

David Bowie

**Case Study:
Spotify and the MTA
Promote "David Bowie
Is" Exhibition at the
Brooklyn Museum**

**SPOTIFY'S
'DAVID BOWIE
IS HERE'
SUBWAY
TAKEOVER**

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SPOTIFY'S 'DAVID BOWIE IS HERE' SUBWAY TAKEOVER

The music service's OOH campaign to promote the exhibit was a home run. All they had to do was persuade the Brooklyn Museum and the MTA to play ball

Category:

Out-of-home, digital audio

Vertical market:

Museums

Agency:

Spotify In-House

Initiative:

"David Bowie Is Here"

Timing:

April 17-May 13, 2018

The marketing challenge

When the Brooklyn Museum first approached Spotify to sponsor its "David Bowie Is" exhibition back in 2017, the digital audio service was, not surprisingly, thrilled. The late musician is one of the most universally beloved artists of all time, and the chance to work on a project about him in any capacity was a win for Spotify. Plus, the show, which first opened at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London back in 2013 before making its way around the world—was already a big hit. The Brooklyn Museum would be its last stop, making the sponsorship even more significant.

But Spotify wanted more.

Jade Bird performs at the Brooklyn Museum's "Night of 1,000 Bowies."



All images courtesy Spotify

“Sponsoring the Bowie exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum was easy to say yes to, but we put pressure on ourselves to make it an even bigger marketing opportunity for Spotify,” says Alexandra Tanguay, VP of Global Brand at Spotify. “It’s not often that you have the chance to pay authentic homage to an incredible artist like Bowie.” The creative team also believed it was advantageous that the opportunity to honor Bowie came a couple of years after his death. “So often when we lose these iconic artists, it’s difficult to pay respects in the moment—and sometimes it’s maybe not even appropriate,” says Alex Bodman, Spotify’s global executive creative director. “But doing so after the fact is quite often a lot more memorable.”

The question was: How could Spotify take what was originally a sponsorship deal and turn it into something much more ambitious? The first step, of course, was asking the Brooklyn Museum to rethink the marketing plan. Fortunately, the museum was all for it, so Spotify started brainstorming ideas for how they could have more impact. “What we kept coming back to is that we wanted to create an entire cultural moment, an extension of the exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum, rather than just slapping our logo on something,” says Tanguay.

Eventually, after many brainstorming sessions, the team agreed that they’d create this cultural moment in a New York subway station—specifically, the Broadway-Lafayette Street stop, in the SoHo neighborhood Bowie called home for the last two decades of his life. Spotify had learned from its annual “Wrapped” campaign that being hyper-local was an effective way to capture attention and generate conversation. It would be a full-on experiential immersion, one in which they’d create an underground labyrinth that would celebrate the musician, his influence on culture, and his loving relationship with his adopted city.

Were there any issues about promoting an exhibit at a Brooklyn institution with an activation in Manhattan? “Our media buys are usually in the metro area, so we’re used to advertising in Manhattan,” says Michael Tonge, the Brooklyn Museum’s senior marketing manager, “though we’d never done anything as high-impact as this. We also didn’t think it was weird to

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Alexandra Tanguay, VP of Global Brand, Spotify

have the activation in the city, because Brooklyn is so hot now. It’s been cool for a while, and has that international allure.”

The biggest problem was, how would Spotify fit into the mix? “As a brand, it’s really tempting to talk about yourself. But we’re home to the world’s most creative people, so we believe it’s important to let them do the talking,” explains Tanguay. “The challenge quickly became, how to honor such an iconic artist in an authentic and genuine way—while making sure that the campaign benefited Spotify, as well.”

The campaign

In a clever play on the museum’s “David Bowie Is” exhibition title, Spotify called the subway station takeover “David Bowie Is Here.” Running from April 17 to May 13, 2018, the experiential campaign was the perfect mix of artist, Spotify, the Brooklyn Museum and its gritty commuter hub.

For starters, the station was filled with huge wall-size Bowie-inspired artwork, including replicas of pieces that were actually on display at the museum, as well as fan art. Each piece was paired with a quote from Bowie about his love affair with the city. For example, “I have a great time here: We can go where we want, eat where we want, walk out with our child, go to the park, ride the subway, do the things that any family does.” And, in a creative use of on-brand technology, each piece was also paired with a code that people could scan to access Spotify’s multimedia format, Spotlight. Viewers could then listen to Bowie’s music, watch his videos and access other audio,

including anecdotes about his life and mini essays—mimicking the experience of museum-goers who visited the exhibit.

There were other displays scattered throughout the station, too, including a “David Bowery” sign, an installation mural of Bowie’s face visible only to commuters walking down the staircase from the upper to the lower level, and a poster next to the subway’s information kiosk labeled “Bowie’s Neighborhood Map,” marking the artist’s favorite neighborhood spots, like Washington Square Park (where he liked to take walks) and the Magic Shop—the studio where he secretly recorded his last two albums, “Blackstar” and “The Next Day,” and which, sadly, closed in 2016.

In perhaps the most memorable part of the entire experience, subway riders could purchase five different keepsake “Ticket to Mars” MetroCards, each featuring a different Bowie persona, including Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane and the Thin White Duke. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) printed 250,000 cards total. Nearly a year later, these cards—which were sold at the station’s booths and distributed at random—are still coveted memorabilia. “On the day the exhibit opened, there was a line out the door and down the street, because people wanted those cards,” says Tanguay. “It was an incredible thing to observe, and now people are trading them like trading cards on eBay.” Throughout the course of the exhibit, lines continued to be long, with some even reaching a wait of up to two and a half hours. A quick eBay search during our interview revealed that there were even sets available for more than \$200 on the trading site. “Because they were only issued in limited quantity, they’ve become collector’s items,” Tanguay adds.

The results

“David Bowie Is Here” was immediately popular, with broadcast, print and online press coverage resulting in more than \$31 million in earned-media impressions. During the opening week, streams of Bowie’s catalog increased 28 percent in New York and nearly 20 percent globally. Images of the takeover spread across Instagram and Twitter, and 57 million consumers were reached by social sharing in the



From top: Ziggy Stardust MetroCard, wall-size art, Bowie's Neighborhood Map

first week alone—with no paid amplification. “There is an enormous amount of love and respect for his work all around the world,” says Bodman. “And that’s why, in addition to the boldness of the execution, such a hyper-local installation was able to go global.”

The insight

How did Spotify manage to pull off such a bold execution? The answer is that they took big risks—but they didn’t do it alone. They give a lot of credit to their partners—the Brooklyn Museum, Bowie’s estate and archives, and the MTA. “Because the Brooklyn Museum connected us to Bowie’s estate and his archives, we got this incredible access to his life, including



This mural was visible only to commuters descending the subway station stairs.

one of Bowie's lifelong high school friends who became one of his most prolific [collaborators]," says Bodman.

"One of the biggest insights that we took out of all of this was the power of well-intended partnerships," Tanguay explains. "That spirit is what allows a brand like Spotify to amplify the artists and their creativity without talking about ourselves."

The appreciation was mutual. "Working with Spotify was the kind of brand awareness that cultural institutions like us look for," says Tonge. "It's rare that we have the opportunity to talk about our museum in such a large way, and we're grateful for that." The Brooklyn Museum felt fully supported by Spotify's vision, dedication and resources, Tonge says. "Spotify filled in a gap for us. We didn't have the budget to buy any more out-of-home advertising for April, especially not an entire subway station takeover, so it was perfect. Spotify provided muscle and innovation. It was nice to be part of something larger than a media buy—it was a true partnership, a dream partnership. The Spotify team was super-creative and collaborative from the start."

The MTA partnership was just as vital. "They really wanted to do it, which is more a testament to Bowie than anything else—he's

just so loved by so many people," says Bodman. Of course, the MTA didn't grant permission to do just anything. "We had to demonstrate what our intent was, that it would feel more like an exhibition and a public moment than a branded marketing campaign. Their permission ultimately came with the understanding that we were doing this more as a public service to Bowie than a marketing stunt."

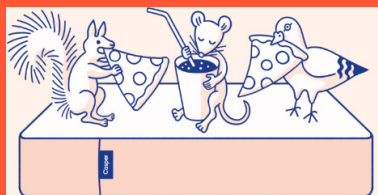
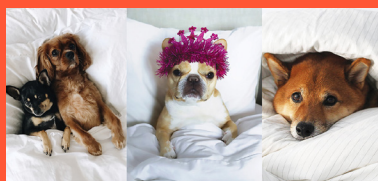
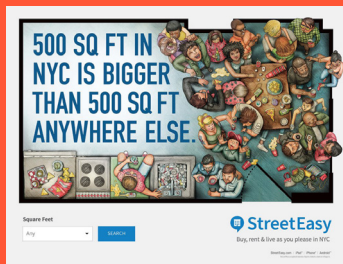
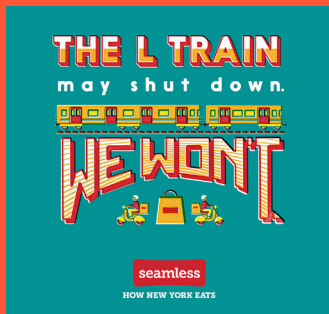
Another lesson: "We do a lot of work as marketers where we focus on the brand, but we learned that, whenever possible, it's best to try to think in moments," concludes Bodman. "And ultimately, you create a moment not by talking about yourself, but by talking about others."

Spotify's final marketing lesson: Never be afraid to ask for more out of an opportunity in the first place. You can talk about others all you want, Tanguay points out, but without the right platform, you're out of luck. "From asking the Brooklyn Museum to rethink the partnership to asking them to connect us with the Bowie estate and the archives to [approaching] the MTA to do something they'd never done before, we just kept pushing and pushing and pushing," recalls Tanguay. "It wasn't easy, and we were met with a little resistance, but in the end we were able to pull off something that was really quite incredible." **AA**

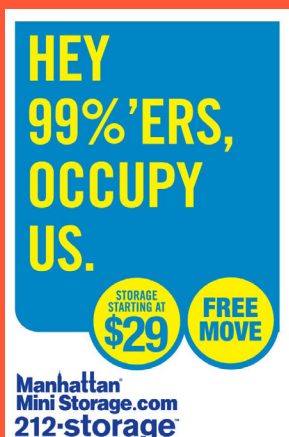
THE EVOLUTION OF THE NYC SUBWAY AD

If you're an old-school New Yorker, you know that subway ads used to be—how shall we put this—less than stellar. Back then, one train ride could introduce you to all sorts of shady characters, from a sketchy plastic surgeon to a cheesy personal insurance lawyer (so many personal insurance lawyers—the city was an extremely hazardous place to live and work, apparently). Perhaps the greatest example of bottom-of-the-barrel subway marketing was the infamous “M.D. TUSCH” in the '90s. In these ads a proctologist named Jeffrey LaVigne claimed that his services offered “no pain” and “no bleeding,” only for him to be sued for malpractice later on. Turns out, “Dr. Tusch” was also performing his procedures with “no anesthetic.”

But these days, we are in a decidedly new era of subway advertising, one with less cheese and sleaze and more well-designed but still cheeky city humor. Rather than slinging questionable services, many of them now target the commuters' common experience of being New Yorkers—with a wiseass New York edge. Why the switch? You can thank both the city's growing startup scene and its failing subway system. Well-funded direct-to-consumer businesses like Brooklinen and Seamless have realized that increased transit delays mean that people are spending more time on the subway than ever before—and they're hungry for relatable content to help pass the time. And when you're stuck on the train—again—due to “police action” at the next station, a funny subway ad may be the difference between a bemused chuckle and a public meltdown. **AA**



THE PERFECT MATTRESS FOR LOCALS



Clockwise from top left: Seamless, StreetEasy, Manhattan Mini Storage, Casper and Brooklinen

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