



## Marketing Messages

### MARY CHARLESON

#### *More marketing wins for post Olympic Canada*

Do you remember a scene from the Tourism Canada commercial during the 2010 Olympics where a young hockey player skates across an untouched frozen lake at sunset? Viewed from above, his pace quickens as the endless lake beckons. It's a image that those of us raised outside the lower mainland may have experienced once or twice in a lifetime, when the perfect alignment of a big freeze and no snow early in the season offers up the quintessential Canadian experience. This memorable piece of footage, captured by a helicopter film crew over Green Lake last winter, was an unplanned ending to a day filming in Whistler to capture 2010 image resources for media. According to John Parker-Jervis, Senior Media Advisor, Canadian Tourism Commission, the film crew spotted the scrimmage on the lake and landed to get permission to capture it. The resulting breakaway hockey player became one of the iconic images that captured and embodied the "experience Canada" brand. It was a brilliant piece of luck. But there was a strategy behind it.

Now that our streets, then filled with patriotism and hockey gold, have returned to normal, we can pause to consider: Was there more to marketing Canada through the games than a two week long commercial? Absolutely, but let's admit with some smugness that the 10 days of sun and warm weather in February broadcast worldwide to 3.5 billion people certainly didn't hurt.

These were called Canada's games, and viewed from a marketing perspective, they were one of the most successful branding exercises I have witnessed in some time. Canada the brand, defined by experiences, became hip and desirable. No longer are we just selling moose, mountains and Mounties.

So how was the Olympics used to reposition Canada the brand and strategically target international tourism markets? Environics, a Toronto based firm known for social values research, had identified nine basic traveler groups worldwide. Having a detailed demographic, psychographic, and values based profile for each, Canada was then positioned to appeal to three categories: the authentic experiencer, the cultural explorer and the free spirit. Specific countries with a high proportion of these groups were identified as strategic targets for a before, during and after-Olympic campaign strategy.

#### **Before:**

15 spots were secured in the cross Canada torch relay for past Olympic medalists and media celebrities from targeted tourism countries including Korea, Japan, China, India, Australia, Brazil, Germany, France, the UK and the US. Torchbearers spent time in the areas they were running and enjoyed local tourism experiences. Many areas across Canada were represented. Home country media covered these celebrities extensively. In the summer of 2009, selected 2010 international athletes with their families were brought to Canada to experience unique adventures through the "Connecting with Canadians program." Video footage of their travels at specific targeted tourism destinations throughout Canada was shared with media in international markets. The goal was to make the winter games resonate with targeted countries by making it relevant and to plant a desire to explore Canada in the future. One NBC feature about travel experiences in the north's polar bear country actually resulted in overloaded website traffic for the tour operator featured, due to subsequent inquiries from Americans.

#### **During:**

The Canadian Tourism Commission made available extensive resources for the media including travel story ideas, high definition video clips and still images of Canadian travel destinations, athletes, torchbearers, as well as venue and host city aerials. These were all easily accessible and rights free. Provincial pavilions represented travel destinations throughout Canada during the games. The Northern pavilion alone had over 250,000 visitors. Meeting planners from around the world were hosted and extensive work was done with First Nations groups to present unique experiences of their culture.

#### **After:**

Now it's all about harvesting the afterglow. Efforts now focus on ensuring a smooth continuum from awareness and interest to planning and booking. Already there have been huge jumps in website visits from Japan, Korea and China, as well as Germany, the UK and the US. Social media is being leveraged extensively during this phase. The updraft in bookings is expected during 2011 and 2012 from the interest created.

As Shane Koyczan, the slam poet who delivered the "Define Canada" piece during the opening ceremonies put it, "We are an experiment going right for a change." That experiment packaged in unique experiences now defines brand Canada.

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*Mary Charleson, President of Charleson Communications, is a marketing educator, speaker and strategist. Her recently published book Five-Minute Marketing is available through [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and [www.Trafford.com](http://www.Trafford.com). She writes monthly and can be reached at [mary@charleson.ca](mailto:mary@charleson.ca)*