

Revival of the Fittest: Art + Media Outreach Prompts a Post-Katrina Cultural Renaissance in New Orleans

Company: New Orleans Museum of Art
Agency: Deveney Communication
Timeframe: September 2006-March 2007

cultural renaissance of the city of New Orleans.

RENAISSANCE, RELOADED

Following Hurricane Katrina's devastation of New Orleans in 2005, the nation of France offered to help rebuild New Orleans' infrastructure, with special emphasis on the city's cultural institutions. As part of the country's commitment, France provided an exhibit of French masterpieces to the **New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA)** entitled "Femme, Femme, Femme: Paintings of Women in French Society from Daumier to Picasso from the Museums of France."

Though the exhibit was being offered as a free gift from France, NOMA needed assistance in marketing the exhibition. The museum hired PR agency **Deveney Communication** in September 2006 to execute a campaign to not only promote the exhibition, but also to catalyze a

According to John Deveney, founder of Deveney Communication, the firm was brought to the project as a result of a trusted referral. "Our work with the museum developed due to a previous working relationship with one of their team members," he says.

Marilyn Dittman, NOMA's current director of development, says the collaboration between the museum and Deveney Communication was fluid and procedural.

"We had regular meetings with the director of the museum," she says. "We all became equal partners to discuss what our next goal was, how we would achieve it and how John would carry it out."

But unfortunately for both NOMA and Deveney Communication, the team had to overcome several unique



Photo courtesy of Deveney Communication.

The Femme art exhibit, given to the New Orleans Museum of Art by France, helped reinvigorated the city in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

RESEARCH-DRIVEN ROI

When working on a multitiered media relations campaign, such as the "Femme, Femme, Femme" exhibit at the **New Orleans Museum of Art**, it's important to cover all bases, says John Deveney, founder of **Deveney Communication** (agency partner on the initiative). Following are his tips for other agencies or companies wishing to launch a similar promotional effort:

- **Always do your research:** This applies to both the topic and coverage of the campaign or event you will be promoting, as well as the structure of the organization you're working with. "For Femme, we were able to follow up with news organizations and media who had covered the arts and Katrina recovery and gain more media coverage," Deveney says. "It's important to discern the best ways to communicate with the client so that you're their ideal agency to work with. We've worked with NOMA since Femme and have formed a great relationship with their team."
- **Facilitate alliances to enhance your efforts:** "For the Femme campaign, we insured that tourism leaders were aware of every event and bit of information," Deveney says. "This allowed them to get the word out to their stakeholders and create programming and messaging to extend the media coverage and awareness."

challenges:

- The population of New Orleans was significantly diminished after Hurricane Katrina;
- Tourism numbers plummeted and crime rates rose following Katrina;
- The museum is located far from the city's tourism hub; and,
- Staffing at NOMA was at 40% of its pre-Katrina levels, resulting in little internal support for exhibitions and marketing.

Plus, NOMA's strained resources and overburdened staffers were challenging to Deveney Communication in their role in the campaign.

"We had to ensure that we were diligent with reporting so they could showcase our worth to board members," says Deveney. "Additionally, we were tasked with promoting a feature type story while much of the focus on New Orleans at the time was negative or Hurricane

Katrina-oriented. This exhibition was a huge piece of the recovery of the arts community, and it was our goal to ensure that news coverage about the city took it into account."

To reach multiple audiences, then, Deveney Communication developed four key objectives:

- Achieve meaningful and far-reaching media placements to increase national awareness of the historical exhibit;
- Enhance the standing of NOMA among key tourism and hospitality stakeholders to encourage long-term infrastructure support and financial solvency;
- Increase monthly museum attendance (from 5,000 visitors a month to 12,500 visitors per month) throughout the duration of the three-month exhibition; and,
- Increase the number and strength of long-term supporters to match pre-Katrina membership levels.

As with most initiatives,

research played an important role in determining the strategy and tactics needed to flesh out the campaign. The team used a formal, qualitative survey to ascertain which markets would be most likely to attend the exhibit based on demographics and intent to visit Louisiana. They also reviewed other successful tourism campaigns and emulated aspects of it to drive the Femme campaign.

The team then conducted a media audit of coverage of the French commitment to New Orleans' recovery, as well as the status of the arts community in New Orleans pre- and post-Katrina. This research tracked the media outlets that covered these stories and that might be interested in news of a cultural renaissance in New Orleans.

From the six-month timeline of September 2006, when Deveney Communication was hired for this campaign, through the March 2007 Femme exhibit's opening, the communications team developed three key strategies:

1. Work with tourism leaders to orchestrate press events announcing the exhibition;
2. Conduct proactive media and community relations to promote the exhibition; and,
3. Establish partnerships before and during the exhibition.

ONE FOR THE MONEY, TWO FOR THE SHOW...

The first phase focused on a press event in Washington, D.C. In just one month, Deveney Communication put together a press event on Oct. 12, 2006, announcing the exhibit and its French sponsorship hosted by Jean-David Levitte, French ambassador to the United States. The agency created a media invitation list, collateral and exhibit background material, and they conducted media outreach and coordinated the logistics with French embassy staff.

According to Deveney,

the offer of this event came with the offer of the exhibit to the museum from France. "Our team worked directly with the French embassy to coordinate all logistics," he explains. "We developed a strict agenda for travel and meetings with French art experts once the NOMA team arrived in Washington, D.C. We also coordinated the development of a press kit and media information for all guests."

The second phase focused on community and media relations prior to the opening of the exhibit. To create pre-opening buzz, Deveney Communication increased partnerships between NOMA and hospitality and tourism leaders as well as press around the region. Outreach to tourism organizations resulted in the first "arts and culture" press trip by the **Louisiana Office of Tourism**, which coincided with the exhibit opening and special hotel/restaurant promotions throughout the city.

The third phase centered on the press conference announcing the opening of the Femme exhibit. Here local, regional, national and international press were invited along with NOMA stakeholders. At this event, Deveney created and executed an agenda for local, national and international leadership, conducted media outreach and coordinated a B-roll shoot featuring interviews from all stakeholders.

The final phase focused on media and community relations following the opening of the exhibit. During the exhibit, the agency forged partnerships throughout the city and state to encourage visitors from around the region, nation and world to continue to visit NOMA. These efforts resulted in a promotion offering free tickets to the exhibit on the *Live with Regis and Kelly* show, and in NOMA hosting an event sponsored by **Veuve Clicquot**, the French champagne, honoring New

Orleans women.

For the campaign, Deveney Communication generated 48 million impressions, including coverage from AP, *Agence France Presse*, *The New York Times*, *Southern Accents* and *Regis and Kelly*. All of New Orleans' local media attended the press conference. Among the local outlets that provided significant feature-length coverage were *New Orleans Magazine* and the *Times-Picayune*.

In July 2007, the Louisiana State Legislature in Baton Rouge approved \$24 million to support a long-planned expansion of NOMA that had been shelved following Hurricane Katrina. Museum staff attributes much of the legislative success to the promotion of the Femme exhibit that reached to the Baton Rouge area.

Museum attendance increased 500% from 5,000 visitors a month to 25,000 visitors a month, surpassing the museum's goal of 12,500 visitors by 200%. The total attendance of 80,431 visitors throughout the three-month exhibit surpassed internal museum goals of 50,000 visitors by 60%. The increased traffic also led to some \$400,000 in sales at the museum gift shop.

During the three months

of the Femme exhibit, NOMA received 2,221 new membership applications, bringing the museum's total membership to 7,354. Working on the campaign drove home two key lessons learned for John Deveney:

- **Close to home:** "In terms of media relations, we learned that with the changing ways that Americans travel, a solid regional hit is a really impactful way to drive attendance. National media coverage is a great reputation builder, but we saw much of our traffic from a regional audience."
- **Lost in translation:** "For programs like these, it's helpful to develop a working glossary of terms for our clients. Different industries speak different languages, and it's important to remain fluent in all. The use of the term 'masterpiece' in the art world has specific requirements, and the words 'exhibit' and 'exhibition' are not interchangeable." FROM

CONTACTS:

Julie Crabill, 415.591.8411, jcrabill@shiftcomm.com;
Pamela Johnston, 212 629-8445, pamela@pjinc.net

NAVIGATING THE SECURITY CHANNELS

When planning a media event that involves a government dignitary, such as a diplomat, it's important to adhere to the following best practice, says John Deveney, founder of **Deveney Communication**:

- **Make security a top priority:** When dealing with top political figures or diplomats, it's imperative *not* to be remiss when it comes to checking security before and during the event. For the Washington, D.C., press event with the French ambassador that announced NOMA's "Femme, Femme, Femme" exhibit, Deveney Communication worked closely with the French embassy to ensure that all guests pass a security clearance. To allow time for the latter, Deveney Communication conducted the media outreach with significant lead time.

Ultimately, it all worked out. "The event itself cemented the really wonderful connection between France and Louisiana," says Deveney, "and was a great chance to build relationships between the two nations, which is another great thing for agencies to keep in mind."