

COUNSELOR

PROMOTIONAL CA

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By John Corrigan & Christopher Ruvo

BEST DISTRIBUTOR CLIENT PROMOTION

HP2 Products & Promotions (asi/217284)

With its award-winning campaign for the NHL's Arizona Coyotes, HP2 Products & Promotions etched its name into hockey history.

Earlier this year, the Phoenix-based distributor created commemorative lapel pins and hanging banners to honor its hometown professional hockey team's most important player: Shane Doan. So impressive were the pins and the player they honored that the prestigious Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto planned to preserve one in its collection. "It's exciting to be part of something that means a lot to Arizona and to hockey," says HP2 founder Marc Hawkins, a Coyotes season ticket holder.

Doan was the team's long-time captain, playing at the club for 21 years. In recognition of the Alberta native, the Coyotes held a special jersey retirement ceremony for Doan's #19 in February. For the event at which the hard-hustling winger gave a speech and was honored, the team wanted branded mementos to give to staff, season ticket holders and ceremony participants.

For that, the Coyotes turned to HP2. Indeed, the distributorship had strategically maneuvered into prime position to win the high-profile order. Hawkins had seen to it that HP2 was a Coyotes' advertiser/sponsor. The partnership helped open the door for HP2 to work with the Coyotes on promo product initiatives, with campaigns that included gameday giveaways of can coolers.

Given HP2's top-notch work on such orders, the Coyotes believed they could trust Hawkins and his team to come through on the demand for Doan merch. HP2 didn't disappoint. Identifying the client's specific needs, HP2 sourced a lapel pin from Blairsville, GA-based 2400 Promotions (asi/92390) and a hanging banner from Hanover, PA-based Quinn (asi/80228).

Cut into the geographic shape of Arizona, the pin featured Doan's name, number and seasons played, as well as the Coyotes logo. The hanging banner also had his name, number, seasons played, and the Coyotes logo on one side, while the other showcased an image of Doan and his career stats. Season ticket holders received the banners. Coyotes' staffers and those who participated



HP2 Products & Promotions created this commemorative lapel pin and hanging banner for the jersey retirement ceremony for NHL player Shane Doan.

in the jersey retirement ceremony received both the pins and banners. "It was absolutely amazing ... I don't even know how to express it," Doan says. "It's one of those things that my gratitude and appreciation, I can't express it in words."

For Hawkins, who was there for the event, it was a special night too, having had a hand in honoring a man who's deeply beloved by Coyotes fans for not only his play and loyalty, but also his charitable work, commitment to the community and easy-going approachability. "The ROI was sentimental, highlighting a very important sports figure to Arizona," says Hawkins.

The Coyotes loved the pins and banners, and the team continues to enlist HP2 for promo solutions. "The relationship is getting better every day," says Hawkins. – CR

MPAIGN AWARDS

creative and successful campaigns.

BEST DISTRIBUTOR SELF-PROMOTION

Spotlight Sport & Corporate Wear (asi/332753)

When tragedy struck Humboldt, Mike and Shannon Yager used branded T-shirts as a salve for their community's broken heart.

In so doing, the proprietors of Humboldt, Saskatchewan-based Spotlight Sport & Corporate Wear sparked a global phenomenon, raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for charity, garnered massive media attention and produced this year's best distributor self-promotion.

The catastrophe occurred the evening of April 6, 2018. A speeding semi-trailer truck smashed into a bus carrying team members and staffers of the Humboldt Broncos, a junior "A" ice hockey team en route to a game. Sixteen people perished, including 10 players. Another 13 people were injured.

Like most everyone in Humboldt, the Yagers felt as if their hearts had been torn out. Rallying from the shock, however, they sought to ease the collective suffering by doing what they do best: providing top-notch imprinted apparel.

Within 18 hours of the accident, the Yagers launched the "We Are Humboldt Strong" fundraising campaign. It centered on selling T-shirts with that message to raise money for the victims' families, and to help locals show support and solidarity. The shirts also featured the Humboldt Broncos logo and a Spotlight sponsorship logo.

Beyond the main charitable goals, "we also hoped to gain exposure as an experienced, caring corporate supporter of the local hockey team and community," says Mike Yager.

Initially, the Yagers aimed to raise \$4,000. It quickly became clear the fundraising goal would be far exceeded. A Facebook post promoting the initiative spread like proverbial wildfire. Orders poured in. The planned three- to six-day campaign period extended into weeks. The Yagers labored around the clock to produce the tees, and as the campaign went on, hooded sweatshirts and jerseys, too. Volunteers helped with the heavy workload. Customers came from across Canada, most U.S. states – even Europe, Australia and Asia.

"I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide a donation to the families that lost loved ones," a T-shirt purchaser from Ontario emailed. "I received my package today and I hugged that package. To you it may only be a T-shirt. To me it means so much more."

In all, Spotlight produced more than 15,000 shirts plus hoodies and jerseys – a tally that enabled the Yagers to present a check for



Spotlight Sport & Corporate Wear raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for charity through sales of these T-shirts and hoodies.

\$304,239 in July 2018 to the Humboldt Strong Community Foundation. "The impact of what Mike and Shannon have done for Humboldt will never be forgotten," says Andrea Albert, who volunteered with Spotlight. "For many, it was part of their healing."

The Yagers' altruistic outreach earned Spotlight attention from Canada's top media outlets, as well as coverage in various blogs, local newspapers and podcasts. The campaign also helped Spotlight connect with new clients and triggered a boom in business. From April to December 2018, Spotlight's sales were up 39%, excluding the Humboldt Broncos/Humboldt Strong merchandise. Including it, sales increased more than 300%. The firm topped Counselor's 2019 list of Canada's fastest-growing promo companies.

While the positive exposure has proved invaluable, the real reward was being able to help grieving families and a stricken community to heal in the aftermath of tragedy. "We shed many tears reading emails from those who embraced what we were doing and who thanked us for allowing them to be a part of it," says Shannon Yager.

Perhaps Spotlight's work proves this: Doing good, for the right reasons, can be the best marketing of all. – CR

BEST SUPPLIER SELF-PROMOTION

Beacon Promotions (asi/39250)

As plastic bag bans ripple throughout the United States, legislators and proponents of these restrictions hope the regulations will encourage consumers to change their behavior and switch to reusable bags for their shopping. That presents potential opportunity for promotional products distributors, who can encourage businesses, nonprofits and other organizations to tap into the momentum of the eco-friendly movement by giving out or selling branded reusable bags.

Beacon Promotions has capitalized on the growing trend by expanding its product line to include tote bags. To raise awareness of the Minnesota-based supplier's new category, the company developed a promotional campaign to jump-start sales and educate distributors.

Beacon Promotions offered the first 150 distributor respondents 50 bags at whatever price they wanted to pay. These orders also had their name or logo added to the imprint for free. Those who responded after the 150 cutoff received a single tote bag with a Beacon imprint and an offer to purchase that same bag at a low price. All bags came in blue or black (BGTO4511) with a hot-pink

flamingo "Float Your Tote" imprint.

"We wanted distributors to know that we have the lowest price point and a Midwest shipping point, so it saves on freight dollars as well," says Gwen Brey, marketing coordinator at Beacon Promotions.

Brey says the results have been amazing: Beacon received 163 orders with the "name your price" campaign, generating \$3,587 in sales for 8,200 bags. The company also received 285 orders from distributors who missed the campaign. All 448 of these requests received a follow-up mailing with a floaty flamingo and a postcard with stats on tote bags. Even after the promotion had ended, Brey says that Beacon received six additional orders for another 450 tote bags.

Perhaps even more promising, Brey says that Beacon created 43 new accounts as a result of the promotion. "We had a great response to the offer and achieved increased awareness of our tote bags, generating over 400 leads," Brey says. "We even had two of our top national accounts reach out and want to do the same thing with their customers. So we've had two similar yet smaller campaigns piggyback our promotion." — *JC*

To help spur sales of bags, Beacon Promotions held a contest in which 150 distributors were ultimately given the opportunity to pay any price they wanted for 50 imprinted bags, a new category for the supplier.



BEST SOCIAL MEDIA PROMOTION

BAMKO (asi/131431)

Some fear the digital age and its potential impact on the promotional products industry. BAMKO is embracing it. Nowhere is that more evident than in the Top 40 distributor's targeted campaign that combined creative branded merchandise and social media influencers to garner millions of high-quality impressions for PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG), a globally popular online multiplayer Battle Royale game.

BAMKO Business Development Manager Craig Cavanaugh engineered the initiative, which he earned the opportunity to fulfill through careful client courting that centered on identifying needs and presenting specially tailored solutions. Ultimately, Cavanaugh and the design pros at Los Angeles-headquartered BAMKO collaborated with the client to craft preliminary swag ideas into a polished branded package.

The campaign involved sending gift boxes to 500 influential online video game streamers with large social media followings. The boxes came with cool merch that hyped the launch of "Vikendi," a new map, or gaming world, for the Battlegrounds franchise.

Arriving in a full-bleed print box that featured the image of a postcard that read "Greetings from Vikendi," the merch included a hand-painted snow globe with a snowman from the game. An Ushanka hat with a "PUBG Partners" front patch further emphasized the winter theme. Branded jacquard-knit socks, a mug, graphic-rich cards with recipes for hearty winter meals and an illustrated map of Vikendi were part of the package, too. Topping things off was a physical postcard from Vikendi that encouraged influencers to share about their swag.

Indeed, a fundamental intention of the campaign was to generate excitement for Vikendi among gaming influencers. The hope was that recipients would share about the new Battlegrounds map with their audiences who are gamers and thus potential customers for PUBG Corporation, the Battlegrounds creator and a subsidiary of South Korean video game company Bluehole. "We aimed to drive user acquisition for the client by leveraging a small core of influencers to amplify the brand to a key demographic of hardcore gamers," says Joshua White, BAMKO's general counsel and SVP of strategic partnerships.

The gift boxes were a smashing success. Gamers gushed about Vikendi on platforms that included Twitch, Twitter, Instagram and

YouTube. "The campaign generated millions of positive brand impressions across various social media channels," says White. "What was important here wasn't just the massive quantity of brand impressions gained from such a small number of products, but also the quality of those impressions, which came from the exact audience – online gamers – that PUBG wanted to reach."

The gift boxes also helped PUBG forge firmer bonds with important influencers. "Their social advocacy has a disproportionately amplifying effect on the PUBG brand, so solidifying those relationships is pivotal," says White.

Bottom line: BAMKO used a strategically focused campaign that wed social media, gaming and tangible promotional products to produce a huge client win. It's an encouraging case study of how merch is more relevant than ever in the online era. "We're in the early stages of working with PUBG on the next campaign," says Cavanaugh. "It's an exciting time." – CR



BAMKO sent a gift box filled with these products to gaming influencers as part of a promotional campaign for its client PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds.

BEST USE OF VIDEO

Dri Duck (asi/50835)

Since the fall of 2018, people have been tuning in to WORK TV – an ESPN spoof that provides coverage of construction sites. More specifically, the jackets the workers are wearing.

“Steve Garvin” and “Bob Rockwell” bring you the latest action, from the foreman’s jacket repelling a blast of water to an instant replay of workers doing a complicated chest bump in their flexible gear.

Dri Duck launched the humorous video series to raise brand awareness and promote its best-sellers: the Cheyenne jacket and the Motion jacket. Because the Kansas-based workwear brand sells through a network of wholesalers as well as distributors, the video series was an easy way to educate all of its customers on its popular products.

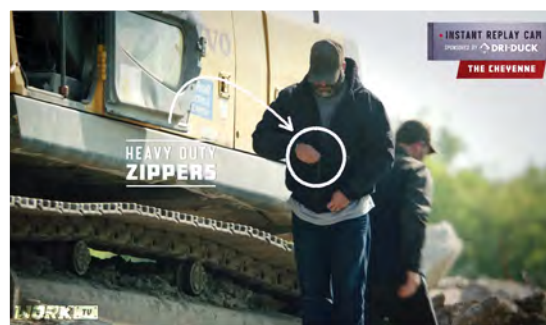
“We wanted to highlight the jackets’ features of comfort, movability and weather resistance,” says Abby Young, direct-to-consumer channel manager at Dri Duck, “and to showcase our clothes while still providing entertainment to the consumer.”

Dri Duck’s marketing team worked with local agency Digital Evolution Group to develop the WORK TV concept, determining whether it should be funny or stoic, planning out production and casting the sportscasters. Young says that both commentators are actors, but the construction workers in the videos are legitimate. They spent one day shooting the videos at a local quarry in Kansas City, KS, where Dri Duck has previously taken photos for its catalogs. The entire process from conception to the final edit took about four months, Young says. “It was a labor of love. They made us laugh, so we were excited to share the videos with the world,” she says.

Since the video series was posted on YouTube at the end of September 2018, “Welcome to WORK TV” has received over 16,000 views. Young says Dri Duck saw a 30% increase in social media followers, receiving almost 4 million impressions on its various platforms as a result. “We’re constantly engaged with our audience and our audience is always engaging with us,” Young says. “This brand awareness play has been very successful.”

In addition to sharing the videos on social media, Dri Duck’s corporate channel manager and sales representatives have been using the videos during presentations with clients. The company’s website also includes a page where customers can watch all the videos, following the WORK TV shenanigans in episodic fashion.

“At a trade show, we actually brought in one of the sportscasters to narrate a challenge with one of our competitors,” Young says. “The audience really loved it, so we’re going to continue to do those types of things in other marketing efforts.” – JC



Supplier Dri Duck launched a humorous video series that spoofs on sports network ESPN. The series raised brand awareness and promoted Dri Duck’s outerwear.