

Tennessee Valley Fair goes for hip update

Integrated Marketing Communications at the University of Tennessee's College of Business Administration is a senior-level marketing elective for undergraduate students. As a team-based, client-project class, students are asked to develop a real-world integrated marketing communications plan for an area organization. Last fall, students worked with the Tennessee Valley Fair to enhance its perception among college-age students and to increase attendance within this group.

Company: Since 1916, the Tennessee Valley Fair has been an annual tradition in Knoxville. Originally named the Tennessee Valley Agricultural and Industrial Fair, it showcased East Tennessee's agricultural heritage. Over the years, the fair has grown to include both agricultural and non-agricultural attractions such as livestock contests and petting zoos, demolition derbies, live wrestling, tractor pulls, amusement rides and live concerts.

Although fair attendance has increased over the past several years — with 2006 attendance at 139,000 — attendance is still below its 2000 record of 180,000. The fair historically has drawn mostly young families and older individuals who attended the fair as youngsters. However, fair managers realized that in order for the fair to grow, it needs to attract new audiences. The challenge posed to the marketing students was to develop an integrated marketing communication plan to increase the number of college-age students attending the fair, which currently is minimal.

Students: Jessica Henshaw, Matt Myers, Katie Mustard, Megan Vandely and Brent Hamby were supervised by Cindy Raines, course lecturer and director of communications for the College of Business Administration.

Approach: Over the course of the semester, students investigated the fair's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and conducted an inclusive customer analysis that honed in on the target audience's values and needs.

The group established a planned objective of increasing 2007 fair attendance by 7,500 people among those 18 to 35 years of age, living within 50 miles of the fairgrounds.

Team members analyzed po-



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Megan Drake and Bryan Moses take in the sights at last year's Tennessee Valley Fair. Students at the University of Tennessee's College of Business Administration worked with the fair to create a marketing plan to draw more young people to the annual Knoxville event.

tential branding initiatives, key positioning opportunities and a core messaging strategy — what does the fair want to say about itself to attract and build loyalty with this target audience? The group evaluated graphic imaging opportunities; traditional and nontraditional marketing channels, including print, television, radio, outdoor, electronic and the Internet; the

use of public relations, events and sponsorships; and the use of consumer promotions and giveaways.

Result: With a new message of "Tennessee Valley Fair: Unlike Any Other!" the group proposed a combination of innovative entertainment venues; special events; and a re-designed, high-intensity image to increase attendance and reinforce that the Tennessee Valley

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Fair is a "whole new fair!"

The group's primary plan includes updating the fair's logo and Web site to be flashier, more distinctive and more appealing to the target audience and to sponsor a weeklong Battle of the Bands with the final competition on "College Night."

The students also cleverly wove into the plan appeals to the philanthropic missions of UT's fraternities and sororities to encourage group fair attendance. Each organization would host an informational booth educating fair attendees about their charities, thereby enhancing awareness for their cause. Special group-package pricing was recommended, along with free shuttle transportation to the fair.

Additional suggestions included:

- Marketing on radio stations using radio personalities familiar to the target audience.

- Marketing on social networking sites (MySpace, FaceBook, etc.) and using the Internet and e-mail.

- Advertising in college and Knoxville newspapers.

- Inundating college campuses, popular restaurants and sports clubs with flyers and promotional items that reinforce the new branding.

"The students presented us with many innovative ideas that we are working to implement into the next several fairs," said Scott Suchomski, the fair's executive director. "We are working on various networking avenues to include My Space and YouTube. Additionally, the fair will be offering a group rate for general admission and hopes to work with KAT regarding transportation to this year's fair."

■ The University of Tennessee College of Business Administration provides Case Study to the Business Journal. Companies and organizations interested in participating in the college's client projects may contact Cindy Raines at craines1@utk.edu.