

COLE HAAN

Background and Challenge

Cole Haan is a brand widely known for making comfortable, conventional brown shoes. Or, in layman's terms, it's everyone's mom's favorite brand. Your dad probably has a dozen pairs in his closet. So when Cole Haan began manufacturing products for a younger consumer, it faced a bit of a crisis; it had aged along with its core consumer and had a serious image problem.

Cole Haan needed to radically regain credibility with a younger target, and recruit a new generation - on a small budget. It was all about going for the bulls-eye of influencers: trend-setting, fashion-forward 25-34 year-olds living in New York City. In other words, the last people willing to give Cole Haan the time of day.

In the fall of 2011, the stylish new Chelsea Pump was to launch. Even though this was a low budget tactic, it presented a genuine opportunity to drive reappraisal with the new target.

This is the story of how we used what might have been just another fashion-week stunt to help Cole Haan drive radical reappraisal of a once dowdy brand and created 'social' media reaching 44m impressions by getting intimate with the consumer journey and radically realistic about the brand.

Understanding the Target

Given the scant media money, we were going to have to do some surgical insight gathering to really understand how to engage the target. We pulled favors from friends of friends to get some face time with what we dubbed the 'New Sartorialist' - the stylish tribe confidently appropriating traditional brands in their own way. We spoke to 10 of them in real depth to work out how we were going to break through and put the brand into growth.

The Insight

The core insight came when a young creative professional described New York style as "day to night to the next morning, for a 20-hour day." In the suburbs we might drive home, go to the gym and get changed. *Her* style needed to get her from the work-place, through the city's cobble stones, curbs and subways, across many blocks and finally out into a fiercely stylish New York night.

Product Truth

Cole Haan was well-equipped to use this insight to its advantage. Nike had owned them since 1988 and had incorporated its Nike Air technology into the soles of the shoes. The high-heeled Chelsea Pump was no different. Comfortable and stylish with a bit of an edge, these pumps were made for the 20-hour day.

In a city where shoes can be a deal breaker that puts a stop to your night out, we had discovered how this brand could connect with young New Yorkers. The Chelsea Pump was the answer to the 20-hr day - we'd found our reappraisal idea.

All we needed now was to bring to life the ultimate torture-test for a 20-hr high-heeled shoe: the New York drag queen.

The Campaign

Our "Don't Go Home" campaign helped young New Yorkers make the choice to stay out and experience more all through the night. The campaign had three elements:

- Out-of-home placements featuring slogans encouraging people to stay out.
- Street dance performances by some of New York most iconic performers.
- Food trucks to help night owls get a burst of energy.

On first view - just some small, modest tactics on the streets of New York.

But some key elements ensured it worked much harder to do a huge brand reappraisal job.

The Driving Principles Behind the Creative

1. Media becomes 'social' when it is woven unexpectedly into the fabric of life

Our budget meant the media choice could not be about reach, but about generating buzz. Our target definitely doesn't want to photograph ads, but they will always instagram cool things they happen across.

We turned to an unconventional medium that had never been used before at scale: after-hours storefront rolling gates. This required us to negotiate permission door-to-door from small business owners to paint 25 gates around the city. We hand-picked locations near bars, restaurants and subways lines our target was likely to take when considering an early night.

When the stores closed, the gates came down just as the old audience was heading home and the New Sartorialist was heading out for the night; we used glow-in-the-dark ink and installed black lights over each location so the lines would pop.

Street level media makes photographing easy - this caused the campaign to spread throughout social channels in a way that a bill-board would never have done. The gates were fresh, unique, and endemic to New York City, lending a sense of authenticity that was critical in earning the trust and respect of the New Sartorialist.

2. To engage an audience who is switched off to your brand, let them speak first.

When people aren't waiting for a message from you we found the thing to do is *get them talking about themselves*, with the brand clearly supporting them along the way. We gave them relevant and meaningful experiences that they would then want to talk about.

When they did tweet us and shared out content against the #dontgohome hash-tag, the brand *then* responded through Cole Haan's social channels.

This stylish target is typically averse to advertising and turned off by overt branding. Branding around the executions was kept to a bare minimum - just the logo not the full name.

3. Say something better than they could say it themselves and they'll share it.

We understood that people share something when it articulates how they feel in more eloquent way than they could ever say it themselves. The lines were quick and witty, and very adoptable. They practically begged to be shared.

4. Be brutally realistic about what people will actually share

New York drag queens, chosen as the ultimate ambassadors of a high-heeled pump with a sole that lets you stay out all night, were a strategic no-brainer. But as a choice for the business, they were a little more controversial. However, we had to be brutally realistic about what people would and would not share; some models parading in shoes would not have got instagrammed. But drag queens putting on a show in Cole Haans on a balmy summer night - much more shareable.

We carefully cast our drag queens to be engaging enthusiasts for the shoes, and chose a handful of strategically picked locations around New York City, to perform impromptu street dance shows wearing the Chelsea Pump. Brand ambassadors helped crowds connect the product with the performers and reinforce the Chelsea Pump as the shoe that helps New Yorkers stay out all night.

Performances were held beneath mobile projections displaying subtle Cole Haan branding and the #dontgohome hashtag. The projections also featured a dynamic feed of content being generated against the hashtag in real time, further drawing passer-bys into the experience.

5. Solve the target's real needs

We outfitted a food truck with neon paint and our campaign messaging - along with a display of the product. The food truck drove around the city late at night and parked in strategic locations near where the New Sartorialist likes to hang out. As citygoers left their bars and restaurants and thought about heading home, our truck was there to give them the necessary fuel they

needed to keep their night going and stay out. Our same drag queen ambassadors manned the trucks, drawing people in and offering them grilled cheese sandwiches.

6. Let people discover for themselves

No one wants to participate in a branded experience while out late at night - but everyone wants a sustaining grilled cheese sandwich. We crafted the food truck experience so that the brand would not be explicitly mentioned until the consumer was interacting with it, which made the whole thing more authentic - overt branding was kept to a minimum. But once they had their treat, the queens engaged people about the Chelsea Pump and explained how it helps them stay on their feet all night long.

7. Reward participation

At the food trucks an extra treat was on offer – bacon on your grilled cheese - for those who tweeted a reason to stay out against our campaign hashtag #dontgohome. This was quite a hit...

Results

Lots of very analogue media combined in a clever way to create an extremely social campaign - nearly 44m social reach impressions in all.

- The accessibility of the street-level nighttime out-of-home mixed with the contextually relevant messaging cut drove conversation and made our installations easily photographable and shareable on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.
- We attracted a new influential audience typically adverse to social interaction with brands and brand followership* increased 8.5%.
- We achieved goals of increased engagement and followership among a very specific target as content engagement rate** increased 105%.
- Social mechanics enabled the campaign to scale way beyond the impressions earned by the hyper-local OOH alone as the campaign yielded 43,766,790 social reach impressions.
- The hyper-local campaign worked to increase awareness of Cole Haan and the Chelsea Pump in New York City. We increased traffic to NYC stores during campaign (+30% month one) (+14% month two).

But perhaps most importantly, the brand was being talked about in a new light. Whereas it rarely enjoyed press before, people in fashion and media were referencing and praising the campaign.

It is still only the beginning, but Cole Haan's journey to force reappraisal among the New Sartorialist couldn't be off to a better start.