

Miami University: “This is Our Miami” – Pride of CASE V Award entry

Title of Entry: “This is Our Miami”

Category Number and Title: 9b, Best Practices in Fundraising and Development, 3,000-9,999 FTE

Institution: Miami University, Oxford, OH

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General Description of Entry:

“This is Our Miami” (www.thisisourmiami.com) was an online project created to develop a more effective year-end e-solicitation in 2008, while engaging current students. Students were encouraged to make a video with the theme “This is Our Miami,” upload it to YouTube, and enter it on our site. Thirty-one videos were submitted. We then held a ten-day voting period to determine the first-, second-, and third-place winners, during which time more than 12,000 votes were cast. Additionally, we chose a “President’s Choice Award” winner, which was used as the year-end e-solicitation to our alumni.

Goals and Objectives of the Project:

The intent of “This is Our Miami” was to elicit a video that would be of interest to our alumni and would inspire them to make an online gift to Miami. It was also designed to cost much less than having a professional video created. Additionally, it was used as an alumni relations tool, as we encouraged alumni, via email and social networks, to watch the videos and vote for their favorites.

How Project Fits into Overall University Goals:

“This is Our Miami” used new media to engage two of our target audiences – students and alumni. It was a vehicle to connect with younger alumni, and re-established a connection between them and the university. It created awareness of why it’s important to give back, and among the alumni who viewed it, it was an innovative way to show the students’ creativity and talent.

Video contests are increasing in popularity in many realms of higher education, but what makes “This is Our Miami” unique is the direct tie to alumni giving. We placed a “Give Online” button and link to the top of the website to provide visitors an easy way to give, and we sent the “President’s Choice Award” winning video as our year-end e-solicitation. In the midst of the economic downturn at the end of 2008, we had our strongest December (and complete year) ever in online gifts.

Audience:

There were several audiences for this project:

Current Miami students were the target audience in terms of participation in the contest itself. Every aspect of the contest was created to specifically address the needs of students, from the prizes we offered (a Wii for first place) to the modes of communication (primarily digital).

Alumni were our target audience in terms of actually watching the winning video and subsequently making an online gift to Miami. We wanted to send a message to them that they would want to watch and that would make them feel connected to the university, which led us to the idea of sending a student-produced video.

The widest audience, however, was those who voted on the winners. We marketed the voting to current students and alumni, but the students who submitted the entry videos engaged their friends and family by encouraging them to vote online. We saw many “Vote for my video!” or “Vote for my friend’s video!” pleas on Facebook, casting the Miami net even wider.

Total Staff:

There were two main roles: Associate Director of Annual Giving (creation and development of idea, submission of proposal, coordination of legal aspect of project, implementation of all promotion and marketing) and Web Author (creation and maintenance of website and e-solicitation). Additionally, a four-person team of students was involved in the public relations process, and assisted with promoting the contest to the student body.

Budget and Costs:

\$2065 -- \$650 for promotion (posters and table-tents around campus) and \$1415 for prizes (for video submission winners).

Results and Measurements of Effectiveness:

“This is Our Miami” was successful on many fronts:

- We received 31 video submissions, far exceeding the original goal of 10.
- We met the objective of using the contest as a cost-saving measure, spending less than half of what a professional video would have cost.
- In terms of site traffic, our website received more than 50,000 hits and more than 12,000 votes were cast to determine the contest’s winner. The contest generated buzz on social networks like Facebook, and was featured in local media outlets. As a fringe benefit, the search results for Miami on YouTube now feature our contest videos, which cast our university in a positive light.
- Most importantly, though, the e-solicitation containing the winning video produced more online gifts than any other e-solicitation we have ever sent: 199 gifts for \$72,315.