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Local Focus Can Be Best Way to Go

Hospital Example Shows Advantage of Targeting Narrow Geographic Area

By Mark Dominiak, Special to TelevisionWeek

This week, as most of us prepare to dive into the holiday season, we relish the opportunity to disengage from the constant deluge of media madness and recharge our energy by reconnecting with family, friends and community.

There's genuine value to be gained by tapping into local community environments, and now is the perfect time of year for planners to reflect on locally targeted media-planning efforts

Back in July, we addressed local media initiatives in our examination of an effort we were beginning for Chicago's Norwegian American Hospital, a local healthcare service provider, that heavily relied on local community presence to create impact. After recently completing the first wave of locally focused efforts, we have some powerful results to report.

Strategic Approach

For NAH, we attempted to leverage two aspects of local marketing to create impact on a shoestring budget. First, we thoughtfully assessed the ability of available media alternatives to effectively influence the small trading area around the hospital. Second, we relied on the everyday communal environment of vehicles to transfer a neighborhood feel to the hospital.

Norwegian American Hospital is located on the northwest side of the Chicago metro neighborhood in the Humboldt Park area. There are a number of small competing hospitals in the area; heavyweights such as Children's Memorial and Northwestern are outside of the neighborhood area to the east.

Norwegian's main competency is in basic community healthcare services, and it has a noteworthy reputation as a birthing center. Birthing, in fact, became the focus of initial campaign messages. It was a topic that helped assess the effort's results, as patient stays had been down significantly and success could simply be gauged by a decrease in empty beds.

NAH's main need was to rebuild its presence in the community and make it the leading healthcare service choice in the area. It was important for us to make sure that what media we did execute delivered as many cumulative impressions as possible within a reasonable radius of the hospital's trading area. It's unreasonable to assume potential patients would travel long distances for primary or emergency care, so impressions delivered far out of the neighborhood had little chance of generating results.

Those needs led to elimination of standby media choices including broadcast television and radio. Even with compelling strengths, both media delivered the vast majority of their impressions outside of the hospital's area. Traditional newspapers were not a viable option, either, as their predetermined zones didn't mesh well with the hospital's radius.

To build awareness, we settled on geographically flexible outdoor. We also chose to use zoned cable, which provided a regionalized option fairly consistent with the hospital's ZIP Code opportunity area. We built a tailored ZIP Code profile in syndicated research to get a feel for which cable networks performed best around the hospital, only running in those that made sense. Presence on cable also was enhanced via video-on-demand, where a lengthy vignette discussing Norwegian's pedigree as a birthing center was made available to viewers.

With that foundation in place, we built in additional media types that would integrate NAH messages into the daily lives of neighborhood residents. We wanted Norwegian to be integrated into environments where groups of people or larger segments of the neighborhood enjoyed shared experiences.

Our first choice was cinema, repurposing creative utilized on cable for the movie screen. Cinema allowed the NAH message to be viewed in an environment frequented by area residents and viewed in a communal fashion. When viewed in proximity to a slide reel featuring local businesses, cinema helped the hospital generate neighborhood credibility.

We also incorporated the unique medium of pizza boxes, delivered from local pizzerias within the hospital's radius. Larger-sized pizza boxes were chosen, to target families during their family dining occasions. It was a strong, neighborhood way to drive home to Mom that Norwegian provided quality baby care.

In-store was the final medium we selected to forge neighborhood connections. We used two of News America's SmartSource in-store advertising and promotional programs, Floortalk billboard-sized floor ads and Carts shopping cart ads. Floortalk allowed us to pinpoint locations in the retail space that could intersect moms amid daily routines while carts allowed us to reach those moms wherever they went in store. Retail locations falling directly within the hospital's radius of opportunity were chosen.

Results

After the first campaign wave in late summer, the hospital saw very encouraging results. Our strategic approach of selecting media types to focus impressions precisely to NAH's neighborhood, coupled with integrating the creative message into media contact points that could weave Norwegian into the daily lives of the community, paid big dividends. There was not just a significant increase in new moms using the birthing center; the ward was filled.

Client and agency have been very happy with the results. But there is still work to be done. We have two more phases of the campaign to implement and it's likely that upcoming phases will shift focus from the birthing center to other competencies of the hospital. We'll need to reassess how execution might need to change to best present a different message to the neighborhood.

This case study validates the strategic decision to focus resources tightly within the local neighborhood. A strategy of tight focus would not work for all clients, but it is valuable in solving media-planning problems where tight geographic targeting or budget is an overwhelming concern. Local clients with few locations or grand

openings and events to promote or perhaps even political campaigns could benefit from the approach.

Learning

Our work on Norwegian also demonstrates that there are other aspects to strategically focusing resources in a local neighborhood that must be accounted for. Some of what we've learned falls in the bucket of things to watch out for and some falls in the bucket of unexpected opportunities.

Look out for odd twists in production-related issues. To be prudent, it would be valuable to allot a bit more for production than what it seems is needed on the surface. Special attention is needed to execute unique media such as pizza boxes, in-store and cinema ads appropriately.

As for opportunity, a variety of vehicles with a local flair that we did not include in our initial planning process we either learned of or were approached by after our campaign began. A number of them were simply community print publications, but one among them merits additional discussion because of its video possibilities.

In following up with News America, we learned of Shelfvision, a fairly recent addition to their line of in-store media options that presents 32-second TV-commercial-like videos at a store shelf in front of a product. It utilizes a motion-activated 3.7-inch diagonal screen presenting television creative or specially created content. In addition, the unit sports a button the customer can push to play an additional message.

A worthwhile application for the second prompt would be to direct customers to a Web site or to register for a contest or a frequent-buyer program. A feature like that would be useful to a local client such as Norwegian, which is not directly selling anything at retail but could gain by prompting potential patients to reach out for more information via the Web.

So at this time of year, enjoy taking a step back and re-energizing for the planning challenges of the New Year. While you're out and about, make a mental note on places where brand messages can be woven into the fabric of daily activities. Those connection points may be a potential opportunity for you to leverage in your next brand plan.

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