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Executive Summary

The Merlin Group

More Than Just Hocus Pocus...

Every 24 minutes Habitat gives a family a key to their house.

We created a campaign that would equip our client, Central South Carolina (CSC) Habitat for Humanity, with the tools and awareness they need to promote their store and establish a source of revenue. A successful store enables Habitat to fulfill its mission to house, equip, and educate those less fortunate.

Equally, The Merlin Group and Habitat share the goal of working toward a better community.

Jean Triskett- Account Executive
Kat Salters- Media Relations
Alisha Cooper- Logistical Operations
Jen Davidson- Creative Technician
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Columbia’s local Habitat for Humanity Store needed a makeover. The Merlin Group used strategic objectives and tactics to increase awareness and sales for the Habitat Store, thus ensuring its future as a key source of funding for the mission.

CSC Habitat has potential to increase sales by incorporating a new target market: college students.

Research and events show the success of our campaign. Growth in sales, volunteerism, and awareness of CSC Habitat Store were all accomplished.

Publicity generated by our campaign was the major factor in increasing their sales nearly 100% during the campaign. We exceeded their minimum monthly goal by approximately $17,000. (See Appendix 7)

It’s not hocus pocus. Our campaign is based on research, sound objectives and tactics, solid implementation, and measureable results.

Read ahead to discover the magic of our campaign.
Target Audiences and *Key Messages:

Primary Audience: USC College students ages 18-25 who live on and off campus.
*Information about the Habitat Store and its location
*Information on items available at the Habitat Store
*Ways students can volunteer with Habitat for Humanity
*Make second-hand items acceptable

Secondary Audience: USC College students' parents and local community members.

*Affordable ways to supply students with items for college
*Ways to give back to the community through Habitat for Humanity
*Information on what the Habitat Store offers.

Overview:

Habitat for Humanity International is a non-profit organization striving to end homelessness around the world.

Established in 1985, the CSC Habitat affiliate is responsible for Richland and Lexington counties. In this area, it is estimated that one of every four families lives in poverty. (See Appendix 1a)

To help the community, CSC Habitat provides homes for deserving residents. Although originally located in Five Points, a main area of downtown Columbia, the store still lacked visibility and familiarity, particularly among our target audience, college students.

Our goal was to raise awareness about the CSC Habitat Store among 18-25 year old college students and increase both volunteerism and store revenue.

Our Cinderella-like makeover was accomplished using the following ingredients:

1. A pinch of publicity
2. A touch of determination
3. College students added for flavor

The Merlin Group's perfect potion transformed CSC Habitat's future.

The Problem:
*The CSC Habitat Store's item turnaround was slower than other affiliates.
*Despite a relocation, Habitat store traffic was still below expectations.
*Staffing was a critical issue.

The Solution:
*USC COLLEGE STUDENTS
Researching Habitat for Humanity as a whole was the groundwork to building a successful campaign. Conducting secondary research provided insight for a starting point. Primary research conducted on a local level uncovered several issues:

1. There is a continuous struggle for awareness of the Habitat Store among USC college students ages 18-25.

   *Awareness is the primary issue in marketing a store. If CSC Habitat lacks this awareness it will have weak activity.
   *The new store location lacks visibility.
   *A negative perception of second-hand items prevents students from shopping at the store.

2. The Habitat Store faces the challenge of a volunteer shortage.

   *Students expect something in return when volunteering. “Volunteering has lost its venerable aspect, because now everyone forces you to do it,” says John, a member of a focus group conducted by The Merlin Group on USC’s campus.

3. Lack of steady revenue affects the number of houses CSC Habitat builds.

   *Students are unaware of abundant volunteer opportunities associated with Habitat for Humanity.

   *Annually, Charlotte, N.C. builds approximately 50 houses; Columbia builds 10-12 houses

   *CSC Habitat has a staffing deficit. This presents a predicament with turnaround, delivery and pickup, fundraising, building houses, and sales in the store. (See Appendix 1a &b)
Overview

The Merlin Group created reachable objectives that would help CSC Habitat for Humanity’s current situation and provide objectives they can implement in the future.

Objective 1: Incorporate college students as an important target market for the CSC Habitat for Humanity Store.

Strategy 1: Strengthen the relationship with the University of South Carolina (USC) and Habitat

Tactic 1: Establish relations with USC student media to advertise the Habitat Store.

Tactic 2: Incorporate the Habitat Store on campus by sponsorship of events.

Objective 2: Market CSC Habitat Store to achieve 75% student awareness.

Strategy 1: Conduct events that promote and publicize the Habitat Store.

Tactic 1: Conduct a “mock yard sale” in front of the USC Student Union using items from the Habitat Store. A hands on display of goods available at the store may stimulate traffic and convince students to shop at the CSC Store. Literature about Habitat and the Store was handed out during the sale. (See Appendix 4)

Tactic 2: Alter a negative stereotype attached to second-hand items by conducting a dorm room makeover on the USC campus. By exclusively using items from the Habitat Store, a miraculous room transformation fostered positive publicity for the CSC affiliate. (See Appendix 4)
Strategy 2: Embrace the use of cutting edge, student-friendly technology to promote the contest opportunity.

**Tactic 1:** Using www.Facebook.com, a social networking website, we created an interest group that provided updated information on the contest, the store, and our campaign. (See Appendix 2B)

**Tactic 2:** Enhance the dorm room makeover event by developing a website for the application process. The website www.jour.sc.edu/pages/bateman2006, served as the hub where students viewed all information regarding the event. This website ensured complete knowledge of the requirements and rules. (See Appendix 4)

**Tactic 3:** Promote the online application through a student listserv. The listserv is an electronic announcement students receive in their emails. The Merlin Group’s announce- ment gave information about the contest and the link to the application site. (See Appendix 2I)

Strategy 3: Utilize media to gain positive publicity for our events.

**Tactic 1:** Generate a press release to send to The State newspaper and The Gamecock. (See Appendix 2G)

**Tactic 2:** Gain publicity by using a variety of advanced multimedia outlets. These outlets include a local television station, print media, and websites containing online news. (See Appendix 2C-2H)

**Objective 3:** Increase volunteerism for the CSC Habitat for Humanity Store.

Strategy 1: Face-to-face recruitment for CSC volunteers.

*In-store help
*Builders
*Fundraisers

**Tactic 1:** Students can sign-up at focus groups and/or “mock yard sale.” Our goal is to obtain 25-30 volunteers.

Tactic 2: Collaborate with at least two student organizations.

Tactic 3: Partner with University 10 to generate volunteers. University 101 is an introductory orientation course for freshman with mandatory service results.
“Mock Yard Sale”  
Greene Street, in front of Russell House Student Union  
10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Feb. 7

Considering the abundance of items available at the Habitat Store, conducting a “mock yard sale” visually attracts students while demonstrating the benefits of purchasing second-hand items.

Although no items could be sold at our event due to University regulation, the intriguing scene guarantees opportunities for interaction. Using CSC Habitat’s truck as a backdrop, there was no mistake that items from the “mock yard sale” came from the Habitat Store.  
(See Appendix 4)

Event Promotion:

150 multicolor fliers posted in residence halls, academic buildings, and the student union (See Appendix 2A)  
*Facebook announcement sent to USC students (See Appendix 2B)

Dorm Room Makeover  
Douglas Residence Hall  
8 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.  
Feb. 22

The popularity of reality television among college students continues to rise with programs such as TLC’s Trading Spaces and While You Were Out. The magic of new décor in a dull room changes appearances and attitudes. Through The Merlin Group’s Dorm Room Makeover, on campus students had the opportunity to change their room’s appearance by applying online. Although only one received the makeover, the campus wide opinion of second-hand items can potentially change. (See Appendix 4)
Event Implementation

Event Promotion:

*500 multicolor fliers posted in residence halls, academic buildings, cars in USC parking garages, and the student union. (See Appendix 2A)

Facebook announcement sent to USC students. (See Appendix 2B)

Facebook, a popular social networking website, is key in college student communication today. Technology advances daily and the target audience uses it relentlessly. To appeal to college students, technology is vital. The Facebook announcement covers the event providing specifics similar to the flyer.

Facebook group: “Make Over My Dorm Room.”

Students were invited to join the online group where the main page contained all information about the makeover. Word-of-mouth increased the membership and awareness of the event. The group provided access to the Habitat Store website and the contest application. Frequent announcements gave latest updates about the event to enable university wide awareness. (See Appendix 2B)

Web based contest application

The application obtained student demographic, encouraged creativity through a 100 word essay and provided humorous content for others to read. Executing the contest through a website proves the frequency in which college students utilize the Internet daily. (See Appendix 4)

Event Publicity

The following websites featured an announcement about the makeover:

*The CSC Habitat for Humanity website
*The Carolina Reporter
*Carolina Today
*Carolina Productions
*The Main USC homepage
*The USC Housing website
*School of Journalism and Mass Communications home page, which receives 107,581 hits per month. Each of these websites provides a link to the application website. (See Appendix 2H)

Mike Miller’s new loft bed constructed with Habitat wood and paint.
Media Implementation

WLTX News 19

Media attention is key in earning publicity for an event. WLTX News 19, a local CBS news station, covered the makeover story and aired it on the 6, 7 and 11 p.m. news, and on their website.

Reporter Addie Bradshaw of WLTX arrived at Douglas Residence Hall at 8:30 a.m., capturing initial pictures and video of the dorm room before the transformation. Bradshaw interviewed The Merlin Group inquiring about the decorating plans, the Habitat Store, the campaign, and also the Bateman Competition.

WLTX proceeded to take video of the makeover until 9:30 a.m. Bradshaw then accompanied two members of The Merlin Group to the Habitat Store where Roy Kramer, CSC Executive Director was interviewed.

At 5:30 p.m. WLTX returned and interviewed the winner of the Dorm Room Makeover, Mike Miller prior to the revealing. They caught Miller's reaction and filmed the completed project. Bradshaw's message about the Habitat Store helped the campaign and verbalized all the great items Habitat offers.

Student Newspaper

The Gamecock is USC's student newspaper. The paper version is published three times a week. The Gamecock online is updated daily. An article about The Merlin Group's Habitat "mock yard sale" was published online at www.TheDailyGamecock.com, which receives approximately 9,000 hits a day.

USC faculty, staff, and students read The Gamecock and its online publication. The paper version of The Gamecock covered the dorm room makeover story. Information was given about Habitat's sponsorship in the contest and how students can decorate their own rooms with Habitat items.

(See Appendix 2C)
**Carolina Reporter**

*The Carolina Reporter* is a pre-professional student-run newspaper that prints both paper and online versions. The paper version runs twice a month. *The Carolina Reporter* is updated daily. An article about Bateman and each USC team, including The Merlin Group was published on the week of March 2, 2006. The featured topics included transforming the public image of the CSC Habitat Store, background of Habitat, increasing awareness, increasing knowledge of the variety of different ways to volunteer, and targeting college students. These topics gave the readers an idea of the goals of The Bateman Team Case Study Competition, awareness of Habitat for Humanity, and more information on the mission of The Merlin Group's campaign. (See Appendix 2E)

**Carolina Today**

The University’s main website covered the makeover and provided excellent press for Habitat for Humanity. The story was posted online for two-and-a-half weeks. (See Appendix 2H)

*Messages were also sent through Facebook and reached over 1000 USC Students.* (See Appendix 2B)

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**Budget:**

- Our budget was modeled after a Habitat budget: Doing amazing things with little funds.
- Our total campaign cost $364.00. (See Appendix 5)

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**Timeline Summary:**

- **Our timeline stretched from November 29, 2005 to March 21, 2006.**
- All our events were completed by February 28, 2006, in compliance with PRSSA regulations. (See Appendix 6)

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**ROI Summary**

- **Our ROI exceeded $15.00 for every dollar spent.** It included broadcast and print media. Our campaign also included a substantial amount of unpaid media, while did not contribute directly to the ROI figures, served to dramatically raise awareness and contribute to the overall success of our campaign. (See Appendix 5)
Objective 1: Incorporate college students as an important target market for the CSC Habitat for Humanity Store.

Achieved

During meetings with Habitat, recommendations were made to advertise and publicize the Habitat for Humanity store in USC publications, including The Gamecock, Garnet & Black, and Russell House Student Union advertising. Recommendations were also made to sponsor ongoing events taking place on USC’s campus.

Objective 2: Market CSC Habitat Store ensuring 75% of local student awareness.

Exceeded

Of the 260 surveyed USC students, 96 were knowledgeable about the CSC Habitat store and its location. The original goal was to increase this number by 75%. After saturating the campus with fliers and information with key messages, gaining media coverage, hosting events, and gaining partnerships, The Merlin Group was successful at increasing that number by 83%. Overall 216 students surveyed were knowledgeable about the CSC Habitat store and its location. (See Appendix 1B)

Objective 3: Increase volunteerism for the CSC Habitat Store.

Exceeded

The original goal for this objective was to gain 25-30 volunteers and at least two student organizations to partner with CSC Habitat during our campaign. After successful events and promotions, The Merlin Group was able to recruit 53 volunteers and four different student organizations agreed to partner with CSC Habitat for Humanity. These organizations include:

* Reformed University Fellowship
* Campus Crusade for Christ
* Baptist Collegiate Ministry
* Maxcy College

(See Appendix 4)

Overall Campaign: Far Exceeded

"On average, our sales have increased from about $450 per day to $900 per day. We believe the publicity generated by your project was a major factor in this."

-Larry Forsyth, Development Director of CSC Habitat