

# The Exhibitor<sup>4</sup> Campaign



Palais des congrès  
de Montréal

## Campaign objectives

The Exhibitor4 campaign is a stellar example of how a targeted, multi-channel approach and original, out-of-the-box creative can come together to win over clients and achieve tangible results.

The Palais des congrès de Montréal had two objectives in deploying this campaign: build awareness among international consumer and trade show promoters about the convention centre's competitive advantages; and make up for the shortfall in bookings, which had seen a downturn following the 2008 economic crisis, with an aggressive and persuasive offer.

The campaign was a "first" on two fronts: it was the first time the Palais had specifically targeted the consumer and trade show markets with a campaign of this breadth and intricacy; and it was a first in Canada, in that it offered consumer and trade show promoters the benefits and services that are traditionally reserved for convention organizers.

## The Exhibitor4 campaign

The Exhibitor4 campaign launched on January 25, 2011, and ran for eight weeks, until March 23, 2011.

## Setting the stage

The Palais team began by doing their homework as they would for any conventional marketing campaign. They conducted exhaustive research on the international consumer and trade show markets; they defined the Palais' competitive advantage; they put together a persuasive offer; and they carefully analyzed and pre-qualified clients to establish a targeted list of promoters most likely to confirm business.

The Exhibitor4 tagline expresses the main messaging of the campaign by drawing attention to the four main competitive advantages the Palais sought to highlight, namely:

- 1) the convention centre's flexible, multi-purpose spaces;
- 2) the support of an experienced, professional team;
- 3) the accessibility of the Palais, and of the city of Montréal itself;
- 4) a special promotional offer, which was a first in Canada for this market.

The exponent ("4") in the campaign tagline referred not only to the four competitive advantages, but also to the exponential success the promoter could build in partnership with the Palais des congrès.

The special offer gave trade show promoters access to a tourist information booth, a housing management system and parking passes; consumer show promoters received on-site and media visibility to aid in the building attendance for their shows.

Once the target markets, offer and messaging were defined, there was nothing conventional about this innovative campaign.

## Rolling out the campaign

Working with their creative agency, Revolver3, the Palais des congrès carefully constructed a multi-channel, multi-platform campaign that blended savvy sales strategies with bold and original creative. The design concept applied the palette of vibrant colours from the Palais logo, recalling the iconic architecture of the convention centre's massive multi-coloured glass façade.

First, a microsite was built to reinforce the messaging, presenting the tagline, Exhibitor4, and the four key competitive advantages. There were two versions of the microsite; one for consumer and one for trade show promoters. The sites were available in English and in French. The creative showcased the bold, vibrant colours of the Palais logo in its palette.

Next, a direct mailing was sent to the promoter list. The piece was a set of colourful Lego blocks which, when assembled according to the enclosed instructions, came together to build the Palais des congrès logo. Recipients were invited to visit the campaign microsite to find out about the offer.

Analyzing the click-through data, the Palais team was able to identify which promoters had not yet visited the microsite. These promoters received a reminder e-mail, inviting them to visit the microsite.

A second mailing built on the playfulness and humour of the first, this time adding a human face to the Exhibitor4 campaign. Promoters received a Lego likeness of their sales representative, accompanied by a short comic book showing the rep and the client as Lego characters going through the process of building a successful event together. The comic book was personalized with the name of the promoter and their event.

As well, whenever the Palais staff attended industry trade shows, a postcard mailing was sent to clients on the list two to four weeks prior, inviting them to drop by the booth and receive a cool, fun gift.

Concurrently, print and web advertising in trade media and a targeted SEM campaign were added to the mix to reinforce the messaging and improve recall.

The Exhibitor4 campaign was a carefully choreographed sprint toward a specific goal. It managed to turn the challenges of limited time and limited budgets into an opportunity to speak to a new clientele and achieve sales objectives.

## **Exponential results**

The results were staggering, given the limited budgets and short duration of the campaign. In just eight weeks, the Exhibitor4 campaign generated an incredible 50% increase in confirmed bookings, with 22 exhibitions confirmed between January and the closing of the fiscal year on March 31, 2011. This was double the number of bookings over the same period the previous year. The campaign also generated great results for future years as well, with a 20% increase in the booking pace over previous years. The microsites received over 3,000 unique visitors and several clients even took the time to write to their Palais representative to compliment them on the innovative campaign.

The \$45k budget was modest for a campaign of this complexity: \$30k was invested in the concept and design of the microsite and direct mail pieces; \$10k was spent in media buys; and the remaining \$5k was used to produce and distribute the pieces.

The Exhibitor4 campaign allowed clients to discover the benefits of the Palais des congrès and to take advantage of a special offer. For the Palais, it was an opportunity to create new business opportunities and diversify its exhibition activity, with tangible benefits for the convention centre and the city.

In fact, the Exhibitor4 campaign was so successful that the Palais des congrès launched a second phase with an even more personalized approach, making the clients and their events part of the creative.