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## Why Canada's Paint the Town Red program looks like a winner

RICK BURTON & NORM O'REILLY

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RICK  
BURTON

With the Vancouver Winter Olympic Games now less than a month away and the Canadian team poised to possibly lead the world in total medals, we thought it worthwhile to investigate the Canadian Olympic Committee's distinctive activation program, Paint the Town Red. It is a unifying marketing and operations concept that has already generated more than 32 million impressions and is actively benefiting Canadian athletes and sponsors alike.



NORM  
O'REILLY

But what, you ask, does an effective Olympic activation really involve?

### **1. There must be something of value to activate upon.**

As hinted above, Canadian winter sport athletes, thanks in part to Canada's Own the Podium performance program, are placing at or near the top in recent winter World Cups or World Championships. That's significant because Canada is the only country ever to host the Olympic Games (Montreal 1976 and Calgary 1988) and not win a gold medal.

### **2. Strong activation also calls for an integrated (i.e., multiplatform) approach.**

In the case of Paint the Town Red, this includes a national public relations campaign, newsletters (online and print), videos at professional sport venues (and all 2010 Olympic Torch Relay celebrations), co-promotions with sponsors, television advertising, out of home advertising (including 10 tractor trailers crisscrossing the country decorated in Paint the Town Red graphics), interactive activities, experiential marketing (street teams at Games time, partnering with CTV for celebrations), social media, an attractive Web site and creative signs.

### **3. Grassroots efforts are essential.**

Here, the Canadian Olympic Committee has included its Canadian Olympic School Program that will deliver a Web-based Paint the Town Red activity guide for teachers and students ([www.olympicschool.ca](http://www.olympicschool.ca)) that will enable classrooms to follow and track the success of Canada's athletes in a values-based educational format. Also, the committee has engaged its partners in targeting grassroots efforts nationwide, not just in Vancouver.

"We have communities across Canada getting their citizens involved in Paint the Town Red," said David Bedford, the Canadian Olympic Committee's executive director of marketing and communications. "For instance, the Olympic host communities of Vancouver, Whistler and Richmond all have major community

activations ongoing now, with more planned until the end of the Games. It is not just the Games cities, however, that are participating. Communities from all Canadian provinces are taking part — from big cities like Edmonton, Alberta, to smaller towns like Tweed, Ontario.”

**4. There must be infrastructure in place that allows the program to go viral.**

This means an interactive microsite, Facebook and Twitter sites, as well as content from the Canadian Olympic Committee corporate Web site. This has been exceptionally effective to date, as witnessed by the fully engaged Canadian Facebook community, which has quadrupled in size in the past month and was growing at a rate of 2.6 percent a day as of early January.



CANADIAN OLYMPIC COMMITTEE  
The Canadian Olympic Committee program has 10 tractor trailers crisscrossing the country.

**5. Getting numerous agencies involved helps maximize creativity and innovation.**

For Paint the Town, the Canadian Olympic Committee used three agencies, for PR (Hill & Knowlton), creative (Hyphen Communications) and experiential (Inventa). The creativity of these groups has been notable and an example is the Podium Pals program ([www.podiumpals.olympic.ca](http://www.podiumpals.olympic.ca)), otherwise known as *chums de podium* in French. Podium Pals is an online tool that allows you to create a caricature of yourself (using an uploaded photo or photo from Facebook) doing your favorite winter Olympic sport.

Said Olympic freestyle skier Steve Omischl, “My strength has always been on skis, but Podium Pals allows me to take my Olympic aspirations to new heights — curling. Podium Pals is another way for Canadians to Paint the Town Red and support the Canadian Olympic Team. One thing that keeps me going on the road to 2010 is the knowledge that all of Canada is right behind me.”

**6. Perhaps most important is the need for both sponsor and property to activate their relationship and use customer thematics (see table).**

As Bedford concedes, this is the first time they have launched efforts and invested in programs to build marketing equity for their sponsors (as opposed to spending money mostly on brand protection, and leaving sponsors to create their own activation platforms).

“Paint the Town Red is a great platform from which to enhance our Olympic association,” said Dave Struthers, director of promotion marketing and marketing communications at General Mills Canada. “With a giveaway like a T-shirt, Paint the Town Red provided the perfect thematic, and really cemented this program for us. Paint the Town Red took the T-shirt idea and made it real for consumers. This program was a huge success for us, from both a customer and consumer perspective.”

In summary, it looks like the Canadian Olympic Committee has a hit on its hands with Paint the Town Red. Even better, the committee will be able to measure its effectiveness through the following vehicles:

| <b>Paint the Town Red sponsor activations</b> |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Sponsor</b>                                | <b>Activation strategy</b>   |
| <b>General Electric</b>                       | Hold themed events at Robson Square skating rink, one for public prior to Games and one for family and friends during        |
| <b>McDonald's</b>                             | Outfit restaurant staff in red uniforms, working to tie program into Paint the Town Red                                      |
| <b>Air Canada</b>                             | In-flight entertainment to show Paint the Town Red video   |
| <b>Rona</b>                                   | Distributing 140,000 “Paintbook” toolkit booklets  |
| <b>Molson</b>                                 | Include Paint the Town Red logo/theme on key account programming during Games  |
| <b>General Motors</b>                         | Sending Paint the Town Red toolkits to all dealers to promote theme  |
| <b>Acklands-Grainger</b>                      | Paint the Town Red in customer catalogs  |
| <b>Workopolis</b>                             | Include Paint the Town Red ad in newsletter to database of job searchers in November and February, reaching 1 million people |
| <b>Insurance Corp. BC</b>                     | Distribution of 100,000 “Paintbook” toolkits to customers in British Columbia  |

■ Number of impressions (paid media/advertising; earned media such as print coverage, online, sponsor reach, experiential reach, school program registration, social networks, etc.)

■ Research. Quantifiable measurements that reflect appropriate or planned improvements such as awareness or commitment to action. (It's worth noting that after the first eight weeks of the campaign, and without any paid media or experiential marketing, the program had reached 12 percent national awareness.)

■ Legitimate testimonials from communities, individuals, teachers, coaches, athletic clubs, sponsors, etc.

The results to date suggest that Paint the Town (not to mention the country) Red is on the verge of becoming a nationwide social movement to inspire Canada to support its athletes as one country when it hosts the Vancouver Games in a few short weeks.

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|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>3M</b>                                 | Organized 10 tractor trailers crisscrossing Canada                 |
| <b>Purolator</b>                          | Distribution of 250,000 "Paintbook" toolkits to business customers |
| <b>Sun Microsystems</b>                   | Annual golf tournament themed as Paint the Town Red                |
| <b>VINCOR</b>                             | Include theme in creative promotions to key accounts               |
| <b>Source:</b> Canadian Olympic Committee |  |

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