

Marketing and Advertising

Time Warner Marketing Stunt Causes Terror

A Time Warner marketing campaign backfired in Boston when security officials decided the city was under attack from terrorists. The company that owns CNN, *Time* magazine and Cartoon Network inadvertently created a wave of panic in Boston and brought the city to a standstill. The company's marketing department placed 40 small, black blinking electronic devices in ten different US cities to promote a new cartoon show *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*. Each was the size of a cereal box, although Warner referred to them as "billboards". Pictures of the flashing digital signs showed protruding wires, hence the belief that they were bombs. Boston's city officials were quick to react in the interests of public safety and brought out its bomb force in force and shut down highways, bridges and rivers.

Warner's marketing arm took full responsibility for the awkward campaign, part of a tactic a spokesperson called "guerilla marketing," an "alternative to traditional media tactics that are high-impact but also very eye-level with the consumer, very grassroots and in-the-streets." An apologetic company spokeswoman said, "We approved it. We're taking full responsibility. We were simply promoting a TV show". She was shocked by the reaction in Boston, adding, "If we had ever perceived this to be something threatening safety, we would never have proceeded with it." Boston was the only city that mistook the signs for being bombs. The boxes caused barely a stir elsewhere and look-alike devices were soon selling for \$2,000 on EBay.

Vocabulary

Find the words in the reading that match the following definitions

1. _____ n. any remarkable feat performed chiefly to attract attention
2. _____ v. to bring a result opposite to that which was planned or expected
3. _____ n. a state of stopping of movement or action
4. _____ v. to push or thrust outward
5. _____ adj. pertaining to, or involving the common people, esp. as contrasted with from an elite
6. _____ v. to recognize, discern, envision, or understand

Discussion

1. Do you think Time Warner should have been more responsible?
2. What would you think if you saw a black box with flashing lights and protruding wires in your town?
3. Do you think Time Warner were happy that their cartoon got a lot of extra publicity?
4. How do you feel about Boston city official's assessment that this was a terrorist attack?
5. Do you think someone should go to jail for causing such panic? If not, what should their punishment entail?
6. Can you recall any other marketing stunts that went wrong?