

From Global Phenomenon to Best Kept Secret, Dîner en Blanc Debuts in Philadelphia

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SITUATION ANALYSIS

Dîner en Blanc originated in Paris in 1988 by François Pasquier who hosted an outdoor gathering with friends. He asked them to wear white so they could be easily identified. This impromptu picnic has grown into global phenomenon that celebrates public space and “dinner as art” on five continents. Guests are asked to wear white, purchase their own supplies, congregate at an assigned meeting spot and walk to a secret venue.

Following last year’s U.S. debut, two local culture enthusiasts saw an opportunity to bring this unique pop-up event to Philadelphia. The duo secured rights from Dîner en Blanc International, recruited group leaders and hired Aversa PR & Events LLC. Together, this team developed a viral campaign that maintained the secrecy of the location. Tactics included media relations, blogger outreach, social media, electronic communications and special events.

On Thursday, August 23, 2012, Dîner en Blanc Philadelphia successfully debuted at Swann Memorial Fountain in Logan Circle. The sold out event attracted 1,300 white clad guests that celebrated their mutual appreciation for public space, food, culture and style. Coverage generated millions of media impressions of Philadelphia’s “Party of the Year.”

RESEARCH

- Team met with International to study branding, discuss audience targeting and explore existing resources
- Team reviewed printed resource materials available from International
- Team interviewed organizers from Dîner en Blanc in New York City and Montreal
- Team attended Dîner en Blanc events in New York City and Montreal to experience the event firsthand
- Team utilized stories and reviews from New York City and Montreal events to identify challenges and opportunities; Team noted negative reviews pertaining to LGBT community and perceptions of elitism
- Team monitored online discussion forums for other Dîner en Blanc sites to develop list of frequently asked questions, formulate robust press materials and study how to best operate a local discussion forum
- Team researched competition from other pop-up events, festivals and summertime celebrations
- Team developed list of journalists and bloggers that cover food, society, events, style, culture and LGBT
- Team researched highly visible public venues that could be repurposed for the event

TARGET AUDIENCES

- **Potential Guests**
 - Arts, culture, food, drink and style enthusiasts
 - Live in or visit Philadelphia, Mainline, South Jersey and upper Delaware
 - Males and females, early 20s to late 50s
 - Friends, family and business contacts of group leaders, co-hosts and agency
 - Other: Public officials, community organizations, LGBT community, restaurant owners and chefs
- **Media**
 - Journalists and bloggers that cover food, events, society, style, culture, LGBT and parents’ date nights
- **Volunteers**
 - Food and culture enthusiasts, active in social media, event planning or public relations experience

OBJECTIVES

- Attract 1,300 paid registrants that will adhere to event’s cultural guidelines
- Build core of supporters by attracting 2,000 social media followers and 2,600 waiting list members
- Expand awareness of Dîner en Blanc International and Philadelphia through 15 major media and 40 blog stories
- Increase interest in public space by securing mentions and photographs for Logan Circle in 10+ stories
- Create a community through an active online forum, two secondary events and presence at community festivals

PLANNING

- Team created a campaign plan, budget and timeline
- Team utilized research to identify challenges
- Team drafted look and feel guide, talking points, media alert, press releases and information fact sheets
- Team hired photographer to shoot teaser images, blog subjects for Picnic Basket Banter and the event itself
- Team identified, recruited and interviewed subjects for blog series titled Picnic Basket Banter
- Team launched social media, blog and discussion forum, and updated local information on International website
- Team developed targeted media list for traditional press and bloggers
- Team developed media communications plan for day of event

- Team consulted with select media outlets to test day of event communications plan and review concerns
- Team met with government, community and tourism leaders to secure feedback and arrange logistics
- Team created free ticket giveaways after registrations sold out to maintain public interest in event
- Team organized list of retail outlets that carried white clothing, tables, chairs and décor
- Team organized onsite catering option through Garces Catering

STRATEGIES

- Create targeted outreach campaign to reach food, society, style, culture and design enthusiasts
- Build suspense by maintaining secrecy of event but teasing about potential public spaces
- Promote the all-inclusive nature of the event to diverse audiences
- Educate potential and actual registrants about cultural guidelines, costs and expectations
- Produce networking opportunities for registrants to meet before and after the event
- Leverage community contacts to maximize event's success and diversify audience
- Launch and maintain social media presence with engaging and informative content

TACTICS

- **Social Media**
 - Facebook – Posts included logistical information, teaser locations, promotional photos, food tips and more
 - Twitter – Per client, @debphl communicated with registrants and @koryaversa interacted with press
 - Pinterest – Inspiration boards for fashion, tables, chairs, linens, china, décor and picnic ideas
- **Media Relations**
 - Targeted Stories – Press releases, fact sheets, phone pitches, interview opportunities, promotional photos
 - Day of Coverage – Build pop-up lounge for press to work, notify press 30 minutes before event, provide press access to Four Season for aerial shots, and share Dropbox with post-event materials
- **Blogger Outreach**
 - Targeted Stories – Press releases, phone pitches, interview opportunities, listings of event entertainment
 - Giveaways – After registrations sold out, three blogs gave away free slots to keep momentum going
 - Day of Coverage – See above under “Media Relations”
- **Electronic Communications**
 - Blog – Event updates, public space teasers, profiles of chefs, style icons, media and notable guests
 - Discussion Forum – Forum for questions, updates, networking and shopping tip exchanges
 - Website – Local information updated on International site (as allowed by International guidelines)
- **Special Events and Community Outreach**
 - Events – Two preview parties at Williams-Sonoma, post-event party at Sofitel Hotel
 - Community – Table at Washington Avenue Night Market, networking at DesignPhiladelphia, others

EVALUATION/RESULTS

Dîner en Blanc brought style and elegance to its Philadelphia debut on Thursday, August 23, 2012. After a summer of suspense, the secret pop-up location was revealed to be Swann Memorial Fountain in Logan Circle. The sold out viral picnic attracted 1,300 guests clad in white and toted their white tables, linens, china and décor.

Coverage for the event started in April of 2012 with two blog pieces that helped co-chairs to secure group leaders. In June of 2012, the organizing committee secured the services of Aversa PR & Events LLC. Together, the team put into motion a viral campaign between late June and late August that produced 47 blog stories and 10 traditional press stories. In response to the campaign, the waiting list grew to 4,000+ people. Online efforts landed Dîner en Blanc Philadelphia with 2,200+ followers on social media. On August 3, 2012, all 1,300 registration slots were sold out to people of all ages, races, nationalities, sexual orientations and backgrounds. Attendees hailed from countries as varied as the United States, Poland, France, Russia, Australia and Great Britain. The picnic bolstered Philadelphia's reputation as a truly international city.

Day of and post event coverage produced millions of audience impressions from at least 32 traditional press stories (including 19 stories and mentions on CBS, FOX, NBC and ABC) and 25 blog stories. Thousands of photos flooded Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram and Yelp. Philadelphia's public space received the attention it deserved with hundreds of photos and mentions in 50 blog and traditional press stories. Philadelphia Magazine's HughE Dillon declared, "I think we have a new event space that is at the center of everything."

Online reviews named the event Philadelphia's "Party of the Year." Due to the tremendous success, the city of Philadelphia and Dîner en Blanc International have already given the green light for another event in Philadelphia in 2013.