



Product #: 6BE-0903C07

Format: FO03 Campaign case study (Silver Anvil)

Title: NORAD Tracks Santa: Keeping the Dream Alive

Silver-Anvil Award of Excellence Winner

North American Aerospace Defense Command, **2009**

Summary: 2009 Silver Anvil Award of Excellence Winner – Events And Observances - Seven Or Fewer Days – Government

“My son is 11 years old and at the age where most of his friends no longer believe in Santa....Tonight you helped an 11-year-old boy believe in the magic of Christmas for yet another year...and you made another year of Christmas memories for his mom. For as you know, they outgrow childhood all too quickly so Christmas memories like these are so very priceless....”

With e-mails like this, NORAD, embarked on its 50th year of tracking Santa around the globe. For 2008, the program embraced new media and found new ways to bring joy to millions around the world.

Full Text: " My son is 11 years old and at the age where most of his friends no longer believe in Santa....Tonight you helped an 11-year-old boy believe in the magic of Christmas for yet another year...and you made another year of Christmas memories for his mom. For as you know, they outgrow childhood all too quickly so Christmas memories like these are so very priceless.”
— A grateful Mom in Holly Springs, NC

In 2008 the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) celebrated its 50-year tradition of presenting children and families of the world its “NORAD Tracks Santa” (NTS) program, as it positioned the program to reach the next generation of “Santa Trackers.” Standing on the precipice of the new media age, NORAD expanded its decades-old international community relations initiative in 2008 by partnering with several corporations, to include Google, Booz, Allen Hamilton, and Verizon to leverage advances in communications and web technology to take our NTS global outreach initiative into the future. Through detailed research and planning, we reevaluated the program’s scope for 2008 for the latest generation of techno-savvy kids and their millennial parents. Our execution included incorporating 2D, and 3D kid-friendly Google Earth maps, multi-lingual videos, a redesigned web-page, interactive games and a social media component. We were able to significantly expand the program’s national and international reach and appeal. The result was a marked increase in the NTS program’s ability to respond interactively with children calling or e-mailing the NTS Operations Center on December 24th, increased national broadcast and print media coverage, and continued favorable brand recognition for NORAD-unique technologies and its long-recognized mission of providing for the defense of North America.

The serendipitous history of NORAD Tracks Santa began December 24, 1955 when an incorrect number was printed in a local newspaper ad and rang into Air Defense Command’s Air Operations Center in Colorado Springs, Colo. The commander on duty at the time, Colonel Harry Shoup, indulged the young caller, reporting Santa’s official location while playing along to keep the child’s belief in Santa alive. From that single act of spirited kindness grew a program that is today institutionalized throughout the NORAD command, as well as loved and anticipated each holiday season by families throughout the world. Few organizations whether profit, not-for-profit, or government, have enjoyed the success and brand recognition of such a far-reaching international community relations program. For one special day, millions of faithful Santa Trackers, young and old, came together in their homes huddled around their computers like firesides of the past, to take a “time out” from the realities and hardships of current times to share together in the joy of tracking Santa’s journey around the globe. In 2008, the average “Santa Tracker” cut across cultural, religious, and age barriers. The NORAD Tracks Santa program allowed parents from Nepal to New Zealand, from Russia to the United States and Canada - to share in one common goal of keeping the dreams and innocence of their children’s holiday imagination alive...be it for “yet another year.”

“I have fond memories of listening to the “Santa Track” on the radio when I was a child, and now, while driving across the country to visit family on Christmas Eve, I’m able to share these same memories with my own

children, only high tech. By virtue of my wireless card and laptop, we can do the same, only now we get to see video of Santa flying over the Great Wall of China!”

—A very happy parent.

A good deal of effort went into this year’s NORAD Tracks Santa program. Here is an overview of the process.

RESEARCH AND PLANNING:

Immediately following the 2007 NTS, we began preparing for 2008. We reviewed lessons learned, measured and evaluated our accomplishments and program reach, then began identifying goals for 2008. The 2008 NTS program goals were as follows:

- o Increase number of new and unique visitors to the NTS Web Site over 2007;
- o Expand global reach of NTS by expanding the web site content from the current six foreign language options into seven foreign language options tracking Santa’s journey across the world;
- o Leverage innovations in the new social media (Twitter, iGoogle, Facebook and YouTube) to draw in a new generation of Santa Trackers and generate interest and chatter between and among participating Santa Trackers;
- o Increase national media coverage (print and broadcast) over 2007 by 25 percent.
- o Increase the percentage of calls answered by staff/volunteers in the NTS Operations Center by 50 percent;
- o Enhance graphics design of animated videos to appeal to both the youngest as well as the older Santa Tracker audience;
- o Design and create animated videos of Santa’s journey over internationally renowned landmarks (Santa Cam Videos) that appear on the website Christmas Eve. Narrate the videos in seven languages to make information accessible to the widest international audience possible.

PRIVATE/PUBLIC PARTNERING.

A significant part of our planning involved engaging private sector partners. By teaming with experts at Google and Booz Allen Hamilton, NORAD event planners focused on creating an entirely new Santa “route” in an effort to cover more towns, cities and territories visited by Santa on Christmas Eve. To gain public awareness of the web site launch on December 1st, NORAD Public Affairs put out several news releases, to include one announcing “Santa’s Test Flight” which was timed in conjunction with a local holiday festival. News releases were carefully crafted to build interest and anticipation for the launch of the web site, and the eventual tracking of Santa around the world on Christmas Eve. Google Earth worked with NORAD public affairs narrators to develop realistic Santa Cam videos, which were imaginary high tech, high speed digital cameras set to capture Santa and his reindeer as they fly over children’s hometowns/countries. These Santa Cams were animated by CGI animations and available upon request to media outlets prior to 24 December event for use in local stories.

EXECUTION:

For the “live” tracking of Santa on Christmas Eve, a conference center on Peterson AFB, Colo., was transformed into a real-world operational call center. More than 1200 community volunteers worked two-hour shifts over a 24-hour period Christmas Eve, responding to e-mails and phone calls from children and parents around the world. Santa’s route/progress was broadcast on screens in two tracking rooms, providing volunteer “Trackers” manning their stations with real-time information that they could then relay to callers and e-mailers. Bi-lingual community volunteers were identified at in-processing to assist in translating in-bound communications in such varied languages as French, Spanish, Chinese and Japanese. Two distinct branches of the NTS Operations Center were created dedicated to e-mail communications and telephone communications respectively. Over 73,872 calls were logged and answered in a 24-hour period.

EVALUATION:

Program Results. From 19-25 December, the NTS Web site had 13,755,194 visits from 219 countries. This represents a 43 percent increase over 2007 for the same time period. The program jumped 800% in its live media coverage on 24 December, attributable to live satellite distribution which allows media to connect to the command from locations throughout the world. Twelve hundred local community volunteers manned the Colorado Springs Operations Center, up from 1000 in 2007. Additionally, a review of the more than 6000 e-mails received overwhelmingly support the program, 99% were favorable or were highly complimentary. All volunteers surveyed had comments to the effect that the NTS experience was the highlight of their holiday season due to their experiences talking to or e-mailing kids around the world.

CONCLUSION:

Here’s how we achieved our goals:

- o Increased number of new and unique visitors to the NTS Web Site over 2007; In a one week period, we had 13,755,194 from 219 countries compared to 9,620,147 from 210 countries in 2007 an increase of 43% over 2007.

- o Expanded global reach of NTS through creation of multi-lingual translations tracking Santa's journey across the world and increased the number of countries and territories visited by nine. We also added Chinese to our list of translations. Ultimately, we had 219 countries/territories visiting the site (in order, top 9; US, UK, Canada, Japan, Australia, Ireland, Germany, Brazil and France) up four percent from 2007.
- o Leveraged innovations in the new social media (Twitter, Facebook, GMobile, Panoramia and YouTube) to draw in a new generation of Santa Trackers and generating interest and chatter between and among participating Santa Trackers;
- o Increased live national media coverage (broadcast) on 24 December over 2007 by 800 percent.

IMPACT:

The 2008 NORAD Tracks Santa program, through its design and execution of an interactive web site, cutting edge graphics, kid-friendly Santa tracking maps, and a cadre of volunteers presented to the children of the world an interactive, multi-media experience to follow Santa's journey across the continents on Christmas eve. The 2008 NORAD Tracks Santa program entertained and enlightened an entirely new generation to the iconic symbol of Santa and the spirit of the holiday season through a unique and collaborative public-private partnership. NORAD did this as it reinforced its own brand recognition as protector/defender of North America.