



In this issue: Honest Tea-Formula-SS+K PR Campaign Turns Sampling Stunt into Search for the "Most Honest City in America"

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Dear Subscriber,

Winning PR Campaigns highlights outstanding PR efforts that have been awarded Bulldog Awards for Excellence in media relations campaigns. These campaigns serve to exemplify best practices, inspire greater creativity and help practitioners achieve better results.

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PR Campaign of the Week

By Jim Bucci

Knowing that sampling is the ultimate tried-and-true tactic for marketing beverages, but one not likely to generate wide interest, **SS+K** devised a novel twist. To promote their client, **Honest Tea**, they launched the "Most Honest City in America" campaign, sampling something more than their client's organic, lightly sweetened tea—the ideal of honesty.

To do that, they erected pop-up stands called "Honest Stores" in seven major U.S. cities over the hot summer months. Part sampling vehicle and part social experiment the stores were stocked with racks of product for sale for \$1.00. All purchases would be made on the honor system with the stores being completely unmanned.

Hidden cameras captured unsuspecting consumers' reactions. Some stole their tea, while many more paid for it. Honest Tea's agency of record, **Formula** spearheaded the traditional media relations, while SS+K issued local reports on each city's results as well as national coverage of the campaign as a whole.

"Sampling is a great tactic for marketing beverages as it gives consumers the opportunity to try something new," explains **Michael Olguin**, president of **Formula**. "However, it isn't typically newsworthy."

Overall, the bulk of Americans proved to be upright citizens with the minority of participants taking product without paying. And the most honest city was? It turned out to be Boston, scoring a 93.3 percent honesty rating, while Los Angeles was the least honest city with a 75 percent score.

"Not only did we generate an amazing amount of buzz and coverage, but we elevated a formerly niche product to a household name," says Olguin.

The Challenge: How to best use B-roll from hidden cameras of customers at pop-up "Honest Stores": To accurately capture the behavior of customers at the pop-up "Honest Stores," hidden cameras would need to be used. But, the biggest challenge would be determining how to best use the B-roll of individuals "borrowing" or paying for the product without being aware that they were being filmed.

"Not using a hidden camera was out of the question, as it was the only way to get a true sense of consumers' honesty," explains Olguin. "To address the issue, we blurred out certain individuals' faces and asked others for approval to use their image."

Also, in certain cities, the pop-up "Honest Stores" had to be executed quickly and as a guerilla effort, making it difficult for media attendance. "Since the locations often changed quickly, we had less time to communicate the details to members of the media," says Olguin. "As such, we offered B-roll and photos of the stands to outlets that were unable to personally witness them."

The Strategy: Find the "Most Honest City in America" by testing customers' honesty at unmanned sampling booths: Merely arranging for a sampling event of Honest Tea wouldn't create the sought after consumer buzz or media attention. In order to drive awareness and trial of Honest Tea in key markets, PR efforts would need to be unique, instead of the tried-and-true. SS+K and Formula devised a plan that would have customers not only sample Honest Tea, but also their own sense of honesty.

In an effort to create buzz around Honest Tea's summer sampling initiative, SS+K and Formula launched the search for America's "Most Honest City" by placing "Honest Stores" pop-up stands with racks of cold drinks for sale for one dollar in seven U.S. cities.

"These stations were completely unmanned, and all purchases were made on the honor system," says Olguin.

"Hidden cameras captured unsuspecting consumers' reactions. Some customers 'borrowed' their tea, but many more paid for it."

The Results: "Most Honest City in America" secures top media placements, creates brand buzz among consumers: In addition to garnering top-tier coverage in various media outlets, the campaign was extremely popular among consumers—engaging them in a way that was unexpected and endearingly on-brand. As well as offering locals a refreshing cold beverage and encouraging increased sampling of Honest Tea, the campaign got customers talking about the "Honest Stores" on social media channels and seeking out the stores in their cities.

The campaign garnered 159 media placements, equating to more than 280 million impressions and nearly \$1.5 million in advertising sales. Media coverage of the campaign as well as the final results were covered by USA Today.com, MSNBC, AdAge.com, HuffingtonPost.com, Bostonist.com, LAWeekly.com, and numerous regional TV news affiliates and websites in the seven participating cities.

Secrets of Success: Read on as Olguin offers more tips and explains why this campaign won Bronze in "Best Special Event/Stunt" at the 2011 Bulldog Awards for Excellence in Media Relations & Publicity.

If your campaign is centered on product sampling, include a news peg: "Make sure you attach a newsworthy angle to your sampling efforts," he instructs. "Otherwise, it will be more difficult to secure media coverage."

Lay the groundwork prior to your sampling event: "Seed the story among key media to create interest prior to the sampling day," he offers. "Especially if you know the locations are bound to change throughout the day."

Widen the focus of your local efforts to gain national appeal: "Give your local efforts a wider national appeal for additional coverage," he says. "While the 'Honest Stores' were only placed in seven cities, we were able to secure national placements by tying them to the search for the 'Most Honest City in America.'"

Let the media in on your PR plans, so they know how to cover your story: "We let media in on the secret, but asked them not to spill the beans to their viewers and readers," he explains. "But, after a few cities were under our belt, the media had an idea of how it would play out, and were ready to capture the stunt."

Winner's Profile:

Formula is a national public relations boutique with offices in New York, Los Angeles and San Diego. The firm's practice areas include consumer, lifestyle, business, technology, sports, entertainment and travel. Based in New York, **SS+K** is a marketing and communications agency specializing in creative social engagement.

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