

KPR Case Study

Maritz Research

Take Me
Out to the
Ballgame

Background

KPR was hired by Maritz Research to help the company use some of its internal resources as tools in external branding, particularly through the public press. One of the largest consumer research companies in the world, Maritz had historically undertaken what it called "Maritz Polls," proprietary research conducted on its own behalf, to keep its knowledge of consumer behavior current. The knowledge gained from the polls was of enormous value to Maritz executives and Maritz clients, but when released to the press it was almost totally ignored, particularly in the mainstream national business press and the national consumer press. Because Maritz's clients were so focused on these areas of the press themselves, publicity in these media represented a key branding opportunity that was frustratingly elusive. With an important poll on sports and sports marketing up coming, Maritz asked Kitchen to help solve the media relations problem.

Challenges and Opportunity

At first glance, a poll examining Americans attitudes towards sports seemed like an easy publicity subject. While the ranks of marketing reporters are tiny, the ranks of sports reporters are enormous, especially at the most prestigious publications in America. The key, of course, was to select a subject that appealed to the most influential of these and the rest would follow, a method of crafting stories we'd used many times before with excellent results. The trick, we reasoned, would be to capture the interest of columnists who cover the world of sports but not specific teams (though baseball was a major focus of the poll and spring training was already underway). A sounding of only two prominent columnists at major New York daily papers—papers we would need if we were to succeed—told us any story we could propose on the poll was doomed.

The crucial insight, and the insight that transformed not only this Maritz Poll but all the succeeding ones into publicity juggernauts, was that though the polls were of inestimable value to Maritz in other ways, they provided to the press insight and real breaking news on subjects that the mainstream press simply doesn't cover. In other words, there are blind spots in the beat system of reporting in the national press and Maritz had failed in its publicity efforts in the past because the intelligence it brought to light was often smack in the middle of one of them. If publicity was the goal, we would have to rethink the polls themselves.



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Strategy and Tactics

The solution to the problem resided in re-examining what the point of publicity was. It was not, we agreed with the client, to publicize the poll itself, but to publicize Maritz's expertise. The poll was simply a vehicle for that. We would thus win if our target publications reported that Maritz had an expertise in sports marketing research, whether it cited the most commercially valuable data from the poll or not. This change in thinking freed us to reach for any segment of the press corps to whom we could make a case for a story.

We decided to target one of the largest beats in the American press, a beat that cuts across virtually every industry and appears in mainstream business and consumer press alike, workplace/careers/work-life. And to reach this enormous cadre of reporters we added a single question to the Maritz poll: "Have you ever called in sick at work to go to a baseball game?" With that, the story simply fell into our laps.

Results

We held the story for the opening week of baseball season, and reported that 12% of Americans who follow baseball had called in sick to go to a game. It was nearly irresistible. The first place the story appeared was on the front page of The Wall Street Journal. It then appeared in the Associated Press's "Watercooler" column, one of the best picked up columns on the wire. In the succeeding days and weeks, the story (many including our core sports marketing data) appeared in dozens of publications, including the "Diary" column in the Sunday New York Times Business Section.

After the release of the sports marketing poll, Maritz began a robust effort to brand itself via the mainstream national press. Each successive poll has generated more publicity than the one before it, and Maritz has actually seen new Fortune 1000 clients come in the door who first learned of Maritz's expertise in their area through the publicity from recent Maritz polls. While sales are not the only object of media relations efforts, they are always welcome.