



CAMPAIGNS: Public Service PR - Revisiting '80s for teenage drink test

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Client: The Century Council (www.centurycouncil.org)
PR Team: Internal, help from MGH Advertising (Baltimore)
Campaign: Point-of-sale Pop Culture Campaign (Deterring Underage Drinking)
Time Frame: July 4, 2000 - December 2001
Budget: Approximately \$25,000

"If you've never done the Moon-walk, never wished your name was Rio, or never listened to an 8-Track, prepare to be carded."

If you're not thinking Michael Jackson, Duran Duran, and tape/CD's predecessor, drop the beer and step away from the counter.

This was the message brought to underage drinkers by The Century Council (a nonprofit funded by leading US distillers). Injecting humor into its long-running point-of-sale campaign aimed at deterring underage drinking, which accounts for 69% of arrests of US youths under 21, what could be cornier than kitschy references to 1980s pop culture?

Research

Since its inception in 1991, the Council has distributed over seven million point-of-sale materials to retailers and wholesalers across the US, free.

Before overhauling the successful program, the Council had to do some legwork. A survey was distributed to the four largest retail groups, which became partners in the campaign. Interviews with bar owners, storeowners, and restaurant managers showed that humor, combined with stern warnings, often works to reach underage buyers.

With those results in hand, MGH Advertising, the Council's ad agency, developed the pop culture theme.

Strategy

With the campaign reformatted, and a 42-city rollout scheduled to run through the end of 2001, the Council focused on PR.

To maximize press interest, the campaign was officially unveiled right before July 4 (in Austin, TX).

"We are targeting cities with universities and medium-size markets," says Monica Gallagher, a Council PR rep. "We realize this is not 'hard' news. We are also strategic on when we unveil the campaign, redoubling efforts in advance of homecoming, back to school, holidays, spring break, and prom/graduation."

Since the launch, retailers in 22 US cities have requested over 600,000 point-of-sale materials. Over 20 additional launches are planned for the rest of 2001.

Tactics

To help boost awareness, the Council teamed with the National Association of Beverage Retailers, National License Beverage Association, Wine and Spirits Wholesalers of America, and the National Alcohol Beverage Control Association.

Members of these groups spoke at the press events, all hosted at retail establishments. Additionally, local retailers and wholesalers, law enforcement reps, and - when possible - university administrators were also recruited to speak.

The Council also placed an ad in the industry trade magazine Bev Media to push the cause.

Results

Most network affiliates covered the press events. Print coverage included The Hartford Courant, The Dallas Morning News, and The Columbus Dispatch.

"We also managed to unveil the campaign in some cities on the same day that Al Gore or President Bush held a campaign event - and we still managed to receive press," notes Gallagher.

Then in late May, the campaign received a major boost in national exposure - on CNN and ABC Network Radio among others - due to the incident involving Jenna Bush attempting to purchase alcohol in Austin.

"Ironically, our campaign was in Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio at the same time that story broke," reflects Gallagher. "Because the incident brought the issue of underage alcohol purchasing to the forefront, we got more coverage than usual."

Future

The Council will move on to Oklahoma City, Spokane, WA, Greensboro, NC, Cheyenne, WY, and others. Enjoying such a positive response, as well as a ton of suggestions, the Council is also currently developing additional slogans.