Challenges
When speaking out has consequences, silence seems like the safest choice

A number of community organizations in and around Simi Valley, California had been working for years to dismantle racism in the community, and had been making headway.

But in the last three years, the problem has grown worse, with more open, and more dangerous, attacks on a wider variety of residents. This made more residents than ever uneasy, but the vitriol and increasingly dire consequences enforced isolation and silence. Some were willing to speak out, but simply didn't know what to do, or didn't know that there were many like-minded people in the community.

To address this problem, a number of organizations, lead by an immigrant justice nonprofit called Buen Vecino, organized an experiment: start a conversation about racism with a talk by a prominent speaker and a local panel. Use the event to help people and organizations make connections. And if it worked, repeat and amplify.

Marketing challenges:

- Get people to attend, especially broader audiences.
- Make residents aware that many in the community recognize the problem and are trying to address it.
- We knew that the local panel would be a huge draw, but in order to protect them from harassment, we couldn't reveal their identities until the last week of the campaign.

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Branding
Establishing visual and thematic unity, empowerment, and parity

On a previous project, a successful City Council campaign, we’d learned that there were many residents who were appalled by racism in the community, but they thought they were alone and were afraid to speak out. So we developed a tagline that challenged those assumptions, in a palette of vibrant, energetic and upbeat colors.

It communicates the message of unity and empowerment, and it works well in both English and Spanish.

It was important that the branding not only work in both languages, but also communicate parity. Selecting high-contrast colors, combining them judiciously, and providing the branding elements as standalone components that can be rearranged as needed helped achieve that goal.

The tagline “Not Alone / Not Afraid” is tied to a larger theme in the community and not just this event, it can work for an entire planned speaker series and other efforts.

Brand Fonts:
Futura Book
Futura Medium

Free alternatives for sponsors:
Oswald Regular
Oswald Medium
Imagery

Achieving a balance of concept and specific community makeup...with stock photography

Anyone who’s ever had to search for “ethnic” stock photos knows what a challenge it can be to find images that represent a specific community and mood. Blow it, and the images look inauthentic to your audience.

So when custom photos aren’t an option, the next-best option is to use stock very thoughtfully.

We chose images that suggest, rather than illustrate, through selective focus, details as focal points, and diversity that’s accurate for the city. When backgrounds are present, we made sure that they are reminiscent of Simi Valley’s particular Western chaparral landscape.

Finally, we rendered the images as black & white, to provide an elegant contrast to the branding colors, unify them, and maintain focus on the message.
Print
Playing cards and plaid fabric inspire a design solution

We needed flyers in both English and Spanish. We could have printed some in each language, or created a two-sided flyer with one language on each side.

But we went a different route.

To emphasize that this is a community effort, not a white or Latinx one, we wanted one flyer, not two, with both languages on the same side of the sheet.

Reversing the direction of one language, like a playing card, makes it easier for each reader to focus on their preferred language. There is no primary or secondary position: from the reader’s perspective, the preferred language is always on top, with the English and Spanish logos meeting in the middle.

The final challenge was to find room for a lot of sponsor logos. Rather than repeat them on both orientations, we ran them along a white “ribbon” on one side, perpendicular to the rest of the content.

Together with the other linear elements, they weave through the layout like a plaid pattern. This saves space, and provides another unifying element that reinforces the idea that we’re all in this together.
Video

Simple elements get attention

We're lucky enough to have in-house video production capabilities, so under other circumstances we might have concepted and shot an original video set in the community and featuring community voices.

But in the tight time frame we had for promoting the event, it made more sense to keep it simple.

Opening with the "elephant in the room" provides a beat of preparation for a jarring word -- "racism" -- that is uncomfortable for so many in the community.

Showing the payoff as a small, static, frivolous figurine, instead of a young or smaller living animal, makes the topic less frightening and makes the task seem more achievable.
Email

Multiple options for stakeholders

Event producers, sponsors, and others all had different requirements for sending email.

Some stakeholders needed fully formatted HTML email. Some needed separate images and text, or PDFs of the flyer.

We assigned each component a unique ID number, and set up a well-organized cloud-based resource where stakeholders could quickly find and use what they needed.

The system also included other creative assets, including social media images.

The flexibility also allowed us to quickly customize emails as needed. For example, just a few days before the event, the school district gave us permission to invite high schools to publicize the event to students (students could attend free). We were easily able to add disclaimers and other requirements to all relevant components and spread the word.

Creatively, the letter format allowed us to expand on the communication and talk about racism in a more emotional way. Copy and graphics explain how racism is designed to keep us apart, and how it can be defeated by working together.

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Social media

For individual posts and ads

In a typical program, we create many resources for social media, in a number of formats. We run tests, analyze results, and adjust messages, images, targets, and media for maximum effect.

But the timeline of this project was only a few weeks from beginning to end. So we stuck to a handful of images, with and without text, to do double duty for posts and paid advertising.

Between events, existing and expanded options can continue to build awareness in the community.
Results
They came, they engaged, we’ll do it again

- 200 people attended. There was overwhelming enthusiasm for continuing the series.

- Attendees engaged with representatives from nine diverse organizations. The organizations, in turn, report that new people expressed interest in getting involved.

- The marketing campaign got the attention of the local newspaper, which reported on it in the days leading up to the event, boosting response.

- Sponsors said that the range of materials and the cloud-based library made it easy to communicate to their members, and would favorably influence their decision to sponsor future events.

- We can use the library of materials to continue the awareness effort between events.