



CAMPAIGNS: Fund-raising - L&B contain press at Fight Night gala

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Client: Fight Night Foundation (Phoenix)
PR Team: Lavidge & Baumayr (Scottsdale, AZ)
Campaign: Celebrity Fight Night
Time Frame: February 5 - March 17, 2001
Budget: dollars 15,000

For the Fight Night Foundation, the problem isn't raising money or attracting the media to their annual Celebrity Fight Night charity gala. It's keeping the journalists in line.

After weathering backlash from celebrities angered by pushy paparazzi at last year's event, organizers enlisted Lavidge & Baumayr to get a handle on the press this year.

The 7th annual Celebrity Fight Night, held March 17, 2001, benefited The Muhammad Ali Parkinson Research Center at Barrow Neurological Institute in Phoenix.

Strategy

The guest list included high-profile entertainers and athletes, but the foundation was reluctant to announce their names in case they were unable to attend at the last minute. Therefore, celebrity names were not used in any promotional material.

The caliber of star power at past events virtually ensured major coverage.

So the focus was to generate local excitement and national awareness of the event and its mission, while managing the media frenzy and preserving guests' privacy.

Tactics

A formal credentials system was established for the first time this year to ensure all media representatives at the event were working, and not

simply attending for their own enjoyment. L&B required journalists to submit their credentials two weeks prior to the event and asked them to identify potential story angles in advance.

"Not only did we require the media to complete the credentials materials prior to the event, but we asked that they wear their credentials on site and be escorted by a member of our team throughout the evening's event," says Michelle Olson, director of PR for Lavidge & Baumayr.

Hollywood publicist Joan Swift was recruited to help coordinate national coverage.

To head off tension with the media, L&B also presented alternative story ideas to broadcast journalists, as opposed to standard one-on-ones with celebrities. For example, Muhammad Ali's doctor agreed to be interviewed about Barrow's Parkinson's Disease program.

A red carpet entry area was staged and camera crews were corralled there to videotape the arrival of the more than 40 celebrities and their guests.

Muhammad Ali and Michael J. Fox, guests of honor, arrived together and were cheered by more than 100 onlookers as they were interviewed by national and local news media.

The event also included a celebrity bout between Evander Holyfield and Steven Seagal, and a live auction for exotic travel and entertainment packages, and valuable sports memorabilia.

Results

Celebrity Fight Night drew 995 guests at dollars 1,000 a seat. Through ticket sales, the live auction, a silent auction and impulsive gifts from attendees, the event raised dollars 2.5 million plus after expenses.

More than 60 print and broadcast journalists requested credentials for the event. Media coverage included headliner segments on Access Hollywood, Entertainment Tonight, Extra, HBO Sports, FOX Sports, as well as live and taped coverage on all local television networks.

Print coverage included feature stories in Us Weekly, People, USA Today, The Arizona Republic, Scottsdale Life magazine, Scottsdale Magazine, Phoenix magazine, and various other weekly and daily publications in Arizona.

Future

Pleased with the outcome, the Fight Night Foundation plans to use a similar scheme to promote and manage media at next year's event.