

Volvo Cars North America Case Study

- *The Local Angle drives 100m+ media impressions, largest community relations event in Volvo's 50-year U.S. history...*

Challenge

The Volvo Cars North America Public Relations group was a small team with a massive challenge: how to conduct a full-scale, nationwide PR and automotive events mission with a staff of fewer than 10. Worse, corporate leadership was trimming media relations budgets while competitors were growing theirs.

How could Volvo maintain its market perception as a world-class brand in an environment where press relationships were critical, but reporters had the staff outnumbered hundreds to one?

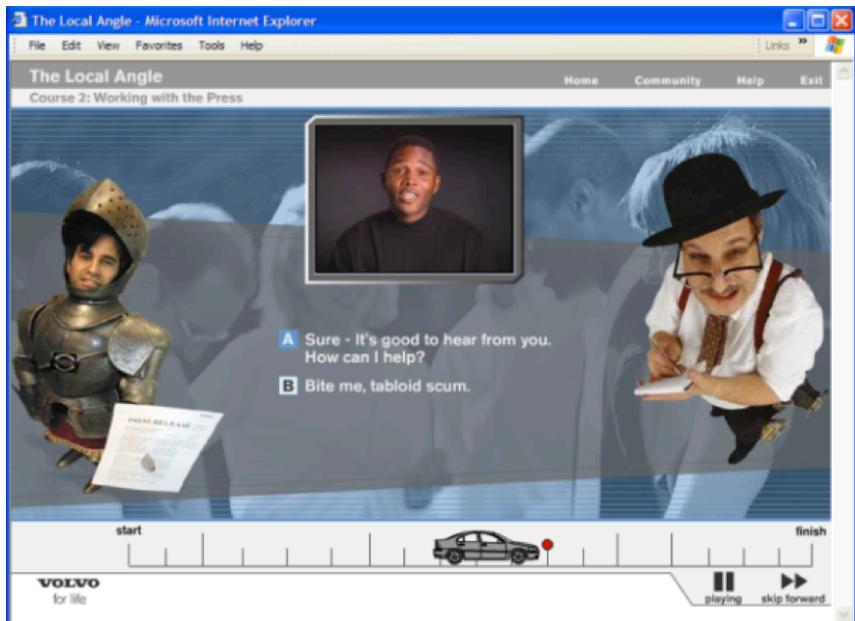


Solution

Volvo retained Gronstedt Group to research the challenge and collaborate on an integrated solution. The ideation/concept phase arrived at a question: **what if Volvo could leverage its expansive nationwide retailer network, transforming local dealerships into PR adjuncts?**

It was agreed that Gronstedt Group would develop The Local Angle, an online simulation to teach Volvo retailers how to develop effective local media and community relations programs. Managers would learn techniques for stretching publicity budgets, boosting awareness and sales, and enhancing their positions in the communities they serve through productive relationships with print and broadcast outlets. The program would be a practical, hands-on learning experience that retailers could immediately begin using to engage key reporters and editors.

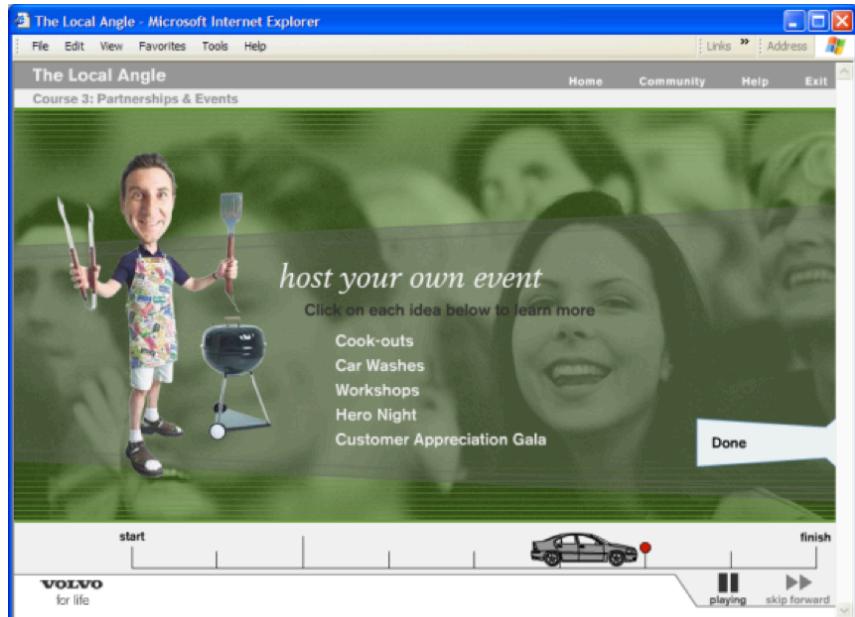
The first step addressed the value of the program. Auto dealers are rarely versed in PR – they know advertising, but have little expertise in media relations. Why should they dedicate scarce resources to this corporate program they may not understand?



Episode one in the four-part suite focused on these concerns, making a compelling case for integrating PR into the marketing mix and developing proactive programs that build the Volvo and retailer brands. Subsequent episodes taught dealer managers the basics – PR 101 – and looked at the power of local event sponsorships. Retailers were also taught how to manage unexpected news and provided with helpful case studies illustrating winning PR strategies employed by best-in-company peer retailers.

In the particularly well-rated third episode, The Local Angle profiled the local PR efforts of Borton Volvo in Minneapolis, a dealership which had dramatically improved its fortunes thanks to a highly successful PR program. The General Manager detailed the value Borton has derived from its sponsorships of youth and college hockey and arts festivals, and he provided a step-by-step walk-through detailing how the store organized and executed its signature event, the annual block party.

Retailers sit up and take notice when they hear from their peers about real-world successes – such as parties drawing thousands of people to their stores – that drive steadily increasing sales and improved relationships with customers, neighbors, and even city governments.



From concept to execution The Local Angle leveraged the full Gronstedt Group toolbox: innovative marketing and communication strategy, a unique faculty for content marketing, unsurpassed writing and storytelling ability, and robust expertise in developing third-generation interactive learning simulations.

Conclusion

Six months after the launch, 400 managers at Volvo's 350 retailers had taken the course. 87% of retailers who took the program thought it was "useful" to "very useful" and over 90% thought this form of online training was "effective" to "very effective" compared with other training methods. Open-ended survey responses suggested that the program has been hugely successful in generating ideas and expertise for the dealers' own local PR efforts. Retailers recounted how the program helped them recognize the value of building awareness, credibility, and sales through increased media visibility and the goodwill generated by aggressive community outreach efforts.

Volvo Cars PR leadership credited The Local Angle with helping make its subsequent "Volvo Drive for Life Days" one of the nation's largest ever one-time fundraisers for local charity. The three-day event reached people in hundreds of local communities across the nation and **generated more than 100 million media impressions**.

Volvo retailer efforts surpassed the company's million-dollar fund-raising target, making it the **largest-ever community relations event in Volvo's 50-year U.S. history**.

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