



Showcasing the Charlotte Region to Drive Economic Development

Luquire George Andrews and Development Counsellors International and Charlotte Chamber of Commerce AND Charlotte Regional Partnership AND Charlotte Center City Partners, Jan 1, 2013

Summary: 2013 Silver Anvil Award of Excellence Winner — Events and Observances - Seven or Fewer Days — Associations

When economic developers in Charlotte USA felt it was time to raise the region's profile to help attract new jobs and investment, they chose LGA and DCI to spearhead the first-ever national and international media relations campaign. The results were significant with stories in major media outlets such as Bloomberg Television, *China Daily*, CNN, *The Economist*, *The Times London*, *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal*, showcasing the region's resilience to the banking crisis as well as energy, advanced manufacturing and international industries. More important, a follow-up survey of location advisors showed increased awareness of the region's diverse economy.

Events and observances (seven or fewer days) includes programs or events scheduled for one to seven consecutive days (not including planning and preparation). Events may include commemorations, observances, openings, celebrations or other special activities, and must occur within a time span of one week. The association subcategory includes trade and industry groups, professional societies, chambers of commerce and similar organizations.

Full Text: **OVERVIEW**

When the long shadow of the global financial crisis fell across Charlotte in 2008, doomsayers hastily issued a bleak forecast for North Carolina's largest city, the second-largest financial center in the U.S. and home to two of the nation's Top 10 banks. But predictions of the city's demise were premature: not only has Charlotte's financial services sector bounced back, but also the city and surrounding 16-county region are on an infrastructure improvement and economic-development roll that reflects a broader and more diverse economic base. In 2010, economic development leaders felt it was time to tell that story and raise the region's profile to help attract new jobs and investment. In an unprecedented collaboration, the Charlotte Chamber, Charlotte Center City Partners and Charlotte Regional Partnership banded together and secured private funding to launch the region's first ever national and international media relations campaign – and chose Charlotte-based Luquire George Andrews (LGA) and Development Counsellors International (DCI) in New York to spearhead the two-year initiative.

One challenge for LGA/DCI was creating a campaign that reflected the points of view of the three oversight groups, which are allies in economic development, yet still have their own interests and coverage areas. At the same time, we had to champion the diverse strengths of the cities and counties comprising the Charlotte region.

In addition, three months after the campaign launch, Charlotte learned that it would host the Democratic National Convention in September 2012 – a home run for the city's economy. But with the thousands of national and international media that would descend on the city, LGA/DCI had to remain focused on our strategy and find ways to convince our "most-wanted" media to

look beyond the predictable politics and cover our region's business stories, all within the current budget.

RESEARCH

LGA/DCI conducted a nationwide perception survey among location advisors – key influencers in corporate relocation and expansion decisions. Survey results confirmed that location advisors had favorable impressions of the Charlotte region, but low awareness of the diverse economy, including industries such as energy, advanced manufacturing, aerospace and defense, and health and life sciences. More surprising, there was little awareness that our international airport – the sixth busiest nationwide – offers non-stop service to more than 134 destinations worldwide and 695 daily departures (more passengers than LaGuardia and Reagan National). The following are a sampling of the key findings from the survey:

- More than half (54%) had visited Charlotte within the past year.
- They rated Charlotte's business climate the best, over 8 major markets, including Chicago and Atlanta, nationwide.
- 89% associated the Charlotte region with the financial services industry.
- 13% associated the Charlotte region with the energy industry.
- 26% of respondents felt the region was overly dependent on the financial industry.

We also conducted more than 20 in-depth, qualitative interviews with senior company executives – another key target for the campaign – from companies such as Carolinas Healthcare, Duke Energy, Electrolux, Siemens Energy and Wells Fargo. Many of them echoed the business strengths and weaknesses identified in the survey results.

PLANNING

With insight from the research to fuel our strategy, LGA/DCI recommended eight story themelines that served as the backbone for the two-year media relations campaign. The themelines included low awareness industries and newsworthy topics, including Charlotte's resilience to the banking crisis, energy, workforce development, foreign direct investment, aerospace and defense, motorsports, uptown development and health and life sciences.

We collaborated with our three economic development partners to build consensus around the themelines, key messages, spokespeople and companies, and to ease their minds that each agencies' interests would be represented. We met with company leaders and executives to develop the stories and find the angles and examples that would make our pitches attractive. Keeping our story pitches fresh was an ongoing process of staying connected with our partner agencies and meeting regularly with an advisory committee of local public relations professionals of major companies to stay abreast of economic development activity and unique business stories in the region.

Campaign Objective:

Generate at least 50 national and international media placements over two years that would:

- Increase positive awareness of the region.
- Influence audiences of target location advisors and corporate executives.
- Showcase the Charlotte region as a great place to invest, live and work.

Communication strategies:

- Create a compelling narrative that tells why the Charlotte region is the ideal choice to locate, relocate and expand a business.
- Feature the most influential and prominent spokespeople in the region.
- Target top-tier national and international media to reach our target audience and tell the stories.
- Utilize a mix of ongoing, proactive pitching; press trips to the region and desk-side

- briefings in major markets.
- Leverage major Charlotte-region positive news.

Additional strategies after landing the 2012 Democratic National Convention:

- Identify targeted media attending the convention and pitch them in advance.
- Be an accessible, proactive media resource on the ground.
- Collaborate with key convention players, including the City of Charlotte, Charlotte In 2012 Host Committee and the Democratic National Convention Committee to help tell our stories.

EXECUTION

Over the course of two years, LGA/DCI reached out to countless reporters through tailored written pitches that spoke to the individual writers' interests as well as rigorous phone follow-up to discuss the storylines in detail and provide sources and information. We leveraged major news such as the 2012 Democratic National Convention – which landed a feature story in *The Economist* – Chiquita's headquarters move to Charlotte, and the President's State of the Union address that highlighted U.S. manufacturing to generate additional coverage for the region. Perseverance was key to success, especially with the changing media landscape. For example, the story on Charlotte's energy hub that ran on the front page of the business section in *The Washington Post* in September 2011 was nearly one year in the making after we had pitched the reporter before he left *The Wall Street Journal*.

In addition to ongoing pitching, LGA/DCI:

- Developed talking points for key business leaders and spokespeople.
- Organized four, two-day press trips on topics including energy, health and life sciences, advanced manufacturing and foreign direct investment that brought 19 reporters to the Charlotte region.
- Coordinated 18 desk-side media interviews with key spokespeople, including Charlotte Mayor Anthony Foxx, Duke Energy CEO Jim Rogers and Charlotte Regional Partnership President Ronnie Bryant, in New York, Los Angeles, Brazil, China and Paris.
- Assisted with 7 individual media visits to Charlotte from outlets, including *The Economist*, *Kiplinger*, CNN and *The Times London*.
- Staffed Charlotte In 2012 media booth during the DNC and coordinated interviews with Governor Bev Perdue, Charlotte Mayor Anthony Foxx and Charlotte Chamber President Bob Morgan on CNN and Bloomberg TV.

EVALUATION

When the campaign ended in October 2012, LGA/DCI had secured 62 media placements totaling more than 180 million media impressions with an editorial financial impact of more than \$3.9 million. Stories were covered by national and international media heavy-weights, including Bloomberg TV, *China Daily*, CNBC, CNN, Deutschlandradio, *The Economist*, *Entrepreneur*, *Financial Times*, *Fortune*, Fox News, *Kiplinger Magazine*, *The New York Post*, *The New York Times*, NPR, NIKKEI, *The Times London*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Most were feature-length print and broadcast stories on topics, including the region's diverse economy, resilience in the banking crisis, energy capital, landing the DNC, workforce development and New Yorkers migrating to Charlotte.

More important, in a follow-up survey of location advisors, LGA/DCI found broader awareness of the region's diverse economy, including energy and advanced manufacturing – two industries that received significant coverage during the two-year campaign. Key success metrics include:

- 33% of respondents reported that the Charlotte region was ultimately chosen as the site

for their projects – an increase from 2010, when only 26% reported that Charlotte was selected.

- 23% of respondents were aware of the energy industry versus 13% in 2010.
- 39% of respondents were aware of the advanced manufacturing industry versus 28% in 2010.

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Product #: 6BE-1302E08