



2007 Bronze Effie Winner

Bridgestone Golf “Tobu”

Category: **David vs. Goliath**
Agency: **JWT Atlanta**
Client: **Bridgestone Golf, Inc.**

Strategic Challenge

There are more than 27 million Americans who play golf, with about 120 golf balls to choose from, it can make the average golfer’s head spin. Depending on their level of play, their decision is based on anything from top of mind awareness to price. Better players go with what they know or simply play what the pro’s play. Hackers tend to gravitate to price. In either case, being a heavy hitter in the category goes a long way in selling golf balls.

Titleist is the category’s Mark Maguire. They invest millions to build and maintain their brand. In 2006 alone, Titleist spent over \$27 million in advertising for the golf ball market (remember they sell other stuff too), nearly 45% of the golf ball category.(1) Consequently, Titleist is the top-of-mind leader, with the largest number of pros (50+) using it on tour; the most ranked in the top 20.

Additionally, they spend \$70 million on player endorsements and tournaments coverage.(1) Then there’s Nike or should we say Tiger Woods. With the largest endorsement deal in sports history.(2)

Nike’s golf division skyrocketed to number 3 in share when Tiger Woods became the face of the brand.(3)

The estimated \$100 million deal, over five years, is small compared to the amount of exposure the ‘swoosh’ gets in all Tiger related ads and tournament wins.

Enter Bridgestone, a *tire* company, a *Japanese* tire company, with \$404,000 in their pocket and a line of new balls (e5 and e6) to sell; zero share, zero reputation, zero momentum.

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The Big Idea

If you asked the nice people at Bridgestone what makes them so successful in the tire business, they'd tell you it's their use of technology. So it made sense to use technology to help define what makes them different in golf, right? Wrong! Everything in golf is about technology. Technology and distance are the two most over-used words in golf. At first we tried to convince them to navigate around the idea of technology leading to distance, but they wouldn't budge. So we did what the client wanted, only in Japanese, which is the idea.

Japanese brands are a big part of the American culture and stand for quality and technology: Sony, Toyota, Canon, Panasonic, Nintendo, Nokia, Motorola, and many more. These brands possess a cache driven by their inherent technology. Stepping out of the closet, Bridgestone could be Japanese and imply technology in a category that demands it, only we get to say it in another language. People will listen, they will be intrigued.

Most golf jokes center around some insensitive or oblivious guy who will do just about anything to improve his golf game, (insert golf joke link here). This insight begs the question: how far would someone go to find out more about our product? What additional steps would they take to track down information that would give them the edge they need to beat their buddy? Or, knowing they just love the game and enjoy immersing themselves in its glory, how far would they allow us to take them in our story.

Bringing the Idea to Life

Somewhere in Covington, GA there is a real Japanese scientist who works for Bridgestone Golf, his job is to design a golf ball that goes farther and straighter. He has a laboratory, a white lab coat and he tests golf balls all day long on a mechanical arm. One day, this doctor of ballology tees up his most recent concoction of materials and lets it fly off the tee. To his own amazement and the astonishment of his lab assistants, the ball fly's off the tee, through the net and clear through the wall of the laboratory. It's like the Japanese version of Flubber! "Holy Shit!" one lab assistant yells, as they look at each other and yell, "TOBU"!

If a golf enthusiast was to witness this event he'd have more questions than answers since the entire episode is in Japanese. However, there are two things he can walk away with; hope for *his* golf game and the word "Tobu". Sure cancer and Aids get all the headlines, but these guys are doing some really important research in Covington, but what's Tobu? There's hope though, they left a web site address: www.findtobu.com.

If the witness is a golf enthusiast (and there's a good chance he is since we found him on the Golf channel), he will follow the clues and go to the site where he'll find golf heaven. There he can learn about the new e5 and e6; how the physics make for a straighter trajectory, better distance and greater feel around the greens. He can test, for himself, by playing the TOBU game, while being monitored by the Dr. Waza's assistants. He can flash back to what he saw on the Golf Channel. Most importantly, he can find the meaning of TOBU: "fly's far with emotion." With this discovery he can browse the history of Tobu, through www.tobusociety.org seeing ancient yardage markers and the staff of Wa.

After his initial experience of Tobu, he is likely to stumble on it again, either in Golf magazines, where he is an avid reader, or the Golf Channel's new original show, The Big Break, where there are

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60 opportunities over 12 weeks for him to experience Tobu. Either way, he will be led back to Tobu on the internet where he and 90,000 of his golfing buddies will spend an average of 3.3 minutes looking around and spending time. He may have directed a friend or two to see the Tobu site, of course not anyone he's trying to beat. Or, he or one of his friends may have been part of a web blast that concluded at the Bridgestone site. He may even hear Tobu yelled out on an adjacent fairway from a fellow golfer who experience Tobu in his own life.

The bottom line, Bridgestone Golf wasn't going to beat the likes of Titleist or Nike with the Conventional weapons of TV dollars and print ads; at best they would be outspent in that war 50 to 1. No, they had to be viral, to be a part of the golf lexicon. They used the word Tobu. And since Tobu offered the things golf enthusiasts' want most (knowledge and a better game), they were willing to go the extra mile to find it.

TRUE STORY

There's a true story of a business man who created a game called Tobu after being exposed to this campaign. It was played in a foursome by passing cards back and forth depending on how you hit the ball.

There is an *Oh Shit* card for the worst tee shot and a *Tobu* card for the monster drive. The game is played with points and the one with the most, reaches Tobu.

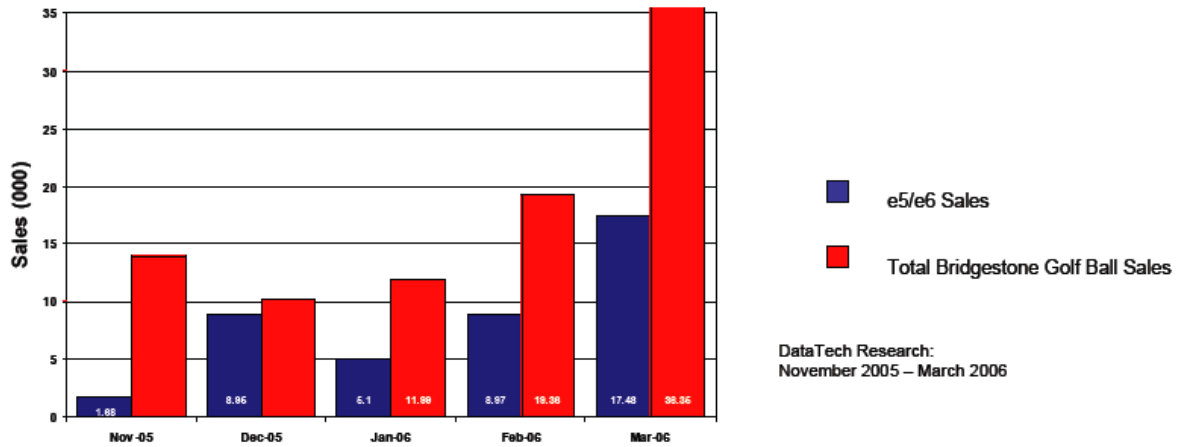
Results

The call-to-action to the website from TV, print and web blast introduced more than 90,000 golfers to FindTobu.com in which they spent an average of more than 3.3 minutes with the brand.(4)

A buzz was beginning in the golf community, especially on message boards where golfers would talk about the balls as well as the 'Tobu' game featured on the website. The \$404,000 'Tobu' campaign not only resulted in a 203.6% increase in sales, but the three month launch also resulted in the most successful brand launch to date, beating out product launches of Bridgestone competitors.(5) The entire Bridgestone product line of golf balls also saw much success with a market share of 1.6% in January of 2006.(6) By the time golf season was in full force, Bridgestone Golf was taking away market share from competitors. In May 2006, market share for Bridgestone Golf's golf ball line was 2.8% (with e5/e6 contributing 1.3%) with sales at over \$62.9 million.(7) The success of 'Tobu' placed Bridgestone Golf on the map and a major contender in the golf marketplace. In the \$19-and-up category, Bridgestone Golf has surpassed Nike, and is now at the #3 position.(7)

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1. Nielsen: Full year 2005 spending
2. CNN.com: Transcripts for Saturday Morning News; September, 16, 2006.
3. SmarterStats Enterprise; February 2006 Edition
4. DataTech Research; February 2006
5. Golf DataTech Running Market Share Report 1997- 2006
6. DataTech Research; May 2006
7. DataTech Research; May 2006

Budget: Under \$500 thousand

Campaign Reach: National

Media Channels: TV, Consumer Magazine, Interactive/Online

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