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Branding: Olympus fashions plan to up visibility of cause, products

Craig McGuire - 2 May 2005 00:00

Colon cancer is usually not the first thing that springs to mind when thinking of New York Fashion Week, the twice-annual event where fashionistas flock to the temporary tents in Bryant Park to watch designers' shows.

However, when Olympus inked its three-year title sponsorship deal in fall 2003, it immediately sought a tie-in with a cancer-research organization to generate goodwill and visibility through cause marketing.

Strategy

"The biggest challenge in the planning phases was identifying a cause," says Jennifer Burke, VP at Mullen, Olympus' AOR.

So why colon cancer?

Obviously, it is a worthwhile cause. According to the American Cancer Society, colorectal cancer will produce 145,290 new cases and 56,290 deaths this year.

But, again, why colon cancer?

"Colon cancer is a cause that is especially relevant to the company," says Chris Sluka, PR manager at Olympus. "[Our company] actually pioneered the development of the technology used to identify and remove colon polyps."

After considering potential partners, the Entertainment Industry Foundation's National Colorectal Cancer Research Alliance (NCCRA), cofounded by *Today* anchor Katie Couric (who got involved with the cause when her husband, Jay Monahan, died of the disease in 1998), was chosen.

Burke says, "Our goals in building the program were simple: Educate consumers about the importance of early screening, further debunk the taboo inherent in the subject of colon cancer, position Olympus as a legitimate player in the fashion community, and generate visibility for Olympus' consumer products and leadership in the medical space."

Tactics

The partnership was announced by way of a press conference featuring Couric and Olympus executives during the company's debut as Fashion Week title sponsor in February 2004.

During the September event, Olympus unveiled the Be Seen, Be Screened initiative, aimed at educating women about the importance of early screening.

Be Seen, Be Screened kicked off with an Olympus-commissioned auction of one-of-a-kind

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camera accessories contributed by top fashion designers, including Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger, and Betsey Johnson.

The auction was timed to begin in tandem with the launch of Olympus' newest digital camera - the Verve - showcased with accessories in an Accessories Gallery under the tents.

A press event featuring Couric, actress Nia Vardalos, supermodel Iman, designer and colon-cancer survivor Carmen Marc Valvo, celebrity photographer Patrick McMullan, and *Vogue* editor-in-chief Anna Wintour served to unveil the gallery.

A print PSA featuring supermodel Heidi Klum, whose grandmother died of colon cancer, was unveiled in February at a press conference held on Fashion Week's opening day.

Results

The auction ultimately resulted in thousands of hits to Olympus' micro site on eBay and raised more than \$12,000 for the NCCRA.

"We've successfully promoted our consumer products and generated brand visibility within a program that has also successfully demystified a disease and saved lives," Sluka says. "The media coverage has been phenomenal - with coverage everywhere from *The New York Times* to the *Today* show to *Vogue*. And, we've built relationships with an unbelievable group of people - from Katie Couric to Nia Vardalos, Anna Wintour, Heidi Klum, Vera Wang, Kenneth Cole, [New York] Mayor [Michael] Bloomberg, and more."

People debuted the PSA in its February 7 edition, and a number of publications committed to running it.

Future

Mullen is presently working toward Fashion Week September, though it is still in the planning phase.

PR team: Mullen (Wenham, MA) and Olympus (Melville, NY)

Campaign: Be Seen, Be Screened

Time frame: February 2004 through February 2005

Budget: \$100,000

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