



HEALTH+PUBLIC SERVICE SILVER WINNER

Spike TV True Dads Campaign

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Spike TV, the cable network for men, has committed itself not just to entertaining America's men, but also to addressing their personal needs. As part of that mission, in 2006 Spike announced that it was launching a new pro-social initiative geared toward today's man. Entitled "True Dads," the initiative encourages fathers to be more involved in the lives of their children. The initiative was to include organized activities as well as a broadcast and online PSA campaign.

Among consumers – and, especially in the media – the prevailing image of Spike TV has been rather one-dimensional, and best personified by the stereotypical sex-and-violence-crazed bachelor or frat boy. This, despite the fact that the network has aired such quality drama as "The Kill Point," starring Emmy Award winner John Leguizamo, and innovative programming like the sports-themed reality show "Pros vs. Joes." It was Spike's hope that if crafted well, the "True Dads" campaign would serve to evolve Spike's public image so that it could incorporate the brand's more mature side.

As an advertiser-supported programmer, Spike frequently seeks out opportunities to not only acquire new sponsors but also create new opportunities for providing value to its current marketing partners. With what was bound to be an inherently positive message, the "True Dads" campaign represented an ideal vehicle for realizing both of those goals.

There was a need, then, to ensure that the campaign contained the type of messaging and imagery

- a) that would resonate most strongly with today's fathers
- b) that would enhance Spike TV's image among consumers and in the industry
- c) to which sponsors would want to attach themselves

The budget for the campaign was less than \$1 million, with a goal of having that cost offset by sponsorships.

RESEARCH STORY

As the subject matter at the heart of the campaign actually fell outside our immediate area of expertise, we wanted to conduct research on the current state of father-child interactions to guide the crafting of the campaign toward the accomplishing of the three above-mentioned goals.

Methodology

We started with a series of interviews with experts in the area of family relationships – academics, social workers, family therapists – to develop a framework for the issues to be explored in the field.

With those issues established, we moved to a series of focus groups of fathers of minor children (age 17 and under) for our first pass at in-depth exploration of the nature of current father-child interactions. The groups were conducted in Philadelphia, PA and Louisville, KY to represent the diversity of large urban and small town/rural families, as well as the geographic diversity of Northeast, South and Midwest. The groups were divided into cells based on the ages and genders of the children to ensure that the widest possible diversity of experiences was being captured.

The focus groups produced findings that were studied further in the quantitative phase, which consisted of a national random sample survey of over 1000 fathers of minors. Data analysis included a segmentation of the sample based on the respondents' attitudes toward their interactions with their children.

Next, ethnographies were conducted among a dozen representatives of the three most intriguing of the four segments revealed through the quantitative analysis. The participants were recruited based on their fit with the profiles of each segment. We conducted in-home interviews with these fathers, as well as their wives/partners and their children for a 360° perspective. This phase allowed us to paint a more detailed, multi-dimensional portrait of each type of dad we uncovered through our research.

As part of Spike's ongoing effort to be the industry's experts on the lives of men, the network also conducted a separate research study, entitled "State of Men" following the "True Dads" research. This study involved focus groups and a nationwide survey of men and women to tap attitudes about homelife, fatherhood and role models, as well as a unique qualitative method for probing the attitudes of today's man. Called "Man Camp," this particular phase brought together 25 men age 25 to 39 from around the country to a ranch in Tucson, Arizona to talk openly over a two day period about how men define success, their relationships and how they define what it means to be guy.

Findings

The main overarching findings were that:

1. Today's dads are interacting with their children in a wider variety of ways and more intimately than ever before
2. Today's dads are setting higher goals for their involvement in child-rearing than ever before
3. Today's dads have gone a long way in meeting those child-rearing goals

For example:

- Almost all dads today say their ideal is to show affection to their kids often; more than 80% are in-fact affectionate with their kids, compared to only one-third of yesterday's dads.
- Almost all of today's dads set a goal of acting as a confidante for their kids, and two-thirds meet that goal, compared to just one-quarter of yesterday's dads.
- Three-fourths of dads today have as a goal "cooking often for their kids," and about half manage to do so, compared to just one-fifth of yesterday's dads.

Using cluster analysis, we were further able to classify today's dads into four different types:

- **Superdads** (22%): fatherhood is at the core of their identity as a person; highly confident in their abilities as dad
- **Juggling Dads** (20%): fatherhood also at the core of their identity; set high child-rearing goals for themselves, but are unsure how to find the time to meet those goals
- **Struggling Dads** (30%): fatherhood not as intrinsic to their identity; set high child rearing goals, but feel least equipped with knowledge on which types of father-child interaction are best for the child
- **Traditional Dads** (27%): least likely to buy into the more-involved-in-child-rearing model of fatherhood; set lower child-rearing goals, and meet them more easily; are therefore more confident in their abilities

The fathers also made it clear that there were two key things they were looking for as they charted this new (to them) course:

1. **Recognition:** Nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of today dads feel that society as a whole has yet to fully recognize the advances they have made in the nature of their interaction with their children.
2. **Guidance:** This mode of fatherhood is so new to today's dads that they feel they don't have clear role models. In fact, we discovered that they are actually more likely to use *their mothers or their wives* than their own dads as role models on *how to be a good dad* today.

From the "State of Men" study, Spike also uncovered a newly-expanded definition of who men today consider a "hero." Beyond the classic larger-than-life, superman model of a hero, today's men also frequently look to more "regular" guys who may have lifted themselves up by their own bootstraps and/or are engaged in more modestly-celebrated yet highly "substantial" endeavors, such as teaching, firefighting, or military service.

Together, these findings on the mindset of today's men were key to shaping the course of the "True Dads" campaign as described below.

CAMPAIGN DESCRIPTION

Target

As previously mentioned, there were essentially three target audiences for the "True Dads" campaign:

1. Fathers of pre-adult age children
2. Sponsors and potential sponsors
3. The national consumer and trade news media

The best-known PSA campaigns tend to be of the type that would speak well to the first audience, but are not designed to aggressively address the other two. For that we would need a different creative approach.

Creative Execution

A classic approach might be to directly implore dads to be more involved with their kids after offering key motivational statistics, like:

“Children who are close to their dads have rates of drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and dropping out of school that are 1/3 to 1/2 those of other kids. Spend time with your children. It’s the best investment you can make”

– or something along those lines.

Instead, using the research for direction, Spike chose to celebrate the progress that dads have made in being more involved in the lives of their kids. In so doing, we attempted to offer fathers the two things they were requesting: recognition, with messaging that would particularly resonate with Superdads, and guidance, with messaging geared toward Juggling and Struggling Dads.

- In one example, a father is shown engaging in a variety of activities with his children, including hosting his kids’ birthday party, changing a diaper and attending a child’s school play. The voiceover recognizes all the Superdads out there who, like this one, manage to remain heavily involved in their children’s lives.
- In a second example, a dad is shown sitting in the living room with his sons, sipping soft drinks. The voiceover suggests that, “Drinking with the boys” is what real men – or, in this case “true dads” – do often.
- Further, to reflect men’s renewed interest in “everyday” heroes, Spike expanded the initiative to include a special focus on those serving in the military. Named “True Dads in Uniform,” this phase of the initiative seeks to connect military fathers serving away from home with their families by providing American servicemen with the means to videotape themselves reading stories and to send these personal video messages on DVD to their children at home. The spots for this phase of the campaign show children at home watching a recording of their father reading a story to them while overseas in the military.

On the whole, the idea was to always maintain a positive tone, while using example, rather than exhortation, to lead dads toward engaging more thoroughly with their children.

Media Plan

Spots ran on Spike TV and spike.com from June 2007 through the end of 2008, and also at Minor League Baseball games in roughly 40 markets during the summer of 2008.

RESULTS

1. Sponsor Reaction. The creative output of the “True Dads” campaign has been so attractive to advertisers that it has to-date generated more than \$10 million in co-sponsorships, easily allowing Spike TV to cover its costs for producing and running the campaign.

Among the campaign’s cosponsors were Wendy’s – a brand new sponsor for Spike TV – and Hyundai/Kia, who had previously completed a marketing relationship with Spike, but was lured back specifically by the “True Dads” campaign. Meanwhile, several current Spike advertisers, such as Red Lobster and T-Mobile found in “True Dads” a reason to augment their sponsorship commitment with the network.

2. Viewer Reaction. We tested the finished creative executions in focus groups of both men and women, in Philadelphia and Dallas. While some of the participants had trouble reconciling such a consistently positive campaign with their impressions of Spike as a renegade brand, most of the reaction fell along the lines of the following comments:

“I like it. It says men can take responsibility.”

“I think it improves [Spike’s] image.”

“Makes [Spike] well-rounded”

“It’s the other side of the coin for Spike TV”

“Not just about sex and violence”

“It’s more family-oriented. Realistic situations. Genuine.”

“The dads still looked Spike TV-ish – rough.”

This demonstrates that the messaging of the “True Dads” campaign not only resonated with the primary target audience, but it also successfully and credibly depicted Spike as a multidimensional – and not so juvenile as previously thought – brand.

3. Industry/Media Reaction. The external impact of the “True Dads” campaign has been powerful. The campaign won the Gold Medal in the Public Service Announcement Campaign category at 2008 Promax|BDA Marketing Awards. It was just the latest in a string of accolades and points of recognition, including an earlier 1st place award for the related research at the 2008 Cable and Telecommunications Association for Marketing (CTAM) Research Conference case study competition, and media coverage ranging from national news outlets like the Fox News Channel to trade publications like Multichannel News.

An illustrative example of the value of the media impact comes from the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, a daily paper hailing from a city packed with highly-educated residents who generally consider Spike a lowbrow brand. In a column on Spike’s attention to fatherhood issues, Family Writer Paul Nyhan wrote that “whatever you think of Spike,” (before letting his readers know that he thought not too highly of us) our work in this area showed that “the times, they are-a-changing.” Though admittedly something of a backhanded compliment, it was an indication of how Spike’s “True Dads” efforts were slowly turning around previously resistant minds regarding the network’s image. It was also an example of the campaign’s ability to multiply its reach through external media coverage.

On the whole, Spike TV’s “True Dads” campaign represents the use of stereotype-shattering research to inform eye-catching creative, resulting in a campaign that not only provides a social benefit to Spike’s viewers, but also provides image-building benefits to Spike and its sponsors, not to mention a respectable financial return for Spike.