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Touchpoint Communications
Smoking Ordinance Launch
Press Conference

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Smoking Ordinance Launch Press Conference

After several years of heated discussion, Charleston, South Carolina implemented a smoking ordinance on July 23, 2007. Our client, Smokefree Lowcountry, was instrumental in influencing the passage of a smoking ordinance and wanted to launch an awareness campaign for the first “smokefree” day. This campaign had two target audiences: the general public and businesses.

We studied how other cities and states educated their citizens about a smoking ordinance going into effect. Some did next to nothing, others relied on city government to help create excitement. We were somewhere in the middle: we wanted to create excitement, and could not rely on any city resources to help. Based on our findings and our limited budget, we decided to hold a press event, and brainstormed ideas to add a creative element to the press conference.

Because ashtrays were about to become artifacts, we mounted an Ashtray Recycling event in a city park. We targeted businesses, who were invited to trade in ashtrays for outdoor receptacles. We held the press event at Washington Square, which is located next to Charleston City Hall. We booked public and political figures to speak at the press conference. Charleston City Council members, public health officials from DHEC, and our client spoke and conducted one-on-one interviews. We invited a local recycling company to provide bins for the event. To help inspire businesses to recycle their ashtrays, we contacted DHEC and they agreed to provide several Smokers’ Outpost to businesses participating in the ashtray recycling. A photographer also donated their services to document the press conference for Smokefree Charleston’s website.

Using a media advisory and press release, we opened the event up to the general public and invited businesses to bring old ashtrays. A media advisory was sent to all local media to inform them of the press conference and a press release was distributed at the event. Email blasts were sent to food and beverage leaders throughout the region, and allowed us to send the message directly to approximately 150 key Charleston business people most affected by the new law. Our media relations efforts produced two advance articles in The Post & Courier, a hit in the Charleston Regional Business Journal and coverage on the local CBS affiliate, Channel 5 (at noon and 5 p.m.).

We had some challenges securing city permits, due in part to the coincidental scheduling of the CNN Democratic Party debates in Charleston that day – an event that distracted city officials and local news media. We were also concerned that businesses would not participate in the ashtray recycling component so we worked a number of our professional relationships to ensure participation.

The budget for the press conference was \$250, and paid for a podium rental, the creation of a banner (which was used for other events during the summer implementation program) and our time promoting the event. Pre-event coverage in Post & Courier garnered 98,000 impressions and 12,000 impressions from Charleston Regional Business Journal. Post event coverage on Charleston’s number one rated news station, WCSC Live 5 News, yielded more than 100,000 viewers. We also received on-line coverage on both the TV and newspaper sites. Several businesses recycled their ashtrays and nearly 60 ashtrays were collected. Additionally, several individuals from the general public attended the press conference to show their support for the smoking ordinance.

We deemed the press conference a success because we obtain both pre- and post-event coverage, attracted the general public and had businesses participate in the ashtray recycling component.

50-Word Summary Smoking Ordinance Launch Press Conference

Charleston, SC implemented a smoking ordinance in July 2007 and Smokefree Lowcountry launched an awareness campaign to educate the public about the change. A press conference was held and businesses were invited to recycle their ashtrays. Numerous businesses, individuals and public figures were in attendance to support the smoking ordinance.

