

April 22, 2023

To: Rich Guest

From: Audrey Lin

RE: Barbie, the movie

Hi Rich,

Have you seen the new Barbie movie teaser trailer? I think the Barbie movie's marketing campaign will be a fascinating one to follow as they work up to their theatrical release this summer. So far, they've dropped two teaser trailers, a TikTok sound, a teaser movie poster, character posters, and the Barbie Selfie Generator – a website powered by AI for people to generate their own “character posters” using their own selfies.

I'm not even sure what the movie is about yet and neither do most people, but what the movie is about almost seems beside the point. The movie has been getting a lot of attention, and the RED marketing framework might help us understand why.

Relevance

Everyone is talking about it.

The first teaser trailer parodies the opening scene from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which is surprising, dramatic, and just the right amount of bizarre. It starts with a dusty, prehistoric landscape populated with little girls playing with their frumpy baby dolls, when suddenly they come across a towering, glamorous, adult Barbie. The little girls forsake their baby dolls, smashing them to pieces against the ground in slow motion. One is thrown up into the air and seamlessly transitions into the sparkly pink Barbie title, then we are given a quick peek into a spectacle of playhouses and dance sequences in pink and neon.

The second teaser trailer is completely different, but just as buzzy. It's hyper-feminine from start to finish, more fever dream than a cohesive narrative: Barbie's pink heels click-clacking across a pink floor, Barbie stepping out of her heels without losing her pointed feet, a plastic beach with plastic sand and plastic waves, all the Barbies and Kens on the beach saying “Hi Barbie! Hi

Ken!” to each other, Barbie cruising by playhouses, driving her plastic car with no hands, a beach fight or party (who’s to say?), an intense game of rock paper scissors, Barbie and Ken leaving Barbie Land, falling into Real World, Kens threatening to beach each other off.

All of these elements are perfect fodder for party talk: unexpected, of the moment, or just plain fun. The internet absolutely lost it over Barbie’s pointed feet, and even Chrissy Teigen tweeted about it, puzzling over the mechanics of that shot. What makes elements like these even more brilliant is that not only are they party talk worthy, but they also leverage the Barbie brand’s distinctive assets, boosting the movie’s social relevance. Barbie dolls are known for their pointed feet, and to see this unrealistic body standard portrayed by Margot Robbie as a real life Barbie was remarkable. YouTube comments show fan appreciation for the director’s dedication to a faithful adaptation from toy to live action.

The marketers also provide many mechanisms for fans to talk about the movie, fostering viral, shareable moments. The opening dialogue of the second teaser trailer was made into a TikTok sound (“Hi Barbie! Hi Ken!”), but it’s the character posters that have really taken the internet by storm. 24 character posters were released featuring the Barbie movie’s star-studded cast, leveraging borrowed equity. The posters each spotlight a character against a sparkly starburst shaped like the Mattel (Barbie toy manufacturer) logo and emblazoned over with the pink Barbie title, once again leveraging the Barbie brand’s distinctive assets. The posters also include the theater release date in the Barbie title font, as well as character taglines in white sans-serif, inspiring the “She’s everything. He’s just Ken” memes. Then the character posters are taken one step further with the Barbie Selfie Generator, transforming mere posters for viewing into a participatory experience.

The Barbie Selfie Generator is a website powered by AI for people to generate their own “character posters” using their own selfies. Users can upload their selfies, then the website automatically crops the image and generates the “character poster” complete with the sparkly Mattel starburst, Barbie title, character tagline, and even the theater release date. When the 24 character posters were first released, there were some people with the technical know-how who meticulously photoshopped their own Barbie selfie posters to post and share, but the AI-powered Barbie Selfie Generator is what allowed this to take off at scale and become a viral phenomenon. It handed people a template to talk about the movie... and about themselves.

Besides generating buzz and boosting social relevance, the Barbie Selfie Generator also works to show that the Barbie movie succeeds with cultural relevance too, tapping into something that resonates with people personally. People are literally placing themselves in the context of the movie and changing their social media profile pictures to their Barbie selfie posters, communicating their identity, and aligning themselves with the brand.

The first Barbie doll was a fashion model, and the Barbie dolls since have portrayed hundreds of careers, empowering little girls to be anything they want to be when they grow up – a message which continues to resonate to this day. In recent years, the line has expanded to become more diverse and continues to evolve in order to keep up with dominant and emerging cultural codes. Similarly, the Barbie movie's 24 character posters reflect a diverse cast, and the Barbie Selfie Generator is the ultimate vehicle for representation, giving everyone an opportunity to represent themselves as a Barbie.

Ease

So far, much of the Barbie movie's advertising has been on social media, but as we get closer to the theater release date, we may see advertisements appear in even more places. Social media is a great tool to reach a broad audience as almost everyone has it, and while I am not privy to measurements such as the Barbie movie's social media reach, all the social buzz as well as the strong visuals of the viral Barbie selfie posters have certainly made the movie easy to notice online. The movie succeeds in getting noticed with memorable creative eliciting strong emotional reactions as described previously, getting everyone talking about the details of the teaser trailers and sharing their Barbie selfie posters. The creative consistently includes the text "Only in Theaters July 21" – even the user-generated Barbie selfie posters! – making it clear where and when the movie can be seen, which ultimately makes the movie easier to access when the time comes.

Another strategy the movie uses to get noticed is leveraging the existing audiences from Mattel and Warner Bros, whose websites both feature banners and thumbnails promoting the movie. Additionally, the Barbie movie's official Instagram cleverly uses Instagram's Collab feature, which allows two accounts to share the same post, or in other words, allows one post to reach two audiences. Almost all of the Barbie movie's Instagram posts are posted in collaboration with the Barbie doll's official Instagram. The Collab feature is limited to two accounts, but not to be

left out, Mattel's and Warner Bros' official Instagrams post the same posts promoting the Barbie movie individually.

On Twitter, the Barbie movie implements branded emojis, which show when the #BarbieTheMovie or #Barbie hashtags are used, making the hashtags more noticeable. The emoji is immediately recognizable as the "B" of the Barbie title font, and it is the same "B" that is featured on the movie's teaser poster.

Distinctiveness

A great advantage the Barbie movie has is the legacy of the Barbie brand, which has a plethora of distinctive assets to draw from. Instead of creating its own visual code from scratch, the Barbie movie leverages the Barbie brand's. The Barbie movie dives into the Barbie brand's archives and pulls out the logo iteration from 1975, which has a more modern feel compared to the Barbie brand's current logo iteration, which was updated in 2009 to replicate the 1959 design. The 1975 design carries a hyper-feminine aesthetic with decorative typography and a pink long shadow behind bold white text. It is so distinctive that even just the "B" from the Barbie title evokes the brand, which is used on the movie's teaser poster and Twitter branded emoji, as described previously. The aesthetic is carried through with the Barbie selfie posters as well, and it is so effective that any selfie on a sparkly starburst with a sky-blue background is recognizable as a Barbie selfie, whether it's a social media post or a tiny social media profile picture.

Besides the branding, the Barbie dolls themselves also hold a treasure trove of distinctive assets, which are featured in full force in the movie's teaser trailers. In fact, it seems like the teaser trailers aren't as concerned with teasing the plot of the movie so much as to stuff in as many of these distinctive assets – or "easter eggs" – as they could. The teaser trailer showed Barbie's pointed feet, specific outfits and accessories, the plastic playhouses with exposed sides (so that kids can reach into them and play), plastic cars, and even a plastic beach!

I can't wait for the Barbie movie, and I'm just as excited to see the rest of the marketing campaign unfold! Hope to see you in theaters!

Best,
Audrey