

Putting Philadelphia's Dell Music Center Center Stage
9. Marketing Communications, Established Products and Services
Simon PR, B.I. Consulting and Shocktheory Interactive

50-word summary

The campaign for the Dell Music Center's 2014 summer season included street teams, a new web site and a media relations campaign that yielded 1.9 million impressions and a front page story in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. The Dell increased ticket sales 33 percent and four out of five concerts were total sell-outs.

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Program Overview

Located in beautiful Fairmount Park, the Dell Music Center has a rich and storied history. It was incorporated as the Robin Hood Dell East in 1935 "to provide summer orchestral concerts, operas, ballets, and other musical events of the highest standards" to area residents. It's the first summer home of the world-renowned Philadelphia Orchestra, which played there for four decades and where Judy Garland had her first public concert. It's also the place of memories for generations of concert goers, some of whom bequeath their tickets to their children and grandchildren.

For 73 years, the Dell offered summer concerts with renowned performers such as Duke Ellington, Ray Charles, Tony Bennett and Ella Fitzgerald. But time took its toll. The venue fell into disrepair and it closed in 2008 for major structural renovations. Two years later Mayor Nutter joyfully announced its reopening under the new name, The Dell Music Center.

Managed by the Philadelphia Parks & Recreation department, the 5,200-seat outdoor venue is one of this country's only city-owned and operated outdoor amphitheaters. Its summer concert series, called "Essence of Entertainment" offers accessible entertainment, primarily for an urban audience.

Susan Slawson, Philadelphia's first Deputy Commissioner of Recreation and Programs and her team knew that 2014 would be a milestone season. They had lined up Fantasia, Roberta Flack and Al Jarreau to perform. They were offering theater for the time: a drama called "The Meeting" based on a fictional encounter between Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. They were presenting the world-renown and diverse Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra, signaling the return of classical music to its original summer home. Construction on a grand new facade was almost complete. Its unveiling would mark the end of the five-year, \$6 million renovation, funded by the State of Pennsylvania and the City Of Philadelphia

It was time for the 'new' Dell to be introduced. The City hand-picked a team of top communications experts: Simon PR for planning, strategy, and media relations; its long-time concert promoter, B.I. Consulting for guerilla marketing, advertising and sponsorship management; and Shocktheory Interactive to redesign its website.

The goals: energize its customer base, build the venue's brand and reputation with a broader market, and ultimately, make the Dell's 2014 summer season self-sustaining.

Objectives

- Increase ticket revenue 25 percent over 2013 and add at least three new sponsors.
- Secure coverage in mainstream media, including a major feature story in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and a total of 35 media placements or more.
- Generate at least 10 placements in media outlets that cover the Philadelphia suburbs.

Target Audiences

- Members of the general public in the Greater Philadelphia region, especially those interested in music.
- Members of the regional media, including reporters/editors at suburban newspapers.

Research and Planning

Simon PR met regularly with the Parks and Recreation Department's team and B.I. Consulting to review previous efforts and guide the planning process. The Agency scoured the archives backstage to learn about the venue's history and studied media relations results to identify themes and reporters. Shocktheory considered the Dell's current website infrastructure and poured over previous season's images, video and music. B.I. Consulting was armed with its deep knowledge of the venue, of urban radio stations, and of the best locations for guerilla marketing. The entire team agreed that getting an early start on marketing and PR would be vital to success; they shared a sense of urgency.

Strategies

- Launch marketing efforts at least 10 days earlier than in previous years.
- Use radio advertising and street teams to reach an urban audience, print ads in 'alternative' newspapers to reach music lovers, and a partnership with a mainstream media outlet to reach a broader market.
- Create a new website that is exciting, informative and user-friendly.

- Issue a steady stream of news releases to a wide range of local media. Pitch stories around key milestones and shows that need sales support.

Tactics

Two media sponsors, urban radio station WDAS-FM, and African American newspaper *The Tribune* broke the 2014 season lineup on April 23rd, a full two weeks earlier than 2013. The next day, Simon PR issued the first of eight news releases to 65 media outlets covering Philadelphia and its suburbs. To jump-start ticket sales, B.I. Consulting negotiated a series of radio promotions including a live broadcast at The Dell box office of May 17th. Radio advertising began two days earlier and street teams were dispatched to Philadelphia public transit stations to talk up the concerts and hand out flyers to City residents.

Shortly thereafter, The Dell launched its sophisticated new website. Visitors to mydelleast.com saw a flash gallery of performers' photos and heard the pulsating beat of music. As they scrolled down the page, music and video of previous seasons reminded them of the energy surrounding The Dell. An easy-to-use navigation system led patrons to each show and the mechanism to purchase tickets.

While season marketing continued, Simon PR focused its energies on expanding The Dell's reach and reputation. It introduced Commissioner Slawson to public broadcasting station WHYY, the perfect partner for Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra. Eager to expand its listener base, WHYY signed on as a full season sponsor.

Next, Simon PR set its sights on delivering the client's media relations objectives. It attended a Black Pearl rehearsal, interviewed and photographed the amateur musicians, and served up localized news releases to their hometown suburban newspapers.

Securing a major feature in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* was the Agency's top deliverable. Simon PR knew that Black Pearl's free concert on June 21st, marking the return of classical music to The Dell, was the perfect angle. The timing was perfect too—just five days prior to the façade unveiling. The Agency's strong pitch letter focused on two key ideas: that Black Pearl is a national model and that taxpayer dollars have brought back a City jewel. After entertainment and City editors pleaded that they were short-staffed, Simon PR hand-delivered a package to *Inquirer* editor Bill Marimow. The next day, entertainment reporter Tirdad Derakshani requested multiple interviews for a major story.

Results

Simon PR generated 55 earned media placements for the season, far surpassing the 35-story goal. Total impressions were just under 2 million with an additional 1.5 million online page views. Among the stories were (1) a season lineup in the suburban daily, *Delaware County Daily Times* (2) a feature on "The Meeting," on KYW Newsradio, the top radio station in the Philadelphia media market (3) feature stories on the Black Pearl amateur musicians in six suburban newspapers (4) a major feature on WHYY-FM along with an online gallery of rehearsal photos (5) and an Al Jarreau interview in the *Philadelphia Daily News*. A total of 11 stories ran in the suburbs, exceeding the 10-story goal.

The façade unveiling was covered by Philadelphia's top TV station, 6ABC, which aired a package including compliments from Mayor Nutter, two city council members and season ticket holders.

Commissioner Slawson couldn't have been happier with the major feature story Simon PR secured in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. It ran on the coveted daily's front page on the day of the Black Pearl concert and included a color photo of the beautiful new façade and interviews with her, loyal patrons, Black Pearl's founder and singer Will Downing. He said he looked forward to The Dell because the "audience response is nothing but elation."

And so it was. On warm summer evenings as the sun began to set over the trees in Fairmount Park, thousands of Philadelphians and suburbanites lined up under the state-of-the-art entrance of The Dell. Friends and neighbors reconnected, barbecue grills filled the air with sweet aromas, a DJ got the crowd going and renowned performers crooned to the crowds late into the night.

All told, The Dell took in more than \$1.18MM in ticket sales, a 33 percent increase over 2013. Sponsorships were up, too, from nine in 2013 to 12 in 2014. Among them, WHYY, which reaches 426,350 affluent and well-educated listeners each week.

In his August 21 story, *Philadelphia Daily News* reporter Jonathan Takiff detailed the Dell's successes. "For the first time in memory, patrons attempting to buy tickets the day of the show have been turned away. It's been looking totally rosy at the Fairmount Park venue this summer."