

The PRISM Public Awareness Campaign: Public Service Announcements

When the PRISM Public Awareness Campaign Vendor Team began brainstorming on the best way to get the Campaign started, there were several sure-fire elements that had to be in the mix of a strong implementation plan – print/outdoor advertising AND media/broadcast through public service announcements and possible radio spots.

With a limited development budget but big production ideas, we immediately started our search for Georgia talent and models that would be appealing to our varied target audience – Georgia parents in small rural towns, urban/inner city neighborhoods, and the sprawling landscapes of the suburbs. We also wanted the children to look as normal and neighborly as any kid found throughout the south.

After narrowing down our talent selection, we photographed 12 Georgia students over the course of two weekends. With more than 50 shots per students, we further narrowed down our pick to 10 students who would serve as the “face” and “persona” of the public awareness campaign.

We then invited these ten students to work on live video shots in front of a “blue screen” repeating various phrases associated with our campaign themes – “If you make me take Math and Science;” “I may not ‘thank you’ now;” “But one day, one day, I will!” And, “If I can do math and science;” “I can get a better job;” “I’ll make better choices;” “I can do anything!”

At the time of the video shoot – these simple phrases had absolutely no meaning and felt out of context with the Awareness Campaign theme. But, once the tracks were sorted and edited, and a real background was laid over the blue screen – the public service announcements completely came to life.

The official launch of the Campaign was January 2006 – both print and broadcast media options were unveiled across the state and the reaction was quite pleasing. It was even featured on the US Department of Education’s website when Secretary Spellings had one of our banners hanging over her head during a speech she delivered on “Launch Day”.

Some of our National Science Foundation colleagues were astonished at the professional quality of the final product, commenting that the ads brought tears to their eyes.

Because we were running these PSA’s in very different regions across the state, we were not able to run as many in the Atlanta metropolitan area as we could in the Savannah region. In fact, the cost of running 50 spots in Atlanta was nearly 10 times as much as the Savannah region, where we were able to book 200+ spots over a two-month period.

During our first cycle, we ran these PSAs during peak times and days – often following American Idol and during the morning/evening news – times we knew parents and their children would be watching television together.

After our first two-month run, we conducted market research to examine the effectiveness of the Public Awareness Campaign based upon audience “recall” and “reaction” to our ads. Some 500+ parents participated in the online survey across the state and we were delighted that in during our eight week run a surprising percentage of parents remembered

the campaign collaterals (which included billboards, bus shelters, newspaper ads, and pamphlets in addition to the public service announcements).

According to our market researchers, the two TV ads tested receive very favorable evaluations. Some of the comments parents wrote about the ads included:

- *Quick and to the point. Puts it straight forward that if you know math and science things will be easier for you in the future.*
- *Simplicity. Very persuasive. To the point. Gave specific examples that children and adults can understand about how math and science can benefit someone in their daily life/career. Excellent role models in the ad. Clean & modern composition.*
- *Shows the practicality and usefulness of math and science in everyday decision making.*
- *I like the message the kids are getting across to more kids.*
- *Appealing children, different ages, conversational tone. Simple message.*
- *I really liked this advertisement. It shows how some children think. What I took out of this was the quote "I may not thank you now but.....one day."*
- *The overall message of how math and science is important to the success of the individual. Many good career options open up and the chances of success are greater if the person has a strong background.*

Finally, the researchers explained that parents were asked to evaluate seven different means of communication for their effectiveness in communicating with parents like themselves about the importance of math and science education for children (using a 5-point scale where 1 = Not at all Effective to 5 = Extremely Effective). Overall, parents thought **TV ads** were the most effective (4.06). The next most effective means of communication in their judgment were **parent guides/booklets** (3.91), **movie theater preview/ad** (3.56), **posters sent home from school** (3.18) and **billboards** (3.03). (Maguire Associates, February 2007)

These data helped us determine how we used the Public Service Announcements in future cycles of the Campaign. Much of the strategy now includes getting the PSAs in front of more audiences throughout Georgia as well as other campaign collateral pieces that received high marks for its effectiveness with parents and students.

We look forward to developing more ads and PSAs in the years to come as we begin to source private funding to continue the state's effort to encourage parental involvement in student interest and student achievement in math and science.

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