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Snapchat ‘geofilters’ offer firms new way to reach millennials

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For Chris Searles of Searles Graphics, Patchogue’s annual Alive After Five street fair provided a perfect venue to expand his Yaphank small business marketing firm’s reach with a younger audience.

The event earlier this month had just what he needed: A crowd of young people concentrated in a small geographic area, many of whom were likely to be using Snapchat, a mobile messaging app used to share photos and videos.

So the firm created a custom Snapchat “geofilter” — a special overlay that can be placed on top of a photo or video to communicate where the Snap was taken. The geofilter had both the fair’s name, Alive After Five, and tagline, Music+Eats+Beer +Art, and more subtly, the Searles Graphics logo.

The filter was available to Snapchat users in a 313,000-square-foot area around Main Street for the five-hour period of the event. It was used 403 times, and Snapchats carrying the filter were viewed by approximately 26,000 people. The filter cost Searles \$33 — or about a penny for every eight views.

“A lot of these people we probably wouldn’t have reached through another medium,” he says, noting Snapchat targets a younger demographic.

Searles also created a custom geofilter for the firm in May for the Long Island Library Conference, that cost \$18 for a nine-hour period.

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“It’s a relatively inexpensive, different way to reach a targeted audience,” he says.

Snapchat launched its on-demand geofilters for individuals and businesses in February. The program lets users create custom overlays and define the area in which they will appear (snapchat.com/on-demand).

The filters can be purchased to appear for as little as an hour or up to 30 days. Pricing starts at \$5 and is based largely on the size and duration of your “geofence” — the area in which your filter is available to Snapchat users. The targeted area can range from 20,000 square feet up to 5 million square feet.

Filters can be purchased by individuals or businesses. So far, roughly 60 percent have been purchased by businesses, according to Snapchat.

Locally, most businesses have yet to catch on, say experts.

“It’s still relatively new and not everyone understands the benefits of using it,” says Tim Levin, head of social media at Efferent Media, a Lindenhurst digital marketing agency.

But he thinks that’s a mistake.

Small businesses should be utilizing it as a branding tool, particularly if they are targeting millennials, he notes.

Snapchat reaches 41 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds in the U.S. each day, says John Lincoln, CEO of Ignite Visibility, a San Diego Internet marketing firm, and author of “Digital Influencer” (John Lincoln Marketing; \$12.99).

“All of our clients want to target millennials,” he notes. “They are the next generation of consumers.”

So what’s the best way to use geofilters to promote your brand?

It’s most popular around specific events, says Lincoln.

That’s why it was a logical choice for Marcum LLP for its recent 3.5-mile run/walk for charity called the Marcum Workplace Challenge.

The firm created a custom geofilter that covered just under 3 million square feet for 4 hours and cost about \$250, says Carolyn Mazzenga, partner in charge of Marcum’s Long Island office in Melville. It said, “I ran at the 2016 . . . Marcum Workplace Challenge.”

The filter was used 559 times, and seen by over 29,000 people, she says. While Marcum’s coverage area was quite large, for more concentrated areas, “the costs are quite nominal,” says Mazzenga.

The firm promotes the annual event via social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and with Snapchat added to the mix, “the custom geofilter is just another way to engage our participants,” she says.

When creating a geofilter, avoid making it “ad-like,” says Levin. Also unless you’re a major brand, your company name should be “the smaller part of it.”

Most importantly, it needs to be creative, says Lincoln. “It either needs to be funny, pretty or have an emotional impact on the user; otherwise they will never touch it.”

Consider trying it sooner rather than later, he adds. “I think it’s going to become twice as expensive and twice as popular come next year.”