

Scott's Directories Know How, 10/26/2007

Priceless Public Relations

By Emma Warrillow, President Emma Warrillow & Associates Inc.

October 2007

Last week, MasterCard Canada announced that it will donate \$160,000 to the City of Toronto to be used to operate the city's 49 outdoor rinks in the month of December. Earlier this year, much public outcry ensued when Toronto's municipal government announced that the opening of the outdoor rinks would be delayed until January as a cost-saving measure.

While MasterCard says that it is not looking for reciprocation from the city in terms of signage or sponsorship, it will reap many other marketing benefits. Even for a very small business, getting your picture in the local paper, donating to a school fundraiser, or giving away your services to a local seniors home can translate to increased sales.

I've written before about the benefit and need to make all marketing spending accountable and PR is no different. Public relations campaigns can, and should, be measured like any other marketing initiative. Their cost needs to be compared to the benefit you achieve.

I am not privy to what MasterCard is planning but here are some things I would consider:

Quantity and quality metrics – These metrics can be used for a company to compare this PR initiative to all others undertaken by the organization.

- o How many times was the donation mentioned?
- o Where was it covered? Did it appear on the front page of the Toronto Star or buried in the back of the Life section? Obviously, the better the PR the better coverage it gets.
- o What mediums picked it up? What is their reach? I "heard" the MasterCard news online, in print, on the radio and during local television news.
- o How long did the coverage last? Sometimes, an item is news for a day only – in this case, will MasterCard be able to generate more press when they hand over the cheque? On opening day at the rinks?

Advertising equivalency metrics – In order to determine the return on this "campaign" MasterCard can look at what it would cost them to buy this type of coverage. How much would an equivalent advertising campaign cost? My guess is considerably more than \$160,000. Converting this to an equivalent advertising cost provides some idea of how efficient this was – and is particularly important for a high-cost item like this donation.

Directional metrics – Does it paint MasterCard in a good light? How good? In this case, all of the articles I saw focused on the positive – how MasterCard was helping kids get out and skate (contributing to the fitness levels of our youth) and how there were no strings attached (no signage at the rinks etc.). In other cases, even when coverage is mostly positive, there may be some examination of motives or drawbacks which can leave a less positive overall impression.

Awareness and attitude changes - Companies like MasterCard undertake regular market research to help them understand how they are viewed by the public. After a donation of this nature, the company will likely conduct research to understand whether awareness (aided and unaided) and attitude have changed for the better.

Sales metrics – Of course, for most organizations the rubber hits the road not with increased awareness but with actual sales. I am sure MasterCard will be watching more concrete metrics too – they want more people pulling out their MasterCard and more applications. If you can differentiate sales that come directly from your PR, the cost per acquisition is typically much lower than other vehicles.

Finally, PR can produce lift for your other marketing tactics. MasterCard may wish to measure whether direct mail campaigns have a higher uptake in Toronto after this press. They may also extend the impact of the campaign by referring to it directly in future marketingI see a “Seeing your kids skate outside this winter: Priceless” tag in the future!


This is not an exhaustive list of metrics. Much has been written on this topic, and on the merits of different measures. However, I hope it helps you understand the value of measuring your PR and the benefits it may bring.

Of course, not all PR has to cost \$160,000. Well crafted press releases often generate significant coverage all for the cost of a good copywriter. Look for opportunities to showcase your business – and start tracking the results.

And for MasterCard’s sake, hope for a cold December and lots of rosy-cheeked kids on the rinks!

Emma Warrillow runs Emma Warrillow & Associates Inc. (www.emmawarrillow.com) and helps companies articulate their analytic and measurement strategies and make the most of their customer data. She can be reached at emma@emmawarrillow.com

[Table of Contents](#)

 [Click to Print](#)

© 2007 [Business Information Group](#).

A member of the [esourceNetwork](#)

[Business Information Group Privacy Policy](#)