



[HARVEY CHIPKIN]

Weddings and Honeymoons Transcend the Recession; Doing Good Works; Movies; and the Allure of “FREE!”

This column is designed to give you insights and ideas that you may be able to apply to your own problems and prospects. The column is intended to serve as an idea-exchange and to inspire creativity in real-life situations, so you're encouraged to share your "best practices" with other readers by emailing your success stories to me at hchipkin@comcast.net. Be sure to include your name, title, organization, and telephone number, so that you can be reached if necessary.

Even as tools and technology change, some words are guaranteed to attract popular attention. They include: weddings, beer, contests and, of course, free. Here are stories about marketers who made the most of those perennial consumer favorites.

During the economic downturn, segments that have maintained their "big spending" tradition are weddings and honeymoons. One New York City hotel and one Tahitian resort sought to capitalize on that situation.

THE COMPANY: New York Helmsley Hotel.

THE SITUATION: The hotel, which recently underwent major renovations and improvements to its public spaces and inaugurated a renewed emphasis on food & beverage, was aiming to increase its position in the lucrative wedding market. Hotel managers learned that WPIX 11, a local TV station which is headquartered near the hotel, would be running a 21-week wedding series on its morning show offering planning tips, trends and advice; at the end, one couple would win the wedding of their dreams.



THE SOLUTION: The hotel decided to hold the launch party for the series, which coincided with the morning show. It was held in the hotel's extravagant Knickerbocker Suite with a wedding expo featuring the sponsors, continental breakfast and prizes for all attendees, which included stays at the hotel and its sister property, The Helmsley Park Lane. The show was

broadcast live from the hotel through the morning and featured a celebrity wedding planner and well known wedding vendors. All told, the hotel enjoyed 13 minutes of air time. Zack Zahran, the hotel's general manger, said that despite the risks of a live telecast he had faith in his team and that was the deciding factor. The breakfast was attended by 135 couples—all

IHG's print advertisement promoting free luggage fees.

potential brides and grooms. They were all invited to visit a suite set up for honeymooners, which was also seen on the show. Zahran and the hotel's chef and banquet manager were interviewed, as was Takis Anoussis, general manager of The Park Lane.

THE RESULTS: "We have the names of every single one of these future brides and grooms," says Zafran, "and we will contact them to see if they have a venue yet for their affair. And, of course, these are people who have friends in similar situations. We are working with a few of them already." The show went smoothly and, according to Tom McCartin of Agency 212, which handles advertising for the hotel, "We were enthusiastic enough to ask for first refusal next year." The hotel's return in public relations value was estimated at about \$80,000 from the show itself. There were also more than 60 other TV stations nationally that did stories on the event; print coverage included *USA Today*, *Bloomberg News* and many local outlets. Finally, there was online coverage on Yahoo Biz, Forbes.com and many other sites.

On the other side of the world, a beautiful string of islands took a chance on enhancing their image via a reality show—and won.

THE COMPANY: Tahiti Tourism North America, which promotes travel to the islands.

THE SITUATION: Producers of the television reality show "The Bachelorette" wanted to film the

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Terms and Conditions: For baggage fee rebate, must book at any IHG brand hotel worldwide on or after August 16, 2010 and stay between September 1 – December 30, 2010. Only one bag per hotel stay combined with one round-trip baggage fee up to a maximum of \$50 for one bag and one passenger from corresponding flight will result in a reward being awarded per weekend stay. Open to residents of the 50 United States and the District of Columbia. One reward (IHG Visa® Prepaid Card) will be awarded on every qualifying two-night weekend (Friday, Saturday, Sunday) stay booked on or after August 16, 2010 at participating InterContinental®, Crowne Plaza®, Hotel Indigo®, Holiday Inn®, Holiday Inn Express® and Express by Holiday Inn™, Holiday Inn Club Vacations™, Staybridge Suites® and Candlewood Suites® hotels for U.S. resident stays worldwide between September 1 and December 30, 2010. Stay method of payment must be a valid Visa credit card. Submit rebate redemption form along with copies of the required documents for award. This card is issued by MetaBank® pursuant to a license from Visa U.S.A. Inc.. For full terms and conditions, visit www.ihg.com/checkitfree. © 2010 InterContinental Hotels Group. All rights reserved. Most hotels are independently owned and/or operated.



season's final two episodes in Tahiti. While the islands have hosted filming of one season of the reality show "Survivor," as well as various movies, officials needed to be sure that the project protected the islands' brand.

THE SOLUTION: After deciding that the show would reflect well on the destination, officials worked with producers to set the episodes at Le Taha's Island Resort & Spa, a member of Relais et Chateaux. The "bachelorette" and her suitors went diving, took a cruise, fed fish and flew on a helicopter ride—all positive activities as far as the destination's image.

THE RESULTS: The shows were watched by between 11 and 15 million

viewers, a "huge ROI," according to Jonathan Reap, a tourist board spokesman. During the weeks the show was on the air, interest from tour operators and travel agents spiked. Impressions in print and online were massive. Print exposure included 551 articles and hundreds of millions of impressions with huge ad value. The resort created a "Bachelorette Package" that includes accommodations, romantic dinner and the signature Bachelorette "rose ceremony" (when the choices are made). The impact will continue. Reap noted that St. Lucia, which hosted the final episode of "The Bachelor"—a similar show—a year ago, maintains that episode prominently on its home page.

Another tropical island was the lure in a contest run by an Internet start-up. However, rather than heading there for a honeymoon, winners will be doing good works.

THE COMPANY: Trazzler.com, a start-up website that customizes weekend trips for travelers.

THE SITUATION: Trazzler.com executives noticed that many readers expressed interest in volunteer opportunities. The company wanted to find a nonprofit partner for a contest to generate interest in the site and to, as founder Adam Rugel says, “exemplify the concept of smart travel, which is what we’re all about.”

THE SOLUTION: The company teamed up with Seacology, a nonprofit which works to preserve islands around the world to create a Travel Smart Contest. The contest will award two Seacology trips to contributors who share meaningful travel experiences where travelers worked for positive goals. The goal is to reach a collaborative milestone of 25 million miles, based on how many miles contributors had traveled in gaining their experiences. Once the goal is reached, Trazzler.com will donate \$15,000 to Seacology and two winners will receive 10-day Seacology expeditions in Tonga to snorkel with humpback whales and work on island projects, such as building schools and solar energy systems. The contest is expected to last a year.

THE RESULTS: Within the first two months of the contest launch, entering the words “writing contest” into Google brought up the Trazzler.com contest on the first page; that is a result of many participants linking to the page. Those results, said Rugel, “have been huge in developing our brand and validates what we are trying to do. Having a partner like Seacology amplifies our mission and brand.”

More and more, marketers seek to build image through partnerships that amplify the brand message. Here’s how one “hip” hotel marketing group sought to do that by going to the movies.

THE DESTINATION: Design Hotels, a global marketing company.

THE SITUATION: Jeremy Silverman, head of brand experience, Tweeted and blogged about a website he liked called Mubi.com; the site is devoted to classic movies. The operators of the site made contact with Design Hotels and the two companies decided it would be a great idea to combine movies and hotels.

THE SOLUTION: Design Hotels launched Hotel Cinematheque. Every two weeks, a Design Hotels property is paired with a film based on a common location or theme. Travelers who book the featured hotel during the period get to watch the movie streamed onto their computers on a complimentary basis. One example: the Sofa Istanbul hotel was paired with “Climates,” a film from a Turkish director. The initiative was launched during the Berlinale, a film festival in Berlin, where Design Hotel had a new member; a number of celebrities showed up.

THE RESULTS: The launch drove significant coverage in print and online, including a large number of movie blogs—leading to the idea that the promotion could be used to target groups. Design Hotels is working with Mubi.com and other partners, says Silverman, to create a “definitive list of hotel-themed movies.” The program is being expanded upon with a contest and special rates. Guests will be asked to re-create a movie scene in a still image and submit it to a jury in time for a winner to be announced by the time of the next film festival in February. Says

Silverman, “We intend to capitalize on this relationship. In general we are open to doing things like this that broaden our exposure.”

Since marketing began, free has been the most popular pitch. Free becomes even more appealing when travelers are forced to pay for something they believe should be free to begin with.

THE COMPANY: IHG, the global hotel company that operates Holiday Inns and many other brands.

THE SITUATION: The airline fees for checking baggage became a huge consumer issue and according to Del Ross, vice president-U.S. sales and marketing, “whenever one company does something unfriendly to consumers, it creates an opportunity for another company to take advantage of it, especially at a time when everybody can use extra money.”

THE SOLUTION: IHG began a “Check It Free” program that provides a rebate for checked bag fees for any two-night weekend booking from September 1 through December 30. Travelers are able to participate every weekend. They need only pay the baggage fee with a Visa credit card and submit a receipt for the fee to IHG; they can be reimbursed up to \$50 per weekend and \$850 during the full promotion period. Ross said the program was “a reason for trial” for customers, who do not have to be members of IHG’s loyalty program, Priority Club. In fact, a number of third parties—including Expedia and Travelocity, are included in “Check It Free.” The program is available at all IHG hotels globally—more than 4,500 in all. IHG ran an ad campaign, including one at a baggage carousel at Chicago-O’Hare’ and a Twitter campaign.

THE RESULTS: According to Ross,



Denver's Great American Beer Festival



“The Twitter campaign has taken off like crazy because this is easy to understand and the timing is good. We are always trying to take advantage of free media.” According to Ross, the launch of the campaign quickly created 75 million media impressions online, in print and broadcast. That included Good Morning America, *USA Today*, Associated Press, and Fox Business News.

The beer is not free but it flows freely in Denver during a 10-day period focused on the ever-popular beverage. This is an example of how it's sometimes possible to take something you already have—and simply package it more effectively

THE COMPANY: Visit Denver, the city's convention and visitors bureau.

THE SITUATION: The city had long welcomed a popular Great American Beer Festival—a ticketed, three-day event. That event was always sold out, but did not get much media coverage. While it did inspire the creation of other events around the same time

period in September, it was difficult to get information about all of those ancillary events without visiting multiple websites. Most are beer-related, but there are also races, music, food and more. Visit Denver wanted to capitalize on the Great American Beer Festival and the other events—and get across the message that Denver and Colorado are ideal destinations for beer lovers; in fact, more beer is brewed in Colorado than in any other state.

THE SOLUTION: In 2009, the city created the first annual Denver Beer Fest, taking advantage of late summer weather, the popular Great American Beer Festival and all the ancillary events. The city created a website for the 10-day event (www.DenverBeerFest.com), in addition, attendees could receive deals on their phones throughout the 10-day event by texting Denver Beer Fest to a number.

THE RESULTS: The second Denver

Beer Fest has many more events than the first (for example: many restaurants were serving beer-paired dinners this year) and, according to Justin Bresler, vice president-marketing, it is helping to grow the image of Denver and Colorado as the beer capital of the country by serving as a clearing house for the many beer-centric events. Last year, 250 media covered the event—and more were expected this year. The coverage in 2009 was worth about \$1 million in ad equivalence, according to spokesman Rich Grant. Finally, according to Grant, hotels were sold out for the Denver Beer Fest period in 2010 with rates the highest since the Democratic National Convention in 2008. ■