

Building a Winning National Awareness Program

The brainstorming and research are complete and the team is now pursuing a national awareness campaign. Have you considered all the nuances to deliver a winning promotion? A properly run awareness program can be an effective tool to drive traffic to a company's website and social media outlets, and ultimately to develop a deeper brand connection with consumers. And with the social media frenzy over the past decade, social media offers exciting new ways for agencies and brand managers to authentically reach out directly to brand advocates and potential consumers at a fraction of the cost of traditional channels.

When plotting out the campaign, please consider these 10 steps:

1. Create a solid marketing plan - include a positioning statement, situational analysis, objectives (internal and external), target audience (primary and secondary), key messaging, strategies, tactics and the critically important, measurement tools.
2. Look at the promotion as if you are the consumer entering the contest. What clear and compelling actions are you asking them to complete? If you don't ask people to act, they won't.
3. Develop partnerships with like-minded groups or organizations. This enhances credibility and can expand the effort's reach.
4. Set goals and metrics for your promotion. Track everything to show value and provide weekly reporting to the executive team and/or client. If budget allows, conduct pre- and a post-awareness studies.
5. Make it easy to participate. If consumers have to jump through multiple hoops to get involved, chances are they will skip entering and never look back.
6. Qualify the data collected from each participant for future sales efforts and data mining.

7. Every consumer promotion is subject to federal, state and local laws. It is vital to have legal counsel who specializes in promotions and giveaways to contribute to the rules and regulations, and terms and conditions. These documents are designed to minimize the risk and liability for the organization. Also, create contest FAQs to avoid any uncertainty about the campaign.
8. If the prize is valued at more than \$5,000, consider bonding the promotion. Bonds are issued by underwriting companies to cover the value of the prize, and to ensure all prizes are awarded.
9. Don't forget public relations. PR is key to a successful program. It provides an additional authentic voice for the campaign's awareness goals.
10. Be prepared with a contingency plan. Like life, promotions can be unpredictable. Therefore, plot out the possible challenges in every marketing channel early on in your crisis management plan.

A great example is National Mobility Awareness Month for industry trade organization, the National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association (NMEDA). With a budget of \$190,000 the inaugural awareness month for the United States and Canada was initiated to educate seniors, veterans, caregivers and people with disabilities about the many wheelchair accessible vehicles and adaptive mobility equipment options available for living an active and mobile lifestyle. In order to further that mission, NMEDA partnered with their member, automotive industry manufacturers to give away three wheelchair accessible vehicles. A new website was designed - MobilityAwarenessMonth.com where individuals could submit a story about how their "Local Hero" (person with a disability or the caregiver) is overcoming their challenges and living a mobile lifestyle. Consumers were able to submit a 400-word story and a picture or a two-three minute video, and then it was their responsibility to prompt others to vote on the Local Hero. The contest was promoted through social media, Google advertising, industry partners, association members, consumer and influencer print and online publications media buys, a 30-second TV spot on a cable network, and traditional media relations. A press conference was also held to kick-off the promotion and a national spokesperson was selected to advocate for mobility solutions for people with disabilities. The promotion was open for eight weeks to allow for social media and local media penetration.

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When establishing the goals for this program, the agency and the client set realistic expectations for a project of this magnitude. However, the response was beyond exceptional. The initial goal was to award one vehicle, but that multiplied into three due to the generosity of the manufacturers. When considering Local Hero entries, the team anticipated approximately 100 submissions; instead over 1,550 were received.

The promotion quickly grew in popularity. So much so, the site's server became unresponsive at times. This is where "plan for the unexpected" came to life. In order to maintain a fair playing field for the promotion, the contest was shut down for three days in order to switch the site to a dedicated server to better handle the heightened volume of traffic. During that time, ongoing communications via Facebook and Twitter were critical, as well as frequent updates to the membership. Furthermore, a new landing page was developed offering an email sign-up sheet for those interested in being notified when story submissions and voting resumed.

What are the results to date for this effort? To name a few: NMEDA's customer database grew from 115 contacts to approximately 430,000. These contacts can be sorted to expand the association's membership base and assist dealerships with lead generation. Also, the site enjoyed more than two million visitors - individuals that are now familiar with NMEDA. The media relations efforts have amounted in nearly 1,200 news stories, and social media exposure has brought in approximately 1,400 posts. Media values total \$300,000.

Building a winning awareness campaign requires clear objectives and detailed planning; however, the "prize" at the end can result in new and reaffirmed raving fans for a brand, coupled with a meaningful ROI.