



“I Am a Dancer” campaign The Milwaukee Ballet Company

<http://www.milwaukeeballet.org/>

by Chris Stravinski Sharrow
The Milwaukee Ballet Company
Marketing & Public Relations Director
July 2006



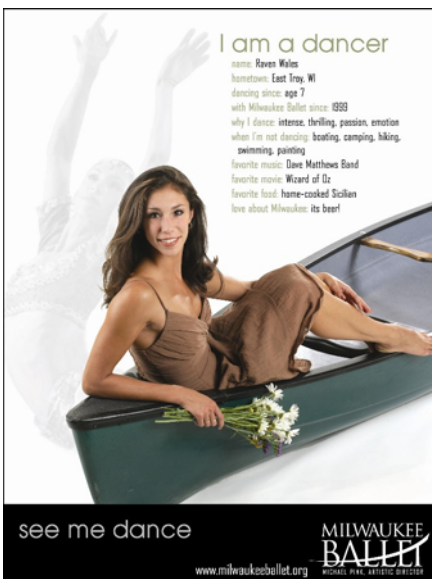
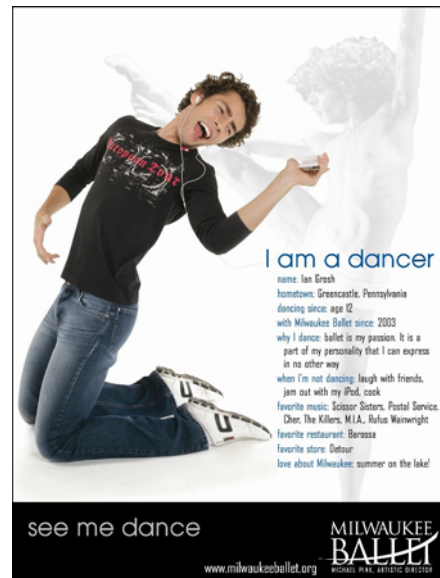
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Americans for the Arts’ Julie Peeler, Vice President of Arts & Business Programs, saw The Milwaukee Ballet “I am a dancer” magnets at the Dance/USA convention. We thought it was such an interesting and innovative campaign, we asked their marketing & public relations director, Chris Stravinski Sharrow, to write about it. “I am a dancer” is completing the first of a three-year strategic plan. We will follow up with the Ballet in each year to find out the impact on their audience and attendance.

The Milwaukee Ballet Company launched the "I Am a Dancer" Campaign in the summer of 2005. The print campaign centers on our young, talented dancers to help the Company attract a new, young demographic (ages 18-34) and stimulate interest from our existing target audience (women, ages 35-64).

The campaign concept came to me after I had just started my job as the Marketing and PR Director for the Milwaukee Ballet. I thought about the dancers, their years of training and their stunning athleticism. I thought that if we could introduce the dancers to their fellow Milwaukeeans by highlighting what makes them interesting people in their private lives --

it would be a natural way to increase awareness of them and the Milwaukee Ballet Company. The dancers live and work in Milwaukee just like the rest of us. However, unlike (most) of the rest of us – they are young, gorgeous and have an extraordinary talent and skill that few people have. I thought if we could show the dancers as themselves -- people would be more comfortable coming to the ballet even though they may never have previously attended a performance.



The Dancer Campaign centers on photographs of the dancers in their everyday clothes with something that identifies them personally (snowboard, canoe, guitar) and includes a screened-back dance image with the tagline: "I am a dancer...see me dance". Information



on their likes and dislikes (favorite book, movie, etc.) accompanies each image.

The campaign images are used in many different media including print ads, full color signage on our huge studio windows visible to high-volume street traffic and on street-level billboards leading into the downtown areas where young professionals gather to socialize. We also printed the images on kitchen magnets distributed in the dorms of two large college campuses and at outreach activities throughout the year. To take advantage of our captive audience at performances, we also featured the campaign as a large format photo exhibit in the intermission lounge of our performing arts center.

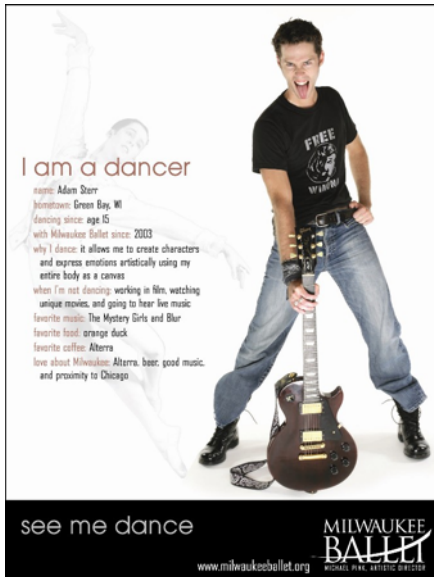
Our internet presence is enhanced with these images featured on the website. Site visitors are encouraged to e-mail the dancers through the marketing department. This program began a few months ago and we are already seeing activity from fans of all ages who send questions to the dancers through our website. The dancers get the usual fan mail from people they don't know and many have reconnected with people they had danced with at other companies. One of our male dancers heard from a young woman he went to grade school with and who was hoping to see him when she moved to Milwaukee. When she admitted to having a "crush" on him in grade school, he had to tell her he's already dating someone. A married couple living in Korea contacted a married couple in the Company to ask about their lives and careers. This email communication has taken off and we are expecting even greater email traffic once the word gets out.

The more the dancers become familiar faces in and around the city as they go about their everyday lives, the more we can expect people to come to the ballet to see them perform. The dancer featured on the billboards was approached constantly by people saying "Aren't you 'so-and-so'-- we saw you on the billboard!" We hope to turn our dancers into local celebrities -- as they should be.

We felt this campaign was worth the investment because we must attract new, younger audiences to increase our revenue and attendance. We've been losing subscribers to age and health issues and because people are not buying season tickets as they have in the past. We must make up the loss of subscribers with an increase in single ticket buyers in every demographic. With the "I am a Dancer"



branding campaign, we have an opportunity to make these new audiences feel that these dancers could be their friends and neighbors – therefore reducing the intimidation of first-time attendance. The dancers should become recognizable on the street and dispel the notion that the dancers are unapproachable or an elite group.



The campaign is an integral part of the three year strategic marketing plan for the ballet to attract new, younger audiences while strengthening the identities of the dancers with the public. We also want to reconnect with audiences that have lapsed with a fresh take on the Milwaukee Ballet.

There is a growing recognition of these dancers when they're out in public running errands, attending events with friends, etc. and that is our return on investment. They are being recognized on the street and that's exactly what we were hoping to achieve. We would like to capitalize on this campaign to help translate the greater visibility of the dancers into increased attendance at their performances from our new, targeted audiences.