

## 'Ball Girl' scores buzz for Gatorade

By Mike Hughlett and Eric Benderoff | Chicago Tribune reporters  
**June 26, 2008**

Seen that wild ball girl video on YouTube?

Ball girl streaks down the left field line at a minor league baseball game and, with a Jackie Chan-like jump at the wall, snares a deep fly ball the left fielder couldn't reach. Unbelievable.

Well, it is indeed unbelievable: The clip is a masterwork of "viral" marketing, essentially an ad aimed at touting Gatorade, but without actually mentioning the company. With viral video, marketers try to create a pop culture buzz that eventually becomes associated with a product.

Chicago-based Gatorade, an arm of PepsiCo, has done viral marketing before, but it's never taken off like ball girl, said Jill Kinney, a Gatorade spokeswoman.

The video has had 1 1/2 to 2 million views on YouTube, she said. On Wednesday it was the most shared video on Break.com, another video-sharing Web site.

The ball girl video was posted June 3, and Advertising Age, an industry publication, published a glowing review of it a few days later. "This week, though, is definitely the tipping point," Kinney said. "It has reached critical mass." A plug Wednesday for it on "Good Morning America" certainly helped.

Viral videos are passed along via e-mail and shared on personal profiles at social sites like Facebook and MySpace. But they achieve must-see status at YouTube, the Web's leading video site.

"Ball Girl" was posted on YouTube by a filmmaker affiliated with **Element 79 Partners**, the Chicago ad agency that created the spot. **Element 79** has done Gatorade ads since 2002.

The original Ball Girl post had a clear reference to Gatorade in the text describing the video. But the video was copied and shared several times over without mentioning the Gatorade connection.

The video gives only the slightest nod to the beverage. When the ball girl sits down after the amazing catch, there's a bottle of Gatorade near her feet.

"It's subtle," Kinney said.

The real payoff is the buzz generated by the video.

"Anytime your brand enters into popular culture discussions, it's going to benefit," Kinney said.

She added that even though many viewers thought the outlandish catch was somehow a fake—which, indeed, was the result of special effects—they were still entertained by it.

Viral videos are not just associated with commercial ventures, and some have achieved cult status, including "Lazy Sunday," a music video parody from Saturday Night Live that was a key catalyst to helping YouTube build an audience.