

**Agency:** Gee Jeffery & Partners Advertising Inc

**Authors:** P Coty, B Channer and D Bramah

## Oxfam Canada

### How a little O.J. helped 500,000 starving people

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case demonstrates the power of advertising in a specific instance and in a specific way. It is a case that demonstrates how advertising was used opportunistically and tactically by Oxfam to raise money and its profile in Canada. At the time of the advertising, Oxfam was desperate for money to aid in the Rwanda crisis and had been unsuccessful in focusing Canadian attention on the issue.

The advertising was designed to jolt and provoke both public and media reaction and break down the barriers of public indifference and apathy. Because of Oxfam's mandate, the strategy required that the advertising not directly exploit the condition of the people Oxfam was trying to help. However, Oxfam endorsed a strategy that allowed the advertising to exploit the potential opportunities to create media coverage of that condition. Obtaining media coverage, therefore, was a primary strategic thrust of the advertising itself.

Two 600 line print ads, 'O.J. Simpson' and 'Killing Fields', were created for newspaper insertion in the *Globe and Mail*. Each ran once: the first on 16 July 1994, and the second on 6 August.

The results were swift and impressive. Direct donations of \$637,000 came to Oxfam as a result of the ads and the ensuing publicity surrounding them. Based on a total insertion cost of \$8,000 (a specially negotiated rate), the return on advertising investment was a staggering 7,962.5%. Additionally, a direct mail solicitation that ran immediately following the first ad insertion raised \$235,000. The response rate to that mailing was 10.12% versus a norm of 1%. Both these results were extraordinary, relative to both Oxfam's previous experience and fund raising industry norms.

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#### SITUATION ANALYSIS

##### Standard returns for Oxfam

Oxfam considers an ad successful if it raises enough money to cover the cost of the ad. In extreme cases, when a particular crisis is getting intense media coverage, donations will exceed media cost. Advertising is used primarily to raise awareness. Generally, the actual donations are raised by direct mail. A standard response to a mailing is 1% and the average donation \$35. Prior to this case, the highest response to an Oxfam campaign was 3% and the average donation \$45; that was during the Ethiopia famine crisis in 1990.

##### The Rwanda emergency

The Rwanda emergency became an international news story in April 1994. The worldwide Oxfam organization specifically identified the need for money to provide water and sanitation in the refugee camps as its top priority. Money was needed immediately.

Oxfam Canada placed two ads, designed by themselves in the *Globe and Mail* in May. They raised only \$40,000. Although this met the criteria of covering the ad cost it was insufficient to meet Oxfam Canada's commitments.

## **The opportunity**

In early July, Oxfam Canada asked Gee, Jeffery & Partners to help create a campaign that would deal effectively with the need to focus more attention on the Rwanda crisis itself and, by extension, on Oxfam's ability to provide material assistance. Oxfam recognized that the crisis had not generated sufficient media publicity and that the opportunity to increase donations was directly tied to raising the public profile of the crisis.

## **The problem**

Oxfam was aware that donor fatigue was a real issue that it had to face along with many relief agencies. There was the additional problem that the Rwanda crisis was due largely to a political and military conflict and not as a result of a natural disaster. As a result, there was less public sympathy and some real indifference when compared with the Ethiopia crisis. To be successful, advertising had to create both controversy and sympathy.

The problem was compounded by the amount of media and public attention that was being diverted from serious news items by notorious, headline-making stories about Tonya Harding, Paul Bernardo and O.J. Simpson.

## **THE STRATEGY**

The principal strategy employed was to create advertising that worked simultaneously at two levels. Success at the first level is essential to this case and to the end result of the donations actually achieved.

### **The news media**

The first level was to provoke media attention and coverage, particularly from the national TV news networks. The creative strategy was deliberately designed to stir up a public reaction so that the Rwanda crisis might obtain intense media coverage from responsible news journalists. To do this, the creative strategy deliberately set out to leverage off other high profile news events of the day. The success of this strategy was demonstrated by both the media coverage itself and by the fact that Canada's highest profile newscaster felt it necessary to defend his network's coverage of the Rwanda crisis.

### **The donor**

The second level was to provoke a direct response from potential donors by diverting their attention from the high profile news items of the day to the reality of what was happening in Rwanda. Specifically, the creative strategy was to shock the reader by 'attaching' the Rwanda crisis to one of the more notorious news stories at the time. By juxtaposing the two, the strategy was to make readers question their own priorities and values.

### **The execution**

The copy says it all. A screaming headline:

'O.J. SIMPSON LIMITED TO TEN VISITORS A DAY.'

And in much smaller type:

'In other news: "500,000 Rwandans slaughtered. Another 1.5 million fighting for their lives in refugee camps."'

This was the essence of the Oxfam campaign to provoke both a media and donor response to the crisis in Rwanda.

It was this single ad, which appeared just once nationally in the *Globe and Mail*, that provoked enough publicity to directly or indirectly raise nearly \$1 million for Oxfam. The second ad juxtaposed movies such as *The Killing Fields* and *Schindler's List* with the Rwanda crisis but did not generate the same publicity. Nevertheless it kept

the issue and the Oxfam name in the public eye. Both ads carried a donation coupon.

### **Media and creative decisions**

First, to be successful with this kind of advertising the timing of the execution is critical. It was fortunate to have the O.J. Simpson spectacle to draw on at the time when we needed it. The selection of O.J. Simpson was crucial and the amount of media attention to his case warranted its use. (A decision to use Paul Bernardo was considered, but discarded as potentially offensive.)

Second, a traditional media campaign with frequent paid insertions of the same ad(s) could not have succeeded in the same way. It would have been seen as exploitive.

### **THE RESULTS**

Because the advertising in this case was designed to work on two levels we are showing the actual donations received and we are also detailing the media coverage and free media space generated by the creative product.

**TABLE 1: DONATIONS**

Total raised from May to November 1994:	\$1,395,000
Total raised prior to O.J. insertions:	\$238,000
Total raised after O.J. insertions:	\$1,147,000
Number of donations received in total:	18,500
Number of new donors May to November 1994:	16,000
Average donation from O.J. insertions:	\$98
Response rate from July 21 mailing:	10.12%
Return on advertising investment:	7,962.5%

The above results all represent records for Oxfam Canada. No advertising campaign has ever produced results like this, particularly in terms of direct advertising response. The highest previous response rate to a new prospect mailing was 3% and the average donation \$45. New donors during the period were twice those generated by Oxfam campaigns during all of the previous year. No Oxfam advertising campaign has ever received the publicity accorded the O.J. Simpson campaign.

### **Media coverage**

This case demonstrates that advertising can contribute to its own effectiveness by extending its reach beyond traditional paid media. Because this was such a strong component in the Oxfam campaign, we are detailing a partial list of news coverage below.

In addition, nine major papers across the country were approached by Oxfam and ran the O.J. Simpson ad or the Killing Fields ad for free. The total value of the media coverage and free insertions is difficult to estimate, but conservatively their equivalent is \$100,000 in paid media.

#### **TV coverage**

- *CBC Prime Time*
- *CTV National News*
- *CBC Sunday Report*

#### **Radio coverage**

- CBC Ottawa, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Montreal
- CFRB *Jane Hawtin show*

#### **Newspaper coverage**

- *Globe and Mail*
- *Toronto Star*
- *Toronto Sun*
- *Winnipeg Free Press*
- *Star Phoenix* (Saskatoon)
- *Canadian Press*
- *Southam News*

**International coverage**

- Reuters
- CNN

**CLIENT**

Oxfam Canada

Patricia Coty

Fund-raising Officer

**AGENCY**

Gee Jeffery & Partners Advertising Inc

Bret Channer

Doug Bramah

VP Associate Creative  
Director  
Associate Creative  
Director



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