



2017 Grand Illumination Parade – Facebook Live and Television Broadcast

Submitted by: Downtown Norfolk Council **Category:** Marketing and Communication

Overview and Background:

The Downtown Norfolk Council (DNC) has produced the Grand Illumination Parade – the premier holiday parade in the region and a Southeast Tourism Top 20 Event – since 1985. Beginning in 1989, we broadcast the parade live in prime time on broadcast television as a way to further distinguish our parade as the region’s best as well as to offer additional sponsorship opportunities, including television commercials within the broadcast and continuous on-screen logo recognition for our presenting sponsor.

In 2016, with a tight budget, an increasingly competitive landscape for raising sponsorship dollars, and changes in the way people are consuming media, we realized it was time to evaluate the current parade broadcast program and our objectives.

The existing parade live broadcast was part of an annual commitment of dollars to our local ABC affiliate. We knew that this annual commitment was no longer the best use of our marketing budget and decided to send out an RFP to all the major broadcast affiliates to determine the true cost of a live parade broadcast.

Our RFP responses required two scenarios for us to choose from:

1. Produce and air the Grand Illumination Parade. The partnering station would produce the parade, air it live and air two re-broadcasts during the holiday season.
2. Re-broadcast a pre-produced parade. DNC contracts with an independent video producer to film the parade and put on Facebook Live and provide an edited and produced parade. The DNC would purchase air-time to re-broadcast the parade during the holiday season.

Once we had the hard costs in, we evaluated the objectives and benefits of broadcasting the parade live versus re-broadcasting a produced parade and came to some conclusions that made our decision clear. It was time to take this longstanding tradition and turn it on its head!

- Ratings for the live broadcast were down. And we could only expect this trend to continue considering major television events like the Super Bowl and Olympics also experienced declines.
- The live broadcast format has many limitations that a pre-produced parade does not. We are limited to one broadcast location, limited camera angles and strict time constraints.
- We would still be able to offer the sponsorship opportunities we had with the traditional live scenario, but a produced version would open the door for even more creative and impressive opportunities.
- More flexibility with video production crew would allow us to capture additional footage of the city to use in other holiday promotions – more bang for our buck!

- We realized the untapped potential for a social media element. We could still offer a “live” experience using Facebook Live instead of a traditional broadcast with the added bonus of engaging with our audience live.

Based on the change, we determined new objectives for the edited parade broadcast and Facebook Live.

- Improve viewership ratings.
- Decrease budget.
- Approach the produced broadcast as essentially an infomercial for Downtown instead of just a parade. The new version will showcase downtown amenities, businesses and the vibe. If you weren't there, you wished you were!
- Have camera crews throughout the 2-mile parade route to capture all the different aspects.
- Creatively feature and promote sponsors – have more “product placement” ability.
- Ability to capture and show behind the scenes moments (staging and line-up, balloon inflation) that viewers have never seen before.
- Include sponsor commercials.
- Have new hosts.
- Introduce “man on the street” to interact with crowd and generate unique content.

Now that we made the decision to make this major change, we knew we had to really get behind it as an organization and make sure that all of our audiences not only understood our decision for the change, but embraced it and were as excited about the new approach as we were.

DNC developed a comprehensive promotional and communications plan including:

- Communication with parade participants letting them know about the change and benefits, including that each and every unit would be featured on Facebook Live and the re-broadcast. In the traditional live format, units were often cut due to commercial breaks and time constraints.
- Dedicated advertising campaign promoting Facebook Live and the parade broadcast dates on social media, television and digital.
- Detailed communications to our audiences to educate them about where, when and how to see the parade live and the re-broadcast.
- Tagging and encouraging participants (approximately 2500) to share Facebook Live with their social followers.

For the Facebook Live broadcast, we had a team monitoring comments and responding live, which added an audience engagement aspect like never before. We were also able to secure a technical sponsor to accommodate the additional band-width needed to support the live feed.

Since we had never done an edited and produced version of the parade, we developed a 3- minute ["sizzle reel"](#) in advance of the parade broadcast to use for promotions, generate excitement and give people an idea of the caliber of the new and improved parade broadcast that would be airing at a later date.

While this initial year of big changes for our Grand Illumination Parade broadcast format will certainly serve as a benchmark and learning experience for the future, the numbers don't lie: our new take on a favorite holiday tradition was a definite success and something we will continue to build and improve.

Key Statistics:

- When combining all the broadcast airings, Facebook Live, and teaser views we saw a 78.10% INCREASE in total parade views and an 89.94% DECREASE in CPM.
- Social media highlights include:
 - 482 shares
 - 727 interactions
 - 75,028 minutes viewed – that is equal to 52 days of parade!
 - 116,652 people reached