

PRWEEK

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Targeted outreach results in broader awareness for ESC

PR team: Entertainment Studios Corp. and Schwartzman & Associates (both Los Angeles)

Campaign: Takeover bid of Paxson Communications

Time frame: March 11 to April 8, 2005

Budget: About \$6,000

Entertainment Studios Corp. (ESC) produces, distributes, and sells advertising time for 15 TV programs. As such, it often competes with major media conglomerates that are also public companies.

"We're a relatively small company in a huge business with huge members," says Stu Stringfellow, president of ESC. "There are no small guys anymore."

In addition, the company had long been discussing the idea of acquiring a network. So when Paxson Communications, the owner of Pax TV, was identified as a potential target for acquisition, ESC enlisted the help of Schwartzman & Associates, which it had been working with for five years.

The goal was to help generate some discussion in the marketplace about the prospective \$2.2 billion deal, shore up possible investors, and raise the profile of the company itself, says Eric Schwartzman, managing director of the agency.

Strategy

In terms of media relations, which made up the crux of the initiative, Schwartzman says there was one primary goal in mind: obtaining coverage in

Television Week, a top trade title. "[*Television Week*] is really the widest circulated and most respected broadcast trade publication out there," he says.

The plan was to secure a story in *Television Week* and then leverage that to garner mainstream, worldwide, regional, and ethnic media coverage, he adds. "We knew that if we went to Dow Jones, Reuters, and AP without that story behind us, we would not appear as credible," he says. So getting *Television Week* the exclusive story was the campaign's initial focus.

Tactics

At the Syndicated Network Television Association show in New York in early March, Schwartzman says the company deployed a word-of-mouth campaign to spread the information about ESC's possible acquisition of Paxson Communications. When a *Television Week* reporter asked Schwartzman about the deal, the agency gave the magazine the exclusive to the story.

After publication of the feature, Schwartzman says, the firm used its contacts at Reuters to secure another story, including an interview with ESC's chairman, Byron Allen, about the impending deal. Once that story was published, it was used to secure stories at other wire-ser-

vice outlets and major newspapers.

Results

News about ESC's proposed takeover of Paxson garnered media coverage in hundreds of outlets, including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and *MSNBC.com*. *Television Week's* publisher also ran a reprint of the original article during the time of the National Association of Broadcasters convention in Las Vegas. In addition, share price for Paxson rose 130%, and trading volume more than quadrupled.

For Stringfellow, however, the most remarkable result was the increase in awareness about ESC. At every television station he visited after the campaign began, people asked him about the deal, he says.

"I have never ... seen a reaction similar to what transpired," he says. "Nothing that I've ever experienced was so successful at spring-boarding us a few notches to the big leagues." Schwartzman says the company was also able to attract potential financiers for the deal.

Future

While ESC's takeover bid of Paxson has not come to fruition yet, Schwartzman says it is still in the works.

ESC continues to work with Schwartzman & Associates on general ways to promote and raise the visibility of the company. The agency has a cyclical campaign that it runs for ESC, always concentrating on the key targets of advertisers, broadcasters, and TV viewers.

"Those are the key prime audiences that we're going after," Schwartzman says.

Erica Iacono



Stringfellow (l), Allen... president and chairman, respectively