

“Stranger Things”, Marketing that’s More than Meets the Eye.

If you haven’t seen an episode of “Stranger Things” by now, you may be the only human in this dimension that hasn’t. Over 40 million global households watched “Stranger Things” on its season 3 debut weekend, July 4th of this year. Over 824,000 US viewers had finished all eight episodes by the end of the first day launched, making “Stranger Things” the most-watched series Netflix has ever analyzed. While we have become engulfed in the lives of Hawkins’ residents and those creepy Demogorgons, we may not realize “Stranger Things” has turned the world of marketing upside down.

Webster’s Dictionary defines “nostalgia” as: *a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations*. Nostalgia is the feeling we get when a song takes us back to a moment in our past, a first dance or kiss. Sometimes it takes us back to an era, like high school or when we lived on Elm Street. Nostalgia evokes emotion within us. It’s how we end up going back to our ex (even when we know better, we want to remember the good times) or the feeling we get when we sit inside a 1966 Stingray Corvette, it’s timeless. Nostalgia brings a sense of authenticity, familiarity, and comfort. It’s no wonder that nostalgia marketing works. It makes us “long for a period or place with happy personal associations”.

The creators of “Stranger Things”, Matt and Ross Duffer (The Duffer Brothers), were born in 1984. Like many of us, they grew up watching ET, Ghostbusters, and Stand By Me. They used nostalgia marketing to take us all back to that era of our lives. Each episode is chocked full of mullets, jean jackets, walkie talkies, and Mongoose bikes (adorned with retro headlights just like ET rode across the moon). The Duffer Brothers have thought of every detail, from the “Reagan/Bush ‘84” signs to the awful retro sofas draped with grandma’s crocheted afghan. We never would have imagined we’d long to recreate the 80’s.

5 ways “Stranger Things” teaches us marketing is more than meets the eye:

1. **All Great Stories are About Survival:** The Duffer Brothers knew they had a great story and were not willing to give away creative rights. They were rejected by over 15 networks before being linked with Shawn Levy, who got them in the door at Netflix. Do not be willing to let go of your vision, be persistent, and find a way to “survive”.
2. **The Upside Down:** Nostalgia marketing is the familiar at 30,000 feet. Remember not to mirror what has been done, but take the familiar and shake things up. In “Stranger Things”, *The Upside Down* is the same as Hawkins, but very different. It’s familiar, but has the unexpected! Producers brought on 80’s actors like Sean Astin, “Bob” (80’s Goonies star) and Winona Ryder. They are the same, but all grown up. You may even find yourself trying to place what movie you remember “Bob” in. Put your personal spin on what works. Work on evoking an emotion, but with a modern-day approach.
3. **Friends Don’t Lie:** Be real. Consumers buy from companies they trust. In season 1, Jonathan Byers asks his brother, Will if he even likes baseball. Will replies that his dad does and sometimes it can be fun to go. Jonathan tells him “you shouldn’t like things because people

tell you you're supposed to." Don't be what you aren't. Know your audience and connect with them, with their interests! Make them the hero!

4. **Bring in the Experts, "Do you Copy?":** Throughout all 3 seasons, the Hawkins' kids, Joyce, and Hopper all have guides throughout the show. Scott Clarke, Hawkins High School science teacher, guides them through electromagnetic fields and how the portals (in theory) could even be possible. In season 3, Alexei, doesn't speak English but becomes a Russian translator. The Duffer Brothers were rejected by 15 networks before bringing in Shawn Levy, who quickly helped land them the deal with Netflix. The Duffer Brothers give credit to several mentors that helped shape their success: Steven Spielberg, Stephen King, George Lucas, and M. Night. Don't be afraid to spend money on experts, you can't afford to miss this step.

5. **Stranger Things Marketing Successes:** When watching Stranger Things, you may notice perfectly placed products like Coke, Eggo Waffles, and Mongoose bicycles. What you may not know is that Netflix or Stranger Things did not financially partner with any of these companies as sponsors. Instead, they had a better idea. They placed these products throughout the show so that the companies would share and cross-promote "Stranger Things" on social media and advertising channels. Eggo Waffles increased its sales by 14% and had a record month of social media mentions. Baskin Robbins (who is not mentioned in the series), took an opportunity to use the *Scoops Ahoy* brand from the show and create a pop-up shop with special "Stranger Things" flavors that were wildly successful. Nike (who was not mentioned) created a very successful *Hawkins High* brand. Be creative and resourceful with what you have. Create partnerships and affiliations with other brands that can help share your message!