

The Greatest Delivery: UPS Healthcare Leads Worldwide COVID-19 Vaccine Logistics and Distribution UPS with FleishmanHillard

If COVID-19 was the global story for 2020, the rollout of the vaccines was its turning point – shifting the narrative from hardship to hope. UPS Communications saw this opportunity to showcase its pivotal role in a once-in-a-century, unified global effort. Additionally, it offered the opportunity to generate more exposure among key customers for UPS’s growing healthcare services business, more credit to the UPSers who made this massive logistics effort possible, more understanding of its world-class capabilities, and more visibility and support for UPS’s philanthropic efforts to increase health equity worldwide. UPS met the moment – not only in delivering more than one billion doses around the world (out-delivering competitors by 2x with 99.5% efficiency), but also showing up in stories that celebrated essential UPSers and positioned the company as a key driver of this century’s “greatest delivery.”

For one year, from the FDA approval of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine in December 2020 through the December 2021 one billion doses delivered milestone, UPS Communications drove a fully integrated campaign, using earned media, owned social media, internal and executive communications.

Insights and Analysis

In July 2020, UPS and FleishmanHillard’s True Global Intelligence (TGI) research enterprise conducted a benchmarking exercise to determine the key drivers of UPS’s reputation among customers and consumers. This research uncovered that company reputation was the #1 criteria driving buying decisions. While UPS had been enacting programs and sharing stories over the past year focused on bolstering its reputation as an innovative logistics company, the message was still struggling to break through (only 25% of those surveyed considered UPS “innovative”). This signaled that UPS Communications needed a new approach – one that married the details of its high-tech logistics services and world-class capabilities with more people-focused storytelling to connect, engage and, ultimately, break through. Additionally, in December 2020, immediately at the start of the COVID-19 vaccine campaign, UPS and TGI developed in-depth media consumption personas for key audience segments – journalists, investors, policymakers, and informed consumers, both domestic and international – to understand where audiences are receiving content to inform planning, outreach and measuring success.

Planning

Media coverage and conversation around COVID-19 vaccines was exceptionally fevered and crowded, particularly during the first vaccine rollouts in December 2020 (Pfizer and Moderna) and February 2021 (Johnson & Johnson). The challenge was to 1) showcase the brand and its employees while avoiding any association with increasingly partisan rhetoric as the year progressed, and 2) advance UPS’s messaging around efficient delivery and innovation even as “vaccine fatigue” in media set in through 2021.

UPS Communications executed a “tentpole and drumbeat” storytelling strategy to achieve its communications objectives, marrying big events and key milestones that capture attention with ongoing storytelling that drives consistent visibility and reinforce positioning with key stakeholders. For its vaccine delivery storytelling efforts, UPS focused on three major tentpole moments – the FDA emergency use authorization of Pfizer and Moderna (December 2020), the Johnson & Johnson vaccine (February 2021) and UPS’s milestone of delivering one billion COVID-19 vaccine doses worldwide (December 2021) – to build and execute global earned-led, multi-channel activations. In between those tentpole moments, UPS teams proactively pitched and secured media coverage and drove a steady stream of content across social and owned channels to consistently position UPS as the healthcare logistics leader, market innovator and driver of global health equity.

Execution

In December 2020 and February 2021, UPS Communications activated its first tentpole moments, showcasing its worldwide distribution capabilities during the announcement of the Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccine approvals. UPS Communications targeted domestic and international top-tier outlets like ABC, CNN, NBC, BBC and many others to generate feature stories that went beyond the “news of the moment” to highlight UPS’s end-to-end healthcare logistics capabilities. UPS also shared compelling visuals and powerful employee soundbites

across internal and external channels to illustrate how it was “moving the world forward by delivering what matters” – UPS’s new mission statement.

Following the J&J vaccine activation, UPS Communications continued its momentum through drumbeat storytelling, including proactive media relations efforts to highlight UPS Healthcare’s end-to-end, cold chain storage capabilities (a key capital investment to handle the increasing prevalence of biologically derived pharmaceuticals) and owned and earned stories that featured UPS’s philanthropic efforts to increase global vaccine access (including Malawi, Ghana and Indonesia).

The vaccine efforts were capped with the final tentpole activation in December 2021 – one billion COVID-19 vaccine doses delivered. Aligned with the one-year anniversary of the first vaccine distribution, this effort struck a balance between celebrating a job well done and acknowledging the critical work that still lies ahead. The team created the “Faces of One Billion” video to celebrate employee efforts and their impact on communities aided by the vaccines, and secured executive interviews with global media, including CNBC International, BBC World TV and CNBC, to discuss support of equitable distribution of the vaccine.

Evaluation

UPS dominated global COVID-19 vaccine logistics coverage. During the Pfizer, Moderna and J&J approvals, UPS executives conducted interviews – onsite at Worldport and remotely from Atlanta – with all major media outlets in the U.S. and top international markets, resulting in more than 9,800 media articles, 94.6 billion total impressions and over 280 pieces of UPS-created content that resulted in over 6 million owned impressions. Coverage included eight-minute CNN and four-minute CNN International features on UPS logistics and healthcare capabilities, as well as hits from the ABC Good Morning America, NBC’s TODAY Show, CBS This Morning, NBC Nightly News, BBC, Cheddar, Washington Post, CNBC and many, many more. In fact, after a 3-minute interview with UPS Healthcare president Wes Wheeler, Good Morning America anchor T.J. Holmes remarked, “A global pandemic. You know a sign when it’s over? A brown [UPS] truck pulls up to a hospital.”

Critically, the drumbeat communications efforts conducted throughout the year focused on efficient delivery and logistics innovation – key business-to-business messages for UPS Healthcare. These drumbeat efforts drove more than 30 total trade and regional articles, resulting in over 65 million impressions in eight months. Coverage published in critical healthcare growth markets including the U.S., Spain, Netherlands, Italy and Germany, showcasing the global reach of UPS’s vaccine efforts.

Finally, this effort helped bolster UPS’s corporate reputation and brand relevance. Notably, perception that UPS cares about social responsibility rose 5% from Q4 2020 to Q4 2021 among a key customer segment, a testament to how COVID-19 vaccine logistics and distribution helped demonstrate that UPS is true to its mission of “moving the world forward by delivering what matters.”