

**Agency:** Geoffrey B. Roche & Partners Adv.

**Authors:** T Bittle, A Macaulay, G B Roche, Chris Harrison, P Ruta, J Ranscombe and A Goldman

## Royal Ontario Museum Campaign

### INTRODUCTION

The Royal Ontario Museum is, arguably, the most venerable cultural institution in Toronto. For decades it has provided sanctity for academics and scientists and sanctuary for parents and children on rainy Saturday mornings. Yet despite major renovations undertaken in the 1980 to make the Museum more 'user-friendly,' the ROM - as it is locally known - remained that venerable warehouse of old artefacts at the corner of Bloor and University Avenue. While special events and exhibits helped nurse the place through the '80s, by 1990 attendance was dropping. Schools and parents had a shopping list of new and exciting rivals to visit. The Science Centre, the CN Tower, the Metro Zoo and Ontario Place had become competing tourist and day-trip destinations.

What to do? Well, if the ROM were a 'branded' product that had been on the shelf too long, one option would be to reposition and relaunch it. And that, is in essence what Geoffrey B. Roche & Partners suggested the ROM do. Dust the place off ('blow the cobwebs off' is how the case writer describes it) and look at the product with fresh eyes and insight - change the perception of the Museum and, in so doing, change the attitudes of the target market.

The agency didn't have a lot of research with which to work, but a few things were clear. The ad budget of \$800,000 wasn't enough to mount a full multi-media campaign. So a tactical decision was made to dominate out-of-home venues such as billboards and transit ads within the Metro Toronto region. This was a practical solution to a budget limitation as well as a strategic way to remind people within the city (tourists and local residents) on a daily basis that the ROM was open for business. Of course, the success of this approach would rely heavily on the creative - it had to be attention grabbing, it had to be enticing and it had to be memorable.

The agency team cut away the traditional public images of what a museum represents and found a repositioning nugget. What does the Museum really have to offer? A lot of 'neat stuff.' Bugs, toys, Egyptian mummies ... a Bat cave. And all of it was in the ROM every single day. It was there any time you wanted to see it. This became the creative focus. Witty headlines and eye-catching visuals were at every street corner, in the subways and on billboards throughout the town. It didn't take long for everyone to get the impression that something new and fun was happening at the ROM. Within a year, the attendance problem was reversed and a palpable change in public attitude was in place. 'Hey, let's go the ROM' was no longer a sentence of boredom, it was a promise of fun.

### JUDGES' COMMENTS

*This category presents some unique challenges in judging because it is sometimes difficult to demonstrate that success was attributed directly to advertising. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to measure success per se.*

*The Royal Ontario Museum presented a clear-cut case to prove that advertising really works. In order to drive attendance, the ROM had in the past used publicity and advertising surrounding special events and special*

*exhibits. Not so this winning campaign. Instead, it very creatively focused on the ROM as a fun place to visit. No special event. No special exhibit. Just the fact that the Museum contained thousands of interesting reasons for a visit.*

*Like most not-for-profit advertisers, the ROM had a limited budget. The successful campaign was executed entirely with out-of-home media - transit shelters, superboards and subway. With no change in product or pricing, the campaign made the Museum seem like a fun place to go. It persuaded people to look inside, and they still do.*

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In February 1991, the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) recognized that it had an awareness problem, and it needed to develop an advertising campaign to help reverse its deep attendance declines. Before this, the ROM had been using publicity and some event advertising to drive attendance at specific events or special exhibits. At the time when Geoffrey B. Roche & Partners was hired, over all attendance at the Museum was in double-digit decline, so this strategy needed to be rethought.

A high-impact campaign was recommended, focusing on the fascinating things that could be found at the Museum every day. From Egyptian mummies to the Jamaican bat cave, the Museum contains thousands of interesting reasons to visit and we used them as ammunition for the advertising.

Most importantly, instead of presenting the Museum as an important place where people should go, we presented it as a fun place where you would want to go.

With a limited budget, the campaign creative was designed to work entirely in out-of-home media, using a mixture of transit shelters, superboards and subway advertising.

The campaign subsequently won several creative awards, including golds in the Marketing Magazine awards, a gold Billi and an Obie award.

More important than the awards, the advertising drove attendance growth for the Museum. In the first few months of the campaign, the double-digit declines of the previous year were reversed. Dramatically, in the first fiscal year of the campaign, attendance at the main ROM building, on which the campaign was focused, increased by 19 per cent over the previous year.

These impressive results were registered at a time when the economic recession, particularly in Toronto, was taking its toll on virtually all other tourism and entertainment attractions. In fact, every other major attraction in Toronto (the Zoo, the Science Centre, the Art Gallery and Ontario Place) reported attendance declines during the period in which Museum attendance grew so dramatically. There was effectively no change in the 'product' or pricing over the time of the campaign. No high-profile temporary exhibits arrived to distort attendance figures. No additional price discounts were implemented.

A quantitative research study was implemented, four months after the campaign began- to measure the impact of the advertising. The result: 43 per cent of Toronto adults recalled the campaign and provided rich and accurate recall of message specifics.

The campaign blew the cobwebs off the Museum, and made it seem a fun place to. So people did go.

---

## **SITUATION ANALYSIS**

The Royal Ontario Museum has existed in Toronto since 1911. Many people living in Toronto have visited it at some time in the past. The distant past for many. And the result for the ROM was declining attendance.

As Toronto's entertainment and tourism infrastructure was growing to include the Science Centre, the Sky Dome, the CN Tower and the Metro Zoo, this venerable institution was becoming ... a venerable institution. It was nice to know it was there but people simply didn't think about visiting.

Until early 1991, the Museum had used in-house publicity and marketing that focused on special exhibits to create interest in visiting. With a new product to promote, this sometimes worked (depending on the exhibit). But it created other problems. Attendance sagged badly between exhibits.

Staff enthusiasm and morale also tended to sag when there wasn't a new exhibit on display. This carried over into the staff's relationship with visitors.

Without special exhibits generating advertising and publicity, tourists in Toronto (60 per cent to 80 per cent of volume, depending on the month) were not being made aware of the Museum.

The Museum's overall budget, restricted to less than inflationary growth by the provincial government, was less able to afford to stage the expensive, high-profile temporary exhibits. That perpetuated the 'feast or famine' attendance situation.

In 1990 and 1991, that event-oriented strategy of generating attendance really began to fail because of a lack of special-exhibit 'news.' In the face of this dilemma, GBR&P developed the campaign on a total advertising budget of \$800,000 for the period from April 2, 1991 to June 30, 1992.

The problem was to find a way to reverse the deep attendance declines and to increase the profile of the ROM, on a relatively small budget.

## **STRATEGY AND EXECUTION**

Without being able to rely on special exhibits to generate interest, the task was to discover what the Museum could deliver to the public on a regular basis. The Museum has an incredible amount of interesting things on display every day. The list ranges from Egyptian Mummies, bats and bizarre bugs to artefacts and treasures that are thousands of years old. It was stuff that could not be found anywhere else. It was stuff that appeals to people of all ages and with which ROM 'consumers' can become deeply involved

So our strategy was to take advantage of this incredibly diverse product range that appealed to both the mind and the emotions and present it in a way that was new and unexpected.

Museums tend to be treated by the public as institutions of higher learning, culturally redeeming places with a mission to educate and inform. In other words, they tend to present themselves as places you should go, rather than places that would be fun to visit. The ROM was a plate of vegetables, not a dessert tray.

## **STRATEGY**

Create the impression that the ROM is a fun place to go for people of all ages;

- Remind people that there is 'neat stuff' on display every day;
- Reach people, both Torontonians and tourists, with as many messages as possible, without a big budget, to help quickly 'reposition' the Museum.

To do this, we picked interesting permanent exhibits, and presented them in a way that spoke to the children that we either are, or have.

As subjects, we used the Bat cave, the Egyptian Mummies, the incredible collection of bugs, the collection of historical toys, the suits of armour - all the things that had high impact and visual appeal plus interest both for

children and kids of any age.

## **MEDIA**

We used out-of-home advertising almost exclusively. Some small space newspaper advertising supported specific events (March break, etc.) at the Museum. The campaign included:

- Three, month-long flights (May, July and September 1991) in transit shelters at medium weights;
- The unique ten-metre long snake ad which ran overhead in the interior of subway cars (it was the most dominant ad ever placed in that medium);
- A regular subway door card campaign rotated monthly;
- Murad mural advertising in two locations for two months;
- Superboard advertising (3 locations x 4 weeks each x 2 flights).

## **RESULTS**

### **ATTENDANCE**

Advertising began late in April 1991. Museum attendance rebounded within two months of the campaign's beginning. It jumped 19 per cent at the main building, where the campaign was focused, in the first full fiscal year of the campaign (July 1991 to June 1992) from 407,900 to 484,800.

ROM attendance grew in all but one month, versus the previous year, once the advertising began. [Figure 1](#)

No new exhibits opened until after six months of attendance increases had already been generated by the advertising campaign. And even then, the new Ancient Egypt and Nubia Gallery which opened in February 1992 was not a short-term exhibition that could be expected to produce an immediate attendance jump. It was a permanent gallery that was being re-opened.

All this took place at a time when the economy had reduced the tourist traffic coming into Toronto (tourists from outside the city account for 70 per cent of Museum attendance) and that decrease was felt by all local tourist attractions. The Metro Toronto Convention & Visitors Association reported overall attendance at Toronto attractions was down in the first six months of 1992 compared with the previous year. This makes the ROM attendance increase of 19 per cent all the more remarkable.

With all other important variables remaining constant, this seems to provide clear evidence that advertising drove attendance growth. [Figure 2](#)

### **POST LAUNCH**

#### **RESEARCH**

To make that linkage irrefutable and to measure the progress of the campaign, the Museum chose to do a quantitative research study in late July 1991, three months after the campaign began. Two hundred door-to-door interviews were conducted by Canadian Facts with respondents between the ages of 15 and 65.

Forty-three per cent of those surveyed claimed aided recall of at least one of the five transit shelter executions. There was high spontaneous recall of key elements of the creative, including 'Come to the Museum,'

and 'There is a variety of things to see at the ROM,' as well as 'It is suitable for all ages.'

#### **ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE**

The Museum also received countless complimentary letters on the campaign and requests for copies of the various posters. As quickly as the snake posters and door cards were being put up in the subway, they were being stolen by over-zealous admirers of the ads. (There were reports from schools about kids trading snake poster parts like trading cards.)

When we chose to reprint the snake poster for sale in the gift shop in the ROM, they sold out (at \$50 per copy)!

## CONCLUSION

The ROM advertising campaign drove double-digit attendance growth that a time when all other entertainment/tourism attractions were suffering.

The campaign succeeded because it delivered fun, memorable messages at high frequency levels. People wanted to see the ads, and then see the original items at the Museum.

In short, we blew the cobwebs off the Museum.

### CLIENT

Royal Ontario Museum

Trilby Bittle

Head of Marketing/Public Information

### AGENCY

Geoffrey B. Roche & Partners Adv.

Andy Macaulay

Sr. VP

Geoffrey B. Roche

Creative

Chris Harrison

Director &

Paul Ruta

Art

Jim Ranscome

Director

Allan Goldman

Art

Director

Writer

Writer

Production

Manager

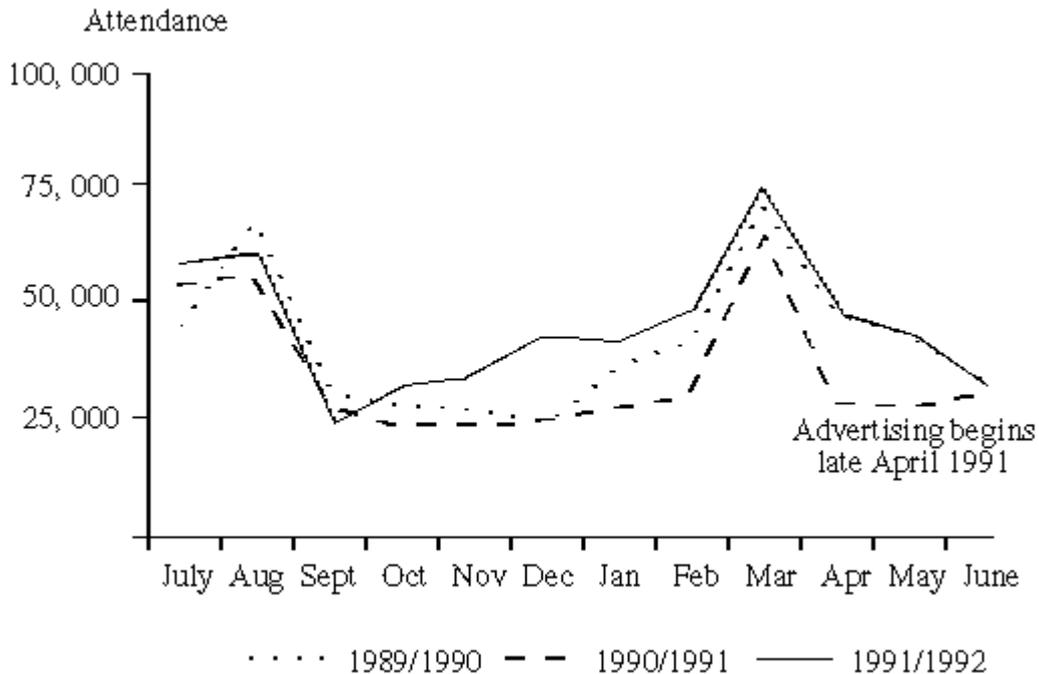


<http://www.warc.com>

© Canadian Congress of Advertising 1993

## NOTES & EXHIBITS

### EXHIBIT 1: ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM ATTENDANCE GROWTH



---

## EXHIBIT 2: ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM TOTAL ATTENDANCE

