

Only in Denver - Yves Saint Laurent Retrospective at the Denver Art Museum

Denver Art Museum, Jan 1, 2013

Summary: 2013 Silver Anvil Award of Excellence Winner — Integrated Communications — Nonprofit Organizations

The internationally acclaimed exhibit *Yves Saint Laurent: The Retrospective* made its only North American stop at the Denver Art Museum (DAM), March 25–July 8, 2012. This overview of the designer's 40 years of creativity featured a selection of 200 haute couture outfits along with photographs, drawings and films that illustrated the development of Saint Laurent's style.

The DAM received more than \$5 million in earned media coverage, attracted more than 125,000 museum visitors and motivated visitors from near and far to experience this exhibition elevating the reputation of the DAM and Denver as a cultural center.

Integrated communications includes any program that demonstrates leadership of public relations strategies and tactics in a creative and effective integrated campaign, along with other marketing or communications. The program must demonstrate the clear leadership of public relations, along with its integration with other disciplines. The nonprofit subcategory is specifically intended for health and welfare organizations, as well as educational and cultural institutions not included in other subcategories.

Full Text: **SITUATION ANALYSIS**

The Denver Art Museum hosted the internationally acclaimed exhibit, *Yves Saint Laurent: The Retrospective (YSL)* for its only North American stop March 25–July 8, 2012. This dazzling overview of the designer's 40 years of creativity featured 200 haute couture outfits, photographs, drawings and films that illustrated Saint Laurent's style and the historical foundations of his work.

After securing the exhibition for Denver, the DAM staff created an immersive experience for visitors. Fashion and social history took center stage, as Saint Laurent's designs set the standard for how women dress in the workplace today. The communications team—an integrated staff of public relations, digital, design and marketing experts—built a program to leverage the *YSL* message, increasing attendance and overall visibility.

Opportunities:

- Only U.S. stop for the exhibition following venues in Paris and Madrid;
- Content offered wide audience appeal and a range of visual and social opportunities;

Challenges:

- Potential for perception that the exhibition is highbrow and expensive;
- Potential national media fatigue from recent fashion-focused exhibitions at other museums;
- Challenge to entice coastal art critics to travel to Denver to see the exhibition.

RESEARCH

Through secondary research, the DAM team developed a solid understanding of media contacts and coverage for museum fashion exhibitions, various angles and how other museums approached these shows. Economic impact reports from previous blockbuster exhibitions at DAM also were studied, helping the team craft ideas for promotional and media partnerships, as well as marketing partnerships with VISIT DENVER, the city's convention and visitors' bureau.

The team also analyzed primary audience research:

- **LOCAL:** Most DAM visitors from Denver;
- **TOURISTS:** 20 to 30 percent of DAM visits from outside Denver. Up to 40 percent in summer;
- **DEMOGRAPHIC:** Average visitor is female aged 45–65 and visits with spouse or friend.

PLANNING

Leveraging this information, the DAM team set goals to support overall institutional initiatives.

Institutional Initiatives:

- Capture new local audiences;
- Expand DAM's regional/national profile;
- Attract 100,000 museum visitors during the fiscal quarter.

Market area: Included reputation-building and tourism-focused national outreach, and regional marketing and media relations to drive attendance.

Target audiences: Expanded on DAM's traditional visitors. Primary audience was arts and culture focused women aged 45–65. Secondary focus was young adults, tourists and the fashion-minded.

Integrated Communications – Measurable goals:

- **Goal 1 Marketing:** Implement paid-media mix to reach target audience and motivate 100,000 museum visits. Reach fashion-focused audiences with *YSL* message via promotional partnerships.
- **Goal 2 Media Relations:** Reach local, regional and national audiences with a New York media tour, behind-the-scenes press opportunities and a media preview to generate coverage. Goals:
 - 5 national print hits
 - 10 Denver TV and radio segments
 - 15 local/regional dailies and long leads
- **Goal 3 Digital Communication:** Integrate *YSL* message into museum's social media channels and influence at least 50 tweets from others that included #YSLDENVER. Develop and manage *YSL* microsite, aimed at attracting tourists. Feature *YSL* prominently on the new DAM website, which launched in March 2012, and achieve 65,000 page views on the exhibition listing.

Budget: Integrated budget to sustain the *YSL* message, including print, outdoor and online advertising, partner marketing program and PR materials: \$400,000.

EXECUTION: Action Plan and Implementation

Communications team developed and executed marketing, media relations and digital tactics:

- **Marketing** – Marketing plan leaned heavily on media partners for paid-ad visibility. Partners included CBS4, *5280 Magazine* and *The Denver Post*. Team implemented

Style Pass, a large-scale promotional program enabling regional businesses to offer mutual discounts for YSL. Nearly 100 Style Pass partners signed on. Team selected signature image for unified collateral.

- **Media Relations** – Media relations timeline included a steady schedule of advance publicity moments, unique story pitches, events and more. Strategy included a fall 2011 New York media tour with national fashion, travel and lifestyle editors and a ski resort media trip to maximize visibility with winter/summer tourists. Ticket kick-off party and behind-the-scenes opportunities to capture visuals of uncrating of key outfits and accessories were media favorites. Media preview included access to special guests including Saint Laurent's longtime partner, Pierre Bergé, and exhibition curator Florence Müller. Nearly 100 print, broadcast and digital media reps attended the exhibition preview.
- **Opening events** – Pushed media access to opening events, including a red carpet gala, VIP night for elected officials and museum supporters and members' day. Opening gala attended by dignitaries and celebrities: French Ambassador to U.S. Francois Delattre, Consulate General of France David Martinon, Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper, Denver Mayor Michael Hancock. The red carpet photo area included more than 10 society photographers and a group of beauty editors from national glossies.
- **Digital Communication**– Integrated YSL message into DAM overall social media and online strategy. Focus on creating engaging, meaningful exchanges online. The *YSLDenver.com* microsite included full online ticketing functionality, access to hotel VIP packages, show content, behind the scenes blog posts, a Q&A with the curator and a fun video from the DAM director on how to properly pronounce "Yves Saint Laurent."

EVALUATION

DAM's YSL integrated communications program exceeded its goals.

Goal 1: Marketing

Implement paid-media mix to reach target audience and motivate 100,000 museum visits. Reach fashion-focused audiences with YSL message via promotional partnerships.

- **Result:** Mix of paid and partner-added-value included print, digital, outdoor, online and broadcast, netting DAM more than 10 million impressions in the local, regional and national marketplace. More than 125,000 people visited the museum during the exhibition's run. Further, the Style Pass and promotional partnership program brought sales of nearly 8,000 exhibition tickets. DAM received a 231 percent ROI for this program.

Goal 2: Media Relations

Reach local, regional and national audiences with a New York media tour, behind-the-scenes press opportunities and a media preview to generate coverage.

- **GOAL:** 5 national publication hits
- **RESULT:** New York media tour resulted in coverage from almost every meeting and the formation of valuable future relationships. DAM received more than 18 national placements including articles in *VOGUE*, *ARTnews*, *Marie Claire*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Surface*, *NYLON*, *W Magazine* and *ELLE*.
- **GOAL:** 10 local/regional TV and radio segments
- **RESULT:** More than 30 local and regional broadcast segments aired during YSL's run, along with national segments on E! News and PBS NewsHour. The PR team utilized key moments during the show (YSL-inspired fashion show with former Project Runway participants, a tactile tour for the visually impaired, a runway show with patients at Children's Hospital Colorado and a local high school class that created YSL-inspired outfits) to garner another 9 broadcast segments.

- **GOAL:** 15 local/regional print dailies and long leads.
- **RESULT:** 73 print hits in dailies and magazines statewide and regionally ranging from multiple *Denver Post* articles to outlets in Colorado Springs, Vail and Aspen to regional hits in New Mexico, Texas and Wyoming.

Goal 3: Digital Communication

Integrate *YSL* message into museum's social media channels and influence at least 50 tweets from others that included #YSLDENVER. Develop and manage *YSL* microsite, aimed at attracting tourists. Feature *YSL* prominently on the new DAM website, which launched in March 2012, and achieve 65,000 page views on the exhibition listing.

- **RESULT:** Tracked at least 77 original tweets using #YSLDENVER during the exhibition run. Two of DAM's ten most-clicked tweets in 2012 were *YSL* related. The how-to pronounce YouTube video was the most-viewed video on the DAM's channel in 2012. The museum saw more than 186,000 page views on the exhibition listing.

Additional Results: Denver Art Museum received more than \$5 million in earned media coverage resulting in 750 pages of editorial coverage for *YSL*. More than 1/5 of visitors indicated this was their first visit to the DAM, confirming reach to new audiences. Surpassing institutional goals, the integrated communications plan motivated visitors from near and far to experience this once-in-a-lifetime exhibition, often multiple times, elevating the overall reputation of the DAM and Denver as a cultural center.

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