

The Circus Comes to PIFA: Events That Transformed Philadelphia's Skyline

Philadelphia School of Circus Arts by Kory Michael Aversa

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Philadelphia School of Circus Arts transformed itself into the Philadelphia region's center of circus arts through an event-led campaign during the Philadelphia International Festival of the Arts (PIFA). PSCA grew from being a one-year old, Germantown-based school to become the high-flying star of a month-long international festival celebrating Paris 1911-1920. PSCA brought the circus from Germantown to the region – and the world – through two high-profile events. “The Green Fairy Cabaret” and “Fly City” were created to develop new audiences, increase interest and awareness in circus arts, build name recognition and generate revenue. PSCA also achieved these goals by providing performers and resources for other circus-inspired festival events. PSCA utilized primary and secondary research to develop the events and the campaign to promote them, which included partnerships, media relations and social media. As a result, PSCA achieved all objectives, including selling XYZ tickets for “Green Fairy” and XYZ tickets for “Fly City” lessons, exposing 11,634 people first-hand to circus arts, generating millions of media impressions as a result of 10 newspaper articles and image features, 4 television stories, 2 radio stories, 48 blog posts and 53 online calendar listings. PSCA increased mailing lists by 546 individuals, attracted 612 new Facebook followers and increased website visitors by 42%. PSCA's campaign generated at least 120 stories and listings for PIFA itself.

RESEARCH

PSCA employees were approached by the Kimmel Center to participate in its first inaugural festival of the arts, which would feature activities highlighting Paris 1911-1920. Research conducted online and through telephone calls to professional circuses revealed that Paris in the early 1900s was home to five permanent circuses. Further investigation revealed that Absinthe was a popular drink among circus performers and other creative artists. The flying trapeze was also coming into the height of popularity, after its invention in France in the mid-to-late 1800s.

Until this time, PSCA had sponsored several smaller, internal events that featured variety acts. PSCA had never created a full cohesive original production or sponsored events outside of its Germantown studio. PSCA convened meetings with board members, students, volunteers, performers and local circus partners to develop the event concepts, create objectives, identify audiences, identify influencers and assess the feasibility of participation. Secondary research included performance reports, student surveys, demographic reports, information from a non-profit audience study, telephone discussions with other circus schools and Internet searches. PSCA scanned the marketplace and found no direct competition for “Green Fairy” or “Fly City.” In a difficult economy, PSCA identified general competition for the art and entertainment dollar from the other 145 groups presenting events in the festival.

During the development of event planning materials, it was determined that paid marketing was not feasible. Other challenges included outdated media lists, lack of social media relationships, and dormant social media pages. PSCA developed a low-cost public relations plan to promote the events. It was tailored to a one-person staff with no physical office. PSCA also researched opportunities available through PIFA marketing and tourism partners.

TARGET AUDIENCES

- **Current/potential students and patrons** – Females 25-44, college students, parents, GLBT, seniors
- **Traditional arts patrons** – Patrons of the Kimmel Center, Ticket Philadelphia, ballet, orchestra, theatre, etc.
- **Traditional Media** – Local and regional newspaper, television and radio; out-of-market media through GPTMC
- **Bloggers and online calendar editors** – Mommy, arts, tourism, GLBT, entertainment, college, neighborhood
- **Regional organizations** – Arts, tourism and neighborhood-based organizations
- **Group sales coordinators** – Tour operators, Meet-Up administrators and senior center coordinators

OBJECTIVES

- Increase base and engagement of social media followers by increasing fans by 400 persons, posting at least seven posts per week, increasing interactions to 250,000, increasing monthly users to 1,000, and developing 1,000 YouTube views
- Generate at least 500 prospects for PSCA class and performance mailing lists (print and electronic)
- Increase awareness of PSCA and FSCA programs, whereas PSCA website traffic increases by 10%, XYZ new students attend PSCA 2011 classes, XYZ new students attend FSCA 2011 classes, and mailing lists increase by 500
- Position PSCA as the region's center for circus arts through coverage by eight major media outlets and 15 blogs
- Increase interest in circus arts by attracting 5,000 participants to PSCA-related activities
- Generate XYZ in net profit from “Fly City” from XYZ tickets (“Green Fairy” break-even from XYZ tickets)
- Create awareness of PIFA by securing at least 50 media and online mentions of PIFA
- Establish PSCA as an arts institution by educating three arts groups and performing in front of 500 arts patrons

PLANNING

Through events, partnerships, media relations and social media, PSCA endeavored to create local and regional awareness of PSCA, FSCA and their core programs not only among current students, patrons and circus fans, but also among traditional arts patrons, arts organizations and the media. PSCA utilized primary and secondary research to develop two events that would achieve the above goals. During event development, a public relations plan was created to promote the events and their goals. Plan materials included a budget, timeline, chart of activities, social media plan, social media calendar, "Fly City" media calendar, organizational fact sheet, updated traditional media, social and electronic media databases, and collateral distribution list. PSCA utilized Internet searches and phone interviews to tie the events to Paris 1911-1920. This research was utilized in developing content for the script, as well as providing educational information and summaries to PIFA organizers, partners and the media. With a small budget, PSCA used in-house staff to develop high quality images and collateral. PSCA hired a new public relations manager and provided him with an extra 20 hours for PIFA-related work. PSCA staff worked with FSCA and PIFA partners to coordinate messaging, timelines and tactics.

STRATEGIES

- Produce two new events to attract current and new patrons/students and drive traffic to PIFA
- Incorporate circus arts performances and outreach opportunities into non-PSCA sponsored festival events
- Launch a targeted media relations campaign to promote the events
- Create targeted outreach campaign to promote the events through blogger outreach and online event calendars
- Leverage PIFA, arts, tourism and circus arts partnerships to maximize free promotional opportunities
- Incorporate information about PSCA's PIFA events into existing promotional materials and outlets
- Create low-cost, high quality print collateral and images to promote events
- Re-launch PSCA social media sites with consistent, engaging and informative event content

TACTICS

- Events
 - Primary: "The Green Fairy Cabaret" and "Fly City" (co-sponsored with Fly School Circus Arts)
 - Secondary: Ticket Launch, Closing Street Festival, Opening Night Gala, Tour Group/Bus Operators Preview
- Media Relations
 - Generate targeted press releases, pitch media lessons, coordinate media tickets, pitch interviews
 - Host international press with Greater Philadelphia Tourism and Marketing Corporation (GPTMC)
- Message & Brand Development
 - Create content for Kimmel Center, PIFA office, Redtettemer, GPTMC and Nina Zucker (NZ)
 - Provide content for electronic marketing "cube" outside Kimmel Center on Broad Street
 - Train PSCA performers and staff on messaging, interviews and social media
 - Lobby for participation in marketing campaign
- Social and Electronic Media
 - Re-launch Facebook and Twitter pages, create Youtube channel, create content for website and e-newsletter
 - Develop content for PIFA, FSCA, Kimmel, NZ, GPTMC social media platforms and websites
 - Conduct outreach to 73 bloggers, two Meet-up groups, and 76 online calendars
- Partnerships
 - Partner with Annenberg Center, Avenue of the Arts, Phillygaycalendar, YELP and Kimmel Center
- Collateral
 - Develop "Green Fairy" postcard and poster, distribute "Fly City" postcard, develop targeted distribution lists
 - Create trade show exhibit for display at "Green Fairy," "Fly City" and Closing Street Festival

EVALUATION/RESULTS

PSCA successfully launched and met all objectives of the event-led public relations campaign. PSCA sponsored two main events and participated in four additional events. "Green Fairy" sold out all six performances to XYZ people, including extra seating added by the venue. The show generated XYZ over goal. Despite a rainy month producing cancelled classes, "Fly City" attracted XYZ students and generated XYZ net profit. In total, PSCA exposed 11,634 people to circus arts, including more than 2,700 traditional arts patrons. Additionally, PSCA developed first-time relations with at least three arts organizations, and received mentions in 16 stories with prominent arts organizations. PSCA increased brand awareness and positioned itself as the region's center for circus arts through event coverage in 15 major media outlets (10 newspaper, 5 television and 1 radio). Additionally, PSCA secured coverage in 48 blog posts and 53 online calendars. PSCA created festival buzz by securing 120 media mentions. PSCA's social media growth included a 612 person increase on Facebook. PSCA increased website traffic by 42%. PSCA, and partner FSCA, received many benefits from an increased interest in circus arts. PSCA attracted XYZ new students, up from XYZ in 2010. Demand for classes grew, as XYZ new classes were added. PSCA generated XYZ ticket sales from post-PIFA performances (Fringe and Circus Soiree), with three shows in the future. FSCA attracted XYZ new students that took their first lesson at PIFA. Additionally, XYZ fall sessions have been sold to students from PIFA, and XYZ students from PIFA purchased new six-session class cards.