

PR WEEK

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CAMPAIGNS

CATEGORY PR

Fashion show is totally off the wall

Client: *The Wallpaper Council (Chicago)*

PR Team: *Amster-Young Public Relations (New York)*

Campaign: *"Wallpaper Walks the Catwalk"*

Time Frame: *Spring 1999 to spring 2000*

Budget: *\$145,000 (estimate takes into account agency's monthly fee from client, spokesperson's annual contract with client and out-of-pocket and production costs)*

When people think wallpaper, they usually think Grandma's garish floral prints. But that's unfair, says Frank Sterling, president of The Wallpaper Council, a trade group. "Wallpaper is much more like art than it was 10 years ago. Wallpaper designers go to Europe for shows and inspiration much like fashion designers."

The council decided it was time to get the word out. For the last couple years, to drum up publicity for the council, Amster-Young Public Relations has coordinated a luncheon at New York's Carlyle Hotel. The lunches were successful in bringing in trade and consumer-decorating magazines. But to really spread the word about how wallpaper had morphed into a hip, chic creature, the agency decided television coverage was a must.

Strategy

"We wanted to shake things up," says president Karen Am-

ster-Young.

Doing so meant bringing together the worlds of fashion and interior design. Instead of a luncheon, Amster-Young PR decided to do an "off-the-wall" fashion show at trendy New York night club EXIT.

The idea behind "Wallpaper Walks the Catwalk" was to have major clothes creators - including Nicole Miller, Geoffrey Beene and Josie Natori - showcase designs that would take creative cues from wallpaper patterns.

Tactics

Amster-Young PR approached top designers, some of whom had home lines and would perhaps be interested in enhancing their relationships with the interior design community. It courted other designers as well. "We were surprised by the way the fashion industry adopted us," says Amster-Young. "We weren't sure if the big names would be interested, but they immediately saw the connection and wanted to participate. They felt a kinship."

The agency sent letters and wallpaper samples to stir the clothes artists' imaginations. Amster-Young PR had worked with the Wilhelmina agency before and it tapped that relationship to obtain models, who, unlike the designers, were paid for their work.

The night of the show, March 14, Wilhelmina models sauntered down the catwalk while pictures of the wallpaper that inspired their outfits were projected on the wall. Attendees bid on the clothes, with proceeds to benefit a design student. The co-hosts, models and designers took advantage of

opportunities to deliver the key message point: the guidelines used in fashion also apply to wallpaper.

The media received press kits with materials, including information about the council, biographies of the designers and a press release about the unique partnership between the fashion and wall coverings industries. A video news release of the event, complete with quotes and sound bites from party guests, was later sent to the press.

Results

The event was attended by 150 people, including more than 45 print journalists from publications like *The New York Times*, *Cosmo Girl!*, *Design Times* and *House Beautiful*. A handful of broadcasters, some fashion designers and council members also attended.

Coverage included segments on CNN *Headline News*, New York 1, *Fox News Live*, as well as in local markets in Los Angeles, San Diego, Seattle, Raleigh and Scranton, PA. Given that much of the print media were monthlies, results haven't yet been tallied. The auction raised \$2,500.

While it's too soon to see any bottom line impact on sales of wallpaper, the buzz was good, and the goal of capturing broadcast publicity was achieved.

Future

Already, Amster-Young PR is hard at work coming up with yet another way to showcase wallpaper in a most unexpected way.

Sheryl Nance-Nash



No wallflowers here... what better way to show that wallpaper has gotten sexy than to put it on models?