

## XBOX: BRAND AUDIT

MKTG353: Brand, Strategy & Social Technology

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### I. Introduction

We conducted a brand audit on Xbox to understand how various stakeholders, consumers specifically, view the brand. Currently a multi-billion dollar industry, the video game industry is undeniably an integral part of U.S. culture, as well as many others around the world. The Xbox is a video game console manufactured by Microsoft, which produces both hardware and software products. The original Xbox console was positioned as a gaming powerhouse—its black, masculine design and concomitant marketing was targeted towards “hardcore” male gamers. It sought to differentiate itself by providing a technologically superior product and immersive, intense gameplay.

These associations resonated well with Xbox’s core audience. However, as Microsoft has sought to expand the appeal of its newest console, the Xbox 360, it must overcome the challenges of this initial branding. Namely, that more “casual” gamers consider the console too hardcore and intimidating. Xbox now faces a branding challenge: how to target and market to a broader, less “hardcore” gaming audience without alienating its core “hardcore” demographic? Xbox's image is strongly associated with graphics, power and great games (that appeal to hardcore gamers). Now, however, it is trying to market itself as a brand with innovative games and entertainment experiences that bring people and family members together to compete, hang out and have fun. Microsoft needs to bridge this disconnect between user imagery and the targeted market of Xbox. The most recent initiative to push this more casual angle is the release of the Kinect, a motion-controlled device that allows players to physically move as though they were characters in the game.

## II. Image v. Identity

The main brand issues uncovered and insights gained during the exploratory research phase of our work helped us to understand the main reasons behind disconnect between user imagery and the targeted market. The insights gained through the initial Image Identity gap analysis, Experience map and Voice Guidelines are briefly discussed here which helped us in finalizing our Social Media Object. These exercises informed our thought process and helped us create what we believe to be a social media object that is authentic and relevant to our audience.

Xbox360 is designed to be the best console in the market with technical capabilities that far surpassed those of competitors. As such, the main image that the Xbox portrays is that of competence. A few common patterns emerged from our research. First of all, a couple of games dominate gamers' mindshare. It was highlighted that people play Xbox a lot of the time with friends. Many people pointed to high-quality graphics and easy connectivity, and described the product as fun and exciting. We found it interesting that many people we talked to seemed to have made their purchasing decision based more on the games available for that console and the overall experience they would have, rather than on the brand of Microsoft.

There were a few "gaps" that were identified based on our analysis. One was that while Xbox seemed to tout the attractiveness of its online community through Xbox Live in making new friends, many players did not feel connected to it, and in fact, many seemed repelled by it, repeatedly complaining of an "aggressive" and "annoying" culture that fostered "trash talking" instead of friendships. The second major gap we identified was the value proposition. While Microsoft seems to market Xbox as a good value proposition based on technical competence, high graphic quality, and extras in various services, many customers did not see the Xbox as a good value proposition, often complaining about the high prices and feeling as though they were being "nickel and dimed" for every additional service, feature, or piece of content.

### **III. Experience**

In general, we imagine Xbox's ideal that the brand experience map would always end on a high note, and minimize the incidence of poor experiences and feelings. They hope to achieve this by making the product easy to setup and use, free of errors and bugs, and making compelling gaming content for their audience. However, not every aspect of the experience is positive, according to the people we surveyed for our voice guideline. Consumers tended to experience unhappy emotions in various stages of the process, from purchasing to setup to gameplay and community interactions. Unfortunately, some of these experiences are not ones that Microsoft can easily control, as many of these issues are related to third parties rather than Xbox. For example, user error, unfriendly community interactions, or problems with games made by third party developers all may be unfairly attributed to Xbox, which is simply the delivery mechanism.

### **IV. Voice Guideline**

If our brand were to have a voice it would be probably closest to that of Tony Stark, also known as "Ironman." He is incredibly smart, exhibiting technical competence and ingenuity. At the same time, he is smooth, suave, and perhaps a bit "too cool for school." He is fun and parties a lot, but many people also may be turned off by him—either because they feel intimidated, or because he has a rather bombastic personality. Compared to its large, hulking predecessor, the design of the new Xbox is slim, sleek, and rather understated—perhaps to make it more appealing and approachable for a broader audience.

### **V. Social Campaign**

Our team decided to create a video that will highlight the new engaging experiences for the expanded target market. Specifically, we would like to create brand awareness and equity with casual male and female gamers ages 15-35. This video will emphasize that Xbox games appeal not only to hardcore gamers but to the more casual gamers. We hope that it will serve as a highly pervasive social media object and that in the current situation this video will have the

ability to create opportunities for brand conversations for both consumers and key decision-makers at Microsoft.

In our video, the Xbox is portrayed as a device that allows one to participate regardless of one's athletic ability, and has "something for everyone." The video draws parallels between the protagonist's situation and the feelings of many casual gamers: that they may feel intimidated by playing with more hardcore, experienced players, but that there are experiences for them, too. Furthermore, by using a child as the main protagonist, we hoped to convey the message that the Xbox and Kinect are family-friendly devices.

In general our launch strategy took into account our customer demographics and their communication preferences. Since we are catering to a relatively young internet savvy demographic, we decided to focus our efforts on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter to get traction. We used YouTube to launch the video and utilize our social networks on Facebook and Twitter to promote the video. We believe our approach will be successful because it will utilize humor to soften Xbox's image and convey the message that Xbox Kinect has something for everyone. We also feel by using celebrity actors and poking fun at the absurdity and general lack of talent by excessive athlete celebrations, we will provide an enjoyable and shareable object. We hope that our object will be shareable because it offers not just a humorous experience, but an unexpected one as well. Typically, many "underdog" videos show the protagonist triumphing in their original goal. However, our video adds a twist to this, by not only having our protagonist fail spectacularly, but also having our large athletes gloat and revel in the child's failure, to bring additional humor through exaggeration. Lastly, counter to some of Xbox's traditional advertising that focuses on functionality, we hope to establish a greater emotional connection by highlighting the user experience. Xbox already has a large presence in the social media realm, our campaign is reach out to potential new consumers and to spark their interest in purchasing an Xbox.

## VI. Lessons

Our metrics included the number of users who view our video, the number of viewers that forward the link via You Tube, number of likes/dislikes, and the comments left by those who watched the video. We initially set our metrics at fairly modest levels: over the course of a week we hoped to achieve 350 views, 150 likes, 75 forwards, and 20 positive comments.

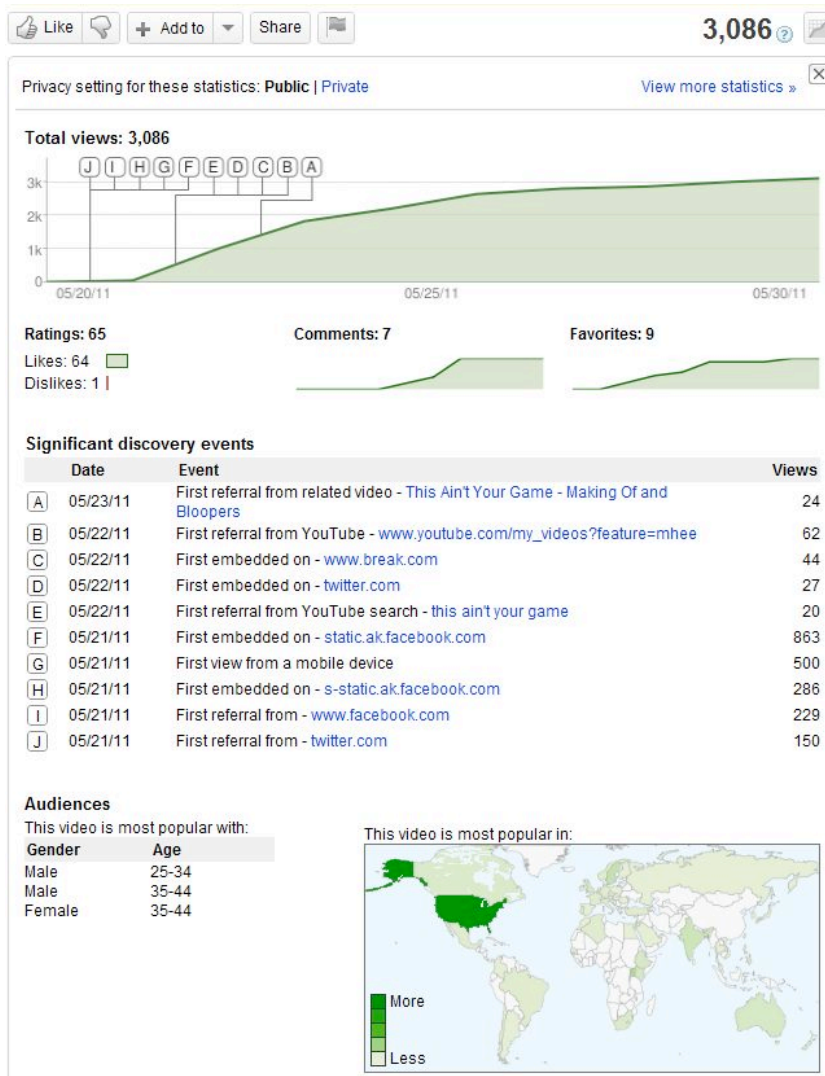
Our campaign proved much more successful than we initially anticipated. Within a week, our video had achieved over 3,000 views on YouTube. All of our group members posted the video on their Facebook pages, and the posts garnered many comments by friends and family members. We didn't achieve as many "likes" on the YouTube platform as we had hoped—part of this problem was that while we achieved many "likes" on Facebook (our primary viewing platform) for the video, these "likes" did not transfer to YouTube's tally. Furthermore, beyond our immediate five-person team, we had many friends repost to their own pages. While this was positive, this meant we had trouble tracking the comments and "likes" beyond our group. Between YouTube and the number of "first level" "likes" (just from our group own postings) on Facebook, we estimate we achieved approximately 163 "likes" for our video with only 1 dislike, and 73 comments. Additionally, our video was retweeted 12 times including MC Hammer, the Public Relations Director for Bing and a former G4 TV star, Laura Foy, and a big tech blogger from Australia, Long Zheng. Furthermore, we also posted a "bloop reel" from the shoot, which we did not publicize as much, but still proved popular, with over 300 views.

Even more encouraging was that our video reached many of the top executives within Microsoft and Xbox. Leveraging our contacts, the video made its way to the Public Relations Director for Bing, the Senior Director of Public Relations for Xbox, the Social Media Manager for Xbox, the General Manager of Marketing for Xbox, and the Senior Director of Media for Xbox. We hope that our video inspired some interesting discussions and ideas for the Xbox Marketing team.

Most of our campaign ran fairly smoothly. However, while we certainly beat our expectations for the video, we are pessimistic as to its virality potential. We believe this is because it still has a “commercial-feel” to it, and the video is not sufficiently “amateur-looking” or “professional-looking” to appeal to a broad audience. We did note a flattening of our viewership curve possibly attributed to the exhaustion of our extended social network or perhaps the result of limited resources and time commitment to complete a full campaign. Another interesting result from our campaign was our lack of penetration within the 13-17 demographic, particularly since our style of humor should have resonated with that affinity group. This however, may have been largely a function of our social networks, as most of us do not have many friends in this age range. Also, our main viewing platform, Facebook is restricts underage users. We also were hoping to get exposure on the official Xbox Facebook page, through group members’ contacts. This did not happen, and was likely not spread beyond more than a few degrees beyond our group’s social networks. We made a few minor adjustments to the keywords for our video after launch to allow it to be better picked up from search engines. If we had to do it differently, we would probably have planned out the video a bit better, which would have allowed us to get the shots we needed to achieve a more professional look. We also could have reached out to fan communities to see if we could leverage their fanbase networks.

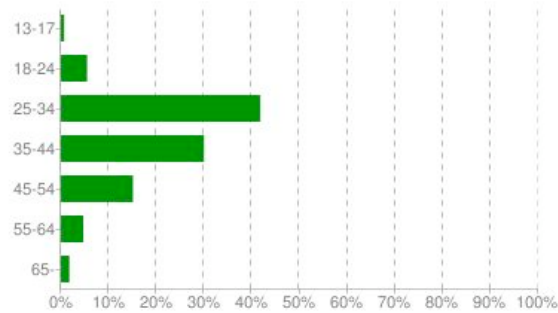
Moving forward for the Xbox brand, we recommend that Xbox continue to market the brand to both hardcore gamers and to casual gamers. It must be careful, though that the marketing for the casual gamers not come across as too feminine or too childish, so as not to alienate core gamers, who typically are grown males, and are Microsoft’s most profitable customers (they purchase the most games and other items, as opposed to the Xbox console, which is sold at a loss.)

## Exhibit A – YouTube Analytics

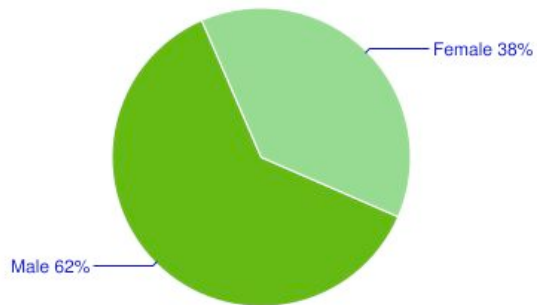


### Demographics [More info](#)

Age ranges for:  All  Male  Female



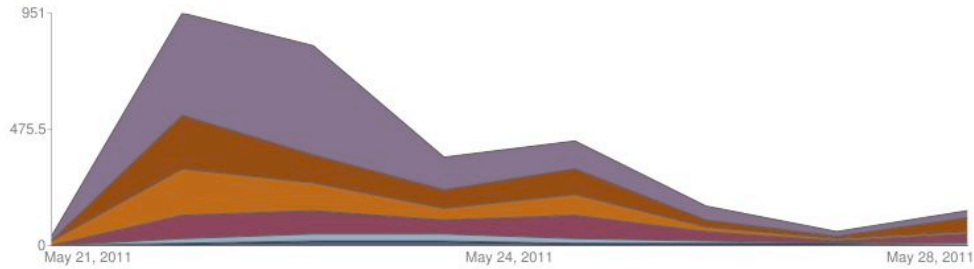
Genders for all age groups



## Exhibit A (cont'd)

### Discovery How are people finding this video? [More info](#)

Links followed to this video  Display as:  Stacked chart  Line chart



<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Links followed to this video	Views	% of total views
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">No link referrer - embedded player</a>	1,231	41.1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">No link referrer - YouTube watch and channel pages (?)</a>	606	20.3
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">No link referrer - mobile devices (?)</a>	500	16.7
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">External website</a>	436	14.6
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">YouTube other pages</a>	111	3.7
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">YouTube search</a>	58	1.9
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">YouTube related video</a>	31	1.0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Google search</a>	14	0.47
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">YouTube channel page</a>	5	0.17

Download reports for this video: [csv](#) [csv for Excel](#) [More info](#)



### Exhibit B – Sample Facebook Post



**This Ain't Your Game**  
www.youtube.com  
Kid gets tackled by Dallas Cowboy (Kalen Thornton), rejected by LA Laker (Mark Madsen), and then shows them both how it's done with Xbox Kinect!

May 22 at 1:25pm · Like · Comment · Share

Cory B. Redding, Gary Kusin, Nnedi Iwuchukwu and 14 others like this.

**Marin Markov** Haha, hilarious!  
May 22 at 1:57pm · Like

**Clarisa Duran Lindenmeyer** Soo great!  
May 22 at 2:40pm · Like

**Debika Sihi** This is fantastic!!!!!!!!!!!!  
May 22 at 2:43pm · Like

**Kalen Thornton** Thanks all, please share the video w/ friends :-)  
May 22 at 2:57pm · Like

**Cherita Freetobeme** awesomeness!!!!!!  
May 22 at 3:19pm · Like

**Bobby Menefee** Winner.  
May 22 at 3:40pm · Like

**Tristan Walker** hahahahahahaha  
May 22 at 3:54pm · Like

**Digital Depictions** Haaaaa!...Love it!  
May 22 at 4:08pm · Like

**Lal Jones-Bey** hahaha!  
May 22 at 4:52pm · Like

**Nicholas Barnes** Thats tight work!  
May 22 at 4:54pm · Like

**Nicole LaMore Black** Great job! Very funny :)  
May 22 at 4:55pm · Like

**Gwen Wright** Wonderful Job made me want to go out and buy two right now...lol..lol...  
May 22 at 5:44pm · Like

**Julie Tanner** Should I expect to see this on TV soon? nice work KT!!  
May 22 at 9:23pm · Like