

First ACW2014 - experiences shared, lessons learned

Cocktail Weeks take place in some of the best capital cities in the world. In *Time Magazine's* January 2013 edition, it named Ghana one of the top three places to visit in the world. This was a proud moment for Ghanaians across the world, although many were confused by the recommendation.

As Ghana is undergoing some major growths and changes it is hard for the every day Ghanaian living in Ghana to appreciate their environment.

The country has now been declared as a middle-income status country. With the emerging middle-class and growing aspirational market, it is any business' dream to be in Ghana right now - more specifically Accra, where the cosmopolitan lifestyle is bursting at the seams with a rapidly saturated hospitality industry serving the diverse residents of Accra.

With the scene already set, agency Sixth Sense Manifesto embarked on implementing Accra Cocktail Week where residents of Accra would begin to appreciate the cocktail culture, try cocktails at a discounted price and learn more about the industry.



Getting started

It's always easy to come up with an idea but to fully conceptualise and execute it becomes the biggest challenge. In the early stages the agency identified it needed five key stakeholders to make Accra Cocktail Week (ACW2014) all that it wanted it to be, which included brands, bars, judges, media partners and the residents of Accra. All stakeholders had an opportunity to benefit from ACW2014 albeit consumption, footfall, purchase of publication or discounts.

It started with a social media campaign led by Facebook where it started posting cocktail recipes and facts to see if it could generate interest amongst consumers for this initiative. Within the first three weeks of daily content posting an organic audience of 699 followers was built with a talkability of 80% about ACW2014. The establishment of its social media platforms gave Sixth Sense Manifesto a reference point for ACW2014 and soon followed its media partnership with *Time Out Accra*, *Accra City Times* and African Consumers.

The agency then simultaneously started speaking with brands and bars to get their participation. Whereas a lot of bars struggled to understand the concept it successfully got the acceptance of 20 bars. And whilst it was a struggle to reach 10% of the beverage brands that operate in Ghana, it was successful to get five world-class brands including Martini, Bacardi, Amarula, Knights Whisky and Kasapreko to participate in delivering a brand experience.

Format

Sixth Sense Manifesto conceptualised and executed a variety of activities throughout ACW2014 so that it gave all stakeholders an opportunity to participate.

It featured a series of events including:

- Cocktail Masterclass - hosted by a mixologist in Accra
- Mixologist Fever - hosted by two bars where mixologists would have fun behind the bar and show residents of Accra a good time
- Cocktail & Food pairing - hosted by two bar/restaurants that offered residents an alternative drink option for their food



In addition, each brand sponsored a day through the working week to deliver a brand experience to the residents of Accra.

Next was the bar judging competition where six consumers visited eight of the 20 participating bars to judge which bar offered the best cocktails and overall experience.

Marketing

As the first press release was published in May to 12 online media sites and four entertainment newspapers it achieved 100% conversion with the online media sites plus a further 220% visibility achieved by other online sites featuring the press release, event information and flyer. It also achieved a 50% conversion with print media.

In addition to the press release and organic patronising of ACW2014 it allocated a considerable budget to social media buy on Facebook in order to promote the brands, the bars and events that were lined up throughout the week.

As a below-the-line brand management agency Sixth Sense Manifesto wanted to focus its efforts on promoting ACW2014 with more direct to consumer strategies rather than the use of ATL mediums. It also heavily relied on its growing media partners to promote the ACW2014 to their database and promote all activities on their platforms as well as the bars and brands.

The week running up to the press launch of ACW2014 got over 4,000 people on Facebook actively engaging on the page, the agency was receiving over 50 enquiries per day via direct mail and phone calls enquiring about the event, let alone the queries that were coming through social media platforms.

Bigger than anybody thought

At the one week countdown to ACW2014, the project appeared to be bigger than originally anticipated.

The press launch was held at an indigenous bar in Osu, Accra on the same day of the world cup launch. Consumers got the chance to sample free cocktails and watch the Brazil game, the turnout was good and the place was buzzing with a mixed crowd from expats, returnees to local residents.

As ACW2014 commenced some challenges arose such as bars still not understanding their role and a lack of communication, no real promotion of ACW2014 on their behalf, no promotion on the brands behalves and a low turnout rate to the bars throughout the week, however for those who participated they testified to truly having a wonderful experience and looking forward to next year's activity.

The agency is currently undergoing a survey with all stakeholders to get their feedback on ACW2014 and what they would add or remove for ACW2015.

Corporate Ghana is weak

The agency states that it wasn't easy working with so many different businesses, as during the process "we learnt how weak corporate Ghana really is and truly how people don't like to spend money and work towards initiatives that truly benefit them in the short and long run. In addition, it was very difficult to get to speak to people on the phone, meet with them face to face and get them to respond to emails or even read them. An observation was that the infrastructure is very fragile and weak and decision makers have to be hands on and micro manage that it doesn't avail them to take advantage of some great opportunities.

"We also observed Ghanaians don't tend to go out and drink much after work, the highest time of footfall was on Ghana match days and Thursday-Saturday.



"It was at times a painful experience and in the end, we made no money from it but had the pleasure of working with some world-class brands and establishing some long-term relationships.

"We have learnt Accra is ready for Cocktail week, however next year we need a bigger team and dedicated co-ordinators for each stakeholder and much more frequent face to face meetings. Plus where we avoided using radio and billboards we plan to invest more into these modes of advertising just to keep ACW top of mind for all stakeholders involved and encourage a higher footfall. Finally, we may adopt a new format for 2015 that would work better for this market."

Next stop is Lagos. The agency has reportedly learnt a lot of lessons from ACW2014 and whilst some of the challenges maybe universal across SME's in Africa, it is hoping for more vim in Lagos.

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