



MARKETING  
PUBLIC RELATIONS  
EVENT COORDINATION

## CASE STUDY

### **Climbmax Climbing Center**

Hot House Classic / WallCrawlers Youth Climbing Team  
Summer 2001

Climbmax Climbing Center is a rock climbing gym in Tempe. After seeing memberships and walk-in growth slow when a competitor moved within one mile of its climbing facility, Climbmax initiated a public relations campaign in Summer 2001 to regain visibility among its core membership and secure its niche as a youth-oriented, family gym. To promote these messages, Tin Can Marketing engaged in a traditional, grassroots PR campaign that focused on Climbmax' new series of bouldering competitions and the success of its youth climbing team. The results were 176 inches of print coverage, 41 minutes of television, and ongoing web listings that put Climbmax Climbing Center in the news at least once a week for a seven-week period.

#### **Research**

In January 2001, a competing rock gym moved into a new facility less than one mile from Climbmax Climbing Center. At the same time, Climbmax' growth in membership and walk-in attendance slowed. Also worrisome was a leveling off of participation in the youth climbing team. The team was at an all-time low of seven active members.

These events caused the owner to evaluate the gym's image and purpose. His main goal of opening the gym was to introduce climbing to the next generation. He wanted to solidify Climbmax' role as a family gym and increase membership on the youth climbing team. In addition, he wanted to jumpstart the slow-down in membership and walk-in attendance, hoping to return to a 30 percent attendance growth rate and boost revenues by 15 percent.

During informal polling of regular members, they indicated a curiosity factor in visiting the competing gym. Most remained loyal to Climbmax, but pointed out that the gym had gotten lax about providing new climbing routes on a frequent basis.

#### **Planning**

The owner's goals defined a broad target audience for public relations efforts that included parents, youth, regular climbers and sports enthusiasts.

After reviewing the different activities in the gym, Tin Can Marketing and Climbmax Climbing Center developed the concept for a series of bouldering competitions. It would draw regulars and new climbers into the gym, provide an outlet for climbers to keep their skills fresh during the summer, force the gym to set new routes every one to two weeks, and provide a new revenue stream.

The youth climbing team – the Wallcrawlers – had qualified its seven members for the national youth rock climbing competition and won the Southwest Regional climbing title for the second year. Tin Can Marketing assessed the success of the team as the ideal way to demonstrate to parents the benefits of climbing as a safe, fun and worthwhile sport for children.

Like any small business, Climbmax was on a limited budget. It did not have the resources for full media kits or mailings. To its benefit, Tin Can had a number of unique visual elements to work with including a portable climbing wall and team building exercises within the gym.

Tin Can Marketing decided a grassroots media relations campaign would have the best results as well as fit its client's budget. Press releases would be the initial form of communication delivered by fax and email with a personalized and targeted cover letter or message. Personal contact would further highlight the features of the climbing team and the gym.

Calendar listings about the competitions would be distributed first followed almost immediately by information about the Wallcrawlers.

### **Execution**

Tin Can Marketing issued two press releases to targeted sports and community print publications and television, and posted competition schedules on sport and community websites.

The first release distributed announced the schedule for the Hot House Classic – Climbmax' first series of bouldering competitions. This gave media a general overview of the sport of climbing. Cover letters placed the emphasis on climbing as a unique physical fitness activity, open to all ages, shapes and sizes. Follow up calls highlighted the visual elements of the competitions.

The second release focused on the seven members of the Wallcrawlers who had qualified for nationals. Recognizing the shift towards community papers that the East Valley Tribune had recently adopted, and that the Arizona Republic would soon initiate, Tin Can Marketing emphasized the local angles of the story. The press release highlighted each member's home community. Follow up calls further targeted the teens by zip code and high schools. This level of detail was a key element in securing story placement.

### **Evaluation**

The short-term results of this campaign exceeded the client's expectations. Media contacts garnered nearly one dozen print stories, four TV live remotes and numerous web listings. For a seven-week period, Climbmax was mentioned in at least one major Phoenix media outlet every week.

Membership goals were also met. The Hot House Classic was a sell out. Child interest was so strong for the competitions, Climbmax initiated an under-9 category for the final trials. Competitions now generates eight percent of Climbmax' annual revenues. Walk-in and membership sales started to grow again and resulted in a 20 percent increase for 2001. Finally, the Wallcrawlers are booming with interest. There are now 13 active members.

The long-term effects of the campaign have been just as valuable. Climbmax is now viewed as a climbing resource to Valley media. Television editors call without prompting to schedule live remotes. The gym has hosted four remotes since the campaign ended. The competitions continue to sell-out. Calendar listings are regularly picked up and often highlighted with file photography. This unsolicited media exposure means the owner can redirect marketing and advertising dollars to other areas of the facility.