

TC10 20/02

The Forum's Got Talent

Aim

To launch a new £38 million students' union building **the Forum** to non-student stakeholders and to build on the University's objective to fully engage with its local and regional community.

Background

In September 2009 building was completed on the University of Hertfordshire's newest venue, **the Forum**. With students returning to the University later that month the building needed to be appropriately tested and launched to the local community ahead of the start of the academic term.

The Forum is a purpose built, state-of-the-art entertainment space with a live music venue that can accommodate 2000 people. It also houses bars and restaurants and informal learning spaces. The venue has facilities which are on a par with those provided by commercial operators with the latest equipment.

Although primarily built to enhance the student experience, **the Forum's** facilities are also available for use by the entire community. So the Forum is intended to be a focal point for the University of Hertfordshire community in its broadest sense and bring real benefits to the local community and local business.

Objectives

- 1 Introduce the people of Hatfield and Hertfordshire to new venue.
- 2 Test venue ahead of academic term.
- 3 Introduce local media to venue and lay foundation for good future relationships.
- 4 Make it fun and memorable.
- 5 Develop key messages to use for future positioning and communications relating to the Forum.

What we did

- Ran **free** family fun day linked to a talent competition - The Forum's Got Talent
- Talent competition prize fund = £1000 - open to 8+.
- Event micro-site built for promotion and registration.
- Advertising undertaken through local schools, libraries, dance and music groups, local media and Facebook.
- Auditions held on the Saturday and Grand Final was held on the Sunday.
- Diversity (as winners of a talent competition) booked to perform a guest spot at Final and 'meet and greet' at the Fun Day.

- Fun Day comprised fairground stalls, circus acts, bouncy castles, games, dance classes, massages and food.
- Developed a partnership with the Welwyn Hatfield Times - one of their reporters acted as a judge.
- Ran competitions in Welwyn Hatfield Times for tickets to the event.
- Developed a partnership with local radio station Hearts FM with one of their reporters acting as compere for the event.
- Developed a brand to be used on all collateral
- Printed special t-shirts for staff to wear to identify them and programmes with quizzes to ensure visitors got to see whole building.
- Media trained eight members of staff to act as spokespeople for the venue, going forward, as well as for the event
- Produced press packs for the venue.

Target Audiences

University Staff
Local community
Local media.

Timings

- Event held over a full weekend in September.
- Auditions for the talent competition took place all day on Saturday.
- Finalists were notified Saturday evening by telephone and listing on website.
- Dress rehearsals for final at 10am, Sunday.
- Doors opened for Fun Day 11am, Sunday
- Diversity guest appearance and signings from 2pm to 2:30pm
- Diversity dance 3pm as opening act for talent show
- Final begins at 3pm, Sunday.
- VIP brunch and tour of Forum held at 10am Sunday, for local councillors, University Governors, people associated with the building of the venue and local resident's groups members, prior to Fun Day opening
- Promotion to groups, schools six weeks before event.
- Web site launched 4 weeks before event.
- Media promotion 4 weeks before event.
- Event Sponsorship sought from University contractors.

What made the event stand out

The outstanding characteristic of this event was FUN! There was a party atmosphere but simultaneously it showcased an iconic building, gave people the opportunity to meet and watch an iconic group and nurtured local talent.

Evaluation and measurement

- 1,500 people attended the Family Fun Day (limit applied by Fire Officers).
- 700 people attended the Grand Final of the Forum's Got Talent (500 seated 200 standing)
- Both events were at capacity.
- 50 'VIPs' attended brunch and tour
- 44 acts auditioned
- Weekly adverts in the Welwyn and Hatfield Times throughout August.
- Front page banners and a four page spread following the event in the Welwyn Hatfield Times.
- Welwyn and Hatfield Times AVE = approximately £10,000 Audience = 65,000
- Radio interview with Diversity on Hearts FM – listening figures over 100,000
- Event adopted by local councils and UHSU, re-badged as ' Hertfordshire's Got Talent' to be run over summer 2010.
- 2 of the acts booked to appear at Club de Havilland – another venue on campus.
- 2 of the student acts booked to appear at various student events.
- UHSU television filmed event and uploaded to their own website and You Tube (over 2000 views)

Results against objectives

Objective 1 – People flocked to the Forum, ranging in age from infants through to Grandparents

Objective 2 – Every operational aspect of the venue was fully tested

Objective 3 – Partnerships entered into with two key local media. Relationships secured for the Forum which benefits both the venue and the media. Both media partners are supporting Hertfordshire's Got Talent.

Objective 4 – People really welcomed the opportunity to visit the Forum. For many it was the first time they had ever been on campus. The atmosphere was electric.

Objective 5 – Planning and running the event brought together teams from a number of business units across the University, allowing us to engage them in message development and ownership of the messages going forward. We were able to give them media training and engage them in media and PR activities.