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K'NEX leverages toys with 'Made in the USA' slogan

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When the \$22 billion toy industry was staggered by numerous recalls on products made in China that were tainted by lead paint, K'NEX Brands, the third largest toy construction company in the world, decided this could be its chance to distance itself from all the controversy. The company called upon Child's Play Communications to help in the effort.

Strategy

"[Child's Play] advised us on how we could rise above the negative publicity of the recalls and position K'NEX as a safe choice," says Barbara Rentschler, VP of global marketing at K'NEX.

The PR team saw placing "Made in the USA" stickers on American K'NEX products as an opportunity.

"This allowed the story to become more about how it would further benefit consumers," says Sara Stern Levin, VP of Child's Play.

Tactics

K'NEX and Child's Play hand picked a group of reporters to cover the campaign. "We turned first to *The Wall Street Journal*, where we reached out directly to Mattel reporter Nicholas Casey, who was writing regularly on the recall crisis," Levin says.

Child's Play also placed emphasis on the local Philadelphia press, landing a full-page story running in the *Philadelphia Business Journal* and a December placement on Philadelphia's FOX channel.

Results

A story ran on the *Journal's* Marketplace section front page and was followed within weeks by a *USA Today* story on the front page of the Money section. The Pennsylvania factory also saw news shows from various states requesting tours. K'NEX saw a 20% increase in retail sales for November and December.

Future

"We have integrated K'NEX Brands' 'Made in the USA' status into all of our pitches moving forward," Levin says.

PR team: K'NEX Brands (Hatfield, PA); Child's Play Communications (NYC)

Campaign: Safety First: K'NEX Connects with Consumers During China Recall Crisis

Duration: September to December 2007

Budget: \$1 million