

The Essentials of a Successful PR Stunt

If you are going to do it, know how to do it right

- Make sure it reflects your brand character.
 - In order to get the best reaction from a stunt, it needs to reflect the true personality of the brand. Most briefs for stunts tend to focus too much on what will get the biggest "wow" factor without this lens. Which is why even the most impressive stunt can fall flat. If a person is left questioning the authenticity of the brand within the stunt, the reactions tend to be ones of confusion at the best case or at the worst case dismissal for "trying too hard".
 - But when the stunt reflects the character of the brand, it can lift the brand in the hearts and minds of consumers. And this is why stunts work for Richard Branson's brand Virgin. The entire brand is built on being audacious, bespoke, OTT. It is known for pushing the limits and then going right over them. When Branson drives a tank through Times Square and pretends to blow up the Coca-Cola sign launching Virgin Cola, it not only feels on-brand, it would almost be off-brand not to. You also have to be brave enough to go all-in. Which Richard is, he is unapologetically all-in.
 - Virgin-Cola failed as a product. Which means, even a well planned and executed stunt isn't a sure thing for brand success. Which leads to the next point...
- Focus on conversion.
 - Once you have attention, what are you going to do with it? This needs to be planned BEFORE the stunt and is usually fueled by a marketing plan with a specific call-to-action. What do you want your consumers to do? How are you going to continue to engage them? Whatever it is, it should more expeditiously push them down the path to whatever is your key KPI...purchase being the most common but could be leads, views, foot-traffic.
 - Remember, a stunt is a flash-in-a-pan and will be short lived. So, you must seize the opportunity. So, make sure they have someplace to go that is a landing spot for your brand. In this way, you can continue the conversation. The biggest mistake brands make here is in thinking the splash is enough and so consumers will just naturally navigate to them. This is not true. You must make the path to you easy with very clear signage that explicitly gives them an action that helps your business in a meaningful way.
 - You need KPI'S. Especially since stunts by nature can tend to be costly. This is the only way you will be able to tell if the ROI was worth it. Make sure your KPI'S are quantifiable too. You don't want your stunt to be subjectively judged by the powers that be especially since by nature stunts are generally only appealing to the group they are intended for.
- Make sure the stunt is intrinsically tied to the brand
 - Stunts are meant to make a statement. You need to make sure your statement is more than "Whoaaaa...that's cool!" Sensationalism for the sake of it is where things often go wrong. The very worst thing that can happen is you get a reaction but people cannot remember what the brand was. I have seen too many of these. This is especially the case if you want publications to write about it in a way that boosts your brand.
 - Make sure you have a message track that explicitly states your "why" to make it easy for journalists to write about it.
- Needs to have drama.
 - Stunts are expected to be over-the-top. Which implies there needs to be some level of drama which is generally fueled by anticipation, unexpectedness, surprise, admiration, cleverness...something that makes people feel something that compels them to share AND engage with the brand according to the CTA.
 - This doesn't mean they need to be overly dangerous or risky. In fact, you need to weigh the risk very carefully. Many of the examples we have given so far could have gone very badly resulting in a significant downside for all parties. You need to consider how you will mitigate and manage the risk if something were to happen. And can your brand survive it?
 - Here are some examples of stunts that are less risky but still qualify as successfully executed stunts:
 - H&S insuring Troy Palamalu's hair for \$1M. Clever...can they really do that? Creates conversation. On brand.
 - Jean Claude Van Damme doing the splits between two moving Volvo trucks. Demonstrating the suspension system in a very dramatic way. Showing versus telling.

