Relief in Sight
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NEED/OPPORTUNITY / The need for AusAID to inform the Australian public about the aid program it manages on their behalf is paramount and ongoing; however, this need became critical following the September 2005 announcement by then Prime Minister John Howard that he would almost double Australia’s overseas aid to the Asia-Pacific region by 2010. Aid was back on the political agenda, and AusAID was under pressure to communicate the effectiveness of the aid program and engage a broad cross-section of the public to build support for the planned increases in overseas aid.

AusAID delivers Australia’s overseas aid program to assist developing countries in reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development, in line with Australia’s national interest. The need to build public understanding and support for this taxpayer funded program is one of the major pillars that underpins the political will to fund it. The implications of a failure to communicate could include a redirection of funds to other government agencies or an overall slowdown in Australia’s overseas aid budget. This would in turn affect the delivery of development assistance to the Asia-Pacific region, Africa and the Middle-East. The agency’s continued work is also of vital importance to Australia’s commitment to helping meet the internationally-agreed-upon Millennium Development Goals—targets set by the world’s nations to reduce poverty by 2015. Internally, the organization was facing a large restructuring to prepare for delivering the increased aid program. Relief in Sight was an opportunity to remotivate staff by reminding them, in the words of one employee, “why we do what we do.”

The Agency had a lot of work to do to convince the public that aid was effective or even that the government had an aid program. This assessment was based on independent community attitudes research conducted every four years by AusAID. The research showed that the Australian public—while generally supportive of aid—had limited awareness of the government’s aid program, low confidence in the funds being spent on aid and lacked understanding about the complex issues surrounding aid. The research recommended that the Agency build public understanding and support for Australia’s efforts, and communicate that aid is essential and effective.

Moving away from high-cost advertising campaigns, the Agency instead looked at proactive public relations campaigns, sponsorships, and partnerships, harnessing the strong media and public interest in humanitarian responses.

INTENDED AUDIENCE(S) / The primary target audience was the general public.

The secondary target audiences were:
- Schools (teachers, students, parents).
- News media, particularly regional and suburban electronic and print.
AusAID conducted independent community attitudes research that showed the public was generally supportive of aid: 90 percent of Australians regarded reducing poverty as an “extremely” or “very” important issue facing the world today. However, the campaign had to respond to the finding that very few people knew about AusAID or the government’s aid program: Only 6 percent of respondents were aware of AusAID as the government’s overseas aid agency. The research also showed that the public had low confidence in the funds being spent on aid, and most did not understand the complex issues surrounding international development. The research indicated that AusAID needed to show people what they were talking about, engage them personally and highlight the humanitarian side of the aid program. For example:

- While 71 percent of respondents think aid is effective, the public needs to see real outcomes from aid and know what it is used for.
- Greater personal engagement in aid would help increase the perception of aid effectiveness.
- Humanitarian or moral reasons (as opposed to self interest) are the key motivators of support for aid.

A media content analysis identified potential opposition to overseas aid from some of Australia’s farming community who were experiencing the worst drought in 100 years. “Charity begins at home” was a strongly held attitude among conservative people, many of whom live in rural and regional Australia—right where AusAID was headed.

The organization’s research and experience showed that the critical factors for the schools audience were long lead times for their planning, providing teachers with curriculum-based lesson plans online, and the ability present the exhibition at schools.

The suburban, regional and rural media would be most interested in AusAID content. Most required a strong local angle so AusAID promoted its special events, mayoral functions, school visits and appearance dates at local shopping centers. The television and radio stations were interested in good talent to interview so the organization’s traveling explainers were a critical inclusion in the campaign.

**GOALS AND OBJECTIVES** / The main goal of *Relief in Sight* was to increase public awareness of and support for the Australian government’s overseas aid program. This goal meant a shift for the agency from informing the public to influencing them. It was critical to the future of the agency to maintain aid as a government priority and shore up voter support for a doubling of the aid program.

Based on research and experience, AusAID set the following objectives:

1. Compile an engaging and informative photographic exhibition depicting the effectiveness of Australia’s humanitarian relief work to generate awareness and support for the Australian government’s aid program.
2. Tour the photographic exhibition through all Australian states and territories over a two-year period.
3. Expose the exhibition and its key messages directly to more than 500,000 people during the tour.
4. Expose the exhibition and its key messages through the media, a web site and in schools, to more than 5 million people during the tour.

These goals were not financial as the exhibition was not intended to generate income.

**SOLUTION OVERVIEW** / The solution AusAID chose was *Relief in Sight*—a national touring photographic exhibition on humanitarian relief combined with a web site, schools program, strategic partnerships, and a public relations campaign to inform and influence a significant proportion of the audience on a limited budget.

Based on research and experience, AusAID selected disaster relief as the most effective theme, based on its ability to:

- Appeal to and engage the widest audience (research showed it was the key motivator in the aid sector).
- Link to and provide follow-up on the Indian Ocean tsunami, which inspired a massive response from Australians.
- Fit comfortably in shopping malls without offending shoppers and, therefore, center management.
- Provide many potential collaborators willing to share their own databases, schools, newsletters, etc., with the national campaign, because by its nature, humanitarian work is all about partnerships.

As a touring exhibition, the design of *Relief in Sight* concentrated on venues and subject matter. The team spent time determining the best venues and ensured the photographs had a strong personal theme. They engaged a couple who had done similar work for AusAID in the past, Simon and Julie Goode, to tour the exhibition. They were the X factor that made a great exhibition unforgettable. Their love for people and passion for the subject matter infected every shopper, student, blog reader, event attendee and media consumer who came into contact with them—they became the program’s goodwill ambassadors. They even came up with the name *Relief in Sight*, which was a great play on the word “in-sight” but also generated a lot of curiosity and excitement as the massive, decorated AusAID van made its way around Australia’s suburbs and towns. The team used public relations company Bay Street Mediaworks to generate a high volume of positive coverage that reached an audience of over 6 million people. They developed an extensive tour schedule and media strategy with events in each state and/or territory, building prepublicity for the arrival of the exhibition and publicity while it was “in town.”

For those who saw it, *Relief in Sight* is remembered as a unique and powerful collection of photographs that tell the story of Australia’s humanitarian work in the Asia-Pacific region. To build this collection, AusAID moved away from commissioned photographers and instead turned to stakeholders for the body of work. This resulted in the freedom to choose from a larger pool of photos so the team found many more hero images, and these, in turn, drew larger audiences and more media coverage. Having extra hero images created more foot traffic at the display as eye-catching images were placed at multiple sight lines. The collaboration with internal and external stakeholders also provided a
wealth of ideas and advice on how to tell the story of humanitarian relief from the perspective of the aid worker. AusAID worked with its staff, its network of government departments (i.e., Defence, the Australian Federal Police and Geoscience Australia), and its partner NGOs (i.e., World Vision and the Red Cross). To supplement the collection, the team worked with a few award-winning professional photographers who had worked for AusAID and commercial photo libraries. The final 68 images were selected because of the unique story they told and their artistic merit. At several events, the team received praise from speakers, noting that the collection reflected the current state of news photography, combining amateur and professional work.

A detailed caption was provided with each photograph to allow the exhibition to function without explainers, when necessary, and still communicate key messages. By writing the captions in three levels of increasing detail, they were consumed in a variety of ways and by different audiences. They consisted of:

- An attention-grabbing title (e.g., “It’s me, I’m alive”).
- A snapshot into the photo’s context (e.g., “Indian Ocean tsunami, Sri Lanka, 2004”).
- A longer caption (approximately 150 words) working from the specific details of the story and moving out to the global context and Australia’s overall response.

By carefully selecting images that depicted crisis, response, rebuilding and disaster mitigation, the team was able to weave key messages into the captions. These were:

- Through AusAID, Australia plays a key, effective role in responding to disasters in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Australians can be proud that their tax dollars contribute to important international relief work.
- In providing disaster relief, AusAID works in partnership with the countries receiving aid, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other donors.
- The Asia-Pacific region is especially vulnerable to natural disasters, with a high frequency of volcanic activity and earthquakes. The region is home to two-thirds of the world’s poor, making response and recovery difficult without external support.
- Cash is best when donating to disaster appeals. This was an important message requested by AusAID’s NGO partners who needed the help of a third party to assist in stopping well-meaning but impractical donations of food and clothing.

The abundance of hero images made AusAID’s collateral materials visually exciting and highly popular, including:

- A brochure, a postcard set, a CD-ROM and a special edition of Focus—AusAID’s flagship magazine—which was distributed at shopping centers, to schools and at special events.
- A dedicated web site with school resources, a photo gallery and a popular blog with visitor photos. The URL was highlighted on all supporting material.
- Curriculum-based classroom work plans for teachers available on CD, online and mailed out in hard copy.
• An additional curriculum-based schools activity worksheet, which was distributed nationally in newspapers.
• A coffee table book for school libraries that was also used as a corporate gift for special guests.

Relief in Sight was the right combination of creative, logistics and people. It was well received by shopping center managers, school principals, NGO partners, politicians and the media. The exhibition was:
• On the road early in 2007 and travelled nationally and displayed at high-profile events such as World Youth Day in 2008, attracting thousands of Australian and international visitors.
• Set up in more than 60 shopping centers and seen by approximately 698,400 people (a conservative estimate).
• Presented at 35 schools and experienced through the materials at a further 138 schools.
• Reported in metropolitan, suburban and regional media through a targeted media strategy.
• Launched at events around the country by high-profile speakers, award-winning photographers and politicians.
• Displayed in the AusAID building for inspiration as well as the offices of the Parliamentary Secretary.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CHALLENGES / Relief in Sight as a management project was implemented according to the very high accountability standards that govern the Australian Public Service through the Financial Management and Accountability Act of 1997. AusAID’s internal measures included detailed measures for project design and accountability. Together, these measures, which protect against the misuse of public funds, have ensured that Relief in Sight was managed in an effective, efficient and transparent manner, providing significant value for the cost to the taxpayer.

The project cost just over A$890,000 for a three-month build, a 24-month tour and a three-month evaluation. The project commenced in October 2006, and was delivered on time and within budget in March 2009.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>COST ITEM</th>
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<tr>
<td>Human Resources:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Tour managers</td>
<td>A$221,539.00 (A$2,307.70 per week)</td>
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<td>- PR contractors</td>
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<td>- In-house staff (EL1)</td>
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<td>Van and caravan lease (including repairs, etc.)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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AusAID limited the cost of photos to about A$10,000 by approaching staff and government and NGO partners. The organization paid a nominal fee for images from two award-winning photographers who had worked for AusAID in the past. The team paid for a handful of images from Panos, Reuters and Getty but negotiated very hard based on the nonprofit application. The exhibition framework was re-conditioned rather than purchased new. AusAID negotiated venue costs down based on the relationships they had previously built with shopping malls and the offer of extra customers attracted by the media/exhibition. They retained suppliers who already understood the importance of Australia’s international relief work and who had proven they could deliver. This included Bay Street Mediaworks, who did not increase their price from the previous exhibition of A$10,000 per month and delivered outstanding media management (generating free coverage valued at over A$35,000 per month, subcontracting/supervising explainers, venue management, special event management, web hosting, regular reporting and a final evaluation). The team reduced the time frame from the previous exhibition to two years as they understood this would allow just enough time to visit all the major regional centers and spend longer in the capital cities.

**MEASUREMENT/EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES / Relief in Sight** was highly successful in building awareness and support for the Australian government’s overseas aid program among the Australian public. To measure this outcome, the team commissioned two separate evaluation reports—one by Bay Street Mediaworks and one by a reputable social research company. In regard to key messages, the independent social researchers concluded the exhibition was “effective in communicating the desired messages to the community.” The results from the quantitative research stage indicate AusAID was successful in increasing awareness and support:

- Forty-five percent indicated their level of support for the Australian government’s overseas aid program had increased.
- Seventy-two percent felt they knew more about the program.
- Seventy-nine percent indicated an intention to take some form of action.
- The ability to correctly answer seven out of eight “quiz” questions was higher among those leaving the exhibition than those entering.

Results from the qualitative research stage also supported the social researchers’ conclusion:

- Eighty-one percent interviewed found the exhibition to be emotionally powerful.
- Ninety percent felt the exhibition was a good way to learn about aid and relief.

The assessment conducted by Bay Street Mediaworks concluded the campaign was successful in meeting its objectives:

- The exhibition successfully toured all states and territories over a two-year period.
• It exceeded targets for directly exhibiting key messages by 198,000, achieving 698,000 visitors at 62 locations.
• It exceeded targets for communicating key messages via the media, online and in schools by over 1.5 million, achieving media circulation of 6,411,290, approximately 180,000 web hits (over 11 months of measuring) and reached thousands of school students.

Hits to the Relief in Sight web site demonstrated a high degree of use by all stakeholders (taxpayers, NGOs and health care workers, youth, educators, members of Parliament, local politicians and media). The evaluation report concluded that schools, too, were impressed with the exhibition, with teachers confirming the presentations to students were “memorable and impressive.”