

Powerade Zero

Problem

How does a beverage company get its product in front of consumers at a sporting event when its competitor owns in-house pouring rights?

Solution

Create a new opportunity to get face-time with consumers.

Background

Powerade Zero, a Coca-Cola owned sports drink, was poised for victory with all-star tennis champion Venus Williams as their new spokesperson. Unfortunately, the US's marquee tennis event, The US Open, is held in Pepsi territory. Because Pepsi owns in-stadium pouring rights, any Coca-Cola owned product is blocked out. Powerade Zero needed to find a stealthy way to integrate into the US Open experience and capitalize on their spokesperson without actually being on the grounds.

Objective

The core objective was to achieve PR buzz around a media execution that leveraged Venus Williams' endorsement but also provided value to the core consumers: educated, above average income, aged 18-49. With a limited budget, Powerade Zero needed to ensure the execution would achieve enough buzz to be picked up by media outlets, as the actual media budget supported limited promotional elements.

Strategy

The US Open is held in Flushing Meadows, a neighborhood far outside of New York's city center and accessible only by a hour-long crowded subway ride, or by car with limited and inconvenient parking. For New Yorkers, shared anxiety and dread over the trek to the US Open is felt weeks in advance of the late August event. The strategy was to be the savior by giving tennis lovers relief to their commuting woes.

Plan Details

Powerade Zero chartered large ferries and mapped an unprecedented waterway route that, for the first time ever, took fans on an express cruise sailing from Manhattan to the doorstep of the US Open. The river route, from 35th Street in Manhattan to Flushing Meadows, was created specifically for this event. The ferries were wrapped with Venus Williams' image and Powerade Zero branding, making them visible from major area bridges and highways as a secondary bonus. Passengers were served Powerade Zero samples on board, while televisions ran tennis content, along with commercial spots.

The ferries were advertised in newspapers, on radio and online to encourage ticketholders to sign up for their free ferry tickets ahead of time. The branded ferry was a Trojan Horse, allowing Coca-Cola's Powerade Zero to enjoy an integral part of the US Open experience, despite being banned from the actual premises.



Results

Powerade Zero was able to end 31 years of transportation nightmares for 4,785 fans. The commute was shortened by an average of 23 minutes and the ferry was completely booked during key match-ups. Even fans who didn't take advantage of the cruise were talking; over 600,000 consumers engaged on Twittering and various blogs.

The campaign was also an outstanding PR success, with 64 media outlets covering the event. Since this event, other advertisers have provided free ferry service to other events. Powerade Zero remains the only advertiser to have created a new route across the waterway.

