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## Audi: The Art of the Heist

**Brand Name:** Audi  
**Product Type or Description:** Automobile  
**Category for this Entry:** Media Strategy  
**Campaign Title:** The Art of the Heist  
**Agency:** McKinney  
**Client:** Audi of America

### Marketing Challenge

*"We've seen this act before, and so far the results have been less than stellar. BMW'S 318ti was discontinued in 1999. The Mercedes 0230 sport coupe will disappear as soon as dealer inventory runs out. Americans think hatchbacks are cheap economy cars.*

- Car and Driver

*"Premium hatchbacks have never had an easy time of it here (BMW 318t4 anyone?). As good as the A3 is, we just don't see that changing any time soon."*

- Automobile Magazine

How do you succeed where others before you have repeatedly failed? How do you make it work with a marketing budget just one-third that of the average luxury car launch? How do you do it in a way that doesn't cheapen the Audi brand?

These were the challenges facing Audi in the spring of 2005 as they planned to launch the new A3.

### Campaign Objectives

- Create buzz and excitement around the A3
- Translate the buzz into sales that meet aggressive goals
- Avoid cheapening the Audi brand

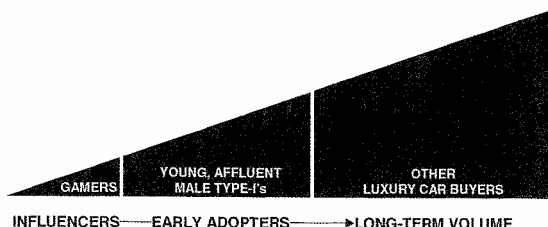
### Target Audience

We know Audi's best prospects as "Type-i": Luxury car buyers who are intelligent, independent and innovative. Within the Type-i universe, highly-affluent (\$1 50K+ income) young males, age 24-30, were most likely to be attracted to the A3 concept. They aren't interested in an "entry level" luxury car; they want "what's next." They can afford the A3, which is generally priced higher than Audi's A4 and comparable to BMW's 3-Series.

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They also have an important fourth “i” — they are influential among their peers. Style-focused, tech-savvy, Web-addicted and a bit detached from traditional media, they gravitate towards content with complex, serial storylines that walk a fine line between reality and fiction, such as *The DaVinci Code*, *Metal Gear Solid, 24* and *The Bourne Identity*.

We built our program to appeal to hard-core online gainers who are into alternate reality gaming, betting they would create the buzz needed to engage these young, affluent male Type-i early adopters.



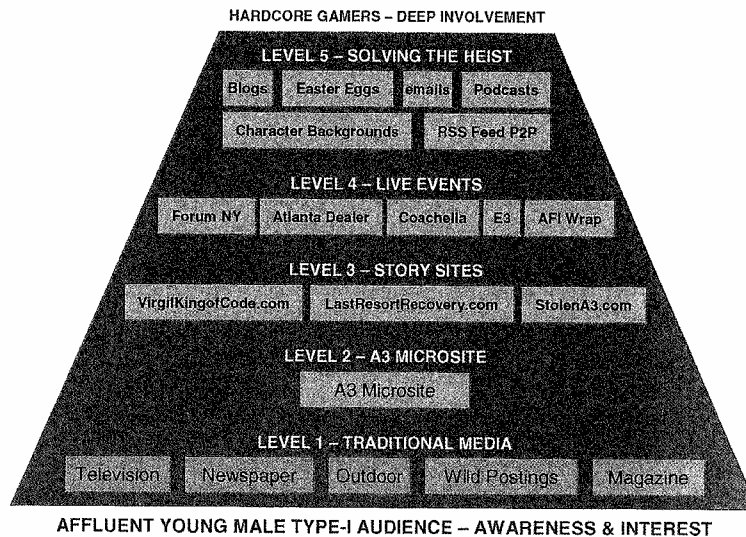
### Communications Insight & Strategy

We invited our audience to participate in a completely immersive campaign called *The Art of the Heist*. The *Heist* was structured to amaze hardcore gainers with the depth and authenticity of the program, while using the buzz they generated to attract and engage the broader Type-i audience and beyond. To use them as a critical part of the media mix.

Best described as a “live interactive movie,” the *Heist* utilized every possible medium to create a 24-hour-a-day alternate reality. Using actors, character websites, blogs, podcasts, emails, live events, PR and unexpected applications of traditional media, the *Heist* so blurred the line between fact and fiction that our target didn’t just watch the campaign unfold. They actually played roles in it.

We used many new media tools. But we also created our own media. Most of the program unfolded on three character Web sites and a story microsite, where we posted an average of twenty new entries each day. The character Web sites were made to be so convincing that the mainstream press sought our actors’ expert opinions on matters related to their fictional businesses. To drive people to these sites and add texture to the storylines, we used small space magazine ads, blogs, RSS feeds, consumer rail, TV, print, out-of-home and wild postings. We also staged live events where the characters interacted directly with consumers who were recruited for “special missions.”

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## In What Way Did Media Drive the Entire Campaign?

Anyone familiar with the car business knows that there's a pretty well established formula for launching cars. It usually involves a lot of television and millions and millions of dollars. We did not have that luxury for the launch of the A3. Combine that with the knowledge that our target — affluent, tech-savvy, Web-addicted young male Type i's — are somewhat skeptical and detached from traditional media, it was quickly apparent that we couldn't follow the old model. We had to create a new one. So the strategy of using gainers to influence the broader Type i target was essentially one born out of necessity, a necessity first recognized by the media team.

### Media

- Television
- Radio
- Newspaper
- Consumer Magazine
- Point of Purchase
- Out-of-Home
- Public Relations
- Interactive/Online
- Other

### Other Supporting Communication Programs

We took advantage of real events to heighten the reality of the program. The action was captured on video and fed to the various Web properties:

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*Ellis Audi Reception*, Atlanta, Ga. — Consumers were recruited to help retrieve an SD card from an A3 on the dealership floor. The action was webcast.

*Coachella Music Festival*, Indio, Calif., and *AFI Filmmaker Event*, New York, NY — More consumers helped retrieve SD cards from display cars at event receptions.

*ES Gaming Convention*, Los Angeles, Calif. — *Heist* character Virgil Tatum made a splash as he toured the convention. His interview with VH1 was broadcast from the convention floor.

#### Total Media Expenditure

- \$10 to under \$20 million

Compared to the competition, this budget is less.

Compared to the prior year budget, this budget is *about the same*.

#### Evidence of Results

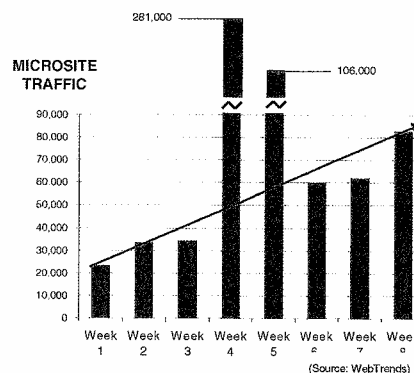
We used an array of tools to measure impact at each level of the purchase funnel, allowing us to monitor and adjust the campaign in real time to ensure we would achieve our critical objectives:

**We created loads of buzz and excitement around the A3** -- Over **500,000 people participated** on an ongoing basis (source: WebTrends). Consumers spent, on average, from **4 to 10 minutes at each of the three story sites** (source: New Media Strategies).

The Heist generated **over 45 million PR impressions** (source: Bacon's, PR Newswire) including **feature articles in *Business Week* and *The Wall Street Journal***. Because it was an **engaging brand experience**, the *Heist* earned a community of participants who protected the program from naysayers (source: New Media Strategies), e.g.:

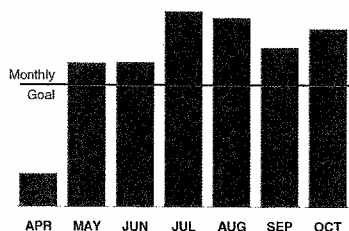
*"WOW... what a lame publicity stunt. 1) You registered www.stolena3.com 2 weeks before the car was actually stolen... AND 2) your website was registered by an ad agency" (posted by "this is a fraud") "Oh, wow, you figured out it's a game?? How intelligent of you... eh, we ALREADY KNEW THAT! Who cares if it's sponsored by Audi if you don't like that just go away. Nobody forced you to come here" (response from "eshan")*

*"My husband is looking to purchase a new car, we've driven cars at BMW, Acura, Mercedes, and Infiniti. We never even considered Audi until now. So as consumers we don't find any of this offensive. We love it" (follow-up response from "nancy")*



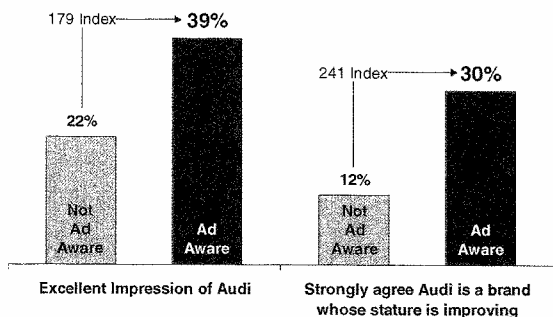
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**The buzz led to sales that are 15.9% over aggressive goals** —(source: Audi). We can connect this success directly to the program: When participants visited audiusa.com, 33% of their interaction was with “buying indicator pages” (car configurator, lease calculator, dealer locator, quote request), dramatically higher than any prior experience (source: Atlas).



**We didn't cheapen the Audi brand — we strengthened it** — Consumers aware of *The Art of the Heist* developed significantly more favorable impressions of the Audi brand (source: Zoomerang Online Survey). And it looks like we're sourcing strength from the right competitors:

So: how do you succeed where others before you have repeatedly failed? How do you make it work with a marketing budget just one-third that of the average luxury car launch? How do you do it in a way that doesn't cheapen the Audi brand? You invite people to experience *The Art of the Heist*.



Unks, a BMW-owner, ignores most ads. “But for Audi to embrace this type of gaming changed my opinion of them,” he says, adding that he long considered Audi just a weaker rival to BMW. **THE**

(Source: *BusinessWeek*, 7/25/05, (Advertising Of, By, and For the People”)

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