Campus engagement, a truly imperative part of Garnet Media Group's mission, was nothing short of difficult during the past year and the COVID-19 pandemic. What could once be accomplished by standing and smiling behind a table covered in branded merchandise was now complicated by COVID-based restrictions and limitations, so Garnet Media Group, specifically the marketing team, had to get creative.

To encourage engagement with the campus and local community for Best of Carolina 2021, the marketing team launched a multi-pronged campaign featuring social media messaging, contests and prizes, and multiple fun-filled events.

Background
As Marketing Director, one of my responsibilities is serving as the editor-in-chief for Garnet Media Group's annual Best of Carolina publication. Best of Carolina showcases reader-voted favorites in 50 categories of businesses and organizations on campus and in the community. For this publication to be successful, students and community members must be engaged with the online nomination and voting process so winners truly reflect our audience's sentiments.

In previous years Best of Carolina consisted of a four-month-long voting period. Voting was conducted online via an embedded survey that had 50 open-ended questions for our audience to write in the names of their favorite places in each category. However, in 2020 we found that the struggle of getting votes was due to the nature of voting – a long, thought-heavy process. So, we implemented a bi- which added a nomination period. Nominations were framed as voting previously was. From there, the top five nominated in each category advanced to voting – a multiple choice survey with an “other” option for write-ins.

Social media messaging
Social media has always been one of the biggest assets for Best of Carolina, but when COVID-19 forced all of us online it became more vital than ever. Garnet Media Group's social media strategy was implemented to combat the lack of face-to-face communication.

When students returned to campus in August, we launched the first layer of messaging: Best of Carolina was back, and better than before. Throughout that month, there were:

- 1 Instagram post with 193 impressions, 68 engagements and 35% engagement rate
- 47 Twitter posts. These posts had 6,633 impressions with 181 engagements and average 3% engagement rate.
- 29 Facebook posts with 1,285 impressions, 54 engagements, and an average 6% engagement rate.

We received a total of 167 nominations.
While outward messaging revolving nominations was taking place, the marketing team inwardly decided on the Best of Carolina 2021 creative direction and theme: Hollywood.

In October, voting opened, and our Hollywood branded messaging began. Variations of graphics were created to capture our audience’s attention with the objective of gaining votes.

From October to December, Garnet Media Group made a total of 258 posts across our three platforms.

- 15 Instagram posts with 2,433 impressions, 683 engagements and an average 17% engagement rate
- 134 Tweets with 29,915 impressions, 834 engagements and an average 2% engagement rate per post
- 109 Facebook posts with 4,733 impressions, 345 engagements, average 8% engagement rate

**Giveaways**

A major component of Best of Carolina strategy is rewarding our audience with prizes to local businesses. Due to the nature of 2020, most of our giveaways were conducted on social media.

Garnet Media Group’s most notable giveaway was for Mt. Joy concert tickets at a local venue. This giveaway was centered around building excitement and anticipation for the release of Best of Carolina 2021, and to encourage our audience to attend the Best of Carolina 2021 Launch Event. To avoid punishing those that were unable to and/or uncomfortable with attending an in-person event, the giveaway was conducted on social media. Each interaction (like, comment, share) with Garnet Media Group’s Launch Event specific posts gained the person a point, and attending the event gained them 10 extra points. Whoever had the most points at the end won tickets to see Mt. Joy in a socially distanced cove at Columbia Speedway.

This giveaway was widely successful. Over 140 people entered the giveaway, and our engagement rates were higher than ever before.

- 12 posts on Instagram with 2,919 impressions, 1,631 engagements, and a 56% engagement rate
- 32 Twitter posts with 19,291 impressions, 2,226 engagements, and a 11.54% engagement rate
- 12 Facebook posts with 1,214 impressions, 758 engagements, and a 62% engagement rate

We had several people attend the event after seeing our giveaway and were able to give concert tickets to a very enthusiastic and lucky winner!

Gift cards to Columbia businesses were also included in the Spin-to-Win wheel at tabling.

**Tabling**

From the beginning of the semester until holiday break in November, the marketing team secured tabling spots in high traffic areas on campus. Team members were trained on how to successfully run a table which included high energy, attention grabbing, and ensuring the students completed nominations or voting.
Best of Carolina is BACK and better than ever

Thank you so much for helping us reach our goal of 1,000 votes for Best of Carolina 2021! It means the world to us!!

Don’t stop yet — voting is open until January 1! Make sure all your favorites win by voting at garnetmedia.org/bestofcarolina

We did it! We reached our goal of 1,000 votes! Thanks to you, but don’t stop yet because voting is still open! How many votes will we get? garnetmedia.org/bestofcarolina

Almost time to roll out the red carpet for the best of the best! 😃

Make sure all your favorites win by voting NOW!! garnetmedia.org/bestofcarolina

We talked to Santa this morning and he told us that if you vote in Best of Carolina 2021 you’ll automatically be put on the nice list! 😊😊

Better get to it before it’s too late! 😊 Vote now at garnetmedia.org/bestofcarolina

University of South Carolina

garnetmediagroup The wait is finally over... BEST OF CAROLINA 2021 IS HERE! 🎈! Nominate your favorites today — link in our bio! 😊

This year Best of Carolina will incorporate a nomination period lasting until the end of September. The TOP 5 from each category will then move on to the voting period.

38w

garnetmediagroup #uofsc #uofsc24 #columbia #southcarolina #capitalcity #bestofcarolina #bestofo #bestofthepoint #gamecocks #carolina #yescolumbus #columbus #vote

19 likes

SEPTEMBER 8, 2020

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36w

15 likes

November 15, 2020

Add a comment...
Who do you think won Best Place to Celebrate a Birthday 2021?
Comment your guess below and come to Greene Street on March 10 to get your copy of Best of Carolina 2021 and see if you were right!

Hint 1:
Come early because there's always a long wait.

Hint 2:
You can find me in the Vista.

Hint 3:
Stop by when you need to satisfy your sweet tooth.
Best of Carolina Votes

Number of Votes

Year

2018  2019  2020  2021

1,500  1,000  500  0

Line1