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## CURRENTS advance work



**VIDEO VICTORS:** From top to bottom, the first, second, and third place winners and the viewers' choice award winner.



# YouTube to the Rescue

A viral marketing campaign succeeds spectacularly

All publicity is not necessarily good publicity in this user-generated-content world—especially for an educational institution trying to protect and enhance its brand. But officials at California State University, Fresno, figured they weren't going to beat YouTube and MySpace, so they might as well join them.

In early 2007 Fresno State officials found 336 Fresno State-related videos on YouTube, and "the most popular didn't reflect the university in a positive light," says Peter Robertson, director of annual giving at the university. He and his colleagues decided to take a page from the Frito-Lay 2007 Super Bowl advertising campaign and asked students to generate their own 30-second video clips about Fresno State. The university offered cash

prizes to three winners and posted all entries on YouTube.

The contest generated 10 student videos that have since become the most viewed Fresno State clips on YouTube. Thirty days after the videos were posted, they had cumulatively received more than 12,000 views. The university created an online portal—[www.iamfresnostate.com](http://www.iamfresnostate.com)—that links to the Fresno State MySpace page and YouTube videos.

The winner of the contest, Fresno State senior Bryan Harley, did a spoof on the Apple commercial in which one actor portrays the cool Apple computer and another plays the trouble-plagued PC. Harley

played the part of Fresno State and a University of California institution, which compete for both students and prestige in California. As Fresno State he's dressed casually and talks excitedly about the institution. As the UC institution he is attired more formally and relies on reputation rather than substance (see top video still at left).

"This contest has been a great opportunity to showcase Fresno State from a student's perspective in a positive way," Robertson says.

"[In one of the videos] four students wrote a song, and the first line is 'Fresno State I love you so.' They've sung it for the [university] president. People love it."

And although Robertson was trying to reach students in a viral way, good-old-fashioned mainstream media can still help spread the word. Initially even the student newspaper didn't cover the contest, much less local media. Then, on May 22, the *New York Times* published an article on the contest, which caused the local media to take notice.

Robertson says that vendors have called to tell him that they could provide the university with the means to post the videos directly on the Fresno State site, but Robertson says they are missing the point. "No one comes to the Fresno State site to view videos. We have 20,000 students, and four out of five of them are on MySpace."—Gayle Bennett

