CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT EVENT: The Arrow and First Amendment Day

In order to promote and practice the values of the First Amendment, and to generate interest/appreciation in students at Southeast Missouri State University for the freedoms protected by the First Amendment (especially freedom of press and speech), The Arrow, working in conjunction with multimedia journalism and advertising majors enrolled in MC429 Media Management, hosted a First Amendment Day on October 23, 2019.

The objectives of the engagement event included: Increase the Arrow’s readership of both the print and online editions, increase the number of followers on the organization’s social media accounts, promote the overall visibility of the news organization as a whole, and position the Arrow as a student news source and active member of the University community.

For this project the MC429 Media Management class was divided into three teams. Each team was responsible for the following:

1. Conduct necessary audience research to determine current interest levels in the topic in order to suggest possible topics and to indicate promotional strategies. Each team had to submit a brief of findings and strategy.
2. Develop 3 story ideas to be pitched to the Arrow’s leadership to run in advance of the event that highlight the topic(s). A summary of the stories, including production requirements, had to be submitted.
3. Develop and design a promotion plan designed to drive traffic to the Arrow’s stories and the event. Each team had to submit a brief of their plan.
4. Develop a detailed plan of the logistics necessary to successfully host this event. Each team must submit a detailed plan that includes responsibilities and deadlines.

Each team then presented their plan to the class instructor and Arrow advisor, who worked with Arrow leadership to decide which plans, or which elements of plans, would be utilized. The event was held at noon at a central point on the campus that allowed for substantial foot traffic and easy access by students.

The overall creative theme was “Let’s Taco ‘Bout Freedom”, which allowed for highlighting each of the freedom’s protected by the First Amendment. Among the activities at the event:

1. Post-It Board: allowed students to write and post anything on large sticky notes to the wall that served as the backdrop of the event
2. Kent Library brought a display of banned books, and had librarians on hand to discuss those books.
3. A local media partner (Real Rock radio) brought their remote-location van to play protest music, banned songs, songs with social themes, etc. The local DJ was on hand to discuss music and freedom.
4. Change My Mind tables: members of the Arrow and the university debate team had 4 tables offering a combination of fun & serious topics to debate.
5. The Arrow table: placed at the central point of the location, Arrow staff members could interact with students, encourage downloads of the news app, promote upcoming stories, solicit reader/student opinions and more.
6. Politician’s Corner: invite local politicians to attend as a listening post.
7. Food: free tacos were provided to attendees under the creative theme of “Let’s Taco ‘Bout It” and were a central focus of the promotion campaign.
8. Department & Organization Tables: several academic departments (Mass Media, Political Science, Speech Communications) hosted tables to engage with students on First Amendment issues,
9. Soapbox: on the main stage students and attendees had 60 seconds to discuss any topic, in any way they chose.

In order to promote the event, The Arrow and MC429 Media Management students utilized the following promotional tools:

1. Print ads in the Arrow print edition distributed just before the event
2. Online ads in the web edition of the Arrow
3. A large painted mural on a high-traffic point on campus
4. Sidewalk chalk message
5. Social media ads on the Arrow’s accounts (Facebook and Instagram)
6. Street teams – students ‘hit the streets’ the day before the event with a mock demonstration designed to draw attention to the event and drive traffic.
Results:

This was the second year for this event, and with a better developed creative theme, more activities, a better location, increased promotion and enhanced opportunities to engage with students, attendance doubled from the previous year. Reviews of the event were very positive and the event will probably be repeated for the next few years.

Following is content from the promotional campaign.

Videos related to the event:

https://www.southeastarrow.com/media/
https://www.facebook.com/SoutheastArrow/videos/2511106749134264/
https://www.facebook.com/SoutheastArrow/videos/566025607476906/