

2006 Puget Sound PRSA Totem Awards

Entry Title: Sea-Tac Airport's Central Terminal Grand Opening

Category: Public Relations Programs: M-3: Special Events, Government

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Situation/Research

Seattle-Tacoma (Sea-Tac) International is the 16th largest US airport with nearly 30 million annual travelers. In 2001, the airport began construction on expansion of its 1949 vintage central terminal, where two restaurants, two gift shops, a coffee stand and two snack concessions were located. All of these establishments were forced to close during construction, leaving even fewer concessions. In anticipation of the new terminal, the airport ended its contract with the monopoly concessions operator and opened opportunities to new establishments. The opening of the central terminal in May/June 2005 would bring 20 new shops and restaurants with a variety of new brand names and owners. In addition, the airport instituted a new "street price" policy – operators could no longer charge higher prices at the airport.

In April 2005, we conducted a terminal intercept survey of over 500 post-security travelers. Questions established baseline opinions about airport concessions' brand names, variety, prices and customer service. In addition, we conducted a secondary analysis of the airport planning department's semi-annual intercept survey to understand established traveler behaviors for pre/post-security dwell times and visits to airport concessions. This combined research enabled us to define our largest obstacles to the success of the new central terminal: *The traveling public strongly perceived Sea-Tac Airport to be unreasonably expensive, lacking in variety, quality, known brand- names - and generally bereft of any pizzazz in its offerings.* The grand opening events needed to make headway in changing these perceptions, and start bringing travelers to the airport early to shop, dine and relax.

Planning

Goal: To change perceptions (identified by research findings) and patronage behaviors for airport concessions by gaining region-wide recognition and participation in the central terminal grand opening events, as well as effectively use the opportunity to introduce a new brand identity for all airport concessions, Pacific Marketplace.

Selected Measurable Objectives: (all are outlined in the included event plan)

- Gain support from all central terminal tenants measured by event giveaways, sampling and demonstrations.
- Gain regional media coverage for our messages in all major TV, radio and print media.
- Attract state, community and business VIPs to media event on June 3. One third of invitees should attend.
- Attract at least 5,000 visitors to the public event on Saturday, June 4. Anticipate up to 10,000 visitors.
- Event evaluations will garner at least 95% positive comments on the public event and new airport offerings.

Strategies:

- Attract a top-notch keynote speaker for the media event as a means of attracting other officials, community/business partners and full media coverage.
- Emphasize the brand name shops/restaurants and new traveler amenities for media coverage.
- Create/promote a family-oriented event to draw thousands to the new terminal on grand opening day.
- Use partnerships with the region's #1 radio station STAR 101.5 radio and ABC KOMO TV to promote events, along with targeted daily print newspapers & a 60 sec radio ad on seven stations to our target demographic.
- Partner with Alaska Airlines, Sea-Tac's largest carrier, to offer a drawing prize of a family trip for four as a draw for participation. Market the prize in all communications.

Selected Messages: (all are outlined in the included event plan)

- Grand opening for Sea-Tac Airport's new central terminal on June 3 & 4.
- Twenty new shops and restaurants, and new lower prices (all located beyond security).
- Shop, Dine and Relax at Sea-Tac. Messages highlighted specifics of each new brand name concept.
- Central terminal adds 240,000 new square feet of terminal space, public art, stunning architecture, and seating area in a sizimically-safe new expansion of the original 1940s structure.
- Travel through Sea-Tac will be easier with the vast new space, new security checkpoint and great new shopping, eating and relaxing.

Audiences:

- **Travelers** –The primary target audience is air travelers of Puget Sound: 46 percent of area residents travel between one and four times a year. Another nine percent travel more frequently (2003 survey research).
- **Airport Employees** – Sea-Tac's 22,000 employees are vital to the success of airport businesses.
- **Media** – Journalists are a key conduit to area residents with messages about their airport.
- **City, Regional and State Officials** – Their support is critical for continued development of the airport.

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Challenges: All VIP/media event participants had to clear the FBI Watch List in order to access the site, thus needed to RSVP in order to be checked on the list. However, a wireless access laptop was set up at registration to do last minute FBI checks. In addition, the media event took place in an area full of travelers during the busy summer season. The space was not large enough to hold 350 participants and travelers without congestion, so the event was split into two locations: the atrium floor, and the balcony above. Even more challenging, the public event took place in a normally post-security space. To create a non-sterile, public space, we constructed a special wall (total length 220 feet) at the north and south nodes connecting central terminal to the neighboring concourses. This prevented the mix of screened travelers with event-goers. The project lead worked to win TSA approval of the wall, which also needed to assemble /disassemble quickly to avoid a security breach. Extra TSA staff and Police were needed to monitor the wall to prevent intrusion/ breach. Other significant problems: 1) vendor access to secure areas of the facility and monitoring of scissors/knives/flammables, 2) the screening capacity crunch caused by the closure of the central checkpoint (which became the public event entrance) and 3) the lack of connectivity between the north and south parts of the airport when the central thoroughfare was cordoned off from travelers for the event. The project lead worked to gain confidence of airline, airport and TSA staff and support in mitigating these problems.

Budget: The event budget was funded by a contribution from the concessions tenants totaling \$270,000. The actual spending reached \$244,000, including terminal signage and all paid advertising, with cost savings realized by tenant/airline sponsorships. Security concerns increased equipment costs, but still other items fell below estimates.

Execution The following tactics were executed in support of the goal and objectives:

Tactics:

- Developed media plan, media kit and pitched story about the facility and opening to regional/trade media.
- Advertised public event in Sun., 5/29 Seattle Times magazine section and four local newspapers Thurs, 6/10.
- Self-produced a 60 sec radio spot to promote the public event airing for two weeks on seven local stations.
- Secured Governor Christine Gregoire as a keynote speaker for the VIP/media event.
- Secured live broadcast by ABC KOMO TV News in the central terminal the night before the public event.
- Used airport's existing KOMO TV "Sea-Tac Solutions" partnership to publicize the new facility with 30-sec spot that began airing in May 2005. Another 30 sec spot about the public event began airing 2 weeks prior.
- Partnered with STAR 101.5 radio for pre-event promotion and on-site celebrity broadcast at public event.
- Partnered with the new concessions to offer free food samples, giveaways, games, demos, etc.
- Secured donation of four round-trip tickets and hotel stay for an Alaska Airlines Vacations package (entry form doubled as an evaluation survey). Promoted on STAR and in print ads as a draw to the event.
- Created a family-friendly event program: 1940s themed musical performances from nationally acclaimed Garfield High School Jazz Band and the Savoy Swing Performance Dance Troupe, a juggling team, aviation "barnstormer" mime, clowns, aviation-themed face painting, airport Police and Fire Dept. demonstrations for kids, Museum of Flight and TSA exhibits, airport wildlife program exhibit with live falcons and more.
- Offered shopping bags, kids' stickers, commemorative post cards, and a Kids' Travel Kit.
- Produced collateral support pieces including a central terminal information brochure and map.

Evaluation & Results The following objectives were met:

Tenant Support: All 20 new tenants participated with extra staff, giveaways, games, sampling and demos. Four non-central terminal tenants also participated with giveaways for both event days.

Media coverage: All four TV news media, several radio and all regional print media carried the specific event messages extensively – with no negative coverage. Network stations carried high profile stories and remote lead-in broadcasts; and newspapers covered the events with mostly front page, above fold stories with photos.

VIP Attendance: More than 350 VIP attendees came to the VIP/media event, or slightly more than a third of the ~1000 people invited. Attendees included CEOs/COOs for each of the new tenant businesses. Washington State Governor gave a nostalgic and upbeat speech and unveiled the new dedication plaque.

Public Attendance: Validated \$2 parking tickets indicate that over 9,000 people came to the event. This does not include a share of the 40,000 boarding passengers that day who had time to visit the event. Also, more parking validations were issued than we were able to collect at the toll booths, because severe backups leaving the parking garage necessitated the opening of the gates with both travelers and event-goers able to leave free of charge.

Event Evaluation Survey: A contest entry form was filled out by 3,803 18+ adults, of which 2,551 answered the four-question survey on the back (67%). 98.9% rated the event either "Excellent," "Very Good" or "Good." The best aspects of the event were "peek at new airport" (1,453 responses) and "new shops/restaurants" (1230). Complete tabulated results of the survey are included.

Future Planned Survey: The 2005 passenger survey will be followed up in April 2006. Already, concessions revenues per passenger exceeded estimates for 2005 by over 10% or to \$7.45 per passenger.