2014 AASHTO TRANSCOMM SKILLS CONTEST

Division 3 – Advertising
Category 3b – TV commercial or PSA: without consultant

Entry Title: VDOT’s Phil Itkwik, Pothole Hunter
Organization: Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)
ENTRY PROFILE

1) Situation, goals and objectives of public relations activity

Got a pothole? Fill it quick!

In Virginia, “Phil Itkwik” can indeed “fill it quick(ly).” Old Phil, pothole hunter extraordinaire and alter ego of one of VDOT’s videographers, has been on the trail of pesky potholes for several years, asking Virginians’ help in finding and reporting them to VDOT.

The “Phil Itkwik, Pothole Hunter” video series has aired on VDOT’s YouTube channel since 2010, but Phil’s third video, posted in 2014, is the one that caught the eye of some local television stations and other websites around the commonwealth and netted him some good coverage for his important message.

That message is this: “Help us help you.” If you see a pothole, report it to VDOT either on the “report a road problem” page on VDOT’s website or by phone via VDOT’s toll-free customer service center number. The pothole gets filled more quickly, and you, the driver, get a smoother ride.

Phil was born after a particularly harsh, record-breaking winter in 2010. Two of VDOT’s videographers wanted to steer clear of the standard bureaucratic government message about how winter breeds potholes and how VDOT then patches them once the snow clears.

Reality shows with quirky characters were trending then, so the pair thought a similar parody would do the trick. One plays Phil onscreen (he admits to some theater classes in college and created Phil’s winning personality), while the other handled the script and the camera work.

The great polar-vortex winter of 2013-2014, with its nearly weekly blasts of snow into early April, again wreaked significant havoc on Virginia’s roads. Phil came out of hibernation early to issue his call to action once more to Virginia drivers, asking their help in providing “pothole intel” so VDOT could “find ‘em and fill ‘em” to give everyone a safer, smoother drive.

You can watch “VDOT’s Phil ItKwik Returns In Pothole Hunter 3” at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNmvnya8khw&feature=youtu.be. When it was posted earlier this year, VDOT put the word out about the new video via its social media networks (Twitter https://twitter.com/VaDOT/status/453875523572494336, Facebook). Emails also helped forward the link far and wide.

Besides their “sticky message,” the best part about this and the other two videos for VDOT is that they cost next to nothing to produce. As one of the videographers put it, “We have no budget – it’s just our equipment, our time and our creativity in getting out VDOT’s message about asking the public to help us find those potholes so we can fill them more quickly.”

If you want to see Phil’s earlier iterations, the first video, “Phil Itkwik The Pothole Hunter” (2010), is at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjVCjVNRC1Q&feature=youtu.be. Season 2, “Phil Itkwik Is Back Hunting Potholes” (2011), is at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JeC-Mxb0IU4&feature=youtu.be.

2) Target audience

All drivers who use Virginia’s roads

3) Measurable results

VDOT’s creative efforts to get people to use its website and toll-free number to report potholes netted good coverage beyond the agency’s YouTube channel. By the end of May 2014, the third video had been viewed more than 2,000 times on YouTube.
A local television station in the Washington, D.C., market aired a short piece about the video and posted the story and video on its website:


https://www.facebook.com/nbcwashingtondc/posts/10152351802848606?stream_ref=10

A television station in the Hampton Roads region (Norfolk-Virginia Beach) sent a team to VDOT’s Central Office in Richmond to interview the two men behind the Phil Itkwik phenomenon:

http://wtkr.com/2014/04/18/no-pothole-is-safe-around-this-guy/

Here are other links where the 2014 video was posted:

http://www.infrastructureusa.org/virginia-dot-profile-of-a-pothole-hunter/
http://muckrack.com/link/ogrVq/vdots-phil-itkwik-urges-residents-to-report-potholes
http://www.tomrust.org/2014/04/04/the-rust-report-april-4-2014/

Finally, this blog entry was posted in February 2014, before Phil Itkwik’s third iteration hit the airwaves. It features the second video in the series:

http://talkingtransportation.wordpress.com/2014/02/19/talking-transportation-filling-the-pothole-story/
SCREEN SHOTS FROM VDOT’S ‘PHIL ITKWIK RETURNS IN POTHOLE HUNTER 3’
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