

AIDS HEALTHCARE FOUNDATION

Problem

How can an advocacy group send a message to a major corporation?

Solution

Use out of home formats to target its employees and executives along their daily commute.

Background

The Los Angeles-based AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF) is a global organization providing cutting-edge medicine and advocacy to over 100,000 people in 22 countries. AHF is actively involved in advocacy for both the treatment of AIDS patients and ensuring that appropriate cost effective drug therapies are available for all AIDS patients. A relatively new and effective therapy for the treatment of patients with AIDS is a drug called Isentress. This drug is extremely effective at treating AIDS patients. However, this drug has historically been very expensive and cost-prohibitive for many patients.

When Merck gained approval of Isentress for first-line use in summer 2009, AHF stepped up its ongoing advocacy and actions targeting Merck over the pricing on Isentress. Over the past year, AHF advocates have staged protests at several healthcare financial/investor meetings where Merck scientists or executives were presenting. In late February, AHF also hosted a protest during the 17th Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI) in San Francisco, where Merck scientists were also presenting a research paper.

Objective

AHF realized it needed to target the decision-makers at Merck to make a real difference. AHF wanted to target the corporate headquarters for Merck with an advertising program, urging the company to do the right thing as it pertained to the drug Isentress. AHF felt if it targeted Merck and its employees with this messaging, it might pressure the company to lower its price for Isentress, thereby making it more affordable for AIDS patients.

Strategy

Whitehouse Station, NJ is the corporate headquarters for Merck. This is an area lacking in traditional out of home inventory, making it rather difficult to use the medium to target Merck and its employees. However, Whitehouse Station is located on the Raritan Valley rail line for the New Jersey Transit system. The station averages 3920 riders per month and is a primary mode of transportation in the region.

There are six platform banners allowed at Whitehouse Station for advertising purposes. As the budget available for advertising was extremely limited, the agency decided to cover the train station, which carries many executives to and from the city, as well employees commuting to the Merck offices.

Plan Details

Market: Whitehouse Station, NJ

Flight Dates: February 15 - April 12, 2010

Out of Home Format Used: Station domination



Results

AHF put out a press release highlighting its campaign and urging Merck to “do the right thing” in an effort to educate Merck employees and other commuters about Merck’s pricing and policies on Isentress. Following this campaign, Merck agreed to change the pricing for Isentress. This action has largely been attributed to the impact of the banner ad campaign.