

A campaign for clean drinking water expands

Stuart Elliott

A Project that originated at a boutique ad agency to help Unicef deliver clean drinking water to children in developing countries is expanding in its third year as more firms join to support the cause.



The Tap Project, as the initiative is called, is adding cities and sponsors and is going bilingual with ads in Spanish as well as English. It takes place this year during World Water Week, which begins on March 22.

The Tap Project was introduced in Esquire magazine in 2007 by David Droga, the creative chairman at Droga5 in New York. The program (www.tapproject.org) allows patrons at participating restaurants to donate \$1 to Unicef each time they order free tap water with their meals rather than costly bottled alternatives.

Since its inception, the Tap Project has raised almost \$1 million to support Unicef water programs in countries like the Central African Republic, Guatemala, Haiti and Togo.

The fund-raising took place only in New York the first year. In 2008, it was introduced nationally, expanding to more than a dozen other cities as additional agencies joined Droga5 in creating pro bono ads to encourage diners and restaurants to take part.



A Barbra Streisand impersonator in an ad seeking donations for water systems.

The count this time is at least 19 cities. In addition, students at the Brigham Young University Ad Lab and the Virginia Commonwealth University Brandcenter are contributing ads along with a score of agencies.

In another first, agencies that specialize in creating campaigns aimed at Spanish-speaking consumers are participating; there are three, producing work to run in Los Angeles, Miami, New York and Puerto Rico.

As the economy deteriorated the last few months, there were fears the interest that had been shown in the Tap Project would wane.

"We're concerned on the restaurant side," said Jay Aldous, chief marketing and communications officer for the United States Fund for Unicef in New York, because many of them "are struggling."

"The case we're trying to make to them is that the Tap Project, correctly implemented, can help drive traffic," Mr. Aldous said.

Joining a previous sponsor, the American Express Company, Mr. Aldous said, are the Watergeeks Laboratories, which makes products like water bottles, and Barnes & Noble, which will sell a line of Tap Project merchandise at the cafes inside its bookstores.

To offset any downturn in participation, the organizers will "look at how to expand Tap beyond restaurants," he added. For instance, people are being encouraged to host parties that week and to donate money using their mobile phones; they can text "tap" or "agua" (Spanish for "water") to Unicef (864233) to make a \$5 donation.

"In these trying times," Mr. Droga said, donations may not lag because people may be "more aware of trying to do some good, to balance the misery."

"The most exciting thing to me is the amount of agencies returning" to help out, he added. "My fear was the ones that did it last year would say, 'We ticked that box' and not come back."

The returnees include, in addition to Droga5, Energy BBDO in Chicago, part of the BBDO Worldwide unit of the Omnicom Group; Goodby, Silverstein & Partners in San Francisco, also an Omnicom agency; Hill, Holliday, Connors, Cosmopolis in Boston, part of the Interpublic Group of Companies; Publicis West in Seattle, part of the Publicis Groupe; Saatchi & Saatchi in New York, another Publicis agency; and the Playa del Rey, Calif., office of TBWA/Chiat/Day, part of the TBWA Worldwide division of Omnicom.

The three newcomers in the realm of Hispanic advertising are Casanova Pendrill in Costa Mesa, Calif.; Grupo Gallegos in Long Beach, Calif.; and PopuliCom in San Juan.

Teresa Elston, managing director at Grupo Gallegos, was among a group of agency executives accompanying Unicef officials to Guatemala last month to see what donations to the Tap Project had accomplished.



The ad for the Tap Project produced by students at Brigham Young University.

"It doesn't take much to make a big difference," Ms. Elston said. "It was amazing the differences between communities that had clean water systems and those that did not."

"In the communities that didn't have water, most of the kids didn't have shoes," she added. "The ones that did, the kids seem to be thriving in so many ways."

As for the effects of the economy on charitable giving, Ms. Elston said she believed that although "those in more difficult situations may pull inward, those who still feel fortunate enough to be doing well in this environment may feel more like giving back."

The work being produced by Grupo Gallegos is to appear in media like television, radio, the Internet, magazines and newspapers.

That is also the case for the ads being produced by Casanova Pendrill, which also plans an experiential element for its campaign centered on unusual vending machines to be installed in locations like Bayfront Park in Miami and Union Square in Manhattan.

The vending machines would pretend to sell dirty, germ-laden water, said Ingrid Otero-Smart, president and chief executive at Casanova Pendrill, to symbolize "the choices a mom is confronted with" in countries where there is little or no clean drinking water for her children.

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