

Boing Boing and Benz

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Back in February 2008 Boing Boing [accepted sponsorship](#) from Honda based around posts tagged ?safety?, ?environment? and ?innovation?. These sections had Honda?s advertising running against them for a limited time. As an [established fixture](#) and arbiter of web culture as well as *?the most popular blog in the world?* according to [Technorati](#), the sponsorship created a split in opinion among many commenters as to whether this was acceptable. Joel Johnson, one of the contributors to the site, saw fit to [raise the issue](#) again some months later to highlight why Honda was one of his favourite companies and stated he?d *?welcome the b ack in a heartbeat?*.

The idea of applying Honda advertising based on how a potentially unrelated post was tagged made for a fairly low-key campaign. A far more high profile series of endorsements have recently been seen on a companion site, Boing Boing Gadgets, where Mercedes Benz have been actively promoted via a series of blog posts:

[Cars! Interior textures of the 2010 E-Class](#) (Gallery)

[Cars! BBG visits Mercedes-Benz? telematics research lab](#)

[Cars! Pairing Mercedes with iPhone](#)

[Cars! Mercedes? future wireless entertainment tech](#)

[In future America, car stops you.](#)

Each post is accompanied with a clear disclaimer stating:

?Disclosure: Mercedes-Benz is a sponsor of BBG. Last week, we drove the new E-Class and were the first bloggers or journalists to get a look inside their North American R&D lab. We?re writing a series of posts about the tech we saw there; Mercedes-Benz has no editorial involvement in these items.?

I?d classify this project as a successful attempt to promote Mercedes Benz via blogger outreach with a light social touch. What makes it interesting is that Mercedes Benz have decided to deploy their assets much more effectively than other manufacturers in order to generate unique content. These posts come across as far more than the result of simply adding a few high-profile bloggers to the traditional press launch of a new car. They are certainly much more advanced than the idea that blogs will pick-up and repeat by rote the flat press releases that usually accompany these events.

What Mercedes Benz have allowed is **access**; the bloggers are then free to produce content that is most appropriate to their audience, free to do the thing they do well without restriction. While this means accepting a loss of brand control it does mean that the resulting posts are authentic, original and non-duplicable, based as they are on unique content derived from speaking to actual Mercedes Benz engineers rather than through the filter of a PR department.

It's striking that there are no visible negative comments responding to the promotion of Mercedes Benz by Boing Boing. This means that, in the context of what we can read, the posts have been placed in the right location and written in the right style to be perceived as relevant to this audience without looking like a blatant piece of product placement that would draw the ire of regular readers. It's therefore a model for how to conduct successful outreach activity.

By leveraging Boing Boing's own features, such as their multiple sections and the ability to retweet posts as well as the blog's relatively large audience, Mercedes Benz got more bang for their buck than if they'd stuck to traditional methods of online promotion. The content was cross-promoted on the main Boing Boing blog which will have increased exposure:

Today at Boing Boing Gadgets:

Our visit to Mercedes' research lab yielded two more videos: how to pair an iPhone with the console, and the company's plans to create an in-car appstore for its in-dash computers.

We visited Mercedes-Benz's R&D labs: the 2010 E-Class is full of high-tech safety equipment (and odd textures) in a few years it'll practically be driving itself.

The campaign could have been improved by creating a Boing Boing specific landing page on the main E-Class site. As it is this doesn't really flow and hold my attention and doesn't fit with the idea of the bloggers visiting the R&D Division which doesn't get a link in itself, probably because it is also very corporate and devoid of interesting content. In addition Mercedes Benz haven't hooked their own social properties up; this Boing Boing content doesn't appear on their [YouTube channel](#) and wasn't promoted via their [Facebook profile](#).

To get the greatest benefit you need to feature your content in all of the social spaces you influence and then apply analytics to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each. In essence, a good starter-for-ten with plenty of opportunity to build on next time.