

## **Creativity in Public Relations**

### **Entry: Love is Love Wedding with \*NSYNC Star Lance Bass in Fort Lauderdale**

#### **TARGET AUDIENCE**

As a pioneer of gay tourism, the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau (GFLCVB) has been marketing to LGBTQ travelers since “Rolling Out the Rainbow Carpet” in 1996. In July 2014, the GFLCVB became the first Florida state government tourism bureau to publically support the repeal of the State’s gay marriage ban. With the repeal imminent, the GFLCVB planned to celebrate this landmark decision with LGBTQ consumers and heterosexual couples from the destination’s key winter markets.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

To create a specific campaign that would communicate Greater Fort Lauderdale’s support and celebration of marriage equality, as well as honor and thank a community that had been so faithful and loyal to the destination for more than 20 years. The campaign would further position Greater Fort Lauderdale as a destination of choice for LGBTQ travelers.

Launch a campaign that could be executed at a moment’s notice to mark this historical moment and be the first destination to do this with a specific campaign. The campaign should generate buzz and gain national mainstream media attention, as well as direct consumers to the CVB’s social and online channels to drive bookings and engagement in the initiative.

The core strategy focused on creating a festive, caring and non-commercial celebration. The “Love is Love” destination wedding commemorated the landmark announcement for same-sex marriage equality in Florida, the Bureau’s commitment to the LGBTQ community, and celebrate Broward County’s Centennial by marrying 100 couples.

Love is Love sunrise beach wedding (and vow renewal) in Greater Fort Lauderdale for 100 gay and straight couples from around the globe commemorated the lifting of the ban on gay marriages in Florida, which became law on January 6, 2015.

By inviting both straight and LGBT couples to participate, the event was to serve as a “warm hug” to the LGBTQ community and demonstrate the intrinsic inclusiveness of Broward’s open arms hospitality.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION**

The “Love is Love” wedding planning was underway to create a festive, historic group sunrise beach wedding in Greater Fort Lauderdale, the “Gay Capital of Florida.” Gay and straight couples submitted their photos and love story at [www.sunny.org/LoveisLove](http://www.sunny.org/LoveisLove) to be selected for one of the 100 spots. An activation plan of digital, social and public relations with LGBT and mainstream outlets solicited the couples to participate.

Partnerships with travel companies including JetBlue, CruisePlanners and the W Fort Lauderdale Hotel provided a complimentary two-night stay, roundtrip airfare, and an opportunity for one lucky couple to win a seven-night Celebrity Cruise honeymoon. More than 50 local hospitality partners provided items for a Hello Sunny wedding welcome bag for each couple. The Broward County Clerk of Courts supported the initiative by offering extended hours on the eve of the wedding to issue marriage licenses to out of town participants, with the GFLCVB providing transportation to the courthouse.

LGBT and straight couples from 18 U.S. states, London, Italy, and South America registered. Once the GFLCVB selected the couples, interviews with the couples' hometown media were secured to tell their story, and why they chose Greater Fort Lauderdale for this personally significant occasion. As rain moved in at 3am, the wedding was moved to inside the W hotel, which created an intimate, shared experience.

GFLCVB president, Nicki Grossman, kicked off the ceremony. She and her husband of 48 years would renew their vows. NSYNC member and Dancing with the Stars alum, Lance Bass, delivered a moving address as the event's official "Love is Love" amBASSador with his new husband Michael Turchin.

Media activities were conducted throughout the entire planning and execution process, including promotion of the contest, couple profiles, ceremony details, Lance Bass announcement, and media press trip. Social media teased the event daily, via the CVB's, partners' and Lance Bass's social platforms.

More than 40 media interviews with couples, guests, Lance Bass, and CVB representatives pre-, on-site and post-wedding were secured. All local affiliates of major news networks covered the event live which was picked up by affiliates coast-to-coast.

Immediately post-event, AP-quality wedding photos were distributed across the wire, along with a national press release. Local broadcast media fed live coverage which was also picked up nationwide.

## **RESULTS**

The success of Love is Love is not only measured by numbers, as it was not about dollars, cents or impressions. This was about creating a memory, celebrating marriage equality and honoring an audience that is an intrinsic part of the destination.

Media results include 201 unique broadcast hits with a total viewership of 58,322,236 and an ad value of \$6,440,986. From New York to Yakima, TV highlights include MSNBC, CNN, and NBC, CBS, ABC and FOX outlets coast to coast. Print coverage totaled a circulation of 2,930,894 with an ad value of \$479,669.94, while online coverage totaled 1,312 articles, 667,892,234 unique monthly viewers and \$698,044 in ad value. Major print and online coverage included the New York Times, Huffington Post, US Magazine, Toronto Sun, Yahoo! Travel, Miami Herald, Baltimore Sun, Brides Magazine, and Travel Weekly, to name

a few. The total advertising equivalency of \$7,618,699.94 represents a 15,137% return of investment on the \$50,000 PR operating budget.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS:

- Measureable spikes in Twitter and Facebook on February 5, 2015 as a result of the wedding
- Love is Love video watched 740 times on YouTube in January and February through embedded players on Sunny.org and Facebook
- #LovesLove and #HelloSunny hashtags performed extremely well, with 1,137 posts, a reach of 13,637,433 and 13,638,570 impressions (Jan 1-Feb 8, 2015)
- Lance Bass was a tweet machine, with an average 700 likes per post and 400,000 reach

#### SUNNY.ORG WEBSITE VISITS:

- 29,159 page views for Love is Love landing page (Jan-Feb 2015)
- Love is Love was the second most shared URL with 1,771 shares
- Sunny.org/Wedding page doubled in visits from December 2014 (7,741 visits) to January 2015 (14,753)
- Friends, family, local community and out-of-area supporters flooded the online wedding guest book with congratulatory messages and well wishes (visit <http://www.sunny.org/love-is-love/sign-guestbook/>)

#### **BUDGET/COSTS**

The PR operating budget was \$XXX, including press release, photo and video production and distribution.