

I Scream! Kiosk

Background

Since the New York Times gave the area its name in 1904, Times Square has been a center of culture, democracy, free speech and a place where people from all walks of life can share ideas. This exchange happens not only in offices and theaters, but on the streets themselves, where New Yorkers gathered to celebrate the end of World War II, to protest the Vietnam war, and to stage countless other demonstrations, processions and parties. Last year, Metro New York called Times Square “a natural magnet for political protest since way before the 2016 presidential election.” Times Square’s role as a center of expression and exchange has only become more important in recent years, when our freedoms seem increasingly fragile.

Chelsea Lipman, the Times Square Alliance’s Art Manager, had this on her mind as she participated in the Women’s March in Washington, D.C. Chelsea was inspired by the way the ideas and passion of a few individuals could spark incredible collective action. Wanting to do more but with little money to give, Chelsea decided to use what she did have: her conceptual design talents and her connection to Times Square.

At the same time, the Alliance had begun a partnership with the public market manager Urbanspace. Their goal was to curate New York’s most distinctive food offerings, and to change perceptions of Times Square as a place without unique, independent businesses. But they hadn’t arrived at a decision about specific vendors.

The Project

I Scream! is a Times Square pop-up kiosk that encourages people to speak up about social and political issues while enjoying a frozen treat. The Alliance and Urbanspace partnered with New York-based, Vendy Award-winning ice cream shop Ice & Vice to offer flavors like "Freeze Global Warming", "The Full Scoop" and "Justice is Sweet." 5% of total profits are donated directly to a rotating list of local and national nonprofits including Habitat for Humanity, Project HOPE and Harlem Grown. The booth itself includes a whiteboard with a written "Scream of the Day," where visitors can express their political frustrations and demand change. "Screams" are also collected and shared online via social media.

Innovation

I Scream! is innovative because it represents the synthesis of several Alliance initiatives:

- To use distinctive food and programming to change perceptions of Times Square as a place of local culture and creativity
- To reinforce Times Square’s role as a cultural, social and political focal point for New Yorkers and visitors from around the world
- To elevate the basic kiosk concept to a higher level of design, integrate quality design principles into the practice of placemaking itself, and underscore Times Square’s role as a center of art and design
- To use partnerships to address potentially sensitive issues in an unexpected, entertaining way, and to partially insulate the Alliance from critique

- To empower staffers to come up with innovative ideas, and provide them the support to make them a reality
- To connect a neighborhood organization to larger, timely social movements and institutions

Replication

While I Scream! is deeply connected to Times Square’s uniqueness as a place, the core principles and ideas used to guide the project are applicable to public spaces everywhere:

- Tap into the unique history and identity of the public space, and amplify the elements that resonate in a contemporary context
- Understand the importance of creating mutually beneficial partnerships that save resources, encourage efficiency and allow each participant to focus on their core competencies. These partnerships can also help build connections between communities and neighborhoods that might otherwise appear disparate (e.g., the “hip” Lower East Side and “touristy” Times Square)
- Reach out to institutions, businesses and creators to deliberately engage them in a public space where they might not otherwise be engaged, and transform the space into a hub for cultural activity
- Create a culture where business buys into programming as a way of repositioning a property or neighborhood and serves their economic interest

Representation

The core idea, design and structure for the project were developed by Chelsea and the Times Square Alliance team; Urbanspace, who manages the rest of Times Square’s food kiosks, helped build a relationship with Ice & Vice, who creates the ice cream flavors. A variety of Times Square stakeholders help identify charitable organizations, which rotate over time. Once a charity organization is selected, we reach out to them; they provide us with materials about their work to distribute.

In short, I Scream! exists within an ecosystem of partnerships. One particularly compelling example of this ecosystem in action occurred last summer, when the Broadway musical “Waitress” partnered with I Scream to offer an exclusive flavor, “Break the Glass Ceiling.” As part of the partnership, The Shubert Organization (which is on the Alliance’s board) donated tickets to the show, which we distributed to the children and families working with Harlem Grown, a partner charity that provides hands-on education in urban farming, sustainability, and nutrition.

Our “Scream of the Day” gives the general public an opportunity to remain engaged, and allows the project itself to evolve along with public discourse. Screams have included: “Stop the brutality,” “Voting rights for all,” and “Silence is complicity.”

Sustainability

The I Scream! initiative has raised over \$17,000 for our charity partners. While the first season didn’t produce a net positive income for the Alliance, the business model has proven sustainable enough that Ice & Vice has signed on for our second iteration, currently under development.

In the meantime, we’ve found ways to make I Scream! successful in the winter months. In December, we placed the kiosk (decked out in a special, festive design) at the entrance to our holiday gift market. We also sent a special coupon to our live-and-work community, offering them

free hot chocolate from the kiosk while they explored the market. The promotion and placement of I Scream! drove significant foot traffic to the holiday market, and resulted in a high-volume of sales for I Scream! itself.

When it comes to environmental sustainability, we're also doing well on that front: in addition to Harlem Grown, the Natural Resource Defense Council was one of our first charitable partners.

Outcome

I Scream! has generated significant positive press coverage for Times Square. The Village Voice called it "the most exciting thing to happen in Times Square since the Clash destroyed it at Bond's in 1981." Gothamist said the kiosk is "as brave and bold about frozen sweets as it is about supporting organizations that are feeling anxiety under the current administration."

The project both reinforces and evolves Times Square's identity: though the area has always been a center for expression, the I Scream kiosk, with its local food vendor and New York-style dynamism, positions Times Square more firmly within the cultural context of the city surrounding it. Accordingly, the kiosk has been popular with our live-and-work community, even as it remains open and accessible to tourists, including those with different political and cultural perspectives.

The Alliance is currently developing a 2.0 version of I Scream!, in which we invite outside designers to rethink the kiosk's graphics, championing causes and ideas that resonate with them. As the project evolves, we hope I Scream embodies the diversity, passion and freedom that make Times Square, and New York, so great.