

## Pop Culture as a Marketing Trigger

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From HBC's Sound Bites Blog ([www.hellermanbaretz.com/soundbites](http://www.hellermanbaretz.com/soundbites))

An avid fan of the television series "Lost," I settled in to my couch for the series' thrilling finale and prepared myself for the 2.5 hour episode that was ahead. Unfortunately, one of the most memorable aspects of that night was the incessant commercials. By my rough calculation, there were about 45 minutes of commercials; a commercial break seemed to come after almost every scene (thanks, ABC).

But, a few of those commercials actually stuck out because they worked so well. Recognizing the pop culture phenomenon "Lost" had become, Target developed ads specifically designed for the "Lost" finale. My favorite was the ad for the First Alert smoke detector. As any "Lost" fan knows, you want to avoid the Smoke Monster as much as possible. Nothing good comes from a confrontation with it. Well, luckily for us, Target has First Alert smoke detectors for \$10.99. What better way to avoid a Smoke Monster than have a smoke detector so you know when it's coming?

The brilliance of the Target ads (there was also a great one involving a keyboard) and the company's marketing strategy was that the retailer capitalized on the momentum of "Lost" and tapped in to the notoriously captive and loyal audience watching the show. The campaign was a one-time event, but its success was immediate. The ads were mentioned on "Lost" blogs and have spawned spoofs on YouTube (imitation remains the sincerest form of flattery).

Target's success with its "Lost"-themed commercials highlight the power of pop culture triggers for marketing and PR professionals. Whether creating ads or developing story pitches, if you can tie them to a relevant and culturally important event, your ideas or products will stand out. I can't remember many of the specific scenes from the show's finale, but I can recall the smoke detector commercial clearly and vividly.

Of course, identifying and relating to that cultural phenomenon is the difficult part (the connection must be appropriate and strong or the effort will fail). But if you're able to establish a creative relationship between the two, you'll certainly grab your target audience's attention and your likelihood of success, whether increasing brand awareness, selling a product, or securing media hits, is that much greater.