

Passenger Opens Community Platform to Agencies

By Douglas Quenqua, ClickZ, Apr 7, 2010

Brand community platform Passenger is giving marketing agencies the ability to form their own social networks online - independent of clients, if they so choose - to conduct focus groups, test ideas or manage word of mouth campaigns.

The initiative, known as the channel partnership program, comes just six months after Passenger gave brands the opportunity to launch and manage their own communities with its self-administration platform.

Agency launch partners include BBMG, Digitas, Tribal DDB and Digital Partners.

"We're providing the social software that allows brand and agencies to connect with customers in real time," said Ryan Alley, VP of product marketing at Passenger. "They can develop and test social media campaigns that are tied into larger public initiatives, help refine and determine what's going to resonate with consumers [and] what's not going to work... They can use the process to better inform their product, or they can use it as a marketing process."

BBMG, which is based in San Francisco, launched its first community with Passenger last month. Calling it The Collective, BBMG is using it as a research platform to hone ideas for eco-friendly and socially minded clients like ShoreBank and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation - and to pitch other like-minded clients.

"What attracted us to the Passenger platform is we don't do research as a service offering, but we do do it to inform the work we are doing, so we are able to use this in that traditional sense as an insights platform," Mitch Baranowski, co-founder and creative director of BBMG, said. "We launched a few weeks ago and already have 400 active, screened consumers that are wired, influential and up to speed on the issues." Baranowski said BBMG hopes to eventually have 2,000 members in the group.

Like all Passenger communities, The Collective is populated primarily by consumers sought out by the client, in this case BBMG. Others can ask to join, but must go through a screening and authentication process. Consumers who participate in the communities are generally incentivized through discounts or complimentary merchandise rather than cash rewards.

Agencies can use the Passenger platform to launch polls, surveys, live chats, brainstorming sessions, discussion boards and multimedia galleries. Baranowski said BBMG is using The Collective primarily for research, but plans to use it for word-of-mouth or advocacy campaigns as well by asking members to take information back to their own social networks.

"These folks are coming here because they want to join the dialogue, they want to have a role, they want to have their voices heard," he said.

Passenger, which is based in Los Angeles, appointed Mitch Gordon to lead the new program as VP of channel partnerships, and JJ Cramer has been named senior director of channel partnerships.