

From Maumee to Wuxi

A Technical Center Opening of Global Proportions

Research & Planning

Industrial business-to-business public relations can be complex and unfamiliar as it is. But executing a comprehensive public relations strategy for a multi-billion dollar corporation launching its first major engineering facility in China is downright daunting. And that's just what Gelia was up against when their client, Dana Holding Corporation (headquartered in Maumee, Ohio) asked the agency to coordinate a facility opening for their new multi-million dollar, 129,000 square-foot, technical center in Wuxi, Jiangsu Province, China.

In order to know where to begin in a country with 1.3 billion people and 40.6 million companies, Gelia had to clearly define why Dana was opening the center and what the company's expectations were.

The new technical center in Wuxi was expected to demonstrate Dana's commitment to the Asia-Pacific marketplace and its customers in that region. Moreover, they wanted to bring awareness to the fact that world-class engineering expertise would be available at a regional level. Dana was looking to expand its footprint for some time to provide faster response times and better serve local needs – and this new technical center was going to be the way in.

But Gelia recognized that putting on such a grand scale event that with Dana's entire executive leadership team in attendance, including the CEO, as well as the Chinese government and media, would require some feet on the ground earlier than one week before. So they enlisted the services of a Chinese ad agency through Worldwide Partners – a network that connects marketing agencies around the world.

While Gelia facilitated all creative execution of the opening, completed all written materials and developed the entire event strategy and schedule, WE Marketing served as Gelia's media relations, vendor, venue and logistics liaison. WE also provided counsel on Chinese customs and protocol.

But as with any good event, it all begins with research. Gelia drew on its past successes in China where the agency facilitated Dana's presence at major Asia-Pacific tradeshows, including three visits to Bauma China and one to Auto Shanghai. The team also investigated Dana's current competitors, identifying 14 key competitors. Three had a technical center, two had testing capabilities, but none of which had the extensive research and development capabilities Dana could bring to the region.

In addition to identifying competitors, Gelia also accounted for cultural issues. Guanxi, which means building personal relationships in Chinese, is extremely important to consider when dealing with the Chinese media. It's a very delicate process, because a strong rapport must be established before you can pitch a story or send an event invitation. Gelia was also prepared to supply "red packets" for any media representatives that would attend the event. As cited in the *Global Public Relations Handbook*, it's customary in China to provide a nominal amount of money to cover travel expenses, usually about \$5-\$10.

And, when creating promotional material, Gelia knew that color selection was critical because certain colors have different meanings. For example, white is synonymous with death.

Then Gelia and Dana identified the event's target audience as potential Chinese customers, current Chinese customers, Dana suppliers, the Chinese media, Chinese government officials and Dana employees.

With defined target publics, a schedule of events was created. March 11, 2013 would include extensive rehearsals. March 12 would be the formal launch event, including speeches from Dana executives, remarks from Wuxi government officials, facility tours, a media luncheon, media one-on-one interviews and a customer dinner. March 13-14 was set aside for customer interviews and entertainment.

The overall goal was to position Dana in the Chinese marketplace as a technology leader, supported by the following objectives to measure the event's success:

- Improve customer relations in Asia-Pacific region, specifically by having 20 customers attend.
- Raise awareness of Dana's presence in China, specifically through an attendance of 150 guests and securing coverage in 20 industry and local publications.
- Demonstrate a rise in sales leads emanating from the Asia-Pacific region by 10% from 2012 to 2013.
- Secure one-on-one interviews with five reporters, and having 15 media representatives attend the luncheon.

A \$160,000 budget was set to complete all marketing communications materials, which included translation.

Implementation

After the schedule and objectives for the event were finalized, an overall message strategy was crafted to resonate with the Chinese audience. Gelia consulted with WE as well as Dana's Chinese employees, and together they decided on "Technology. Collaboration. Growth. Designed in China for China." Gelia joined Dana's corporate color and red to honor the Chinese culture.

As the event grew closer, Gelia encountered time barrier issues, which caused many early morning, and late night meetings. And regardless of weekly scheduled meetings with Dana's marketing team, Gelia and WE – there was the constant struggle of collaborating with so many parties. Language was also an obstacle, creating the need for constant translation.

Gelia was also forced to change many initial plans, due to new Chinese government anti-corruption initiatives. For example, the red carpet had to be replaced with a gray carpet, as Chinese officials are not allowed to have their picture taken on a red carpet. Entertainment could only happen after government officials left, and they were only allowed to say one sentence each during the event. Gelia also planned for government officials to join both the formal launch and dinner, but because of these new directives, they were only allowed to attend one event.

Nevertheless, Gelia proceeded with planning by confirming locations, hotels, flights, meeting areas and restaurants. WE assisted and secured attendants, a bilingual emcee, interpreters, a videographer and photographers. Gelia also provided the creative material to help a third-party vendor transform the industrial manufacturing facility into a stage.

Tactical elements of the event strategy included:

- Strategic Executive Counseling
 - Completed four executive speeches
 - Established key talking points for event
 - Prepared executive Q&A
- Media relations
 - Developed English and Chinese press kit, which included:
 - Fact sheet
 - Press release
 - Images
 - Executive biographies
 - Facilitated one-on-one media interviews
 - Drafted specific responses to individual media questions
 - Compiled industry media list
 - Delivered media invitations for event
 - Pitched launch story after event
- Special Event Support
 - Prepared entire PowerPoint presentation for four presenters
 - Produced Event video
 - Prepared lab tour, including maps, scripts for tour guides and station leaders
 - Designed exterior décor (posters, flags, balloons, full-wall graphics, etc.) and directional signage
 - Assembled autograph wall
- Event Promotion
 - Launched Dana.cn – corporate website specifically for China
 - Developed registration page in four languages
 - Created paper and email invitations in four languages
 - Designed brochure

As the event approached, all parties met bright and early March 11 for an extensive dry run of the entire event. The seating chart was also scrutinized to ensure competitors were not sitting next to each other. But when government officials stopped by, they requested to get rid of balloons, remove all plants and flowers and eliminate any extra opulence. Evidently, this was not a big issue, but definitely wasted event dollars.

And when it came to the actual day, everything went off without a hitch. Well, mostly. Gelia did have to make some last minute changes to the presentations, literally ten minutes before the event began. The program also started 15 minutes earlier to accommodate government officials' schedules. The emcee even had to change outfits for a more traditional Chinese appearance. The room lighting was also in constant flux before the event because too much light was coming through skylights, which was affecting the audience's perspective of the videos.

But, it was smooth sailing from there, all the way through helping event VIPs (Dana executives and government officials) "activate" the facility by touching an enormous, lit Dana logo.

Gelia didn't miss a beat through the rest of the day's events facilitating the tour, media luncheon and one-on-one interviews – all conducted in proper guanxi fashion.

Results & Evaluation

Overall the event was extremely successful, Gelia garnered fantastic results, while Dana truly shined on a global scale.

Gelia's goal of 150 guests was exceeded with more than 300 media, government officials, customers and Dana employees all in attendance. Dana certainly established relationships with local media, surpassing its goal of 15 guests for the luncheon and 5 one-on-one interviews, with 17 representatives attending the luncheon and completing 10 one-on-one interviews after. Also, Gelia's goal of receiving coverage in 20 key publications was met with 21 online articles, three online videos, one major print report, five Weibo social media posts on Weibo, and one television story. All aside from a major article in the Wall Street Journal as well as making the cover of an industry-leading publication – Diesel Progress, which nearly 40% of its readership based in the Asia-Pacific region.

Customer relations was also improved, as Gelia's goal of 20 customer attendees was surpassed by XX

With industrial business-to-business public relations, one of the main goals is always improving sales. And, evidently Gelia's efforts to launch the Dana China Technical Center proved successful.

At the current time of the opening, the Chinese industrial economy was actually down. Dana fully expected the sales decline from 2012 to 2013, with 2012 total sales of 20% (which included a large business acquisition) in Asia-Pacific region, dropping to 12% in 2013. One of the reasons Dana planned for the opening in 2013, was to establish itself as an industry leader, so they would be ready to handle the production increase when the market grows again in 2014. To no surprise, Dana's technical center in Wuxi is growing rapidly, increasing from 70 employees to 200 by the end of 2015.

- Improve customer relations in Asia-Pacific region, specifically by having at least 20 key customers attend the event.
- Demonstrate a clear rise in sales leads by at least 10% from 2012 to 2013, emanating from the Asia-Pacific region.

To support an increase in sales leads, Dana.com saw steady traffic from the Asia-Pacific region from March through April. In fact, 74% of all traffic was all new visitors.

Some of Gelia's most gratifying results were the positive anecdotal responses received from Dana's key executive leadership team, including CEO, Roger Wood. "We were more than pleased with the final results of the opening, we really couldn't have done it without our Gelia team," said Mark Schneider, vice president of Dana off-highway driveline technologies.

Both Gelia and Dana were expected to deliver on a monumental scale with this event. And, both companies did more than deliver. Gelia was regarded as Dana's saving grace for this event, making the company look professional and poised to the entire world, while Dana was catapulted to the top as a fierce global competitor in the Chinese marketplace. Dana was so impressed by Gelia's strategy the team was asked again to facilitate another opening – this time in India. Now, it's time to for round two.