



## LessThanUThink Campaign

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The Capstone Agency and University of Alabama and The Century Council, Jan 1,2011

**Summary:** 2011 SILVER ANVIL AWARD OF EXCELLENCE WINNER — PUBLIC SERVICE — PARTNERSHIPS (FUNDED JOINTLY BY BUSINESSES AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDING NONPROFIT AND GOVERNMENT)

### LessThanUThink Campaign

LessThanUThink developed from a student-generated concept for a nationwide campaign combating binge drinking on college campuses. The campaign's concept placed second in a student competition and sparked the interest of the competition's client, The Century Council, a nonprofit organization funded by distillers. In spring 2010, TCC awarded a \$75,000 grant to The University of Alabama to pilot the campaign on its campus. The University's Advertising and Public Relations department partnered with UA's Student Health Center and charged 15 advertising and public relations students to research, plan, execute and evaluate the campaign's pilot on campus.

### **Full Text: SITUATION ANALYSIS**

Binge drinking affects colleges and universities across the country, and nationally, 44 percent of college students said they've participated in binge drinking. College students generally accept drinking as the social norm; any message that condemns drinking or aims to reduce the students' "good time" will be rejected. Therefore, reaching students about over consumption of alcohol requires developing a new conversation about what constitutes binge drinking and why to moderate alcohol consumption. To test solutions to the problem, The Century Council, a nonprofit organization funded by distillers, partnered with The University of Alabama and its student-run public relations firm to implement a campaign reaching students about the dangers of binge drinking.

### **RESEARCH**

Students at The University of Alabama conducted research to determine the best way to reach college students about the dangers of binge drinking. Focus groups, written and online surveys, in-depth interviews, observations and copy testing inspired the original concept for the campaign's message based on three basic principles:

- Students do not respond to scare tactics and prefer humorous messages with more serious undertones.
- Students do not define binge drinking numerically; instead, they loosely define binge drinking as "drinking in excess and losing control." When defined numerically, students over estimate the number of drinks included in the definition.
- Students are more concerned with short-term, social consequences of binge drinking such as gaining weight or embarrassment than long-term, physical consequences of over consumption such as liver damage.

From quantitative research, the campaign team determined the general awareness and attitudes of UA students concerning binge drinking. In a survey conducted prior to the campaign, only 7 percent of students correctly identified the definition of binge drinking, and 54 percent of students said they had done something they regretted after over consuming alcohol. A survey conducted in the months prior to the campaign showed 51 percent of students believed alcohol is an important part of college culture, and 62 percent agreed that alcohol was important to having a good time.

## **PLANNING**

The campaign team used research findings to develop strategies and tactics to break through the clutter and to create a new conversation about binge drinking. The campaign planned to hit campus with a bang, maintain an edgy image throughout the six-week campaign and make students remember that “it takes LessThanUThink.”

The overall campaign objectives were:

- To increase awareness of the undesired results, situations and consequences associated with the over consumption of alcohol among University of Alabama students to 20 percent by November 2010.
- To increase the number of University of Alabama students who will associate over consumption of alcohol with negative social and physical consequences and will consider monitor their drinking habits by 10 percent by November 2010.

With a \$75,000 budget funded by a grant from The Century Council, LessThanUThink’s campaign team developed a plan to reach students on campus, at home and at the point of consumption. From interacting with students at local bars and impacting UA’s game day festivities to educating students during on-campus events, online and through promotional items, LessThanUThink’s campaign team planned a six-week campaign lasting September 2 – October 16.

## **EXECUTION**

Because binge drinking is a sensitive subject at a large public university, the campaign team worked closely with UA’s Student Health Center and Media Relations department to ensure all messages would be received clearly and in a way that shed the best possible light both on the campaign and on the University. By focusing on awareness and attitude objectives and keeping the campaign free from UA’s brand, the campaign team developed a series of strategies and tactics to reach UA students. The campaign developed partnerships with student organizations and local bars and businesses to work toward a common goal of educating students about the dangers of binge drinking.

The campaign’s tactics fit into three general categories: on-campus initiatives, bar initiatives and online initiatives. The most popular on-campus initiatives focused on making LessThanUThink a popular brand on campus while promoting moderation in all areas of student life. Tactics for on-campus initiatives included an alcohol-free tailgate party, a health and wellness fair a “happy hour” event at the student recreation center to educate students about weight gain associated with binge drinking and several guerilla marketing tactics that grabbed attention and got students talking about the LessThanUThink campaign such as scattering 4,000 neon-colored stress balls on the UA quad and holding a flash mob in the student union. During bar initiatives, campaign team members and student volunteers visited local bars once each week of the campaign for trivia nights or to hand out promotional items. Handing out popular items such as t-shirts and koozies while placing ash trays in the bars that read “You think u quit smoking. And you did. Three drinks ago” made LessThanUThink appear fun and edgy and made students want to know more about the campaign. Due to the success of the bar initiatives, LessThanUThink koozies or t-shirts became hot commodities on campus. The campaign’s online initiatives centered around interacting with students through a campaign website, social media and social media contests. LessThanUThink engaged students on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. The most successful online initiative was a Facebook photo

scavenger hunt in which students took as many photos as possible of themselves with LessThanUThink items; student posted more than 2,000 photos to the campaign fan page. The campaign used advertising in the student newspaper to inform students about events and initiatives, and the campaign also aired PSAs during Tuscaloosa's five most-watched shows.

### **EVALUATION**

Surveys indicated the campaign increased the awareness of the definition of binge drinking from 7 percent to 29.5 percent; 42.7 percent of students said they were aware of the definition as a direct result of LessThanUThink. Of the students surveyed, more than 70 percent were familiar with the LessThanUThink campaign on campus, and focus groups and in-depth interviews showed that students wanted the campaign to continue on campus. This suggests LessThanUThink met its awareness objective by increasing the awareness of binge drinking and its consequences to students on campus.

In the post-campaign online survey, only 38 percent of students believed alcohol was an important part of college culture, a 13-percent decrease from pre-campaign research. Also, 66 percent of students said alcohol doesn't make its users more attractive, an 8-percent increase from the baseline. This suggests the campaign met its attitude objective by changing students' attitudes about alcohol's importance in social situations.

The LessThanUThink campaign received more than 33 pieces of media coverage in online, print and broadcast media. It was the feature story on several Birmingham (Ala.) evening news stations, and the campaign received a "coveted spot" in PRWeek's January 2011 issue with a 700-word case study on the campaign. The campaign's website experienced more than 2,000 hits during the six-week campaign. Its Twitter handle, @LTUThink, gained more than 280 followers, and its Facebook fan page acquired more than 580 fans.