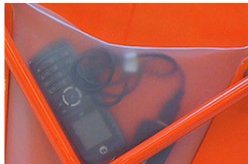


DECEMBER 15, 2009, 8:14 AM ET

A GPS Experiment Busts Street Thieves

By Andy Jordan

What would happen if a furniture company left 24 designer chairs, many equipped with GPS tracking technology, on the streets of New York? Would people take them? Where would they end up?



Blu Dot

A cellphone enabled with GPS tracking was hidden underneath the chairs.

Blu Dot enthusiasts were following real-time locations of the chairs in hopes of nabbing one. The chairs also contained a hidden note, that when discovered by the takers, indicated they should call a number to be interviewed later.

"The key to this idea was involvement," Michael Hart, founder of Mono, said. "Not just them taking the chairs, but the whole community with this notion of an experiment and 'Where will the chairs go?'"

Mono hired a video company, [Supermarche](#), to document the taking of the chairs from several camera angles. The brighter and lighter chairs drew more attention and were nabbed faster, according to Blu Dot.

Blu Dot, a furniture maker based in Minneapolis, found out with its "[Real Good Experiment](#)," which it developed with branding firm [Mono](#). The experiment was equal parts marketing campaign for the chairs, which retail for \$129, and research into the recession-friendly phenomenon of "curb mining" — the practice of nabbing household items left on street corners.

In the days leading up to the placing of the chairs, the experiment was picked up on blogs and gained a Twitter following. Some

Jonathan Levine noticed one of the bright red chairs one morning in downtown Manhattan. "That was too good to be there," he recalled thinking.

He and his son have been curb mining for several years, and his findings include a pay phone, keyboard and working printer. "We see fax machines and printers all the time," he said. There's also more competition since the recession began, he added.

Like many other PUNCOs (a term coined by Supermarche and Mono to indicate "potential unidentified new chair owners) who stumbled on the chairs, Mr. Levine checked out his chair to make sure it wasn't broken, and did a double-take amid his surroundings to see who might have left it there.

All told, Blu Dot believes the experiment generated nearly 60 million Web impressions, including blogs and Twitter posts. Unique visitors to its site tripled in the first few days of the experiment. Blu Dot, which brings in less than \$100 million in annual sales, won't say how much it spent on the campaign, but sales director Medora Danz said the company was happy with what resulted.

There was some concern it wouldn't make an impression beyond "design hipsters," but Blu Dot found it was getting attention from the tech community, including [Fast Company](#) and [a security blog](#).

"We've always been a scrappy [company]," Ms. Danz said. Blu Dot doesn't anticipate bringing the experiment to other cities, though it has fielded requests to do so. "We are cautious not to be perceived as a marketing one-note," she said.

I hung out with the film crew on one of the stakeouts and was code-named "Sloth". Check out our observations: