

CAN YOU WIN THE PR WAR WITH THE PLAZA, THE PIERRE, THE WALDORF AND THE CHAINS WITH JUST ONE QUESTION? BET YOU \$55 MILLION THAT YOU CAN

Park Central Hotel with Jericho Communications

Category 57: Travel -- Hospitality

OVERVIEW:

Called by some the "city of excess," New York is the perfect place to ask, "What would you be willing to do for \$55 million?" The answers may have raised a few eyebrows, but a sound business strategy explains why the Park Central Hotel asked consumers this outrageous question. The Park Central Hotel was once the "belle of the ball" of the New York City hotel scene. But, over the past two decades, it fell into disrepair and took on a tarnished reputation. In an effort to attract a more upscale customer and capture a greater share of Manhattan's booming business hospitality market, management decided to re-invent the property by sinking \$55 million into it. Jericho created a publicity program that moved news of the renovation off the travel trade pages and into the popular consumer media -- raising awareness for the property, along with those uplifted eyebrows.

PLANNING:

The objective of the program was to:

- * Increase visibility for the Park Central Hotel, and generate awareness for the property's \$55 million renovation

To do this, the following strategies were employed:

- * Conduct original research playing off the number \$55 million
- * Create an entertaining news story that ties into topical issues and highlights the Park Central Hotel name

Park Central's target audiences were:

- * Current and potential Park Central Hotel guests, particularly business travelers
- * Consumer-oriented print and broadcast media, as conduits to above audiences

JERICHO'S CREATIVE PHILOSOPHY:

We believe that for a public relations program to be truly successful, it has to move the client's news beyond the typical reporting mechanisms of their own industry (the trades). Travelers, for instance, do not usually choose hotels based on what they read in the travel trades, but rather on what they see and hear about from friends, family and the general consumer media. We also believe that powerful publicity campaigns demonstrate the client's messages, instead of

simply telling a story about them. For the Park Central Hotel, we accomplished both of these strategic points by devising a survey that stimulated consumers to think about the impact \$55 million could have on their own lives. In the process, we created a whole new playing field for our client. We elevated the Park Central above the clamor of the numerous Manhattan properties (many better known) simultaneously undergoing renovations.

EXECUTION:

The Park Central Hotel's executive team knew just what they could accomplish through a \$55 million renovation: a fully refurbished property with higher profit margins. To help consumers better comprehend the scope of such a project, Jericho designed the "Park Central \$55 Million Survey". The concept was simple: get people thinking about what a difference \$55 million could make by asking them what they would or wouldn't be willing to do for that small fortune.

The press release and fact sheet announcing the survey results remained true to the campaign's tongue-in-cheek approach to the subject. The headline tied boldly into the hotly debated Presidential sex scandal, exclaiming, "While Republicans May Think President Clinton is Immoral, for \$55 Million the G.O.P. Says Bring on the Interns!" More fun facts followed relating to political affiliations, occupation, and the battle of the sexes. Finally, the press materials relayed the top five things people would do for \$55 million: 1) cheat on their spouse, 2) sell their spouse, 3) never have sex again, 4) pose in Playboy or Playgirl, and 5) give up one of their senses.

EVALUATION:

The attention-getting publicity program generated more than 24 million media impressions (exhibits D and E), including placements in: TIME MAGAZINE, LOS ANGELES TIMES, NEW YORK POST, PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER, MIAMI HERALD, SACRAMENTO BEE, ARIZONA REPUBLIC, ST. PETERSBURG TIMES, DES MOINES REGISTER...and a variety of regional and local newspapers and radio outlets across the country. In addition, Howard Stern and his sidekick Robin Quivers debated what they would do for \$55 million during a seven-minute segment on the nationally syndicated "HOWARD STERN SHOW"; the Park Central Hotel was mentioned within the first 30 seconds of the segment.

Every placement appeared in a consumer-oriented media outlet, extending coverage well beyond the limited audience reach of the travel trades. Every story also attributed the survey to the Park Central Hotel; and about half of the placements noted the \$55 million renovation that is currently underway.

Sensational though it may have been, the campaign successfully and aggressively got the word out to consumers about the Park Central Hotel's renovation plans. And, that's the first step toward securing a higher occupancy rate at a property that is in such a transitional state.