

Hennepin works to 'save a brain'

HENNEPIN COUNTY MEDICAL

PR TEAM: Hennepin County Medical Center and Russell Herder (both Minneapolis, MN)

CAMPAIGN: Save This Brain

DURATION: August-October 2008

BUDGET: \$200,000



Hennepin County
Medical Center

Although the Hennepin County Medical Center (HCMC) provides leading medical care for traumatic brain injury (TBI), its county-owned status fosters an image more closely associated with inner-city trauma.

Ranked among America's best hospitals by *US News & World Report*, HCMC sought to position itself as the upper Midwest's premier TBI center.

"We knew... that our budget would limit the campaign's reach, so a successful PR campaign was essential to leverage it," says Ted Blank, director of marketing and referral development at HCMC.

STRATEGY

The strategy was to engage consumers in an informal way on the subject of brain injuries, before revealing who was behind the effort, to pique curiosity and heighten awareness.

"HCMC had done little service-line awareness building in the past,

"A successful PR campaign was essential"

Ted Blank, HCMC, director of marketing and referral development

and certainly nothing this nontraditional," says Brent Doering, VP of client services at Russell Herder, the agency retained for the effort. "We had to convince our client that this campaign was worthy of its own unique brand personality."

The team decided to provide people information in an everyday context to help them better understand how easy it is to take care of their brain, he adds.

TACTICS

The "everyday context" involved fitting a cast iron bathtub with wheels and rolling it through downtown Minneapolis' busiest pedestrian areas during high-traffic times.

The bathtub curtain carried the message, "Falls are the #1 cause of brain injuries. 34,446 of them happen right here every year."

The team distributed media alerts, dispatched HCMC medical pros for live interviews, and created a microsite, savethisbrain.org, which allows visitors to build their own version of a brain.

Days after the first event, the team put up educational kiosks staffed by HCMC pros at various events.

RESULTS

The microsite had more than 2,500 unique visitors in the first month. Within the first 24 hours of the campaign, the TBI center received more than 50 calls for examinations for potentially undiagnosed brain injuries.

"The creativity of the campaign... and the creation of a newsworthy event... definitely set it apart in a cluttered news market," Blank says.

The effort was featured on news broadcasts including the Twin Cities' primary daily, the *StarTribune*, the *Downtown Journal*, and *Mpls St Paul Magazine*. Also, doctors from HCMC were interviewed on Minnesota Public Radio.

FUTURE

Phase two of the campaign, which will encompass more community-based events and outreach efforts through schools and sports-related associations, is slated to launch in 2009.

Craig McGuire

PRWEEK'S VIEW

HCMC could have gone the standard route of sticking to promoting its credentials.

Instead, it rolled a bathtub right down the middle of Mainstreet USA.

Sure, we all sort of understand the seriousness of brain injuries, but it is usually more of an abstract horror. Presenting it as something more realistic, like falling in the bathtub, helps to make the connection for the public.

With effective messaging and the media push, only those with misfiring synapses failed to associate the stunt with the HCMC.

Now, that's using your brain.

