

# PR WEEK

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## WEBSITE LAUNCH

### Brilliant Shopper taps into blogs to reach the market

**PR team:** *LaunchSquad (San Francisco) and Brilliant Shopper (Freemont, CA)*

**Campaign:** *Launch of Brilliant Shopper*

**Time frame:** *February through May 2005*

**Budget:** *\$25,000*

Early this year, as competitors were inking deals and launching products, and the media were evangelizing search technology as the net's best thing, Brilliant Shopper founder and CEO Phil Lan decided the time was right to debut his fledgling online engine in beta.

After all, his product would not only borrow some of the buzz being generated, but also would make recruiting a management team and raising funds that much easier.

Brilliant Shopper is a vertical search site designed to combine the functionality of comparison-shopping engines with the breadth of search engines.

The challenge for LaunchSquad, though, was to make enough noise online to satisfy Lan's objectives, but with only a \$25,000 budget.

Enter the blogs.

#### Strategy

Despite the risks associated with introducing a product that has yet to be outfitted with all its bells and whistles, the strategy

has proven successful for others, such as Google's early introduction last year of Gmail, its free, search-based web mail service.

"We had two primary objectives," says Lan. "The first was to increase awareness of Brilliant Shopper to facilitate the build-out of the company, including hiring staff, building our investor pool, and [developing] business relationships. The second was to increase traffic to the website."

LaunchSquad faced a tough task in pursuing coverage for Brilliant Shopper with minimal PR assets (e.g. no live site, very early story) in a short timespan.

Setting its sights on the blogging community, LaunchSquad aimed to generate awareness and build a groundswell of interest while the company completed the site.

#### Tactics

"In preparation for the effort, we extensively researched the blogosphere to understand who were the most influential voices in search and e-commerce, and developed a hub-and-spoke approach to drive maximum coverage based on our briefings," says LaunchSquad partner Jason Throckmorton.

For example, the research showed that certain bloggers (spokes) almost always linked to stories that other, more prominent bloggers (hubs) wrote, so you could get multiple pick-ups from just one posting if you targeted correctly.

In addition to the hub-and-spoke strategy, LaunchSquad also devised a launch event around the availability of the

Brilliant Shopper beta to create a news hook and encourage bloggers to break the story before the site formally debuted to the mainstream media.

#### Results

LaunchSquad scored a coup when John Batelle, a cofounder of *Wired* magazine, as well as Matt Marshall, writer for the *San Jose Mercury News*' Silicon Valley beat, were among the uber-influential bloggers that wrote of Brilliant Shoppers' launch. These postings were in turn picked up by dozens of less-influential bloggers, creating an online ripple effect.

"The publicity from our beta launch increased our page views for that week about two-and-a-half times," Lan says. "It has helped raise the profile of Brilliant Shopper's vision and management, put us on par with shopping search start-ups that were founded earlier, and set us apart from the tier-two players."

#### Future

The formal launch is scheduled for Q3 this year. It will include a meatier budget for both advertising and PR to increase awareness and traffic to the Brilliant Shopper site.

"On a strategic level, we're focused on two areas," Lan says. "Educating the consumer audience about the strengths of Brilliant Shopper vis-à-vis other shopping sites and continuing to raise awareness for the company within the business community to help drive strategic business initiatives."

Craig McGuire