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Stanley Hurwitz - A good name is worth more than riches

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Historic tornadoes hit the South in April. The record storms took 300+ lives, caused billions of dollars in damage, and changed the landscape forever.

One hard-hit town was tiny Phil Campbell, Alabama, (named for a 19th century railroad engineer) where 26 of its 1,000 residents died and 60 were injured. People named Phil (or Phyllis) Campbell have included the town in their travels for years. Interest increased after a writer named Phil Campbell organized the first Phil Campbell Convention there in 1995.

After the tornado, the association launched an "I'm with Phil" campaign on Facebook to help the townspeople. British video producer Phil Campbell collected clips of 11 Phils from around the world declaring their support, and posted it on YouTube. The fundraising has been successful, and as I write this, a large contingent of Phil Campbells from all over plans to converge on the town, help rebuild and bring moral support.

Using a common name to build support for a cause reminds me of a stunt I once used to gain publicity and motivate volunteers for a non-profit's phone-a-thon. Bringing volunteers to evening phone banks isn't easy. My idea: special "theme" nights based on volunteers' names.

To one phoning session we invited people with "colorful" last names: Mr. Green, Mrs. White, Ms. Black. Another evening we invited people with last names of animals: Mr. Fish, Mr. and Mrs. Katz, Mrs. Wolfe, Ms. Byrd, Mr. Siegel.

Admittedly, the gimmick didn't bring a lot of additional volunteers. But we got nice pre-event publicity, and the post-event photos and captions were attention-getting and humorous. (Shown left to right are: Fred Fish, Jon Katz, Edith Wolfe, Stu Siegel, etc.)

The story also reminds me of publicity I did in connection with a five-figure donation to the same organization by Margret Rey who, with her husband H.A. Rey, created the children's book character Curious George. We took a wonderful photo of Mrs. Rey in her Cambridge apartment surrounded by a dozen smirky Curious Georges of various sizes. What a fantastic photo and great publicity- except (true story) one paper's editor had fun with the caption: "Margret Rey greets members of the fundraising committee at her home."

Speaking of names and reputations reminds me of the proverb: "A good name is to be chosen over great riches." For businesses, earning and keeping a good name often requires the services of an experienced and creative PR/marketing professional.

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