

CASE STUDY

Zite

CAMPAIGN TITLE:	Taking Zite Mobile
CATEGORIES:	App Expertise, Company Launch, Expert Positioning, Media Relations, Media Tour, SxSW
DURATION OF CAMPAIGN:	February 2011 – April 2011

Background

Inner Circle Labs began working with Zite, a personalized iPad magazine, in February 2011. We were instantly tasked with launching the app in a market already saturated with iPad news readers. Flipboard, Pulse and The Daily were already making noise in the space and rumors were swirling about Yahoo joining the fray – we needed to quickly set Zite apart.

Objectives

Zite was not simply another way to read the news on an iPad – the deep personalization technology had the potential to change media consumption – regardless of platform – forever. We had to gain broad visibility among consumers, business leaders and tech evangelists to drive downloads and position Zite as a strong entrant into the space. With a rapidly changing media landscape, we needed to find and create opportunities for Zite to insert its voice into trend stories so we could stay relevant in a rapidly evolving news space. Inner Circle Labs’ objectives were to:



- Make noise at launch by securing coverage in key media
- Create visibility for the brand
- Build buzz among both average consumers and the techie crowd
- Drive downloads

Strategies

Inner Circle Labs set out to show that Zite was transforming how people discovered and read content by bringing the first truly personalized iPad magazine to the masses.

Some of our initial strategies included:

1. Make Zite a game changer in media and content: Show that true AI-driven personalization will change everything from how media report & edit to how consumers discover & buy.

2. Dive deep on the backend: Explain that personalization is not customization and to tap the zeitgeist affectively you need to evolve with your user.

3. Be the David to old media’s Goliath: Tap into the knowledge that media is a struggling entity and offer technology like Zite as an anecdote to the ailments of the industry.

4. Bang the drum: Prove Zite is the most nimble, user-dedicated resource for industry insight through regular data, partnership, industry commentary & product news.

Tactics

Inner Circle Labs developed a program dedicated to driving interest and visibility for Zite’s launch in order to get a strong cadre of initial users. After launch, we focused on ensuring users continued to come back to Zite by way of additional updates and proactive campaigns. Key tactics included:



- **Take a top-down and bottom-up media approach at launch:** We planned a media tour in key cities, including New York, Washington D.C. and San Francisco briefing top-tier, mainstream targets and key niche influencers offering exclusive, early access to the world’s first truly personalized news app. The buzz and excitement would meet in the middle as we highlighted Zite-specific themes with strong user benefits like browsing 2.0 and info overload.
- **Find influencers and drive downloads:** We developed the “Give Zite a Shot” campaign at SxSW – a low-budget, high-impact guerilla campaign to encourage attendees to try Zite. We rented a three-wheeled bike, tricked it out with Zite branding and rode around SxSW offering on-the-go cocktails to iPad owners who agreed to download the app on the spot. The elements of the campaign – an adult tricycle, pocket shots & mini sodas and Zite-branded reusable straw cups –

captured attention in the always crowded SxSW arena. Zite users – new and old – jumped to take a shot and get a dose of the best of SxSW news directly to their iPads.

- **Stay top-of mind:** To stay relevant, we gave select media exclusives on Zite’s momentum and newly integrated features and began work on a contributed article and events program to highlight the Zite’s expertise. We created a David versus Goliath paradigm to highlight how Zite as a newcomer (the David) was competing with the major players already in the space (old media Goliaths). We proved we were dedicated to improving the evolving media landscape beyond launch through commentary and data that the old guard media was unwilling or unable to capture.



Execution

By meeting with the hottest tech and mobile-beat reporters during our launch media tour, we were able to secure interest early on. Giving press who we knew were news hounds access to the app early helped secure more organic interest as reporters found that they truly loved Zite. One interesting piece of feedback came from Katie Boehret of the Wall Street Journal. Initially when Zite visited Katie during the tour, she wasn’t sure she would review the app: “There are just so many apps,” she said. After a few days of testing, Katie was hooked and wrote an article about her personal love of Zite that appeared in print and online. This approach helped skyrocket Zite into the marketplace come launch day and made it immediately one of the hottest news apps around – instantly placing it as the leading competitor to the already successful Flipboard.



Post launch, Inner Circle Labs packaged our momentum news into the announcement of the launch of the community’s most requested feature – Instapaper integration. Daniel Terdiman’s Geek Gestalt audience on CNET – a deeply engaged community of geek tech enthusiasts – was the perfect fit for the [exclusive](#). We reached out to Dan offering him access to the product team for insight into how and why the integration was added and gave him early access to the feature to test out himself. These elements, along with a personal interest in Zite, created the perfect follow on piece for Dan which helped prove that Zite was nimble, quick to the draw and dedicated to pleasing its users.

Zite was the hottest app on the market as Inner Circle Labs went into speaker placement mode. While the fire was still hot, we found the most relevant events for Zite to continue to drive visibility. In addition to submitting for new, high caliber events now that our name was known, we decided to follow up with those events that had declined us previously to see if the recent buzz would help us secure a last-minute spot. The Web 2.0 Expo, who had declined our participation, changed their tune once Zite hit the list of top apps and became a media darling. We secured a speaking opportunity at the expo and participation in the demo showcase.



Just as we turned our focus to expert analysis around the changing media landscape as part of our David vs. Goliath campaign, Zite was sent a cease and desist letter penned by the legal counsels of nearly all of the top-tier news publishers. As the Zite community (and most media) rallied around the app as a positive evolution in media, Inner Circle Labs crafted commentary and reached out with Zite’s reaction and plans. The amazing coverage continued:

- [AllThingsD](#)
- [Fast Company](#)
- [GigaOM](#)
- [paidContent](#)
- [Washington Post](#)

We maintained momentum by tying into the hot story around the fate of Delicious and launching a Zite Delicious integration. We decided the best strategy was to follow up with a top-tier reporter from launch and decided based on beat, recent coverage and interest, that Marshall Kirkpatrick from ReadWriteWeb was the ideal person to do this story justice. We reached out with the exclusive and he wrote a stellar piece on Zite that went far beyond this new feature: [ReadWriteWeb](#)



Results

Feedback on Zite was overwhelmingly positive. Within the first day of launch:

- Inner Circle Labs secured eight top-tier articles from media briefed during the tour.
- We produced nearly 100 original articles and app reviews from media, bloggers and online influencers.
- Zite was the #1 free news app in iTunes and highlighted in the "New and Noteworthy" section.

Within five days of launch, Zite was the number one free iPad app overall in the App Store and had been downloaded 120,000 times. Within the first month of launch, Inner Circle Labs helped Zite:

- Create a case study for app makers and media law professors around iPad content aggregation via our reaction to the Cease & Desist.
- Start business development conversations with all of the top-tier publishers.

At SxSW, Inner Circle Labs' creative, eye-catching ideas for Zite were a huge success:

- To support Zite's social media presence, we got folks to pose with their tumblers and tweet photos to @ziteapp.
- The response on the ground was overwhelming. Some highlights included:
 - "This is one of the most clever things we've seen here at SxSW." – CNN tech correspondent, Dan Smith
 - One new Zite user spoke to the team about new feature requests, including Instapaper integration which was announced the following day.
 - We continued the personalization tech discussion with Patrick de Laive and Courtney Boyd Myers of The Next Web.
 - The Webby's VP of Business Development, Georgina Lerman, was seen at three parties throughout the day sipping out of her Zite tumbler.

Not only was editorial coverage a success, but the community rallied around Zite on Twitter as well:

- Zite's Twitter following grew from 200 to more than 7,000 within one week of launch – with 100+ Zite mentions per hour hitting Twitter during peak times.
- User feedback was extremely positive:
 - "We should only care about creating good content. The rest will be done by Zite." -@agp
 - "Best free iPad app I've downloaded this year? Zite. Thanks, NPR, for turning me on to it" -@tbonela
 - "Suddenly @ziteapp is all over my Twitter timeline. Sleeper hit of #sxsw?" -@misc
 - "Loved Flipboard, but super loving Zite." -@FadeDunaway
 - "After using it for a few days, I've determined that the @ziteapp iPad app is the only news app you need." -@Gallery99



Press Coverage

Our top down/bottom up coverage strategy also resulted in multiple hits in app-specific blogs which helped drive downloads:

Launch day coverage

- [Fast Company](#)
- [Forbes](#)
- [Fortune](#)
- [Mashable](#)
- [New York Times/VentureBeat](#)
- [TIME Magazine](#)
- [USA Today](#) (online and in print)
- [Wall Street Journal](#) (online and in print)

Post launch coverage

- [App Shopper](#)
- [Appolicious](#)
- [Maciverse](#)
- [Macstarter](#)
- [Macworld](#)
- [TUAW](#)

UPDATE:

- On August 30, 2011 [Zite was acquired by CNN](#)
- On March 5, 2014 [Zite was acquired by Flipboard from CNN](#)