

Perfect Planning and Pitching Put UT on the Front Lines Of a National News Story

Situation Analysis

The University of Tennessee's College of Business Administration provided a great story foundation with the development of a test designed to help prevent violence in the workplace. HWH Public Relations turned this opportunity into high-profile publicity for its client. "The Conditional Reasoning Test of Aggression" is a simple-to-administer screening tool for employers to spot aggressive/violent tendencies in employees. Drs. Larry James and Michael McIntyre, Industrial Psychologists at the University of Tennessee's College of Business, developed the test to help prevent aggressive eruptions in the workplace. The key to the test's value is that it does not rely on applicants to describe themselves honestly; instead, it requires the subject to solve reasoning problems that are specially designed to screen out aggressive behavior. The test was to be available in January 2001 through a national test distributor.

Execution Strategy

Since instances of "desk rage" and workplace violence are on the rise, HWH took an energetic two-pronged approach to promoting the new screening test. In addition to pitching the test's clear value and timely applications, HWH established Drs. James and McIntyre as pioneering experts in this increasingly relevant field.



Research

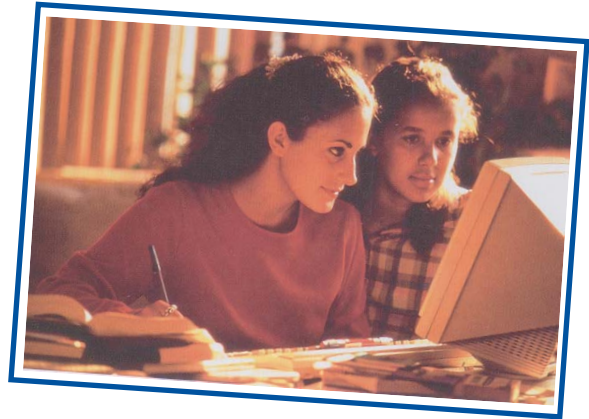
HWH took the opportunity to expand its existing press list for this story. In addition to education, business and research-related outlets, we included huge national outlets we felt might be interested in a subject with national implications.

Release/Collateral Material

The press release on the aggression-screening test was released on December 12, 2000. In addition, HWH prepared a sheet with sample test questions for the media.

Media Training

HWH made sure the University of Tennessee professors were fully prepared for questions from the national press.



Initial Measurements of Success

The expanded press list HWH prepared for this story paid off. The professors and the University received coverage in such media outlets as:

- The New York Times
- Industry Week
- The Wall Street Journal Radio Network
- The Los Angeles Times
- Chicago Sun-Times
- The National Post.

A National Tragedy: UT on the Front Line

On December 26, a software tester in Wakefield, Massachusetts, opened fire on his co-workers with a semiautomatic rifle, killing seven of his colleagues. As media outlets scrambled to make sense of the news, HWH and UT were ready with their established media veteran experts. HWH immediately contacted the press, making them aware of Dr. McIntyre's availability to talk with the media as an expert on this topic. Dr. McIntyre offered insight into the violent incident in print, on radio and on television, and was the subject of an extensive interview by Bryant Gumbel on CBS' The Early Show. Other coverage included:

- MSNBC
- CNN.com
- Associated Press
- Wall Street Journal.com
- The Boston Globe
- Fox News
- CBS Radio in Boston
- KTSA Radio in San Antonio, TX
- Charlotte Sun-Herald
- National Public Radio

Unfortunately, there was another workplace shooting in Chicago in early February. This resulted in a fresh round of publicity for the University, the professors and the rage test. Outlets included The Chicago Tribune, USA Today.com, Texas Star-Telegram, Knight-Ridder News Service, Yahoo News as well as local TV and radio interviews with Dr. McIntyre as the definitive expert on these situations.

The University of Tennessee's College of Business and HWH Public Relations turned a timely, well-conceived academic effort into a public relations triumph with planning, excellent spin and quick thinking.