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Coleman push goes to extremes

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The Coleman Co. will go to the ends of the earth, literally, to generate publicity. Since 1900, Coleman has provided outdoor products, such as lanterns, stoves, tents, sleeping bags, backpacks, coolers, furniture, and grills.

"We have... a well-known brand, but we've come to rest on our laurels, just a bit," says Ann Walden, director of PR for Coleman. "To grow, we need to rely on more than just family campers."

"Not much can go wrong with sponsoring a golf or tennis tournament," says Jeff Blumenfeld, president of Blumenfeld & Associates, which assisted on the effort. "But what about an expedition to 29,000 feet? Or a race in 120-degree weather?"

Strategy

"We needed a brand ambassador to prove the quality of our products under extreme circumstances," Walden says. "But we really didn't know where this would lead."

Coleman found its ambassador in eighth-grade Denver science teacher Mike Haugen, 30, an experienced mountaineer (pictured). "It was Mike who actually suggested a Mount Everest [expedition]," Walden says. "Obviously, this added an entire new dimension to the campaign."

The fact that Haugen was a teacher dovetailed with Coleman's support of the "Leave No Child Inside" movement to reconnect children and nature.

"Kids today are simply not getting outside enough," Walden says. "This movement is good for kids, good for families, good for society, and good for Coleman."

On the other side of the world, Coleman provided a sponsorship at a marathon through California's Death Valley National Park, the lowest and hottest point in North America.

Coleman parent company chairman Martin Franklin raced on behalf of the Wounded Warrior Project.

Tactics

The Everest 5.5 Challenge was designed to document the use of Coleman Exponent equipment in the harsh

environment.

The Coleman PR engine created a Web site that allowed schoolchildren to track Haugen and engage in virtual Mount Everest expeditions.

Coleman sponsored a Mount Everest sleepover for kids at New York's Rubin Museum of Art, along with promotions at the outdoor industry's two largest trade shows: the Outdoor Retailer Winter and Summer Markets.

Haugen also participated in a national tour of Coleman retailers to meet with schoolchildren.

Meanwhile, the cooler sponsorship of the Badwater Ultramarathon, billed as the "Desert in the Desert," had Coleman distributing coolers - and ice cream bars - to each team in the race.

Results

Haugen summited Mount Everest on May 21, as 7,000 schoolchildren followed online.

A departure ceremony in Haugen's schoolyard, where a climbing wall was erected, attracted three Denver TV stations and three local newspapers.

The use of Coleman gear during the sleepover drew multiple live hits during WABC-TV weather remotes from the museum.

Back in Badwater, the PR engine channeled a daily blog tracking Franklin from start to the finish.

Packed in dry ice, the ice cream the Coleman PR team trekked along in its coolers was rock hard four days after the start, despite 125-degree temperatures.

That sponsorship generated more than 12 million impressions across print, TV, and the Web.

Future

"This was obviously more cost-effective than advertising," says Walden.

"These were the kinds of things you really can't demonstrate with a commercial."

Coleman and Haugen are planning an extreme expedition for 2008, with an interactive Web site to encourage kids to be active.

So, where next? "Not sure yet," Walden says. "Alaska, maybe."

PR team: The Coleman Co. (Wichita, KS), Blumenfeld & Associates PR (Darien, CT), and Brandt Associates (Westport, CT)

Campaign: Coleman Goes to Extremes

Duration: January to August 2007

Budget: \$190,000

PRWeek's view

The outdoor extreme sports crowd is a serious bunch, forcing Coleman to elevate its PR game. With the help of Blumenfeld and Brandt Associates, the company was able to demonstrate the quality of its products under the most extreme conditions - a bold move that clearly conveys authenticity to outdoor enthusiasts. And it was able to resonate with other audiences - kids, teachers, and parents - by tying Haugen's expedition to Leave No Child Inside. The effort has armed Coleman with a strategy, an ambassador, and a cause it can sustain well into the future.