

GMTA: scUber

Project scUber

March 09 2020

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Word count (ex: Appendix): 998 words

Objective

By 2018, climate change-induced bleaching in the northern part of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) had created a misperception that Queensland's world-heritage listed icon was in jeopardy. The real story however was nuanced: while some parts of the 2400km-long Reef were impacted by the bleaching events of 2016-17, large portions remained unaffected and beautiful. Yet, media globally were reporting that the Reef was dead, driving down visitation from Queensland's key travel markets.

The decline was concerning. The GBR supports 64,000 jobs, contributes A\$6.4 billion to the Australian economy and welcomes two million visitors annually; each visitor contributing A\$6.50AVG to reef conservation efforts. Quite simply, TEQ needed to turn the tourism decline into growth.

With an initial budget of A\$1 million, the brief was to:

1. Shift media and consumer sentiment by resetting the conversation about the Reef's health
2. Drive awareness and bookings in TEQ's six Western markets
3. Generate more than A\$20m in ASR

Strategy

Launch the world's first bookable rideshare submarine on the Great Barrier Reef, called scUber

Publicis Australia's winning strategy was to develop the world's first bookable rideshare submarine offering a 260° window with an unfiltered lens to the Reef. This future form of travel would not only ignite the world's imagination, it would allow TEQ to broadcast the Reef in its authentic state.

To make this story relevant to a global audience, the submarine had to be bookable for global consumers. This required one important partner – the world's largest ride-share platform, UBER.

TEQ and Publicis pitched the concept to UBER, proposing a partnership that would deliver newsworthiness and scale. ScUber provided:

- UBER with the opportunity to launch a world-first initiative which leveraged the company's innovative transport and technology credentials as well as a platform to promote its sustainability efforts and new partnership with Citizens of The Great Barrier Reef (CoGBR).
- TEQ with access to UBER's global database of 50 million and the opportunity to leverage UBER's platform, brand credibility, innovative technology and global marketing team.

To shift to a more positive narrative, TEQ developed an extensive PR campaign targeting media who had previously covered Reef bleaching.

Tactics

Lead time proved the biggest challenge with just 12 weeks to brief in partners, source an electric submarine and relocate it to Australia, obtain operational permissions, integrate the campaign into UBER's bookability platform, co-develop a media strategy for each market and roll out a communication's plan to UBER'S 50 million users globally.

Further complicating matters, the launch was "live" from a coral cay 80km off the Queensland coast – with limited WIFI.

To add gravitas and shift the conversation away from the perception of a "stunt", TEQ and UBER partnered with Citizens of the Great Barrier Reef (CoGBR), a not-for-profit organisation with a genuine rally call for behavioural change. Additionally, TEQ engineered a pre-event panel session with esteemed Reef experts to address media on the state of the reef.

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All challenges were neutralised by a deeply held cross-organisational belief that the future of the Reef – and the environment - was important. Educating travellers to continue to visit the Reef, to fall in love with it and advocate for it, was at heart of all efforts.

Phase 1: Heron Island, Southern Great Barrier Reef

- May 22: Panel session with five Reef experts including Chief Scientist of GBRMPA
- May 23: 36 media from 25 global outlets were kept in the dark until the Minister for Tourism launched the press call and the submarine appeared in the water before them.
- Assets created in the first 12 hours were deployed through global newswires, plus through TEQ's owned channels and partner networks including Uber's 50 million ride-share database and Tourism Australia's 8.3 million Facebook and 3.8 million Instagram followers.
- A 48hr global press office was managed from Heron Island with support from Herd MSL (Sydney) and TEQ and UBER's international offices
- A competition was launched for two winners from six western markets to experience scUber.
- May 27: Gladstone resident becomes the world's first On-Demand scUber traveller, igniting fresh coverage.
- May 27 – June 4: Media, KOLs, reef sceptics and UBER On-Demand riders experience scUber.

Phase 2: Quicksilver Pontoon, Agincourt off Cairns

- June 8-9: New wave of media invited to scUber's second location to experience the health and beauty of the northern sections of Reef where most bleaching had previously occurred.
- June 8 World Ocean's Day: CoGBR, TEQ and UBER launch Junior Citizens of the Great Barrier Reef with Nickelodeon.
- June 9 - 18: scUber On-Demand opens to UBER riders
- June 11- 18: Competition winners arrive. Canadian couple becomes world's first underwater ride share marriage proposal, sparking coverage.

Results

scUber successfully changed the conversation around the Reef globally and increased consideration and bookings.

- Tourism numbers +4%
- Positive social sentiment on the GBR grew from 21% to 62%.
- Travel partner sales increase (UK sales +22%)
- 4,320 earned media placements via national TV, print and online
- AUD\$130M+ earned media generated
- Over 4.5 billion media impressions globally
- 95% of media stories positive or neutral in sentiment
- 40+ KOLs experience scUber, becoming Reef advocates.
- 152,000 competition entries (two weeks)
- 700,000 website views (eight weeks)
- 11,500 Junior CoGBR signed

Karen Sweeney, Heron Island:

Having ScUber launch on Heron Island resulted immediately in spikes in visits and revenue through our website. Our small team is struggling to keep up with new business enquiries - from dive wholesalers and groups - as a result of the ScUber activity showcasing the diverse marine life thriving on the Great Barrier Reef.

Other highlights

UBER channels fuelled engagement and drove buzz

- 47 million unique app sessions during campaign
- 16 million reach via social channels, 21 million impressions and over 2 million engagement across key markets
- UBER Australia donates \$100,000 to CoGBR
- 5-star rating on all scUber rides
- Celebrity engagement: Ashton Kutcher, George Takei, David Spade, Joel Parkinson and world's first marriage proposal

In conclusion, scUber brought together tourism and technology partners to successfully change conversation and sentiment around the Reef globally and demonstrate an uplift in travel intent to Australia's greatest natural asset.