

LICENSING AND RELATIONSHIPS

Relatively speaking, my time in the licensing industry has been short, but while I'm lean with respect to years in the business, I have built a solid foundation of relationships that I consistently rely on to grow the University of Utah's (UofU) brand and licensing revenue. You'll hear over and over again that leveraging relationships to create win-win opportunities is the most successful pillar to a great program. This has never been truer than when our institutions, licensees and retailers face an uncertain economy with tight marketing budgets and discriminating customer wallets.



Brett Eden



It is easy for many of us to dismiss stereotypical business buzzwords like 'win-win' and 'leverage relationships,' but the power of those words is real if put into action. Launching an equally beneficial opportunity between your program and your client will compel each party to be engaged and can potentially result in benefits for both parties that are greater than those achieved alone.

At Utah, the Ultimate Utah Wedding is a specific example from the last year that helps to illustrate how two somewhat polar industries could reach out to each other and experience success. The focus of our merchandise marketing in prior years has been on maximizing the impact that sports fans, like football and basketball game ticket holders, can have on our program. While these fans are at the core of many licensing programs we realize, like many other rapidly expanding programs, that the true incremental growth is from the casual fan, that when convenient, would like to proudly display their alma mater in a different setting. Our partnership with ABC 4 and www.BrideAccess.com hosted a Utah themed wedding giveaway –www.ultimateutahwedding.com, and exposed an entirely new demographic to our branded merchandise.

The basic concept was modeled after popular wedding giveaways that have been successful on network television in the past. We found a willing and energetic couple, we introduced them on the local daily TV show called Good Things Utah (GTU), and proceeded to revolve their lives and their wedding around the University of Utah brand. Moms and dads of UofU students and potential brides and grooms were exposed to the excitement and energy that our brand could bring to their lives and the lives of the newly engaged couple that so many people were talking about.

For a period of three months, ABC 4 ran weekly segments highlighting each step in the wedding planning process. For example, one week our couple and the hosts of the show would talk about wedding dresses. Several gowns were highlighted, and after the show, all the viewers and their interested friends could get on their computers and vote on which dress they wanted our bride to wear. Importantly, each segment had a different focus, and allowed our department to work with a variety of different retailers that would not necessarily carry Utah themed/branded product otherwise. From cakes to honeymoons, ribbons to stationary, tuxedos to limousines, fans and the local public were able to associate our brand with something new each week. While the basic concept of a wedding giveaway is nothing new, our UofU twist made this a truly unique event. Our couple and all aspects of the wedding were decked out in UofU product. Utah's colors, trademarks and merchandise were highlighted at every possible moment. The groom's cake was in the shape of the mascot, the invitation pictures were taken on the football field, and the final reception/wedding was held at the football stadium. (Yes, the mascot was in attendance dancing the night away.)

The products highlighted on each segment were provided by a partnering client of BrideAccess.com. The price of participation for these clients was the donation of the winning items, i.e., wedding dress, tuxedos, photography, videography, cake, catering, honeymoon, etc. Each vendor received publicity on the TV show and online as viewers voted. The use of social media like a bridal blog, and regular new videos of the couple posted online made the event resonate with a younger audience and accessible to those who could not watch the morning show. The audience was encouraged to purchase the Utah fashion that our bride, groom and newscasters wore each week at a discounted rate if they mentioned the wedding. Life-sized cut-outs at various retailers, and larger than life pictures on buses around town solidified the event in local minds.

All of us who participated saw the value of the partnerships that were formed and benefited from the increased size of our endeavor that was afforded to us because of the teamwork involved in making the Ultimate Utah Wedding a reality. The power of collaboration, even when partners have different markets and niches, can result in those ever so cliché win-win results.

Thanks for this article to Brett Eden, director of licensing and marketing at the University of Utah and member of the ICLA Board of Directors.

