

2018 IDA Awards Entry, Marketing and Communication  
Downtown Denver Rink at Skyline Park presented by the Downtown Denver Partnership

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Downtown Denver Partnership

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**Situation:** The Downtown Denver Rink at Skyline Park is a nearly full-sized ice rink that sits downtown at the corner of 16<sup>th</sup> and Arapahoe St. and is open daily from Nov. 22, 2017 – Feb. 14, 2018. The rink is part of a series of strategic initiatives from the Downtown Denver Partnership that helps to create diverse and attractive programming and encourage a wide variety of cultural, leisure, entertainment and recreation in Downtown Denver's parks and public spaces.

Since the rink's grand opening in 2007, it has been open during the winter season on an annual basis and has been sponsored and largely operated by a corporate sponsor. Beginning in 2017, the Downtown Denver Partnership began to fully control operations, programming and marketing for all things rink. This was considered a first step to align the funding provided by the Partnership with free cultural events and happenings taking place in the downtown area for tourists, residents and downtown employees alike.

**Innovation:** The Downtown Denver Rink is a pop-up ice rink that lives on a public park in the heart of Downtown Denver – with set-up and tear-down of the rink both happening in about a one-week period and rink activation taking place over four months, we definitely see the rink as a whole as a unique and innovative addition to our Downtown parks system. Additionally, because we no longer rely on one large corporate sponsor for sponsorship and programming of the rink our internal team is afforded a unique opportunity to craft the exact experience we want our consumers to have when visiting our rink. Using marketing and communications tactics to target and adapt our messaging to connect with different audiences was key. And, as our audiences span a wide net, we needed to be nimble in our approach and with our marketing dollars.

We knew we couldn't market *just* a rink – there are a handful of ice rinks within an hour's drive of Downtown Denver, we needed events and programming to elevate *our* rink and to be able to market around. Activation that we could market to our target audiences, that could also get picked up by local media for an even further reach. Alongside Downtown Denver businesses, organizations, and restaurants we put together a robust programming calendar to aid in the overall marketing efforts. By working with local media partners, looking at high sales days using our Square data and comparing this info with web analytics to learn about what our most popular programming efforts had been over the years we were able to begin to program events around topics we *knew* would be popular with our target audiences, including: events with local celebrities, kids' events, fitness experiences, and music.

**Representation/Execution:** After months of research around how best to approach the marketing of the rink we developed a plan that included a visual rebrand (including a new name), targeted programming, and a 360-media approach that included owned, earned and paid efforts using array of tactics including radio, on-site rink activations, transit, programmatic digital, OOH and print. All of which allowed us to reach our desired audience in a way that was both cost-effective and memorable.

By changing the official name of the rink to incorporate the Partnership the rink operations, programming and marketing efforts were clearly attributed back to the Partnership. Using the redesign as part of an intentional marketing effort allowed our team to build beautiful, artistic and engaging digital and print marketing assets that truly caught the eye of our target audiences.

A new endeavor for the Partnership, working with Entercom radio to market the rink on-air, on-site and online proved successful. To keep the buy visually relevant the Entercom team visited the rink 8 times over the course of 7 weeks, using content gathered to promote the rink via visual channels. In addition radio, we bought targeted OOH in the form of bus tails – circulating in the busiest areas of Denver and commuting from an array of our target cities. The OOH effort provided exposure to local commuters, drivers and pedestrians in what we know to be prime marketing areas. These moving billboards worked every day from Nov. 22 – Feb. 14, delivering quick bursts of essential info about the rink throughout the marketplace.

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A large part of our strategy centered around being able to promote programming and activation events. By offering Snowga, skating lessons and opportunities for kids and families to meet with some of their favorite characters, like Mickey, Minnie and Poppy from Trolls, we were able to market the rink as a place to stay fit during the cold winter months and as a culturally relevant destination.

**Sustainability:** With all operations, programming and marketing / communications efforts now being held internally – we've been able to foster the sustainability of the Rink program as a whole. Our marketing dollars go further and we're able to create and build our own relationships with sponsors, vendors and downtown partners that were previously held by folks outside of our organization. Because each of the relationships formed whether they were media buys, sponsorship efforts or programming events, were handled by an internal DDP employee we've been given the opportunity to begin to build upon each relationship and weave the relationship into other Downtown Denver Partnership efforts.

**Outcome:** For the past 8 years admission to the rink has been free, with skate rentals starting at \$2. This year, the rink was still free, but the rental fees increased considerably jumping 400% to \$8. Even with this rather large price jump the rink surpassed its goal of attracting 41,000 skaters and hit nearly 44,000 skaters throughout the 2017 - 2018 season, this is largely credited to our robust and diverse B2C marketing efforts.

Partnering with Entercom led to on-site activation efforts that drove listeners to the rink resulting in nearly 2,000 consumers visiting over their 10 activation hours. Entercom's rink-related social posts reached an estimated 37,000 and our on-air radio schedule reached over 1 million listeners over the course of 462 on-air spots. By working with Lamar, our bus tail artwork received over 10 million impressions throughout the 4-month buy. And, the Facebook posts our team created around programming and activation at the rink had an average reach of nearly 3k people per post – with an average of 1.5 posts per week paired with 3 paid promotions our ROI for social came out to spending less than .01 cents to reach each consumer via Facebook. Finally, programming at the rink was also pushed in print in two local publications – those efforts combined earned over 100,000 views.

The efforts of OOH, radio, print, digital and social marketing efforts earned more than 20 million impressions over the 4-month marketing push. We earned over 57,000 new web users during the rink activation periods which accounted for more than 80% of the Downtown Denver Partnership overall web visits.