

Fifth Racing Congress
Thursday, February 5, 2009

8:00 a.m. - 8:30 a.m.

Making the Best of Media Opportunities

• **Greg Peck, President, Fine Line Inc.**

Stan Bergstein: Dave has flown all the way from New York to work with us at this convention and has worked at several others and it's deeply appreciated. The years that I spent with Dave Johnson in New York on the WOR show were probably the most fascinating and most interesting and most rewarding to me over the years in my broadcasting career. So I want to thank him for being with us today, he's going to be introducing our first speaker. We're happy and pleased to have you here this early in the morning and here's Dave to introduce our first speaker.

Dave Johnson: Well one of the continuing threads and themes of the conference this year is promotion. Here's another one, this out of the Canadian Maritimes. Being out of the Canadian Maritimes and also being a student of the game, maybe it's not that unusual that he selected a champion and trained the nearly unbeatable colt champion Muscle Hill. Our speaker, at least before Muscle Hill, made his living as a media consultant to Fortune 500 companies is quite an interesting package. "Making The Best of Media Opportunities" is the topic of our first speaker this morning and it's my pleasure to introduce the president of Fine Line, Incorporated, Greg Peck.

Greg Peck: I'm sorry for all those who thought they would see Gregory Peck. It was great when I lived in Princeton; I used to get terrific dinner reservations because his daughter went to the university at the time. They'd obviously be upset when I got there, but at least I got the good tables. Tell you why I'm here today. As Dave said, I'm involved in this industry as well. I've been at it all my life, for three generations, and happen to have kind of duality in what I do, but I'm basically here to enable you to more effectively get media attention. I liken the metaphors this way; it is to get you to ignite the flame but to do it in a controlled manner that you don't get burned. I'm going to suggest to you that it's easily done. I don't want to stand up here and say to you: Here are all the complexities of doing this and how difficult it is. What you do every day is more difficult than getting involved in a media interview.

So here's what I'm really suggesting. I've got about five or six points I wanted to start with in suggestions of getting more media coverage and then I would kind of go into the once you get the media coverage, how you actually take advantage and complement the reason that you're there in the first place. I hope you say "Yeah I kind of knew that. Yeah, that's about right, we can do that." First thing I suggest is this, to get media attention, is to create alliances with local service groups, local charities. Why? They have advertising and marketing budgets, probably more than you do, and any attention that you get at any of their events that draws media attention is free, free, free.

Advertising and marketing can clearly pinpoint some of the positions that you have to a very focused target audience, but it does not have the credibility that if it's said through a third party. If you read it and somebody else says what a great product horse racing is, it certainly flows better. And if you look at some of the alliances that have been created, look at the Afleet Alexes of the world, what it did, a little girl four-years-old and selling lemonade and how much it raised. I was watching last night, I could see the whole Mildred Williams thing that we have in harness racing, where the women who were driving raised \$100,000 for women's charities. That's a good idea.

The other thing I was thinking was this: You have the facilities at tracks. It's not like you've got to go and rent the conference hall or the concert hall. You see concerts there, you see events there, you've got the parking, you've got the space. I think you're at a real advantage. You have a very appealing venue. Most of the tracks that I've been to, they've worked very hard at making that venue appealing.

The other thing I was going to suggest is to work, wherever you can get involved, with the entertainment industry. I'll give you an example. My wife organized an event at the Meadowlands where she brought in actors from "The Sopranos." One guy was Johnny Sack's brother-in-law, the pharmacist, another one was one of the hit men for Tony, and what they did was they created a buzz at the track. They came back to the track. They liked racing. We had them ride in the starting gate and they seemed to really like it. But it involved entertainers, it got some publicity in entertainment magazines, got some pictures, any way you can do that to involve a local—and it doesn't have to be a famous entertainer—if you can find somebody who is a local personality that draws attention. Any way that you can, as they say, synergize with them, that's a good idea.

Another thing would be community service, where you can get involved. And that's very timely. Obama is very big on calling on America for community service. And I can see you making contact with the media. By the way, I do suggest that, is to talk to them because you'd be surprised. I remember years ago working on a political campaign in New Jersey and inviting the reporter from the New York Times and he came and he was happy to get a nice luncheon and gave a nice report. But again, what I want you to do, when you get that opportunity, don't reactively sit there. Because I'm going to say this, any media relations that you do, to be successful, you need to be message-driven, not question-driven. And that's what happens a lot. We kind of get in there in a reactive mode and what happens is that if they don't ask what we feel are the right questions to prompt that discussion it doesn't go so well.

So again, I urge you to proactively and assertively communicate in these interviews so that you're message-driven and not question-driven because you don't want to call them over. You know what happens? They don't know what your story is and if you can't tell it who will? By the way, we've had discussions here obviously about the whole whipping issue and I firmly believe we should get ahead of the curve. I think that's something they might be interested in. And you're probably thinking "oh yeah, they'll show the drivers flailing on those horses and all that." I wouldn't necessarily say that. I'm not here to say that the media are always going to be fair and balanced like they say on Fox and they're always going to get it right, but I would deal in the margins of what you could get done and I see that as an issue of where you're aggressively taking action on it.

There are misconceptions and misperceptions about the whole thing. I think that's something I can see. The fact, you're exposing the health and welfare and the care of the horse. And let's face it, with the beauty of the horse, people. It's great for visuals and mostly, especially television where they remember visuals. A classic example of that is when Ronald Reagan was in office and he's there opening a senior citizen's home and cutting the ribbon and everything and what happened was Andrea Mitchell gave a very scathing voice-over about it because he had cut back funding, but press secretary Michael Deever called her. She thought he was going to say "no more access." No he called her to thank her. She said "what?" "Yeah," he said, "you had all those beautiful visuals and backdrop of him and that's what they remember." You want to get yourself in a position, as they say that's appealing to the eye.

A lot of you have county fairs, and I suggest those as well because you can be within a few feet of the action and I think if you can get people out. You're asking them to come and watch the horses and enjoy the races. You're not at the same time conveying the message, "Oh, by the way, you're really no good to us if you don't gamble." Because that is the bottom line, pari-mutuel handle. We're trying to improve it and if you look at the Chester Downs of the world you can see what they're doing now. They've changed post time to improve that handle. So, they're ahead of the curve, then it's not so much of a handout.

With that being said, anytime you've been talked in the media about the impact and you involve politicians. For instance, I had a horse win a stake called the Messenger, which is a Triple Crown stake in our business, and my little boy said "What will you do if the horse wins?" And I said, "What do you want me to do Brendon?" He said, "I want you to take him to the bus stop." I said, "Well ok," so I did. Nobody thought he would win by the way, he was supposed to have a heart problem, of course the media bought into that too, they liked that as well because it became quite a story. Put it this way, it made the front page, above the fold of the suburban section of the Philadelphia Inquirer.

Now, let's face it, if you went to buy that advertising you really couldn't because they don't sell that space, not in the center above the fold. Of course the politicians came out and they had a goal in mind, they wanted to promote table games in Pennsylvania. We had a state senator come out and the first thing he talked about was how it impacts agriculture and open space, and how to compete with the other states. So it really involved several people and I thought that it worked really well and I am suggesting anywhere you can do that, that you promote it. I know you're saying to yourself, "You know Greg, we've kind of tried that." I'm suggesting that you keep trying. Again, I go back to, it's a free vehicle. It really is. It's not where you say "How are we going to afford above the fold on the front page there? We just can't do that." You'd be surprised.

I was reading about the 24-hour news cycle, which is 24-seconds now. That's really what it is, and it's because of Internet and you can put things, you can link things and we see such stories now, I'm going to show an example in a little while about Barbaro and the CBS Evening News. We have Deweycheatumnhowe on the Internet with the New York Times is quite an accomplishment. But it's available, it's there.

What I'm suggesting, as I said, is to ignite the flame but at the same time not get burned by creating alliances with local charities, with interest groups, if you can involve entertainment, or let's say you're in Indiana where Dan Pleasac is, I can see there was a nice story done on him at a local media outlet. If you have somebody notable in your town that you can get to the races and maybe do something for you, I would suggest that. Again, you're not all going to have Nicole Kidman or Tom Cruise, if you will, in your town. Get involved in community service, as I say any way you can do that at your local events, such as your county fairs.

Talk to the media, educate them, update them, and anywhere you can get an emotional story, that's always a good one as well. I'm going to suggest to you, even the Eight Belles of the world, actually could have been capitalized on and was not. And you can say "how could they capitalize on that?" Well again, we're getting about four minutes on the Today Show, lead guest, you know, 7:07 kind of thing. And with that being said, if I could get Chris to put that on for me that would be great. (Eight Belles clip) Tell you what I'm going to suggest about that. It was ok, but if you look at the audience, really what they should have been saying, first of all, both of them, you know, how tragic it was, how they were sorry that it ever happened and they'll be doing everything, all the research, which they're currently doing as we know, to look at ways to see what they can do to prevent it from happening again. Then we can get into the 2/10^{ths} of one percent and all that. And they could have really moved it.

Because I'm going to tell you right now, Matt did. It's not that he asked difficult questions. And that's the other thing, we give them way too much credit, they don't ask that difficult a question. This is not Sam Donaldson, you're not on Nightline when Ted Koppel was doing it, it's going to be the day to day stuff and guess what, they're looking for something. Matt's kind of saying to himself, "Ok, we've showed the pictures, now what are we going to beat to death here for the next four minutes." And if somebody is assertively driving the message that, again, it's rare, we're sorry for it. Whether the track was a certain way or the synthetics of the track, our goal is to learn from this, to see what we can do to prevent it, to decrease it from happening again. There, you could take out an advertisement on the Today Show, put it this way, you could take the million dollar spot on the Super Bowl a couple Sundays ago, and talk about what you're doing to prevent injury in the racehorse even after, in the whole Barbaro and Eight Belles of the world and it wouldn't match what you got there.

Let me show you then, what I deem to be a well-done interview. It's Pennsylvania Harness Week, and they do an item on the testing and I think the doctor that does it does an excellent job. And you might say "Well yeah but Greg, again, the questions aren't hard and it's their local television show, they're not going to try and beat up on him." No, here's what I'm suggesting though, remember what I said, message-driven not question driven. I'm not suggesting what the politicians do, they're asked about X and they talk about Y, I don't want you to do that. You must address, if they ask you, address it, refute it, refuse it, deny it, disclaim it, but at least you address it and then you move to message. I'm confident that that's what this gentleman would have done regardless of what was asked. If we could just get a look at that one. (Pennsylvania clip) Now I would say if you brought in the Sam Donaldsons of the world and they tried to browbeat on him, I think that he would have stuck to the same message throughout. By the way, you might say, well he said "level playing field" three times. Don't assume they got it the first time. You can't assume that. Again, I go back to, mostly what we tend to remember about television is the visual side of it. And they had all the great pictures, it was very well done.

In national media, if I can get you to pop up, here we are in the New York Times. Now there's where I would say emotion comes in. You've got Deweycheatumnhowe and the fact that his career was over, and we had all those great visuals throughout his career about him being ridden by saddle, about him swimming, and now he's retiring and you can just see the emotion between man and horse. It's on the Times' website and rarely do we get that. Thanks to Bill Finley we get some, that's for sure. But, let me just summarize again before I'll take questions because I don't want to go over time here. I'm going to say this, identify what's interesting, what's new, what's good about the product, and get it to and through via the media. Finally, when you get the media coverage, again be message-driven, not question-driven. Thank you. We have time for some questions if you have some.

Ellen Harvey: My name is Ellen Harvey and I work for the USTA in their Harness Racing Communications division. You talked about getting out in front of an issue and we have not yet had PETA knocking on our door, but we all feel their heavy breath on our necks. We're kind of at the crux here of a decision to be made about the whipping rules and certainly many, many other issues as well. You get paid a whole lot of money to tell people how to avoid stepping in a big mess. What kind of advice would you give us to get PETA off our neck?

Greg Peck: I'll give you an example of that. I think the rodeo cowboys were mentioned yesterday, and I got a call from them, of course after the fact. Here's what happened. Hard Copy went out, did an expose on the cruelty of the rodeo. Now, the rodeo cowboys are calling it yellow journalism and see how bad they are and blah, blah, blah, then they go on TV in Las Vegas, somebody from PETA and they get absolutely creamed over it. So then they call me and they say, "What should we have done?" I said I would have given Hard Copy an award. What? I said those rodeos that they show, do you sanction them? Well no, they've got nothing to do with us. Oh, I guess you didn't want to tell them. Now let me ask you this, do you want them spurring hard, snapping those calves' necks back? Well of course not and we spend a lot of money on public awareness and we aggressively go after what seems to be a great minority, it rarely happens at a rodeo. I guess you wouldn't want to tell someone that, would you? So my suggestion for you is, is I do think, as far as the whipping goes you're going to get two sides of that and I usually don't give personal opinions but I will in this case.

I think it's something that really we've got to get together with the judges because I've been there and watched them whack, whack, whack. My father used to say "They're not racing horses, they're taming lions here." We don't want that, but aggressively talk to local media about it because I think they'll use it. I'm going to suggest that if you can be message-driven, you can ignite the flame without getting burned. If they do show some flailing and all that, I will say that if orchestrated properly you can come out on top and maybe get a few new fans out of it. Any other questions or comments?

A Voice: Good morning. I agree with everything you've said so far this morning.

Greg Peck: Gee, I've never heard that before.

A Voice: Well, you're right on target and I think our industry—this is my first time at this conference—our industry is so fragmented that the track, the driver or jockey and the owner, everyone has to get a piece of the action but there really is a very small piece left for media relations and promotions. I liken it to NASCAR, and would like it to be like NASCAR. We very seldom mention the jockey or the driver, it's always the horse and true, the horse is putting on the show but the jockey and the driver; they're around for a lot more years than the horse is. We need to lionize them, get them in the media, so they can have the hat with their name on it or have their colors so that they're recognizable. I think we're missing the boat with that, that we're not pushing our industry into the public's eye. The Harness Horse Youth Foundation, we

had that one year at Batavia. It was the greatest event we had all year. We had the biggest handle that night, on Wednesday night, of the entire season. On a Wednesday night, our largest handle. Because of that. Those are the type of things that we need to get out into the public so that they understand who we are and what we're about, and lionize the drivers, get them out there so that people think that they're somebody special.

Greg Peck: You make a good point. The jockeys, by the way, seem to be pretty animated and they seem to get some coverage when the race is actually on and one of the controversial ones was Kent Desormeaux with Big Brown, when he pulled him up and then they talked about it. But your point is well taken. I see Meadowlands now is having the drivers on YouTube. So they talk to Brian Sears, they talk to George Brennan about likes and dislikes. So they're starting it. We've probably been taking baby steps and I suggest that you continue to do that and again, if you don't tell the story, they're not going to tell it for you and a lot of times when they don't know anything about it, they're glad when you tell them your story and they'll use it.

A Voice: I just have one other comment. I subscribe to the Las Vegas Journal Review and each week they have a listing of all the conferences that are happening in Vegas that month. Not one word about this conference in the last two weeks in the Las Vegas Journal Review, and that's not their fault, it's our fault.

Greg Peck: Anybody else? One last one? Ellen again, yep.

Ellen Harvey: I'd just like to take note that I work for the USTA and two of the three examples of good harness racing publicity that you presented today were a result of the USTA effort. Thank you.

Greg Peck: As I've always told you, you're the smartest woman that I know, you and Moira Fanning. Thank you very much for your time.