

Convention 2000: Host Component Publicity Initiative

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SUMMARY

In 2000, AIA Philadelphia played host to the AIA National Convention. The component's goals were to generate as much attention as possible for the convention, to maximize convention attendance, and to facilitate a positive awareness of AIA architects and architecture in general. AIA Philadelphia successfully achieved all of its objectives for the 2000 convention by implementing an eight-part publicity initiative.

PRESS BLITZ

AIA Philadelphia formed a publicity committee to capitalize on promotional opportunities. Focusing on the convention's theme of "New Century New Vision: Livable Communities for America's Future," the committee worked to create a strong presence in local and state media.

The committee also secured the endorsement of the governor, who designated May as "Architects' Month." This support resulted in dozens of articles, television and radio appearances, Web site mentions, press conferences, and other special events. AIA Philadelphia members and staff also wrote articles and spoke for broadcast interviews, thereby adding to the broad media coverage of the convention.

SPECIAL CONVENTION NEWSLETTER

AIA Philadelphia published a special convention edition of *The Philadelphia Architect*, the component's monthly newsletter. The issue was bigger (20 pages instead of 12), brighter (two colors instead of black and white), and reached more people (20,000 instead of 2,200) than the regular edition. Each convention registration packet included a copy of the issue, and extra issues were available on the convention floor. Higher advertising rates for this special edition easily covered the costs of the additional copies and the larger format. Company sponsorships covered the additional costs of printing and distribution.

PHILADELPHIA MAP AND GUIDE

The component published a unique four-color, fold-out "Philadelphia Map & Guide" detailing the numerous events, exhibits, alumni receptions, meetings, and parties held in the Center City and the extended area during the convention. The map and guide showed where activities were occurring relative to hotels and the convention center and demonstrated that the city is accessible and walkable. Conventioneers could keep track of activities outside of the daytime convention programs and focus on events designed to show off the city and its architecture as well as the work of individual architecture firms and members.

WEB SITE

The component dedicated part of its Web site to the convention, including listings of events and tours hosted by AIA Philadelphia, a "call for volunteers" page, a host component party page, and a downloadable convention advertisement that other components could use in their newsletters. After the convention, the section featured photos from the convention and the host component party. The Web site helped to extend the reach of publicity for the convention nationally and internationally. It also allowed people to obtain information and sign up for events without calling the component, thereby reducing the amount of calls the component's small staff had to handle.

HOST CHAPTER EXHIBIT

The host chapter exhibit was on display during the convention, at the entrance of the convention center grand hall, and included at least 30 large panels of images and information. An AIA member designed the exhibit to inform convention guests and the public about architecture in Philadelphia by highlighting local firms, local architecture schools, and related organizations.

"ONLY IN PHILLY" ADS

The component produced a series of advertisements designed to raise excitement about the convention,

specifically for the host component party. A volunteer wrote the copy, and the component designed and produced the advertisement with the tag line, "It Could Only Happen in Philadelphia." AIA Philadelphia sent a package of ad slicks to every staffed component in the country with suggestions for inserting the advertisements in each chapter's publication. The ads were also available for download from the component's Web site.

CITY BANNERS

AIA Philadelphia commissioned a design for 10' x 3' banners to be hung around city hall and along two of the city's major streets. The banners flew for the month of May during the convention and again in October for the component's design awards. A member firm or other building-industry firm could adopt a banner by paying a fee to have its name printed inside a color band on the banner. The adopting firm ultimately became the owner of the banner. The banner project created more visibility for the convention as well as for individual architecture firms and affiliate members. The visibility reached beyond the normal scope of the audience with an interest in architecture, broadening exposure, literally, to people on the street.

ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL OF PHILADELPHIA

AIA Philadelphia adopted the charter-school initiative as a legacy project for the AIA convention in Philadelphia. The school is a collaborative effort among AIA Philadelphia, member architects, and a committed group of local educators. The school introduces students to the theories and practice of architecture, design, the building industry, and related community issues, in addition to the standard high school curricula. Through the school the component has made connections with the education community and education press as well as with local politicians involved in education initiatives. The school and its students had a large presence at the convention, with high-profile events at the school that attracted local politicians and AIA local and national leadership.

CONTINUING TO REACH OUT

The new convention publicity committee established many relationships with a broader range of media for the future. The committee decided to extend its mission beyond the convention and now functions as one of the component's 23 regular committees to publicize component events, architecture firms, and architecture in general.

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

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| 07.03.03 | Getting Good Press: Eight Tips for Media Interviews |
| 21.01.01 | Effective AIA Component Web Sites |
| 22.07.03 | How to Gain Publicity and Architectural Awareness |

Feedback

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Key Terms

- Leadership
- Associations
- Design associations
- The American Institute of Architects
- AIA Conventions