(Research in Progress.)

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BACKGROUND

A prominent sports locale in New Hampshire wanted to show its financial contribution it delivered to the state as a whole so it could convince the state to be more supportive of the venue. By combining media analysis and tourism impact with survey research data and economic statistics we were able to quantify its contribution.

RQ 1: Does a popular sporting event bring quantifiable financial benefits to the state, above and beyond the revenue that accrues to the event organizers.
RQ2: What elements of communications, earned, owned, and paid, were responsible for driving that.
RQ3: Is this process one that can be replicated in other circumstances to provide professional communicators to show their impact?

THE CHALLENGES

The research incorporated research data from 3 sources. Paine Publishing was responsible for assessing what the public had been exposed to in terms of news and information. The UNH Survey Research Center conducted surveys to determine the motivations of the attendees. A noted New Hampshire economics researcher would analyze the data from travel and tourism and other sources to determine if there was a measurable uptick in revenue around the time of the race. The data and results are anonymized since the third set of data isn't yet complete.

By combining the three data sets, we would learn what visitors saw, what motivated them to attend, and the ultimate economic impact on New Hampshire tourism.

THE PROCESS

The immediate challenge from a media analysis perspective was that the coverage of this particular venue and the sporting series it was hosting was intense. The client had an active-owned social media program in place along with paid media. Our task was to isolate the coverage that would be likely to convince them to visit New Hampshire, so we eliminated any coverage that didn't specifically mention the track, the state or the town that is held in.

We collected all media mentions that appeared in the six-week period before the event and follow up coverage in the month after the race. We included traditional online and broadcast news media as well as social media, blogs, videos, and other non-traditional forms of media. We coded for:

- Sentiment – how did the item leave the reader feeling about New Hampshire.
- Focus – what was the primary focus of the article:
- Attributes – what attributes were mentioned, i.e., fun, family friendly, expensive etc.
- Benefits – were there any specific benefits mentioned, i.e., NH scenic beauty, culture, etc.
- Quotes – who, if anyone, was quoted in the story.
- The percentage of coverage that references other venues, trips, or sites in New Hampshire (as opposed to just race-related coverage.).

The analysis included a total of 3698 individual items (articles, TV and Radio clips, posts, and other media.) Roughly half (51%) mentioned either the client, New Hampshire or both in a significant way, The rest were omitted because they focused on other races and only mentioned New Hampshire in passing.

The Secret Formula

In order to maintain its funding, the New Hampshire Department of Travel and Tourism must deliver to the governor and legislature a report on the ROI of its promotional efforts. The formula has been in use for decades and has resulted in regular increases in the department's budgets. It combines tax and survey research with other internal data to estimate the number of tourists that visited the state in the last year, and the average amount each visitor spent. It then totals up and subtracts the costs of outreach investments by the state of all of its communications efforts and determines the ROI. In a time of tight budgets, the notoriously miserly NH Legislature generally believes that investment in Paid, Earned and Owned media is worth funding.

According to the most recent statistics available from the NHDTT, it takes approximately 400 desirable impressions to bring one visitor to the state, and the average visitor spend is over $1,244 per visitor.

Using our media analysis, we defined a "desirable impression" as one that included attributes of the state's culture, scenic beauty, family friendliness, and fun appeared which appeared in 15% of all coverage of this specific event. Using Cision's data that meant that the race generated some 47 million desirable TV, radio, and online impressions. We did not include earned social media due to a lack of credible reach numbers. Nor did we include the client's paid media coverage.

Using the NHDTT's formula, and our data, the event was responsible for up 117,759 additional visitors above and beyond paid advertising. The incremental revenue generated was $146,356,596.

The Survey Data

The survey data reinforced our conclusions. Most of the visitors came as a group of 2-4 people and stayed in New Hampshire for several days before and after the event. At the site alone, event fans spent more than twice as much as the average visitor to the state. Before and after the event they spent 20% more than the average. Adding to the impact, more than a quarter of attendees visited other scenic areas of New Hampshire.

Conclusions

RQ 1: Does a popular sporting event bring quantifiable financial benefits to the state, above and beyond the revenue that accrues to the event organizers.

A1: Yes. We were able to calculate the increased potential revenue from earned media.

RQ2: What elements of communications earned, owned, and paid, were responsible for driving that increase:

A2: Partially. Attendees were asked where they heard about the event and a small percentage cited earned media as a source. Most were already familiar with the event.

RQ3: Is this process one that can be replicated in other circumstances to provide professional communicators to show their impact?

A3: Yes. This project demonstrates that you can show financial impact if you have other data sources such as survey research and economic data.