

TOWNSVILLE ENTERPRISE

Integrated Stadium & Entertainment Centre campaign

CASE STUDY

1. Introduction

1.1 Summary

In 2013 research firm KPMG conducted a feasibility study into the best options for maintaining sports stadia and entertainment infrastructure in Townsville, North Queensland. This report recommended the best long term outcome both economically and socially for the region would be to build a combined facility in the heart of the CBD. The proposal aligned with local council's ambition to develop the waterfront Priority Development Area along the banks of the Ross Creek in the inner city, creating a series of active precincts connected within walking distance in the CBD.

Following the release of the study the Integrated Stadium and Entertainment Centre (ISEC) project was considered by all key regional business and advocacy groups and councils as Townsville and North Queensland's priority infrastructure project to 2020. KPMG had nominated a figure of \$380 million to budget for the entire project with \$250 million deemed appropriate to kick start the facility with the stadium component. Funding was being sought from State Government initially as the primary funding body of stadiums and Federal Government as the primary funding body for entertainment centers. Understanding the need for support at every level of government, it was crucial for the campaign and proposal to meet the agenda of all levels of government in order to gain budgetary consideration in the lead up to the State and Federal elections.

Initial public sentiment surveys indicated limited local awareness of the need to replace the two existing, ageing stadia and entertainment facilities and low levels of community support for the council's plans generally, to develop the inner city waterfront as a pathway to urban renewal. Support for the project politically was also limited.

A committee, led by Townsville Enterprise Limited (TEL), and with representatives from Townsville City Council, Chamber of Commerce, Nation Rugby League and the North Queensland Cowboys was established to keep focus on the project. It was agreed a campaign was required to lead public education on the ISEC to achieve greater levels of community awareness and support for the project, to bolster lobbying efforts with government, and build a stronger understanding of its benefits to the Townsville and North Queensland regional communities.

1.2 Background

As a key priority for the region, Townsville Enterprise engaged consultants to work with them to develop and deliver a comprehensive Public Education and Engagement Strategy ultimately aimed at securing the necessary support and funding for the project.

The strategy developed in conjunction with the consultants outlined a structured program of stakeholder engagement, political advocacy, media and public education activities aimed at generating higher levels of community and political support for the project to ultimately secure the necessary funding. This campaign was rolled out through three stages and over two election cycles.

Stage one, “Make it happen” was activated in the lead up to the State Election and ultimately secured bi-partisan support for the project with both sides committing a \$100million to the project. When developing the region’s major project priorities for the 2015 State Election city leaders confirmed that the integrated Stadium and Entertainment Centre was the region’s number one priority. Townsville Enterprise, Townsville City Council, the Townsville Chamber of Commerce, the Property Council and key regional councils supported a lobbying campaign that ultimately secured commitment of funding of \$100M toward the project from both sides of government. Following the success of the campaign for State Government funding, the Integrated Stadium and Entertainment Centre (ISEC) committee decided in early 2015 to continue lobbying to secure matched funding from the Federal Government toward the project to complete Stage 1, being the stadium.

Stage two, “More than a stadium” was activated following the state election where funding was committed primarily for the stadium component of the project. It was designed to raise public awareness of the broader benefits the overall project could deliver socially and economically and meet Federal Government’s urban renewal agenda. The support gained through this education phase served to increase public pressure on both sides of government to commit new and necessary funds for the project to go ahead.

Stage three, “It’s time to deliver” was activated to leverage increased public support gained through stage two, raise the visibility of the campaign nationally and escalate political pressure to ultimately exceed typical Federal Government funding in this area which would secure the project.

2. The Problem

2.1 What the project needed

1. Education of the local community and region about the need and benefits of the project to secure high level and visible support.
2. Funding from all levels of government and the private sector for the project.

2.2 Issues

- Low level community understanding of the need to replace existing facilities
- Localised emotional attachment to existing facilities
- Disinterest in the project when perceived as just a stadium
- Low level state and federal political support for the project
- Competing state government funding agendas

- Historically limited support federally for funding stadiums

3. Audiences and Messaging

3.1 Target Audiences

Government

Local MPs

State and Federal ministers and decision makers

Media

Townsville and North Queensland Community

Cowboys supporters

Mum and dad households in the suburbs and broader region (voters)

Local business

Key influencers

Local peak bodies and organizations

Subject Matter Experts

High profile local supporters

3.2 Communication

The campaign was built to consistently and effectively sell the broader project benefits, drive a call to action to show support for the project, and to build the weight of political lobbying efforts. The campaign team used the following tools to engage with audiences:

- A project website to house all marketing collateral, imagery, project fact sheets, videos and Q & As relating to the project
- Social media pages including a dedicated Facebook page and strategy to activate partner assets
- Activating a nationally high profile, well respected and relevant and passionate local advocate
- Strategic media partnerships to drive a highly visible and education driven campaign in support of the project
- Leveraging the success of the North Queensland Cowboys NRL team
- Utilising local council urban renewal project marketing collateral and key messaging
- Media interviews and public presentations with subject matter experts educating the public and debunking myths of the project
- Using relevant local media advertising to create visibility, communicate the bigger picture and create a call to action
- Creating a series of videos collating high profile and relevant voices of support to reach various stakeholder groups
- Activating guerilla marketing initiatives through the controlled collaboration of local creative and industry groups
- Creating targeted, informed and nuanced reports and submissions for government speaking to their relevant policy agendas.

3.3 Key Messages

A series of key messages, sub messages and proof points were established at each project stage to create consistent and simple messaging to guide marketing and communication activities.

These were used across all channels and through every activity to build a powerful and influential narrative in support of the project and to influence local thinking.

These message were strategically integrated with the political agenda of all levels of government whilst also speaking to the fears and drivers of the local community, in order to build a strong emotional connection with the project while building a case for funding.

Messaging was tested through each phase and refined based on shifting agendas and emerging emotional drivers. This served to maximize the campaign 'voice' through a highly engaged and vocal supporter network. It included activities like leveraging the success of the local NRL team, the Cowboys to build an agenda of 'we deserve it' and playing to local cynicism toward big city project funding which met a national media agenda to support regional centers to get their "Fair share".

4. Phased Activity and Outcomes

4.1 PHASE 1- MAKE IT HAPPEN

A community sentiment report at the start of the campaign registered low community engagement and support for the campaign and heightened tension that the project would only serve the NRL community. To counter these myths and engage with the broader community base, a strategy of articulating both the need to replace two ageing facilities, and the broader social, economic and cultural benefit for the region was developed. A key component of the strategy was the activation of high profile local ambassadors to take the campaign messaging and branding to market.

A range of local celebrities/influencers across various sports, arts, entertainment and business sectors, who had genuinely expressed their support for the campaign, were approached to act as ambassadors for the project. Ultimately the goal was to use these voices to reach a broader audience and raise enough public support (demonstrated through the collection of signatures both online and through petitions) to act as evidence that the project was a key issue locally and potentially an election issue for all levels of government.

North Queensland Cowboys Co-Captain and NRL heavyweight Jonathan Thurston was approached to be the face of the campaign with his young family. The intent was to use his voice to reach a national audience and tell the story that this project was not just about football but was a critical and catalytic investment piece to secure the future of his much loved home community for future generations including his own children. A community breakfast was held to launch the campaign and announce the Thurston family as the face of the project. Targeted media activity was coordinated for the launch with significant national media coverage achieved.

To increase visibility of the campaign post the launch, a day was scheduled with campaign ambassadors from the Arts, Business, Sports and Events community to build a series of campaign assets. This included a photoshoot for marketing purposes and a series of videos with key messaging around the "make it happen" message. Billboards, physical and digital promotional collateral and a 30 second TVC and a series of you tube videos were created for use in social media. The videos were rolled out across TEL, ISEC and partner social media channels and a number of PR and community

engagement activities were created around the use of ambassadors to maintain the visibility and momentum of the campaign. For example a major activation was held at the WNBL Townsville Fire finals game, to leverage Suzy Batkovic's support for the project.

In order to engage the community and show the broader benefits of the project a mobile educational booth was developed combining digital and physical marketing initiatives. The booth was set up at community open days, in shopping centres and at a range of community sports, arts and entertainment events and was manned by an educated attendant to answer any questions of the public. It was campaign branded and encouraged visitors to share their support and or learnings by connecting to and sharing the campaign Facebook page and using the campaign hashtag. It also contained an iPad which featured the Integrated Stadium and Entertainment Centre website where visitors they could vote to show their support, along with fact sheets on the project to debunk widely held myths in the community. The booth achieved significant results in educating and converting public opinion. Once community members understood the broader benefits of the project they were quick to support it and around 3,000 signatures were collected through the use of this booth.

Phase one resulted in significant national media coverage and saw local media throw their support behind the project. This presented an appearance of strong public support and ultimately secured a \$100M pledge from both major political parties for the project.

4.2 PHASE 2 - MORE THAN A STADIUM

Following the \$100M pledge by the State Government in early 2015, an anti-stadium campaign was activated online by members of the public who believed the money would be better used on other projects. This activity impacted public opinion and was reflected in plateauing levels of online support for ISEC. It also fueled ongoing perceptions in the wider community that the project was just an NRL stadium rather than a boarder integrated project for events, conventions, arts and culture. In order to further educate the community about the broader economic and investment deliverables this piece of important social infrastructure would provide, a strategy of articulating a bigger picture urban renewal and economic development narrative was developed. This project would be an Integrated Stadium and Entertainment Centre for sports, art and culture and entertainment and the ongoing benefits for the community included job creation, urban renewal and CBD activation. It was "more than a stadium". A key component of the strategy for phase two was to engage subject matter experts involved in the development of other stadia around the country and world. These supporters were deployed to share case studies with the local community of how these sorts of investments could deliver ongoing, positive benefits for the growth and development of community's. Specifically they provided expert commentary of the potential future state for Townsville should the project be successful.

An obvious candidate for the role of SME and key spokesperson for phase 2 of the campaign was former Adelaide Lord Mayor Stephen Yarwood. The success of the 2014 Adelaide Oval redevelopment was continuing to make headlines globally, attributed for attracting additional investment to the city and spurring urban renewal in the CBD which had transformed this once small regional city into a lively metropolitan hot spot. Similar to phase one, Mr Yarwood was used to front a series of educational and marketing videos to draw similarities between the Adelaide Oval redevelopment and the proposed development of ISEC for Townsville. This series was filmed in both Adelaide and Townsville and also incorporated interviews with Adelaide business and CBD visitors to further communicate the transformative potential of these sorts of projects. The video clips were rolled out across social media attracting significant engagement reaching an audience of 57.8K. The video campaign attracted local and state media coverage and drew

attention away from the anti- stadium campaign as people realized the broader potential of the project to impact positively on various sections of the community.

Given the high engagement these videos received, Stephen Yarwood was brought to Townsville as the key note speaker at one of Townsville's most highly patronized regular business events. With a presentation titled "More than a stadium" Mr Yarwood used the opportunity to highlight the distinct parallels between the Adelaide Oval redevelopment and the proposed ISEC development in Townsville to new audiences. The breakfast attracted a record of 300 guests and feedback from attendees was one of converted thinking in support of the campaign. This was significant as high profile detractors in attendance were amongst those who were now convinced of the projects benefits. A Round Table lunch was held with city, business and industry leaders which gave clarity around the funding model of the Adelaide Oval and the best methods of lobbying for funding from all levels of Government and how to engage the community to garner support.

4.2.1 LEVERAGING LOCAL ACTIVITIES

A significant even during phase two of the campaign was the NRL grand final which featured Townsville's own NRL team the Cowboys, and of course the face of the ISEC campaign, Johnathan Thurston. Part of the strategy for Phase 2 was to leverage the profile the Cowboys ride to the Grand Final had given the campaign.

An online survey in mid 2015 indicated many residents in the suburbs who supported the North Queensland Cowboys were not supportive of moving their home ground to the CBD in Townsville. A targeted PR campaign was created around the North Queensland Cowboys entering the NRL finals series under the cloud that their home ground facility was outdated and in need of repair. The intent was to use their increased profile and national voice to highlight both the need for a new facility to replace an aging out of date stadium and that the project was in fact more than a stadium.

A collaborative community PR stunt involving painting a North Queensland Cowboys hat on a highly visible and iconic local site (the Castle Hill Saint) was used to highlight the success of the North Queensland Cowboys and call on the community to sign an online petition to give the Cowboys the new home they deserved. The activation attracted local, state and national media coverage, an online audience of over 90K and an additional 3,000 petition signatures online. A number of smaller PR and social media activities were staged in the lead up to the Grand Final resulting in an increase in online traffic to the ISEC website and social media pages and a shift in the sentiment of the online audience towards supporting the project.

When the Cowboys made it into the Grand Final, a major activation was planned to educate the community on the benefits of a new facility, fostering support to give the Cowboys a home they deserve and collecting petition signatures. Campaign staff and volunteers attended Grand Final functions across the city to gather hard copy signatures and social media posts were rolled out during the evening and following the Cowboys win to leverage the heightened loyalty to the Cowboys. Johnathan Thurston's subsequent call to arms for a new Stadium for North Queensland during his speech created the perfect platform to escalate online activity for the campaign and social media was immediately used to leverage his comments with activity reaching over 150K Facebook users alone.

During the weeks following the Grand Final win a number of Media Releases and targeted media stories were organised to leverage Johnathan Thurston's televised call for a new stadium. The social media strategy included collaboration with Johnathan Thurston, the NQ Cowboys, The Cowboys

Leagues Club, Townsville City Council and a number of other partners with large social media followings and resulted in an additional 3,000 online votes pledged and around 2,500 hard copy signatures collected.

The Phase 2 strategy also included activations and additional media stories around activities and events occurring across the city. The intent was to target large audiences through vehicles already attracting significant media attention.

The local elections also provided a platform to educate the community through the publicly declared support from both Mayoral Candidates for the project. A number of media stories were generated around the Local Elections to highlight the ISEC project as the city's top priority and debates and community forums were strategically leveraged to promote the benefits of the project. Likewise, visits from Federal politicians ahead of the Federal Election were used to highlight the ISEC project as the region's top priority through round table discussions which often attracted significant media attention.

The campaign strategy included targeting a number of community events to garner community support including sporting events, community open days and local identity media appearances. These opportunities were used to showcase the multi-user purpose of the new facility.

An online digital campaign supported phase 2 PR and media activity reached an audience of over 200,000 while 258 media stories were generated reaching an audience of over 14 million and generating a PR value of over \$1.6M. Phase also attracted a funding commitment from the federal opposition in anticipation of the projects impact of federal election outcomes in the region.

4.3 PHASE 3 – IT'S TIME TO DELIVER

In early 2016 Townsville City Council indicated it would purchase the land the ISEC would be built upon. With \$100M committed from the State Government and a further \$100M pledged by the Federal Labour Government in the lead up to the election it was still not enough to see the project come to life. Phase 3 of the campaign was developed to send the message that following the recommendations outlined in feasibility studies, the economic benefits outlined in economic analyses and the increasing community support for the project, it was time to deliver the funding to make it happen. A strategy was developed to articulate the proven benefits of the project, highlight that the risk to the future of the North Queensland Cowboys and to increase the pressure on both the State and Federal Governments to deliver the funding required for stage 1 of the project.

North Queensland Cowboys Co Captain Johnathan Thurston was re-engaged to lead the final stage of the campaign with strong messages to all levels of Government that the future of North Queensland's premiership team and the future of the region was dependent on delivering the project.

A video was developed with Jonathan Thurston delivering key messages around the benefits the project would have on jobs for locals, transforming the CBD, attracting additional investment and creating a city young people would stay in to further their careers with the final campaign message "it's time to deliver".

Phase 3 of the campaign was launched using Jonathan Thurston's call to arms through local, state and national media coverage. A total of 45 news clips were generated reaching an audience of 2.7M and generating a PR value of \$570,984 and resulted in the rapid growth of community support for the project and a significant shift in the sentiment of the online audience from being bystanders to showing support the project.

The major activation for Phase 3 was at the May 20 North Queensland Cowboys V Brisbane Broncos game at 1300 SMILES Stadium. The video of Jonathan Thurston's call to arms was played at the start of the game and a poster created in partnership with the local regional paper, the Townsville Bulletin was distributed amongst the community and handed out at the game using phase 2 and 3 messages of more than a stadium and its time to deliver. A team of volunteers were also at the game and collected an additional 1000 petition signatures of support for the project.

Despite increasing public support and high visibility for the campaign nation-wide, it was identified that some suburban community members needed to understand the rationale of moving the location of the stadium into the CBD before they would support the project. Former Lord Mayor of Adelaide Stephen Yarwood was once again engaged to present a community forum at the Brothers Leagues Club located next to the Cowboys home ground stadium. The forum was attended by around 100 residents and was live streamed on Facebook to an audience of over 1 million viewers and considered a resounding success.

It was following the community forum and visits by Mr Yarwood and fellow subject matter expert, Dunedin's Forsyth Barr Stadium Venues Chief Executive Officer Terry Davies, that perceptions of the project truly started to gain the full support of the local community- evident through letters to the editor, online feedback and emails sent to TEL, Council and the North Queensland Cowboys. However a commitment of funding was still not forthcoming from the incumbent federal party the LNP.

In June 2016 local businesses and members of the creative industries joined forces to create a stunning activation on the site of the proposed ISEC. Large shipping containers and billboard skins were donated, with local cranes companies offering their services to build a giant billboard on the site. Local and national audio visual experts volunteered their time with local artists and creative businesses to bring the site to life using large scale concept images of the proposed facility, interspersed with key messages for the campaign and projected onto a 9 x 9M temporary billboard screen. The activation received significant local and state media coverage, was visited by hundreds of locals and a video produced by local businesses attracted a reach of over 35000.

This activity coincided with a local submission for support of the stadium to the federal government. The submission included how the project supported the federal government's key policy agendas for urban renewal and investment in Northern Australia and also provided independent economic analysis of the benefit of the project for the region. Work by council to create a Priority Development Area for investment along the banks of the inner city creek, included the proposed ISEC site. The fact that the whole area had been earmarked for fast tracked development and that there were approved plans to connect the entire inner city through a series of walkways and bridges helped tell a story of the big picture benefit of the project. The submission created a compelling case for how this investment would kick start urban renewal and create jobs as a time when the city needed them most. As significant campaign activity continued throughout 2016, lobbying, political and media pressure on the Federal and State

Governments increased. In early June the State government announced an additional \$40M toward the campaign with the NRL contributing \$10M and on June 10 the Federal Government announced an unprecedented \$100M towards the project securing the delivery of stage one.

This announcement generated 134 media items across 20 media outlets reaching an audience of over 13 million and generating a total PR value of \$1,409,679 for TEL.

Over the course of the three phase campaign 16,500 signatures were collected in support of the project with the total direct and indirect PR value of the campaign in excess of \$4.5M and a funding total of \$250M.

5. CONCLUSION

It is evident from this experience that multilayered activity to influence communities and governments to support large scale and potentially controversial developments is absolutely required.

The marketing approach used key influencers, experts and emotional levers to execute strategic and consistent key messaging through targeted activity to key audiences.

The media program complimented this campaign and took the project to a broader national audience to influence both public and political perceptions of the project.

Combining these two areas with a lobbying program which was designed to meet government agendas and build appropriate narratives around key policy areas ultimately created a successful campaign.

The Public Education and Engagement Strategy, through the three phased campaign approach, successfully educated the Townsville North Queensland community and the wider region about the need and benefits of an Integrated Stadium and Entertainment Centre. This ultimately motivated people to show their support for the facility and subsequently increased pressure on all levels of Government to deliver the project with \$140M committed by the State Government, \$100M by the Federal Government, \$10M from the NRL and the site purchased by Townsville City Council.

On October 9 2016 Premier Anastasia Palaszczuk announced the construction of the project would commence in 2017.