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## Smoothie King gives the troops a little refreshment

[Craig McGuire](#)

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PR team: Smoothie King (HQ Covington, LA; franchise: Columbus, OH) and St. John & Partners (Jacksonville, FL)

Campaign: Sending Smoothies to the Troops

Time Frame: May 2007

Budget: \$6,500

Sometimes, good PR happens to good people.

Steve Shepherd was deployed to Iraq with his Ohio National Guard unit just as he was set to open a Smoothie King franchise in suburban Columbus, OH. Several months later, his wife Laura Shepherd planned to send frozen smoothies to Steve's 100-member unit in time for Memorial Day 2007.

Laura wanted the general public in the Columbus area to remember and support the troops deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan, so she asked St. John & Partners (SJ&P), Smoothie King's AOR, to help tell her story.

"When I started this, I was totally naive when it comes to PR," Laura says. "So I was very surprised by all the publicity we generated."

Strategy

"When we learned what Laura was planning to do, we realized we had a powerful, feel-good story brewing," says Katherine Meariman, EVP of administration at Smoothie King.

What emerged was a strategy to generate local coverage for Shepherd, while also advancing the Smoothie King brand and its support of the American troops beyond one franchisee, spotlighting the entire Smoothie King franchise community.

## Tactics

SJ&P interviewed Laura to learn as much as possible about her, her husband's National Guard unit, and her reasons for trying to ship frozen smoothies into a war zone with average daily temperatures of 100+ degrees.

The agency researched military, business, and local news media, developed key messages for Laura to use in interviews, and contacted the PA officer for the Ohio National Guard.

Later, Laura's husband sent back digital images of the troops enjoying the smoothies to use in outreach.

## Results

"This was more than a PR campaign," says Todd Lynch, SJ&P director of PR. "This was the story of a family living the American dream of opening a business, while also sacrificing to defend our country. PR enabled us to tell this story in a way you just couldn't with advertising."

TV station WBNS-10 shared its reporting with the Ohio News Network, a 24-hour cable news channel reaching 1.5 million homes in all 12 designated market areas throughout Ohio.

Additionally, the Shepherds won "Franchisee of the Year" at the annual Smoothie King conference in August 2008.

## Future

This program is now promoted as a PR Best Practice for franchises, Meariman says, expecting additional franchisees will follow suit, particularly around military holidays.

Since the Shepherd's campaign, franchisees in Orange Park, FL; Baton Rouge, LA; and Colorado Springs, CO, have garnered coverage sending shipments to Afghanistan and Iraq.