



Erin McMackin
Follow truennorth to a Higher Education
Prepared for truennorth



Executive Summary

truennorth is a joint venture between third-generation family run Lyden Company and Shell Oil Company and employs nearly 1,100 people in 110 convenience stores servicing northern Illinois, southern Michigan, and northern Ohio. The negative feelings many people have regarding oil production in recent years overshadow *truennorth*'s commitment to community and education. The following proposal outlines a public relations program that seeks to create a lasting association in the public's mind between *truennorth* and community.

Research

↑ Primary Research

- Company Research
 - Send funds to various universities and high schools in their home States
 - Environmental efforts: LED lighting, low energy buildings, double walled underground tanks and pipes
 - Only 22 people commented on the latest Facebook promotional giveaway
- Target Audience: high school juniors and seniors
- Conduct surveys and focus groups to determine attitudes about stores
- Analyze sales around time of educational giving
- Flesch Reading Ease Formula

↑ Secondary Research

- Nearly 6.5 million drivers are 18 and under (Federal Highway Administration)
- 90% of teens have used Social Media sites (Common Sense Media)

Objectives

↑ *Output Objectives:* Create competition, website, social media, QR codes, paid media

↑ *Informational Objectives*

- To increase awareness of the educational community efforts made by *truennorth* (by 20% among all segments of each community during the next school year)
- To increase awareness of the distinction between Shell and *truennorth* (by 30% among the current shoppers during the next school year)
- To increase awareness about the environmental steps *truennorth* has taken (by 10% among customers during the next school year)

↑ *Attitudinal Objectives*

- To promote favorable attitudes toward *truennorth* convenience stores (among 70% of the current shoppers during the next school year)

↑ *Behavioral Objectives*

- To encourage at least 150 students to apply for the scholarship competition by the January deadline.
- To encourage at least one public figure to speak at each semi-final competition and one at the final
- To increase the use of rewards cards (by 20% during the next school year)

Program: follow truenorth to a higher education

- ↑ Environmental Scholarship Competition among Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio high school students
 - Students will be asked to create a sustainable and efficient environmental program to enact at school
 - Top six contestants will receive various scholarships
- ↑ Invite public figures to each event
- ↑ Paid and unpaid media outreach
- ↑ Update the website and Facebook, create a Twitter
- ↑ QR codes
- ↑ Brochures/Flyers at stations and sent to high schools

Evaluation

- ↑ Evaluation of Output Objectives: records of all website updates, Facebook posts, tweets, brochures/flyers, radio and television advertisements, and press and social media news releases
- ↑ Evaluation of Informational Objectives: Flesch Reading Ease Formula
- ↑ Evaluation of Message Exposure: count media impressions
- ↑ Evaluation of Message Retention: surveys and focus groups
- ↑ Evaluation of Attitudinal Objectives: surveys and focus groups
- ↑ Evaluation of Behavioral Objectives: measure how many students apply, how many public figures attend, and how much reward card use increases



Follow *truenorth* to a Higher Education



Public Relations Program Proposal Erin McMackin 4 December 2012

truenorth is a third-generation family run company that employs nearly 1,100 people at 110 convenience stores. These stores service northern Illinois, southern Michigan, and northern Ohio. *truenorth* is a joint venture between the family operated Lyden Company and Shell Oil Company. The negative feelings many people have regarding oil production, especially in recent years overshadow *truenorth*'s commitment to community and education. Much of the company's donations to educational institutions and efforts to help the environment go unnoticed. The following proposal outlines a proactive public relations program that seeks to create a lasting association in the public's mind between *truenorth* and community.

truenorth Public Relations Proposal

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Research

Before creating this program, I thoroughly researched *truenorth*'s website and social media presence, then spoke with the president, Mark E. Lyden. Mr. Lyden made it very clear that your mission is to be community minded, and to actively help every community you are in, especially Cleveland, the location of your new headquarters. He also expressed the company's desire to distinguish the brand, so that consumers do not just see the stores as Shell stations.

For this program, the target audience consists of high school juniors and seniors in northern Illinois, southern Michigan, and northern Ohio. According to 2010 statistics from the Federal Highway Administration, nearly 6.5 million drivers are age 18 or younger. Furthermore, Common Sense Media reports that ninety percent of teens 13 to 17-years-old have used social media. Earlier this year, *truenorth* gave away a promotional mountain bike to whomever provided the best comment describing where he or she would ride the mountain bike. The promotion was a good idea, but only 23 of your 506 fans commented on the picture. For these reasons, I would like to increase your presence on social media sites and create a conversation with your consumers.

To enable evaluations, I will also research preexisting attitudes and behaviors about *truenorth*. Sample questions include, "do you tend to shop at some convenience stores more than others? ... If so, please tell us which stores you visit most ... Have you ever shopped at a *truenorth* convenience store? ... If so, do you have a rewards card? ... Do you believe *truenorth* to be a favorable part of the community? Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, or Not Sure." I will also analyze *truenorth*'s sales and rewards card usage, especially the two months after each large donation to an educational institution. Finally, I will use the Flesch Reading Ease Formula on the brochures, flyers, and on the website to ensure the greatest likelihood of comprehension and retention.

Objectives



Your history of dedication to funding educational institutes such as local high schools and universities in *truenorth* communities lacks the awareness you deserve. We would like to increase awareness of this funding through our program. Additionally, we would like to increase awareness of the steps *truenorth* has taken to minimize the company's impact on the environment. These include your use of LED lighting, low energy buildings, and double-walled underground tanks and pipes.

Finally, we would like to highlight the fact that you are a third-generation family run business in existence for 93 years. Specifically, the objectives are as follows on the next page:

Output Objectives

- ↑ To create a scholarship competition that involves students from Illinois, Ohio, and Michigan
- ↑ To create a more interactive website with complete information
- ↑ To send one news release about the competition to major media outlets and daily newspapers in each *truenorth* community
- ↑ To send one social media new release about the competition to major local bloggers in each *truenorth* community
- ↑ To create a Twitter handle for each metropolitan area with *truenorth* stores and one handle for the company itself
- ↑ To send three tweets every day aimed at creating a conversation leading up to the competition
- ↑ To write one Facebook post every day aimed at creating conversation about the competition

Impact Objectives

↑ ***Informational Objectives***

- To increase awareness of the educational community efforts made by *truenorth* (by 20% among all segments of each community during the next school year)
- To increase awareness of the distinction between Shell and *truenorth* (by 30% among the current shoppers during the next school year)
- To increase awareness about the positive environmental steps *truenorth* has taken (by 15% among customers during the next school year)

↑ ***Attitudinal Objectives***

- To promote favorable attitudes toward *truenorth* convenience stores (among 70% of the current shoppers during the next school year)

↑ ***Behavioral Objectives***

- To encourage at least 150 students to apply for the scholarship competition by the January deadline.
- To encourage at least one public figure to speak at each semi-final competition and at least one at the final
- To increase the use of rewards cards (by 20% during the next school year)

Program

Follow truenorth to a higher education

truenorth is part of the community, and as such, wants to give back in a way that benefits everyone: education. The theme and message above will be woven throughout the program. In order to increase the association among education, community, and *truenorth* in the consumer's mind, we will also weave *truenorth*'s compass rose symbol throughout the program.

The core of the program is a scholarly competition among high school juniors and seniors that lasts the duration of one academic school year. To emphasize *truenorth*'s commitment to the environment, the students will be asked to create a program for their school to cut down on waste, preserve energy, and get other students involved in environmental protection. According to a panel of judges, the student who creates the most sustainable and efficient program will win. Students will be asked to first submit their programs online via the website. From there, the judges will choose fifteen students each from northern Illinois, southern Michigan, and northern Ohio to demonstrate their programs in semi-final showcases in Chicago, Ann Arbor, and Cleveland, respectively. Two students from each city will then be invited to the finals in Cleveland. *truenorth* gift cards will be given to the families of each finalist to cover transportation costs along with extra spending money for snacks along the way. Reward cards will be handed out to all attendees at each event. After the finalists showcase their programs, the panel of judges will choose a winner and a runner-up. The winner will be awarded \$100,000 toward college tuition, second place will be awarded \$75,000 toward college tuition, and the other four finalists will be awarded \$50,000 each toward college tuition.

To achieve our awareness objectives, public figures will be invited to attend each round of the competition. We will also send out one press release to every major news source and local newspaper in each *truenorth* community, as well as one social media news release to every influential blogger in each *truenorth* community in an effort to earn media attention for the competition.

Our audience is tech-savvy and relies heavily on social media. To reach them, I have created a few steps. First, we will update the website to make it more complete and interactive. A few of the links are dead or redirect to old content, and much of the information is no longer current or complete. We will also add links to the Facebook and Twitter accounts discussed below. Once updated, we will make the homepage about the scholarship competition. We will also create a page on the website exclusively for the scholarship competition. This page will include such content as relevant videos, competition details, an explanation of the prizes, helpful resources to begin the project, and links to eligibility information and entry instructions. *truenorth*'s Facebook page can also be improved. Currently, you post regularly with good, friendly content. For this program, I would increase post frequency to every day, either about the competition or with a "fun fact" about *truenorth*. These "fun facts" will all relate back to the efforts *truenorth* makes to minimize the company's affect on the environment and to benefit educational institutions. All or most posts will be written in a way to spark conversation with your followers. Furthermore, *truenorth* could benefit from various Twitter handles for each metropolitan area, and one for the company as a whole. The local handles can tweet deals and updated gas prices in their respective areas, as well as tweet at followers to create more involvement. The general handle can also tweet promotions and deals, but should mainly focus on the scholarship competition leading up to the finals. As with Facebook posts, tweets would be used to start conversations with customers and followers.

Once all of these platforms are ready to go live, we will work to create large followings on each. In order to meet this objective, all those who enter the competition will be encouraged to like our Facebook page and follow us on Twitter. We will also place QR codes that link to the competition page of the website on each gas pump. Pumps are an ideal place for QR codes, because customers are forced to stand by them as they fill their tanks. For those without QR code readers, we will place brochures advertising the competition at each pump, and on each cashier counter inside the stores. Your friendly cashiers will be asked to quickly promote the competition to each customer. Additionally, we ask that you continue to buy airtime at the local radio and television stations, and to use those spots to advertise the scholarship competition. Finally, we will send the brochures along with flyers to the teachers and principles of high schools in *truenorth* communities. Through a combination of paid and unpaid media we will reach our intended audience.

Evaluation

To evaluate the program, I will evaluate the output, informational, attitudinal, and behavioral objectives individually. Evaluation will be an ongoing process starting from inception. For the output objectives, I will keep records of all website updates, Facebook posts, tweets, brochures/flyers, radio and television advertisements, press releases, and social media news releases I send out throughout the year. To evaluate the informational objectives, I will use the Flesch Reading Ease Formula to measure the message comprehension capabilities of the brochures/flyers, website, and select Facebook posts and tweets. By counting media impressions, I will evaluate message exposure. Next, I will conduct surveys and focus groups to measure message retention. Questions will include, “which company sponsored the Environmental Scholarship Competition?” and “are you aware of the efforts *truenorth* has made recently to help the environment?” I will also use these surveys and focus groups to evaluate my attitudinal objectives, by asking, “do you believe *truenorth* to be a positive part of the community? Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, or Not Sure.” Finally, to evaluate my behavioral objectives, I will test audience behaviors before and after program exposure. I will also measure how many students applied for the competition, how many public figures came to the showcases, and by how much the use of rewards cards increased. Evaluation of the program will vary with each type of objective.

Conclusion



Over the years, *truenorth* has proven its dedication to educational funding, the environment, and community. Drawing from my research on the company, the target audience, and preexisting attitudes about convenience stores, I created a public relations program to increase this awareness and reciprocal behavior. The objectives of this program are to create consumer awareness about the community-oriented mission of *truenorth* and to encourage more community members to become involved in *truenorth*. The program will consist of a mix of paid and unpaid media and a heavy reliance on social and new media. Central to the program is the Environmental Scholarship Competition among students from *truenorth* communities. Evaluation of the success of the program will occur throughout the process. At the end of the program, however, I will evaluate the effectiveness of both output and input objectives through a series of surveys, focus groups, and analysis of sales.

Thank you for considering my proposal. I hope to become part of your community.

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