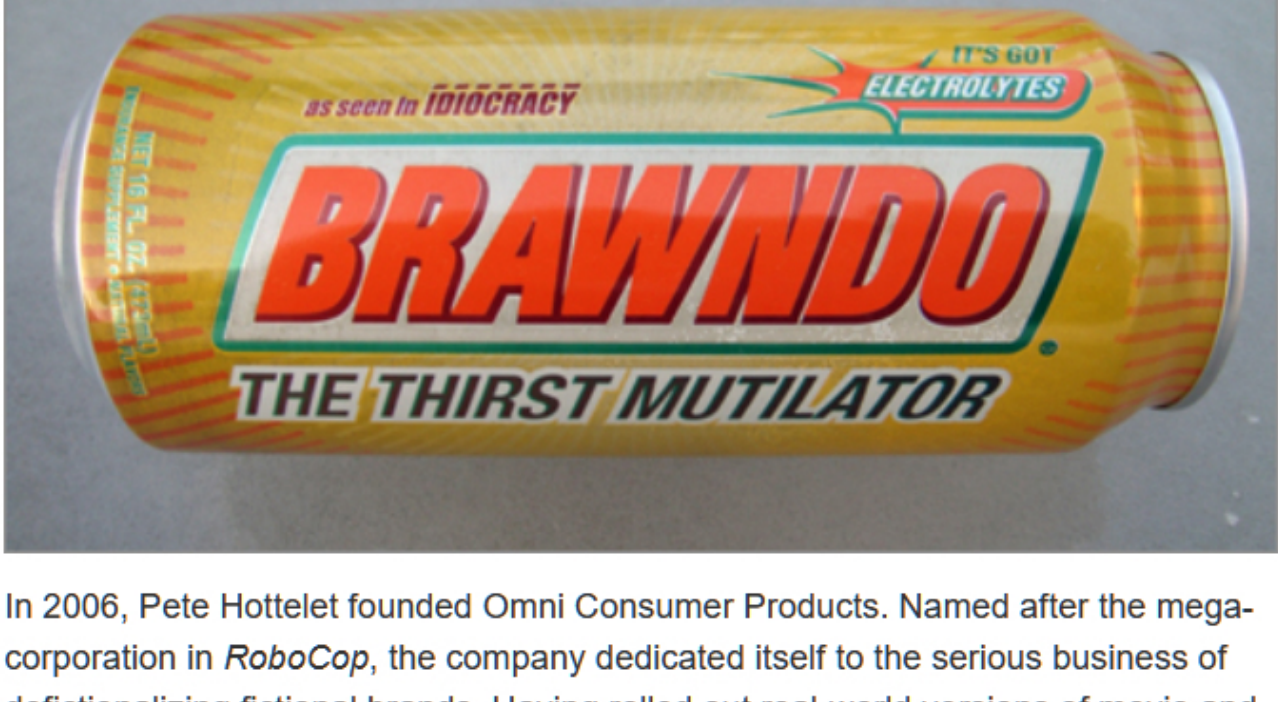


That's entertainvertising: Pete Hottelet and the mocketing contortionism of fake brands made real

By Rebecca Cullers on Mon Jul 26, 2010

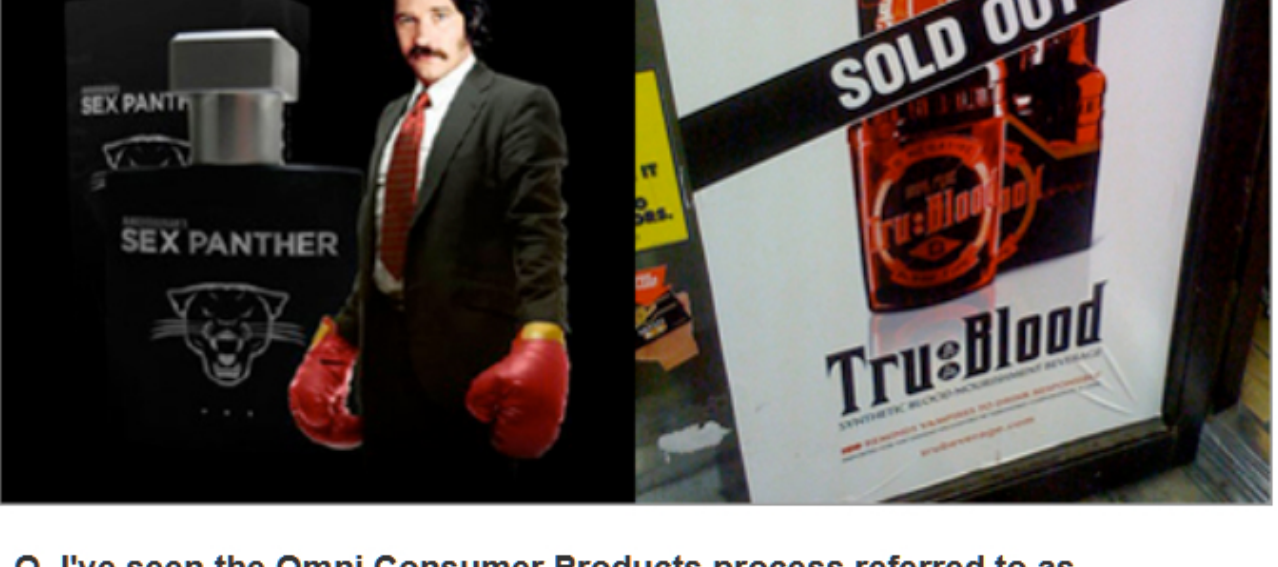


In 2006, Pete Hottelet founded Omni Consumer Products. Named after the mega-corporation in *RoboCop*, the company dedicated itself to the serious business of defictionalizing fictional brands. Having rolled out real-world versions of movie and TV brands ranging from Brawndo (the energy drink from *Idiocracy*) to Sex Panther cologne (from *Anchorman*) to Tru Blood (the blood replacement beverage from *True Blood*) to, shortly, Stay Puft Marshmallows (from *Ghostbusters*), Omni Consumer Products leads the U.S. in the art of bringing products off the screen and into your life. (Its tagline: "The future of yesterday, today.") Hottelet took a moment to e-mail with AdFreak and explain how he got into the business of defictionalization and how to do it right.

Q. When did you first get the idea to start bringing fictional brands into reality? I understand you were inspired by the Swingline stapler from *Office Space*, which didn't come in red until after the movie and people demanded it. But what made you decide to jump into this whole world?

A. In a world with "monster" everything and "Extreme Tylenol," it was sort of inevitable. I did it because it was hilarious, but someone else would have done it if I didn't. Look at it this way: We live in a country that invented the pizza vending machine, the foot-long cheeseburger, and a chicken, bacon and cheddar cheese sandwich bereft entirely of bread. And one time we sent a man to go walk around on the moon just because we could. Yeah, the moon. That moon.

Considering I studied art in college, beverages seemed like a reasonable enough problem for a person to try and tackle. I imagine things would have gone terribly awry if I'd tried my hand at rocketry.



Q. I've seen the Omni Consumer Products process referred to as "defictionalization." Is that the word you'd use to describe it, and how would you define it?

A. I coined "entertainvertising" as sort of a goof on "advertainment." Scientific American referred to it as "Moebius-like-referential pop-culture-as-reality mocketing contortionism." Defictionalization is definitely more succinct, although maybe not as much fun to say. Basically, it's the act of creating or identifying a brand within a narrative, and producing a physical product of the described type bearing that branding. As viewership becomes increasingly fragmented, this sort of thing is going to grow into a standard practice in the entertainment industry. Right now, marketers have their eyes on the so-called "third screen" with a focus on mobile. Well, guess what the "fourth screen" is? Real life.

Q. Are there fake brands you've tried to acquire the rights to, but been unable to?

A. So goes the tale of Duff beer and Morley cigarettes. Alcohol and tobacco are sort of a sticky wicket, it turns out. Also, firearms. Or just products that might result in unsavory shenanigans, like a *Dexter*-branded knife-and-garbage-bag set, or a Black Mesa crowbar from Valve's *Half-Life*. Let me rephrase that—when I say "unsavory shenanigans," I mean manslaughter.

Q. You approached Picnicface, a Canadian comedy troupe, who had viral success with their own fake drink, Powerthirst, and had them riff off their Powerthirst commercials in ads for Brawndo, the fake drink from *Idiocracy* that you made real. The levels of meta there blow my mind, but from an advertising standpoint, were you worried people might not realize Brawndo now actually existed?

A. The guys from Picnicface are great to work with. Mark Little is a genius. I don't think there was really a concern about product confusion—it was more about making some epic clips. A 300-foot-tall pony? Covered in chainsaws? Yeah, we went there. Shaving your chest with a lawnmower? Check. Fistfight with a grizzly bear? You got it. I think what's really funny about all this is that this marketing approach is now getting incorporated into actual campaigns for real brands. Made by serious companies. Clearly, the gauntlet has been thrown. One of us will have to ride a wildebeest across the English Channel.

Q. Could you pontificate for a moment about how long a product based on a movie reference can hold its appeal after a movie comes out?

A. You'd be surprised at the longevity of some of these. *Anchorman* came out six years ago, and Sex Panther sales are strong. And *Ghostbusters* is 26 years old, and it's one of Columbia's strongest properties. For catalog movies, it makes sense to pick and choose the most iconic brands or products you can. We've had good judgment on those so far. *True Blood* is in a completely different league. The entire concept behind the show is to blend the real, the unreal and the surreal, and I think they do an amazing job of it. I really have to hand it to Alan Ball, Campfire and all the folks at HBO for being extremely big picture with their approach—the drink is only a small part of the world they're building.

Q. You'll soon be selling Stay Puft marshmallows. Obviously, *Ghostbusters* has stood the test of time and is experiencing a resurgence with *Ghostbusters: The Video Game* and the third *Ghostbusters* movie, coming in 2012. Would you care to expound upon the pop-culture lifecycle of a reference that's gone out and come back in with extra nostalgia power behind it? Will you advertise Stay Puft differently as a result?

A. The great thing about Stay Puft is that because the fan base is so large, we had a much greater opportunity to create a good product. The marshmallows are a hand-crafted gourmet product, and so the pricing isn't going to compete with what you get at the supermarket. They're also caffeinated. Regular marshmallows are notoriously deficient in important vitamins like caffeine. As far as the advertising, I think that's better left as a surprise. Everyone likes surprises, right?



Q. On the *True Blood* front, HBO owns the show rights, but Campfire created the Tru Blood beverage campaign and commercials. Did you have to acquire rights from both of them? How did that work out?

A. We started working on Tru Blood creative before the first season came out—a lot of the details on the bottle, like the cap size and labeling, were a little bit tricky to pull off. But Alan [Ball] has a really specific vision for things, so it was important to make sure everything came out 1:1. We had to design a few things from scratch (e.g., the 4-pack construction) because we didn't have contact with the Campfire folks. HBO owns all the trademarks, branding, and so on.

Q. What is so appealing to people about seeing fiction become reality—even when the fictitious world it's coming from is downright appalling (*Idiocracy*) or the product is portrayed as comically ineffective in the original (Sex Panther cologne)?

A. People like to have fun. If you create these products in a quality fashion that's respectful of the people that are buying them, that fun becomes a collaborative effort between the people creating the entertainment and the people enjoying the entertainment. It's no longer about being outside the world looking in, but participating in the experience in an immersive or tangible way. The huge popularity of *Avatar* 3-D is an expression of this same sentiment, I think.

It's also great when people see these products out in the real world, unaware of the source, and that leads them back to the originating show or movie. It's almost like a *They Live* moment when they get to peel back the curtain on reality for a second.

Q. Given the distrust of advertising, do you think people are more drawn to ads for something like Sex Panther cologne because the claims are clearly, even absurdly false? Or are you just mocking overblown cologne ads? Everyone knows Axe won't make women attack you like rabid dogs, and you'll never swan dive into the best night of your life, no matter how much Old Spice you wear.

A. I think it's obvious that the claims we've been laying out [for Sex Panther] aren't nearly absurd enough. Consider this: If Axe is the fragrance equivalent of a spicy spaghetti dinner, Sex Panther cologne is the equivalent of winning the Indy 500 in a Trans-Am made entirely of live snakes.

Don't tell me that's impossible. Nothing's impossible when you're wearing Sex Panther. Because you don't spray it on your body. You spray it on your SOUL. AND IT DOESN'T COME OFF.

Q. How important to you is the quality of the products?

A. Quality is probably the most important thing. If you're not going to do that, what's the point?

Q. What brands are you planning to license in the future?

A. Well, I was the proud owner of the trademark for Slurm [the beverage from *Futurama*], but that one slipped through my fingers. Much like trying to pour a can of warm soda into your hand, actually. So, to avoid that happening again, I generally try not to talk about it too much. I do take requests, though.

Q. Anything else you'd like to ad?

A. Is that a double entendre? Well played. Well played.

[Leave a comment.](#)

QUICK LINKS



Google Search

☒ search AdFreak

ADVERTISEMENT

ADFREAK ON FACEBOOK

CONTRIBUTORS

- » [Rebecca Cullers](#)
- » [Mark Dolliver](#)
- » [David Gianatasio](#)
- » [David Griner](#)
- » [David Kiefaber](#)
- » [Barbara Lippert](#)
- » [Brian Morrissey](#)
- » [Tim Nudd](#) (editor)
- » [Noreen O'Leary](#)
- » [Email us](#)

'GET A MAC': THE COMPLETE CAMPAIGN

