

IABC Gold Quill Awards 2004
Build-A-Bear Workshop Comes to Canada
Division 1 – Communication Management
Category 12.2 – Special Events Internal or External: Private

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Division/Category: 1 – Communication Management / 12.2 – Special Events –
Internal or External: Private
Title/Description of Entry: BABW Comes to Canada
Time Period of Project: February to October, 2003
Brief Description: Build-A-Bear Workshop – a retailer that invites Guests of
all ages to create their own customized stuffed animal –
staged innovative Grand Opening Events to mark its launch
into Canada. This was the retailer's first step outside the
U.S. and signaled the beginning of its successful
international expansion.

The Work Plan

Need/Opportunity

In late 2002, Build-A-Bear Workshop (BABW) – the leading U.S.-based make-your-own-stuffed-animal concept for mall-based retailing – announced its intention to launch its first stores outside of the United States in Spring 2003. Canada was chosen as its first foreign country and stores were to be opened in four distinct markets.

In less than six years, BABW has become one of North America's most celebrated, award-winning retailers. Since the opening of its first store in St. Louis, Missouri in 1997, and without the support of advertising, the company had grown to more than 130 stores across the United States, with annual sales of \$170 million U.S.

While widely recognized in the U.S. as a retail innovator, BABW had extremely low retail brand recognition in Canada. Since BABW did have a small following of Canadians who had experienced a U.S. store during family vacations, we believed there was a tremendous opportunity to leverage these "brand ambassadors" to help create excitement within the Canadian marketplace.

To be successful in Canada, the retailer recognized it needed to celebrate each local market store opening and demonstrate the experiential retail concept where Guests create their own stuffed animals as they choose, stuff, fluff, name and dress their way through a series of bear-making stations, triggering an emotional connection with teddy bears. BABW is founded on the principle of giving back to the community. The company's charitable commitment needed to be brought to life in Canada, through Canadian charitable partnerships.

Strategic Objectives (SO), an independent public relations agency based in Toronto, was contracted as BABW's Canadian Public Relations Agency to launch the first international expansion of BABW with four stores to open in 2003:

- Edmonton, Alberta (West Edmonton Mall) – May 29, 2003
- Calgary, Alberta (Chinook Centre) – June 20, 2003
- Mississauga (Toronto), Ontario (Square One) – August 8, 2003
- Coquitlam (Vancouver), British Columbia (Coquitlam Centre) – October 23, 2003

SO won the account in February 2003 after a competitive pitch. This win was based on our development of an innovative, multi-faceted PR plan that brought new ideas and approaches to this retailer which already had a highly developed PR team. Our Canada-specific plan incorporated extensive research and insight into the market which was highly valuable to BABW, as well provided new event concepts that could be implemented for future U.S. and foreign market BABW openings. Relevant insight in our culture included the country's icons (Royal Canadian Mounted Police – RCMP), animals (Moose and Beaver), charities, partnerships and the media market. The result was a non-traditional, fun, newsworthy Grand Opening Public Relations Event Program that captured attention of the media and consumers; built strong brand awareness of Build-A-Bear Workshop; and created compelling reasons to experience the new retail concept.

Intended Audiences

The target audience for the Canadian Launch of BABW included:

- National and local media in Canada, to profile the BABW experience, our message and our brand ambassadors
- Canadian Guests who had previously visited a BABW in the United States
- Canadians aged 3 – 103 years of age; BABW knows that teddy bears are cherished by boys, girls, men and women of all ages

Goals

- Stage special events that would meet program objectives
- Introduce BABW into the Canadian marketplace
- Position BABW as the leader in the make-your-own-stuffed animal concept for mall-based retailing

Objectives

- Generate media attention, and positive editorial coverage of BABW to coincide and support each store opening
- Generate excitement and awareness among local-market Guests who had visited a U.S. store, as we wanted these “brand ambassadors” to help create consumer buzz
 - Drive Grand Opening store traffic and sales

Solution Overview

SO developed a three-day *Canadian Grand Opening Cele-bear-ation* event program that included brand new event concepts including:

- **Media Co-Promotions**

- **Morning Radio Drops**
- **Taking it to the Street Events: News Bulletin Bears and Take Your Teddy to Work Day** events, featuring Bear Hugs Mascot Bearemy[®] and Fashion Spokesbunny Pawlette Coufur[™], giving out free bear hugs on the sidewalks of Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto and Vancouver
- **Ambassador Sneak Peek Events:** private shopping evenings for Canadians who had visited a store in the U.S.
- **Stuffed With Hugs Media Sneak Peek Events:** events where media personalities and their children were invited to experience BABW and make a bear for a local children's hospitals
- **Grand Opening Day Cele-bear-ation Events** with local school children and local Mayors making bears for a chosen charity
- **Proactive Media Relations** to support the events and public awareness

All elements incorporated the “bearism” vocabulary which is imbedded in the BABW culture. The program resulted in outstanding sales results, customer traffic, brand awareness and media coverage, positioning BABW as a leading, new, unique retail destination.

Media Co-Promotions and Radio Drops: We began our buzz-building in all four markets by securing high-profile audience interactive programs with all prime local television, radio shows and newspapers including Edmonton's #1 Morning Show on Global Television and top-rated Nationally Syndicated women's interest TV show *CityLine* (WS#1). A targeted broadcast script (WS#2) helped yield extensive and generous editorial coverage of the upcoming store openings. BABW teddy bears and other beary great merchandise were featured in most coverage (WS#3).

We arranged for mascot Bearemy to deliver cuddly teddy bears and bear hugs to morning radio hosts on more than 39 of the cities' top radio stations (WS#4). Radio hosts were generous in their on-air discussions of the retailer's arrival on-the-scene and all of the upcoming events – generating on-air buzz, awareness and media interest of Build-A-Bear Workshop's Grand Opening Cele-bear-ations (WS#5).

Taking it to the Streets Events – News Bulletin Bears and Take Your Teddy to Work Day Events: To create community attention for BABW, SO developed and coordinated events in Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto and Vancouver (WS#6). The News Bulletin Bears events in Edmonton, Toronto and Vancouver and the Take Your Teddy to Work Day event in Calgary, featured mascots Bearemy and Pawlette Coufur. The Mascots spread bear hugs and distributed the first Canadian “Beary-Newsworthy”[®] free bulletin (WS#7) to morning commuters. Chalk artists spread paw prints on the sidewalks announcing BABW grand openings. In Calgary, this event concept was changed to “Take your Teddy to Work Day” as Calgary and Edmonton are in the same province and we did not want to duplicate an event that had already received exceptional public and media exposure. Consumer and media response was incredible! The Edmonton Event generated live coverage on A-Channel's *Big Breakfast* morning show (WS#1) and feature photos in both daily newspapers: the Edmonton Sun and Edmonton Journal (WS#8).

Calgarians rushed to the mascots to receive one of the more than 300 bears given out within a two hour period, and more than 1 million commuters at Toronto's Union Station either received or were offered bear hugs and free bulletins.

Stuffed with Hugs Media Sneak Peek Event: Buzz-building continued with special Stuffed with Hugs Media Sneak Peek Events in each local market leading up to each store opening. SO invited local, key media influencers (WS#9) to experience first-hand the interactive, retail-tainment concept. With store construction often being completed just hours before Guests arrived, the shelves were quickly stocked with the latest BABW furry friends, fashion and Canadian exclusive merchandise (i.e. Canadian Mountie Moose).

BABW is committed to giving back to the community and partnering with local children's charities. SO coordinated partnerships with local children's hospitals and invited Media Guests to make a bear for themselves as well as one to be donated to the chosen children's hospital. Response was overwhelming and feedback was extremely positive – morning on-air personalities spoke on-air the next morning about their experience at BABW and promoted the grand opening!

Ambassador Sneak Peek Event: BABW has a unique database of Canadians who had visited a store in the United States. SO recommended an Ambassador Event to herald each Grand Opening, generate excitement and drive store traffic and sales (WS#10). Invitations (WS#11) were sent to approximately 1,500 Guests within a 5-mile radius of each store, providing them the opportunity for a private, preview shopping event at the store on the evening before opening day. Hundreds of Guests were greeted by BABW's Chief Executive Bear Maxine Clark and given a special Back Stage Paws (WS#12), bear hugs from Bearemy and Pawlette Coufur, free prizes, and the opportunity to be the first to shop in the new store. At each mall, these events attracted unprecedented consumer line-ups of more than 2,000 adults and children and contributed to record sales revenues for each Grand Opening.

Grand Opening Cele-bear-ation Event: The advance publicity generated beary great excitement on opening day resulting in hundreds of customers lining-up and waiting for the doors to open. Grand Opening Cele-bear-ations got off to early starts in both Calgary and Mississauga with pre-store opening live television remotes from Calgary's *Big Breakfast* and Canada's #1 Local Morning Show *BreakfastTelevision*, (WS#1). Local school children were invited to make bears for the local children's hospital and join Chief Executive Bear Maxine Clark for the Grand Opening Ribbon Cutting Ceremony with local mayors (WS#13).

Media Relations Program: SO created an impactful and informative Media Relations Program to highlight the Grand Opening Events and drive consumer traffic. We distributed a Media Kit (WS#14) in a colourful teddy bear backpack that included a news release, fact sheet, Maxine Clark biography, digital product photography and Media Alerts communicating the News Bulletin Bears and Grand Opening Cele-bear-ations

events. Kits were sent to key contacts and proactive media relations secured brand-focused editorial coverage.

Implementation

While details are confidential, the budget for this multi-market project was less than \$100,000 U.S. (\$130,000 CDN). With these resources SO:

- Developed an innovative PR strategy with local variations to maximize opportunities in four markets
- Developed, produced and managed a seven-event plan for each market: Media Co-Promotions; Radio Drops; News Bulletin Bears and Take Your Teddy to Work Day; Stuffed with Hugs Media Sneak Peek; Ambassador Sneak Peek; Grand Opening Cele-bear-ation and Media Relations
- Developed charitable partnerships with four leading children's hospitals and secured participation of local schools and mayors
- Sourced, hired and managed actors for mascots and mascot handlers
- In partnership with BABW, liaised with mall management to coordinate in-store events
- Wrote and distributed a newsworthy media kit to create awareness of BABW's launch into the Canadian marketplace
- Wrote and distributed two media alerts to notify journalists about the News Bulletin Bears and Grand Opening Cele-bear-ations events
- Conducted proactive follow-up media relations to secure media attendance and positive editorial coverage for the events
- Developed key messages and Good Answers to Tough Questions to ensure consistent messages (WS#15)

Challenges

The BABW Canadian launch experienced a number of challenges:

- There was no advertising support – the Canadian launch was 100% PR driven
- The first store opening was at the West Edmonton Mall (WEM) in Edmonton, Alberta. This created a number of challenges including: Edmonton is a small city with a small media market; new stores open frequently at WEM and receive no media or consumer fanfare.
- SO needed to contain coverage in market-specific areas (i.e. Edmonton and Calgary) so as not to pre-empt the national launch in Toronto – the media hub of Canada
- While BABW is the originator of the stuff-your-own teddy bear concept and #1 in the U.S., Canadian copy cats had already opened in Ontario and British Columbia
- SO received approval for this event program only two months before the first opening in Edmonton, Alberta and had to very quickly pull all elements together
- At the time of two Grand Openings, national disasters were at the forefront of the media agenda: Alberta was battling Mad Cow Disease and British Columbia was experiencing a national emergency of the worst flooding in a century with thousands of people forced from their homes and more than 485 mm of rain fall in less than five days. We had to be sensitive to community concerns while at the same time engage consumers and the media to consider the BABW events worthy of their time.

- SO experienced behind-the-scenes last minute on-site challenges with the professional, hired actors for the mascots and mascot keepers. One actor became claustrophobic in the costume and others were not able to perform mascot duties due to medical emergencies (i.e. broken arm, emergency wisdom teeth removal).
- The Mississauga and Coquitlam stores are in desirable malls with excellent consumer traffic, but were located outside of the key media core of downtown Toronto and Vancouver. We had to convince media that the events were worthy of them going beyond their “traditional” coverage area.

Measuring/Evaluation

The *Canadian Grand Opening Cele-bear-ation* event program achieved all goals and objectives; beat every expectation in capturing media and public attention; built strong brand awareness of BABW; created compelling reasons to experience the new retail concept; and generated record sales and Grand Opening consumer traffic. Our multi-faceted, brand-building event program generated exceptional media coverage that included front page of the business section in The National Post (WS#8); live coverage on CTV’s Canada AM, Canada’s only national morning show (WS#1); and coverage on all four top breakfast programs in their respective markets including Toronto’s Breakfast Television Canada’s #1 Local Morning Show.

Measurement was based on event attendance and in-store traffic, first day sales and media coverage based on advertising equivalencies.

- A total of 6,000 invitations were distributed and a total of 2,200 Guests attended the Ambassador Sneak Peek Events - an astounding 36% participation rate. In Coquitlam, more than 850 Guests lined-up for hours to attend the Sneak Peek event, achieving more than a 50% participation rate. As these events generated such outstanding response and beat all expected direct mail response rates – the event concept is now being integrated into new store openings’ plans in the United States.
- Media and their children flocked to our Stuffed with Hugs Media Sneak Peek Events. The events were attended by each city’s most influential media including more than 15 TV crews. BABW was beary thrilled with the response!
- Media personalities and local school children made more than 800 bears that BABW donated to local children’s hospitals. This generated considerable goodwill, tremendous excitement, positive buzz and established charitable community relationships for each store.
- The 2-hour Ambassador Sneak Peek Events generated \$7,000 - \$10,000 in Grand Opening sales.
- Total PR Audit Value: \$772,000 US (\$1 million+ CDN). Total audience impressions: more than 19 million – more than one-half of the entire population of Canada. Coverage included 28 print articles (WS#8); and 44 Broadcast Segments totaling 3 hours (WS#1 and WS#5). BABW branding and key messages appeared in 100% of coverage, positioning BABW as the leader in the make-your-own-stuffed-animal concept for mall-based retailing.
 - How do you create news about teddy bears? According to The National Post, “Just when it seemed as though retailers couldn’t find a fresh way to market

- stuffed animals, Maxine Clark has hit the mark with Build-A-Bear Workshop....They're enjoying a terrific streak." (WS#8)
- SO developed a Grand Opening compilation video (WS#16) for use at the International Council of Shopping Centres' annual conference. This award-winning video is now used by BABW to source real estate internationally. It has also set a benchmark for future international store openings.

BABW's Canadian exclusive, first-time ever events generated sales, drove traffic, generated consumer buzz and secured outstanding media coverage. Working in partnership with the BABW Marketing PR Team and with assistance from BABW's printing supplier, Attitude Film & Print, SO delivered a resoundingly successful multi-faceted event program. The in-house BABW PR Team leveraged our insight into the Canadian marketplace and had the confidence in us to execute a Canadian exclusive event program. The ultimate measure of success is that our event programs are now rolling out to new store openings in the United States and SO continues to work with BABW in 2004!