

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS RAZORBACK FOUNDATION

CHRISTMAS IN JULY PROMOTION



INTRODUCTION

The University of Arkansas Razorback Foundation presented DME with a unique idea they believed could meet several of their needs during a time when it can be difficult to spark engagement from donors. Kassidie Blackstock, the Director of Strategic Communication & Stewardship for the Razorback Foundation, turned to Tye Edwards, Sr. Business Development Manager at DME, to see if their idea of utilizing a DME platform in a completely different way could actually work.

DME had worked with the Razorback Foundation on a benefits package and gift program the past year. That type of program was one of great familiarity and success for DME. Blackstock's new proposal would take an existing DME platform and venture into uncharted waters.

THE CHALLENGE

On many occasions, colleges and universities identify a premium or promotion they really like and then use it in perpetuity because of its popularity. Those kinds of initiatives can pay huge dividends year in and year out because they are universally loved by donors, sponsors and fans. The challenge, however, is having the foresight and creativity to identify a promotion like that.

Blackstock and the Razorback Foundation wanted to try a "Christmas in July" online fanshop that would incorporate Christmas-themed items in their store. The challenge for DME would be to find items with holiday spirit in the middle of the summer that could be offered with little or no minimums. An additional obstacle would be to convince donors to purchase Christmas items in 90-degree weather. While DME had completed many holiday stores in the past, they had never operated one so far outside of the actual holiday. The Razorback Foundation's Christmas in July store would be the first of its kind.

The holiday pop-up store would be a fundraising promotion for the Razorback Foundation that would benefit its 465 student-athletes across 19 programs without a hard ask from the Foundation to its donors. If it worked it would fill a void during a month when special fundraising incentives have usually been dormant.

"Christmas in July came about because we were discussing doing something on "Giving Tuesday" - that is the Tuesday in the fall that follows Thanksgiving," said Blackstock. "However, a lot of schools and organizations already participate in that so knowing that July is kind of a slower month because there are no sports going on - that is how Christmas in July was born."

THE SOLUTION

Most successful partnerships occur because both sides of the handshake are willing to put in the time and effort to ensure the objective is achieved. That was definitely the case with the Christmas in July promotion.

On DME's side, they identified several items for the store that

would not only be popular, but that they could source and fulfill quickly on a low quantity. Kitchen towels, wrapping paper, ornaments and holiday cards all branded with the Razorback logo were among the items DME placed in the store.

On the Razorback Foundation's side, they used their many resources to promote the store through radio, print and social media channels to bring heightened awareness to the campaign. Blackstock and other members of the Foundation promoted the program from its opening to its closing which led to the campaign being a huge success and a benefit to all Razorback student-athletes.

Donors had such a positive impression of the store that additional items were added during the month-long run of the pop-up promotion in July. The wrapping paper was a huge hit and the best-selling item in the online store with several donors purchasing multiple rolls.

Along with having items in the store that donors could appreciate, there was also an incentive to buy from the Razorback Foundation's Christmas in July store because all items were exclusive to the pop-up store. The gifts wouldn't be available anywhere else.

SUMMARY

Nothing is more satisfying than launching a program or a promotion that hasn't been done before and seeing the benefits for all on such a wide scale. DME and the Razorback Foundation were standing at the edge of an unplowed field but had the foresight to believe not only in the promotion, but the passion of Razorback donors. The potential for repetition of this program is very high and word of its positive response has already started to spread to other fundraising offices.

"We are consistently looking for new, unique ways to engage Razorback fans," said Scott Varady, Executive Director of the Razorback Foundation. "The Christmas in July online store created an opportunity for fans to get a jump on the holiday shopping while supporting Razorback student-athletes."