



With 32 nations set to begin competition for the World Cup this month, soccer (a.k.a. “football” outside the U.S.) is top of mind all over the globe.

WiLDCOAST, a non-profit working to protect coastal waters and wildlife in the Californias and Latin America, is very astutely taking advantage of this surge in interest to broaden awareness of its international “Defend the Ocean Campaign.”

Back in January, WiLDCOAST contacted Jorge Campos, assistant coach for the Mexican national soccer team and a former goalie, to see if he would serve as one of several familiar faces in the campaign. (Campos is hugely popular in Mexico and Latin America where the ocean plays a central role in the economies of many nations.) Despite a hectic travel schedule, Campos agreed to set aside two hours for a photo shoot on a beach in Acapulco near where his family lives. The result is the poster pictured here in which Campos reminds viewers, “The best defense of the sea is you.”

WiLDCOAST started implementing the campaign in March and it has already generated media coverage in Baja California Norte, Sonora, Guerrero, and Mexico City. With a postcard mailing and letter-writing campaign still to come, the organization expects to deliver its message to 500 million people before the complete campaign is over. ■



Reality TV is (a) hideous (b) horrible (c) helpful

In television’s “vast wasteland,” reality shows may be the most desolate stretch. For nonprofits, however, they can provide fertile ground for planting your message in prime time.

In July, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation will release a new report entitled, “Your Issue Here: How to Partner with Hollywood’s Creative Community to Deliver Your Message to Millions of Americans.” The report presents case studies of nonprofits that have successfully collaborated with television shows to promote their causes to large audiences, and it offers 13 guidelines to help you do the same.

Last fall, I began working with the foundation to design the report, drawing on my experience running the Environmental Media Association. (EMA is a Los Angeles-based nonprofit that encourages film and TV producers to weave environmental messages into their stories.) Karen Brailsford, a journalist who has covered Hollywood for *People*, *Inside TV*, and *In Touch* magazines, spent four months interviewing television industry insiders and nonprofit executives to learn what works (and what doesn’t) when these two worlds collide.

Some of the lessons that emerged from this research will come as no surprise. Relationships matter, they require a serious investment of time, and they must be nurtured with great care and patience. But some were eye-opening, and the fact that reality television – a genre that has given us “When Animals Attack,” “Nanny 911,” and “America’s Wildest Police Chases” – has the potential to help nonprofits may be the most surprising of all.



► The following is an excerpt from “Your Issue Here: How to Partner with Hollywood’s Creative Community to Deliver Your Message to Millions of Americans,” which will be available at www.rwjf.org in July.

The genetic disorder Osteogenesis Imperfecta (OI) does not attract a bevy of A-list stars vying to host charity events in its name, nor does it generate much media attention. In fact, there is very little public awareness of OI, a condition that can cause a rib to crack from coughing or a leg to break from simply rolling over in bed. A relatively small number of Americans—somewhere between 20,000 and 50,000—are afflicted with OI, which probably explains its low profile. This lack of attention, however, does not mitigate the fact that for those suffering with OI, every day is filled with moments that may lead to serious injury.

In 2002, William Bradner, then director of communications and events at the Osteogenesis Imperfecta Foundation (OIF), was charged with raising his organization’s profile. Bradner was also seeking ways to identify those afflicted with OI who were not already listed in OIF’s 9,000-member database. To accomplish both tasks he needed to cast a wide net, publicizing OI to millions so that the tens of thousands with the disorder who were scattered across the U.S. could hear his message. Bradner would find precisely what he was looking for in prime time television.

Extreme Makeover: Home Edition, a reality show airing Sunday nights on ABC, selects a family facing seemingly insurmountable obstacles and rewards them with a top-to-bottom remodel. Each week, host Ty Pennington leads a team of designers, contractors, workmen, and neighbors in a

dramatic race against time. The team must completely rebuild an entire house—every room plus the exterior and landscaping—in just seven days. Viewers witness the incredible transformation of the house, and each show ends with an emotional finale showing how the makeover affects the selected family.

Bradner recognized that the program’s inspirational, triumph-over-adversity tone would resonate with his target audience, and its format—changing a house to better meet the needs of its occupants—was a perfect fit. He drafted a letter to the show’s producers describing OI and explaining why a profile of a family afflicted with it would be particularly suitable for *Extreme Makeover*. Individuals with OI often experience limited mobility, he wrote. Accidents, surgeries, fractures, even fatigue, can require an OI sufferer to use a wheelchair. Remodeling a home to make it wheelchair accessible would clearly improve the day-to-day lives of a family affected by OI.

Bradner mailed his letter and waited patiently for a reply. And then he waited some more. Two years would pass before the show responded. Inundated with thousands of similar letters each week, the producers had filed away Bradner’s pitch for future consideration. In early 2004, *Extreme Makeover* producer Andy Lipson placed a call to Bradner. Did OIF have candidates with dramatic stories that could be featured on the program? The foundation immediately polled its members and submitted the case histories of five such families. The show’s producers selected the heart-wrenching story of the Burns family of Garden Grove, California.

Benjamin Burns appeared to be healthy when he was born in 1997, but signs of the disorder began to surface after six months.

When his sister grabbed Benjamin to prevent him from falling, she accidentally fractured his arm. Over the next several weeks, Benjamin’s parents, Gerald and Ellen Burns, had to take him to the hospital repeatedly due to injuries incurred from routine tasks. Doctors determined that the boy’s arm had been re-injured and that he had a fractured skull. The hospital contacted Child Protective Services, the Burns were accused of child abuse, and for a time they lost custody of their son. Only after Benjamin was diagnosed with OI was he returned to the parents who had loved him and cared for him all along. By age seven, Benjamin was so fearful of causing a fracture he walked on his knees.

OIF worked closely with *Extreme Makeover*, providing an expert with OI, architect Karen Braitmayer, who directed the necessary design changes needed for the Burns family home. Braitmayer recommended modifications such as widening all the hallways and

walkways to render them wheelchair accessible, and installing a home security and intercom system with interior video cameras so Benjamin could call for help when he needed it.

The episode devoted to Benjamin Burns aired in November 2004 to a prime time audience in the millions. Within minutes of its conclusion, the OIF website was registering dozens of new members. Within days, hundreds of people had sent emails to the foundation requesting information. The number of hits to the site increased by 103% from the previous November, and the number of first time visitors increased by 143%. *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* did not just remodel a house; the show helped make over the OIF Foundation, giving it broader reach and heightened visibility. And all it took was an eye for opportunity, a lot of patience, and the ability to respond quickly when the phone finally rang. ■



The Burns family poses with *Extreme Makeover* host Ty Pennington (second from left) in front of their remodeled home.

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