over a thousand ads a day, especially ads in the canned style of the Blogads network. So on the one hand, it's impressive that the Alltel phone company earned the Wall Street Journal's attention with an easily missable string of ads.

On the other, this is the most oblique ad campaign to ever hit the blogosphere. Alltel is running spoof ads urging people to sue it. The ads link to a fake legal site filled with background that has nothing to do with Alltel.

The spoof anti-site is a tired reverse-psychology viral marketing trick, but in Alltel's case, it's carried out to ridiculous lengths, with a roster of fake web pages long enough to impress the *Lost* marketers or *Da Vinci Code* alternate-reality gamers.

The spoof pages are funny -- the references to the "ever-encroaching Acronym Industry," "Melaninally-Challenged Americans v. TAN-acious Sunless Creme, Inc." and "increased national standards for elasticity in gentlemen's dress socks" make the site read like an early draft for a Douglas Adams novel.

standards for elasticity in gentlemen's dress socks" make the site read like an early draft for a Douglas Adams novel.

But what good is this to Alltel? After all the jokes, readers haven't actually been pitched anything -- and that's fine by me.

[Alltel Spoofs Itself in Online Ads, But Not Everyone Gets the Joke \[WSJ\]](#)

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Our tiny profit is lost. Haiku ads don't work.
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COMMENTS

AcilletaM says:

That guy looks like he's demonstrating the proper technique for a prostate exam, not arguing a case.

08/04/06 01:47 AM

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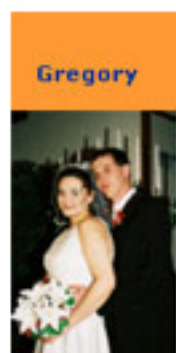
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CREATIVE SHOWCASE



Gregory

10/11/2006 8:18 AM

T-Mobile is a bunch of POSERS! mastermind behind the My Circle Dorado, AR Retail Store representation

[[View Creative 1](#) »]

Alltel's Lawsuit Spoof Goes Viral

October 31, 2006

Creative Showcase: Campbell-Ewald and GMD Studios brought attention to mobile provider Alltel through buzz about a (fake) lawsuit.

PRINT EMAIL DEL.ICIO.US DIGG IT

Creative Notes ▾

Firefox compatible

Campaign Details ▾

Client: Alltel

Creative Agency: Campbell-Ewald and GMD Studios

Campaign Insight ▾

Alltel is the fifth largest wireless company in the nation, and typically thought of as a regional player. Our challenge was to creatively increase Alltel's national brand awareness in the

The Panel ▾

This campaign has all of the components of a modern day viral piece-- a MySpace presence, a third party propaganda site, an event site, and a corporate marketing site. Or does it?

The corporate site does a great job of simply illustrating the power of Alltel's new offering, "My Circle," which enables its subscribers to place free calls to any 10 numbers they choose, regardless of the network they are on. That sounds like a pretty sweet deal!

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consumer markets where it is less well known.

The first step in the process was to create a back-story about why the trial was occurring. The back-story came in the concept of People Against My Circle Foundation (www.pamcf.com). The PAMCF organization believes that the ability to add someone to your Circle without their consent is wrongful and unjust.

The online campaign launch deadline was timed in conjunction with the first airing of the "Courtroom" TV spot. Campbell-Ewald handled the design, while GMD handled the web production. Once the websites were launched, the team made weekly updates by posting the next court date on the official website, www.alltelcircle.com. The turnaround window between the time voiceovers were recorded and their launch was tight. Each audio testimony was professionally edited by Ozone (Royal Oak, MI), then built into flash movies that synced with the courtroom sketches. Two Campbell-Ewald sketch artists worked around the clock to bring life to the audio. Chad's video blog (diaries) and post-courtroom interview footage was captured at the "Courtroom" TV shoot. Claudia Lake and Edward Maxwell Von Houten video was captured in-house at Campbell-Ewald.

In many ways, the campaign exceeded expectations. First off, the only media pointing toward this campaign was unbranded blog ads that drove people to join PAMCF's Class Action Lawsuit. These were initially seeded within various law blogs and discussion boards. The main objective of the campaign was to create buzz and awareness about My Circle, which was

The rest of the sites associated with this campaign attempt to take the campaign viral. That is where I believe it falls short. Getting a campaign to go viral is an aggressive goal, no doubt. The ultimate test for me regarding a site's viral nature is to ask the question, "Do I feel compelled to pass this site along to my friends?" Unfortunately in this case, the answer is no.

Some of the best viral sites that I have come across, like the Sony BRAVIA-Advert, Subservient Chicken and Comcastic, have achieved viral success based on their simplicity, not complexity.

Despite my opinion of the viral nature of this campaign, I commend Alltel for having the courage to go to market with an alternative form of communication. Perhaps next time their circle will call more of their audience to them.

-- Sean Connelly, founder, Refinery

Alltel's My Circle campaign does a valiant job of attempting to create a thorough narrative that keeps the consumer interested in a lawsuit spoof that finds the offer of free calls to your inner circle illegal and preposterous. However, the actors playing roles of competitive cellular providers are in themselves implausible in both TV and online video. This is a campaign that attempts to do what Audi's "Art of the Heist" did online -- to offer a compelling narrative with multiple online mechanisms to engage viewers in the story -- however, it's a bit too thin and too complicated for a simple offer like this. Kudos to the agency for selling through all the elements of engagement, however, after I understood the message about the offer, I felt there simply wasn't enough conflict/drama inherent in the offer or



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achieved when the Wall Street Journal featured an article on the campaign. This created major internet buzz and discussion, as well as other spin-off articles.

Several weeks after the campaign ended, stats are still showing an average of over 1,000 visitors a day to both websites, as well as an average length per visit that exceeds five minutes (at one point during the campaign this exceeded 10 minutes). Chad's MySpace continues to grow on a daily basis, receiving new friend requests and positive comments and emails.

From day one, we said that in every facet of the trial one simple message would be embedded in everything that we did. That message was: Alltel customers can call any 10 numbers on any network for free. And although that message is delivered in the subtext of some outrageous and humorous instances, it comes across in everything that was production.

-- Ann Phipps, EVP, executive creative director, new and alternative media, Campbell-Ewald

promise to hold the ongoing interest of the consumer through the additional narrative elements.

Nice campaign elements creatively, but the overall idea is just a bit too implausible to hold consumer interest.

-- Alan Schulman, chief creative officer, Brand New World

Editor's Note ▾

Creative Showcase is meant to be a teaching tool and an inspiration for our readers. We comment only on creative that we really love. Our panelists discuss what makes it great, but if they feel there were missed opportunities that would have made it better, we invite them to mention those. And finally, we seek out a wide range of opinions that reflect the marketplace for the panel, in order to provide constructive, useable feedback for agencies, clients and others involved in these creative pieces.

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November 02, 2006

ON: Alltel's Lawsuit Spoof Goes Viral

Chad at Alltel

View My: [Pics](#) | [Videos](#)

"Are You Circle Worthy?"

Male
27 years old
Little Rock, ARKANSAS
United States

Last Login:
10/30/2006

Contacting Chad at Alltel
[Send Message](#) [Forward to Friend](#)
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[Instant Message](#) [Block User](#)
[Add to Group](#) [Rank User](#)

MySpace URL:
<http://www.myspace.com/support/mycircle>

Chad at Alltel's Interests

General	Talking on the phone and hanging out with My Circle.
Music	Come and Get Your Love!!!
Movies	The Legend of Zorro, Ocean's Twelve, The Terminal, Intolerable Cruelty, Snowg, Chicago, America's Sweethearts, Traffic and High Fidelity...to name a few.
Television	All the Alltel TV ads!!!

Chad at Alltel is in your extended network

Chad at Alltel's Latest Blog Entry [\[Subscribe to this Blog\]](#)
10/17 - First, Superman. Now, Chad returns! [\(view more\)](#)
8/9 - Guilty...but not in my eyes. [\(view more\)](#)
8/2 - Von Houten Cries and I got a Standing O [\(view more\)](#)
8/1 - Jack's Free!!! [\(view more\)](#)
7/26 - My Little Orange Buddy's in Jail! [\(view more\)](#)
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Chad at Alltel's Blurbs
About me:
MY CIRCLE ON TRIAL - FOUND GUILTY!!!

Hey, Chad here, and welcome to my MySpace profile. Now, my friends can stop asking me why I'm not on here (You know who you are). Anyways, I plan on sprucing up this page a bit in the coming weeks. I'm working on putting up some pictures of me hanging out with **My Circle**, and some little videos I shot with my cell phone...think of them kinda as my video diaries.

I'm all about making new friends, so feel free to drop me a line, oh and add me to your Circle. I plan on making this the biggest Circle on all of MySpace. Real quick, I want to throw a shout out to my little orange buddy. Sorry about the mix-up at the bowling alley the other night. Hopefully that polish helped. Well that's all for now. Talk to you later.

Here's my latest video diary:
8/09 - Thanks You All!!!



This campaign has all of the components of a modern day viral piece-- a MySpace presence, a third party propaganda site, an event site, and a corporate marketing site. Or does it?


Campbell-Ewald and GMD Studios brought attention to mobile provider Alltel through buzz about a (fake) lawsuit.

The corporate site does a great job of simply illustrating the power of Alltel's new offering, "My Circle," which enables its subscribers to place free calls to any 10 numbers they choose, regardless of the network they are on. That sounds like a pretty sweet deal! I know that viral is supposed to be a campy but the least they could have done was pump up this my space page.

Technorati Tags: [alltel](#), [marketing](#), [mobile](#), [myspace](#), [online media](#)

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Posted by Joanna Peña-Bickley on November 02, 2006 in [New Age Branding](#) | [Permalink](#)

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Lee_in_FL's Home Page

"A Part-Time Effort"

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Have You Seen This Advertisement?

WEDNESDAY, 9. AUGUST 2006, 19:34:09




JOIN MY CLASS ACTION SUIT

Have you been added to an
Alltel My Circle
without your consent?

Join our class action
lawsuit and let our
experience help to
RECOVER YOUR DAMAGES!

Although I've seen the advertisement quite a few times, I never really attempted to contact the advertising lawyer; however, I was curious as to how anyone could sue Alltel simply for being included in a circle that allows the Alltel user to call people within their "circle" at no charge, no matter what network the person being called is utilizing.

ABOUT



Name: Lee

Location: Orlando, Florida

Occupation: (USA)
Professional
Struggler

[More »](#)

LATEST BLOG ENTRIES

- [CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF WHAT YOU'LL FIND INSIDE!](#)
- [Two Weeks Notice Now Required Before Firing An Employee!](#)
- [Young Entrepreneurs are Not](#)

Now, I no longer have to wonder! The [Wall Street Journal](#) has cleared the air on the subject!

First of all, it's actually a spoof by Alltell to create additional interest in their latest advertising campaign.

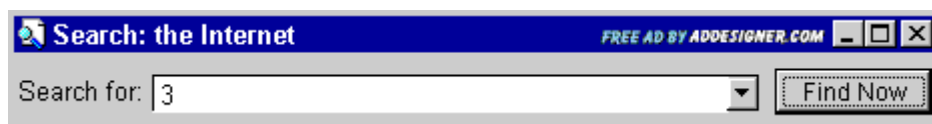
If you check on the attorney's [experience](#), you will discover that he claims to have (by way of legal action in the courts)...

...Increased national standards for elasticity in gentlemen's dress socks by almost 17%.

...Forced the United States Post Office to create lick-less (self-adhesive) postage stamps.

...Sued his mother's obstetrician for malpractice relating to his "innie" belly button.

So...I guess this means I won't be getting any extra money as a result of this attorney's expertise (although, I DO have an "innie"!)



You are 65.123.68.85! Your ISP is campbell-ewald.com!
You are running on Windows XP and using IE 6!
Your comments are welcomed!

danasoft.com

[Welcomed in Central Connecticut!](#)

■ [Young Entrepreneurs are Not Welcomed in Central Connecticut!](#)

■ [He Changed His Middle Name to "None of the Above"!](#)

■ [Why Are Men Suddenly Flocking to Auckland?](#)

■ [Are YOU One of 55 Out of 100 Who Can Read This?](#)

■ [Salmon Please....I'll Pass on the Vanilla, Thank You!](#)

■ [Equality in the Eyes of the Law? NOT!](#)



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ATTRACTIONS IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD

Zoli's Blog

Random thoughts on Business, Startups, Technology, Software, Open Source, Collaboration, Politics.



Zoli Erdos
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Controversial Blog Advertising

by [Zoli Erdos](#) on Sun 30 Jul 2006 11:07 AM PDT | [Permanent Link](#) | [Cosmos](#)

(Updated)

The Blog-ad to the right is from [Guy Kawasaki's blog](#). I don't really understand why Guy runs it - in fact I wonder if he paid attention to what this really is. Don't get me wrong, this is not an "anti-Guy" rant, what I dislike is Class Action Suits, and stupid advertising in general.

I don't think I am alone thinking that class action lawsuits are controversial, to say the least. Sure, they provide a way to curtail companies "evil" behavior - but provide little to no benefit to individual "class members". In fact it's widely known that the only party benefiting from settlements are the lawyers. For everyone else involved it's a lot of hoopla for nothing.

As for the particular case, I admit I don't know Alltel and their "My Circle" program: for all I

Blogads

JOIN MY CLASS ACTION SUIT



Have you been added to an Alltel My Circle without your consent?

Join our class action lawsuit and let our experience help to RECOVER YOUR DAMAGES!

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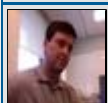
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Join My Community



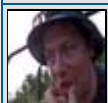
divedi



BWJones



JeffNolan



fredwilson

View Entire Reader Community
(provided by MyBlogLog)

know they may truly be evil, but this class action suit solicitation provides a link to them anyway, potentially boosting their business - not very smart, if you ask me.

Another link reveals the [lead plaintiff's background](#): he spent his life representing us, the "little man" against "bad industries". Here's a typical case:

"In 1998 a crossed leg, revealing a slouchy, wrinkled sock, falsely identified me as an untrustworthy loafer to other members of an important real estate consortium, costing me my seat on the board. After suing the sock company for damages, new industry standards were put in place, ensuring that the same fate won't happen to you.."

Hm... personally, I would not want to be in a board where I can lose membership due to wrinkled socks :-). Seriously, Guy, do you really want to promote this angry man's next tirade?

Update: While typing this up, I've just received an email solicitation to join (start?) another class action lawsuit, against [Panda Software for their spam](#). I politely declined. I found my own [creative way to stop Panda's spam](#), and it worked. Case closed. I'm not interested in spending my life fighting.

Update: (7/30). OK, I bought it. 🤡 It's a spoof .. or viral ad, whatever you want to call it. There is no class action lawsuit, only the campaign bu Alltel. Thanks to [Thatedeguy](#) for being doubtful enough .. (see his comment below). I digged further and I think he is right.

Update #3 (7/30): [Guy Kawasaki confirms](#) it's a spoof, an ad run by Alltel. I'm glad to see we're on the same page as far as the "class action lawsuit" is concerned, i.e. he rejected it

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when he thought it was real. Thanks, for coming over to comment, Guy!

Technorati : [Edward Maxwell Von Houten](#), [alltel](#), [alltel my circle](#), [blog advertising](#), [blogads](#), [class action](#), [class action lawsuits](#), [guy kawasaki](#), [panda software](#), [panda spam](#), [spam](#)

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COMMENTS

Post a comment for this article:

Post a Comment

Re: Controversial Blog Advertising

by [Thatedeguy](#) on Sun 30 Jul 2006 01:05 PM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

I can't say with utmost certainty, but I believe the PAMCF class-action suit is a spoof.

In fact, on the page you are led to, if you click trial, you get supportmycircle.com showing pictures of the actor in the "my circle" television spots.

Underneath it all, it is merely a cleverly concocted advertisement campaign.

[Reply](#)

Re: Controversial Blog Advertising

by Anonymous on Sun 30 Jul 2006 01:23 PM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

Zoli,

Interesting, I first rejected the ad for the same reason. Then Blogads wrote me to tell me it's a spoof and actually Alltel's ad.

That's why it's running. I must admit, though, it's very hard to figure out it's a spoof.

Guy

[Reply](#)

TRACKBACKS