

How a Dollar Shave Club's Ad Went Viral

BY JOHN PATRICK PULLEN October 13, 2012

Ask a dozen people why they find Dollar Shave Club's online advertisement funny, and you'll probably get 12 different answers. From a machete-wielding CEO to a shaving baby to a goofy dance number, the tightly scripted video, "Our Blades Are F**king Great," has a gag to suit every taste. In the first three months after the startup posted the clip on YouTube last March, it racked up 4.75 million views--thanks in large part to shares on social media sites.

Michael Dubin, the video's star, founded Los Angeles-based Dollar Shave Club with irreverence in mind. The smug cutup, who serves as CEO, studied at the Upright Citizens Brigade (UCB) theater in New York City, where he learned how to wield humor to attract attention.

"People tend to remember things when they're musically presented, and comedy is a form of music," he says. "When you're launching a new business and sharing a new idea, if you can get people to remember it, there's obviously a better chance at success."

And consumers have certainly responded to Dollar Shave Club's spot.

In the first 48 hours after the video debuted on YouTube, some 12,000 people signed up for the service. Aside from some Google ads, there has been no other marketing.

What appears to be an on-the-fly, homemade spot was actually a highly planned effort, says the commercial's director, comedienne Lucia Aniello. A friend of Dubin's from his UCB days, Aniello helms Paulilu, an L.A.-based production company that has created comedy shorts for brands such as Audi, Estée Lauder and the Emmy Awards.

"This is what you get at an ad agency," Dubin says. "Not every entrepreneur has the ability to think comedically and think about their business in the way that we did."

Dubin's connections helped keep Dollar Shave Club's video production costs low; the company spent just \$4,500. Aniello estimates that such a highly polished video would run most companies \$50,000.

Dubin and Aniello were ruthless and unsentimental in planning the shoot. Aniello began the creative process by helping whittle down Dubin's four-page script. "If it wasn't 100 percent essential, it was gone," she says. "Every moment, every frame, everything has to have a reason or point."

Next, they wrote jokes on top of the brand-messaging bones that remained. Keeping the video silly and light, the sharp-witted duo aimed for a self-deprecating tone. "People understand brand messaging, and when you subvert that, they recognize the risk you took," Aniello says. "Learn to trust the funny. If you take a risk, you may get a reward."

Case in point: the F-bomb. Dubin wanted the video's first punch to land hard, but he was struggling to come up with the right line. Then Aniello just said it: "Our blades are f**king great."

"I remember Mike's face when I first said that line," Aniello recalls. "There was a half a second of concern, and then whatever angel sitting on his shoulder--or devil maybe--said, 'Go for it.'"

It has been the company's unofficial slogan ever since.

The effect is a sucker punch to the funny bone, and an example of one of their creative secrets: Be unexpected. "Don't give them a video they could have written themselves," Dubin says.

With a slew of companies copying the spot, Dollar Shave Club will have to be sharper than ever with its next video, which is poised to launch alongside a new shaving cream offering this month. Like a shrewd businessman and a good comedian, Dubin refuses to reveal details in advance, but there's a good chance it's going to be f**king great.

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