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The best laid plans...- by Stanley Hurwitz

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Everyone is familiar with the quote from 18th century writer Robert Burns' poem "To A Mouse" – "The best laid schemes of mice and men" – which you have no doubt used to describe how no matter how carefully a project is planned, something may still go wrong with it. It's true in real estate, construction, PR, manufacturing, engineering, event planning. Probably in every endeavor.

Your highly experienced, creative and trusty public relations pro suggested to his orthodontist client that, to mark National Children's Dental Health Month and to introduce the practice's first pediatric dentist, there was a fantastic opportunity to develop a cross-marketing campaign with the local YMCA whose membership includes thousands of families and kids with teeth. The doctors and Y were quickly on board.

We decided to sponsor a free program at which we would introduce the new dentist and she would do a creative PowerPoint presentation – "Tips for Tooth Care." We chose a weeknight at 6:30 as a generally convenient time for young parents to come to the Y and even bring their kids. In addition to the speaker and a Q&A session, we promised free "healthy teeth kits" (toothpaste, toothbrush, floss, fluoride rinse) and refreshments.

About three weeks before the event, we launched a multi-pronged promotional campaign based on the theme "A Lifetime of Smiles." The marketing plan included a lobby poster, flyers on display and handed out at the Y and the orthodontist's offices, news stories in local media , and calendar and social media postings.

Several days before the program, our Y liaison reported they had 700 views on the program's Facebook post. The dentist's office reported interest among patients. Although we only had one RSVP, we figured people would sign up a few days before.

Event night. 6:30. Just a mom and her daughter in the meeting room. Besides the dentist/presenter, the office sent four staff and, optimistically, enough fruit and sandwiches for 30 people. At 6:45, two of the hygienists went to the main lobby. Minutes later they returned with 12 parents, most with kids tagging along. They were recruited on their way in or out of the Y with the promise of "free supper."

Lesson learned: All of the advance promotion was an excellent exercise in brand-building, both for the Y and the dental office. But instead of focusing on “meet the new dentist,” “free dental care kit,” the Q&A about kid’s teeth, in retrospect I’m convinced advance promotion should have featured in huge letters: “Free supper Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. at the Y.”

Whatever the business, whatever your news, for successful marketing/PR, the trick is finding the right angle to spur readers to take action. The project discussed here proved to me – after 30+ years in PR – that “even the best laid plans. ..” An experienced PR/marketing pro knows how to write compelling stories, and get them into the right hands, attracting attention, (hopefully) creating buzz, and boosting your bottom line.

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