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Celebrating ‘Mean Girls Day’ on Broadway

Part 1: Synopsis

Background

Based on the 2004 film of the same name, *Mean Girls* the musical opened on Broadway in April of 2018 with original writer Tina Fey returning to write the book along with husband Jeff Richmond composing the music. Though opening to somewhat mixed response from critics, the show was nominated for 12 Tony Awards, tying with *SpongeBob SquarePants* for the most nominations of the season, but ultimately got shut out of the awards. Despite the lack of awards, *Mean Girls* recently celebrated its one-year anniversary on Broadway, and at this time appears to be going strong, with no plans to close any time soon. *Mean Girls Day* as a concept began as a way to honor the beloved teen comedy by celebrating on October 3rd of every year, in reference to a famous line in the film that uses the date. The *Mean Girls* Broadway production has had a close link to ‘*Mean Girls Day*’ from its conception, as the production was first officially announced on October 3, 2016, and was initially promoted on October 3, 2017 with Tina Fey, joined by the cast, handing out cheese fries (another reference from the film) to crowds in a hot pink food truck featuring the show’s promotional artwork outside of the August Wilson theater where *Mean Girls* was set to play. Patrons also received pink sunglasses and some had the opportunity to take a photo with Fey at the truck. For *Mean Girls*’ first official ‘*Mean Girls Day*’ to occur during their Broadway run, their celebration efforts were widely expanded to become a day-long celebration throughout New York City and the entire country.

Mission & Objectives

As individual Broadway productions do not have official mission statements, most, if not all, support the mission statement provided by The Broadway League (national trade association for the Broadway industry): to enlighten and increase the public's knowledge, appreciation and awareness of the theatrical arts and to provide a forum for the discussion of issues relating to the preservation and promotion of live theatre as a vital and culturally significant artistic medium by such means as shall be charitable in nature. In regards to *Mean Girls*’ ‘*Mean Girls Day*’ campaign specifically, the overarching initiative was to make world-class theater more accessible and provide an opportunity for fans of *Mean Girls* to come together as a community to celebrate the holiday (Page Six.)

Key Stakeholders

Mean Girls celebrated Mean Girls Day with many corporate partners, listed most notably on the event page: Postmates, Cupcake Vineyards, Lucky Seat, Maker's Mark, and the Young Women's Leadership Network, which *Mean Girls* has an ongoing partnership with that was established in May of 2018. Drybar, Dylan's Candy Bar, and Bloomingdales also had special events and offers in celebration, as well as a multitude of local NYC restaurants, bars, and hotels. MAC Cosmetics serves as a permanent sponsor for the production, and was also included in the Mean Girls Day co-sponsor roster. Some permanent key stakeholders include producer Lorne Michaels of SNL fame, as well as the other members of the creative team.

Programming

Mean Girls' various social media accounts, most notably Instagram, began promoting the celebration in late September, promising fun activities and events to take place on October 3, 2018. The majority of the day's programming took place within New York City at a plethora of locations, including free *Mean Girls*-inspired makeovers at the M.A.C. flagship store, a *Mean Girls* Drybar takeover, treats and eats, giveaways, discounts, specialty cocktails, and other *Mean Girls* themed experiences all over the city, all day long. *Mean Girls*' partnership with Postmates offered fans, both in NYC and throughout the country, the opportunity to get free delivery with the code, WEARPINK, and for New York City residents, a chance to win lottery tickets to a performance if they ordered cheese fries from the app. Additionally, TriviaTainment hosted Mean Girls local trivia events throughout the country. All of the festivities were listed in full on the *Mean Girls* Broadway website's official 'Mean Girls Day' page, where fans could find an interactive map labelling every event available in the country. Also on this page was the downloadable "Party Pack" with Drink Recipes, Drinking Games, and Trivia Study Tips to help fans host their own 'Mean Girls Day' party at home. Fans could also enter into the official 'Mean Girls Day' Fan Performance lottery to win free tickets to the October 3rd show; every single ticket for this performance was obtained through this system. For an additional entry, fans could Instagram or tweet #MakeFetchHappen for a chance to win a pair of tickets to the performance. Before the performance that night, to the delight of fans, Jonathan Bennett (who played Aaron Samuels in the film) took the stage to read an official proclamation, declaring October 3, 2018 'Mean Girls Day' in the state of New York. Upon introducing Tina Fey to the unexpected audience, the writer was met with a standing ovation and roaring cheers, and gave a speech on the meaning of the story, citing its important place in the movement for women's empowerment and females in leadership roles (Page Six). In addition to the performance that evening, Tina Fey, along with the cast, were joined by Julie Menin, the commissioner of the New York mayor's office of media and entertainment, to unveil the newly renamed W. 52nd St. as "W. Fetch St." The change was made "in honor of 'Mean Girls Day' and the musical's commitment to making world-class theater more accessible," as stated in Menin's ceremonial speech to the cheering fans.

Part 2: Analysis of Case

Main Point #1

The best campaigns serve as an extension of your overall brand.

The 'Mean Girls Day' campaign acted as a celebration and representation of the show's brand and overall mission.

Mean Girls has one of the strongest “brands” as a show on Broadway right now because of its commitment in tone and style consistency across its communication efforts. At its core, *Mean Girls* is a teen comedy, and thus its social media platforms often feature humorous, light-hearted posts with bright colors, doodles, and pop culture references. *Mean Girls* is very self-aware of the category it belongs in and thus doesn't take itself too seriously, while simultaneously not being afraid to assert itself as a change-making piece of theatre with its high emphasis on female empowerment and involvement in various social campaigns. *Mean Girls* wants to make a difference, but also have fun while doing it. 'Mean Girls Day' as a campaign reflects this notion perfectly, and served as the perfect way to bring attention to the causes the show's team cares about, namely accessibility and inclusivity, while also providing fun, exciting experiences and takeaways for fans to enjoy and engage with.

Case Comparison: Hallmark Writers Tour

New York City may be a far cry from the hometowns Hallmark chose to visit on their writers tour, but the principle of getting out in the communities you serve and creating meaningful moments with your consumers is consistent throughout both cases. Where Hallmark wanted to learn what greeting cards meant to their customers, one of the biggest themes of 'Mean Girl Day' was to celebrate the impact the film and the musical have had on audiences, particularly female, and celebrate the loyal following and fan community. Both campaigns from *Mean Girls* and Hallmark stress the importance of brand consistency and authenticity, as well as the value of making personal connections with audiences that in turn entice new audiences to join the community.

Main Point #2

Take advantage of a time period or day when your audience will be most engaged.

'Mean Girls Day' as a definitive date in which fans can celebrate automatically generates a lot of excitement that Mean Girls chose to hone in on.

Just as mainstream holidays have their season and their day in the spotlight, holidays within pop culture also have the capability to spark great exhilaration and enthusiasm in the publics that celebrate them. Before *Mean Girls* on Broadway expanded 'Mean Girls Day' into a nationwide day of celebration, the hype in years prior surrounding it was mostly limited to repetitive internet discourse and an increase in pink outfits for a day. People would get excited to post about it on social media or watch the movie with friends, but there wasn't really a widespread, accessible outlet for fans to come together and enjoy October 3rd as a community. In having an unofficial holiday associated with the plot of their show, *Mean Girls* was given a golden opportunity to capitalize on the hype surrounding the date, turning what to most is just a normal day in mid-fall into a full-blown extravaganza. Hardcore *Mean Girls* fans would already be looking for a cool new way to celebrate their favorite film, and the musical's fresh iteration of the story coincided with its capability to offer a completely new 'Mean Girls Day' experience. Additionally, the beauty of celebrating a holiday, in this context, is that 'Mean Girls Day' only comes once a year; fans are pushed to participate while they still can, as all of the goodies are in limited quantities and the events are one-night-only. The notion of a limited-time offer appeals to our internal fear as social humans of missing out on something cool because we didn't act fast enough. By giving their audience a "get it before it's gone!" ultimatum, *Mean Girls* was able to boost participation in the celebration, capitalizing on their audience's desire to be included in the fun.

Case Comparison: Air New Zealand's Pink Flight

When Air New Zealand timed the launch of the Pink Flight, an experience catered to a more niche audience within the LGBTQ+ community, to coincide with Sydney Pride, they created a prosperous opportunity for themselves to be able to provide the perfect experience for the perfect customer at the perfect time. Just as 'Mean Girls Day' had its specific audience on its specific day, both brands' events showed that they knew how to cater to the desires and needs of their unique, enthusiastic publics at distinct times when they were looking to be catered to. Large scale events like these also instill in their audiences the notion that the most unique and innovative experiences by nature can only be available for a limited time and only on special occasions, as frequency and longevity would ultimately deteriorate what made the celebration worthwhile in the first place. With this in mind, brands can teach audiences to anxiously await your next big event and participate in droves so as to not miss out on the next grand experience.

Main Point #3

A singular event can become its own campaign and boost audience loyalty

Though 'Mean Girls Day' was just a day-long event, it served as a vehicle to enact the show's mission and forge a stronger connection with its fanbase.

One-day special events in the style of 'Mean Girls Day' are far and few between in the Broadway industry, as most public relations efforts for Broadway shows rely on social media and other digital content (vlogs from cast members, behind-the-scenes featurettes, etc.) as their primary tools for engagement. Additionally, most theatre fans often have to find fan experiences for themselves, rather than have them brought or well advertised to them as *Mean Girls* did with every aspect of the 'Mean Girls Day' campaign. One of the greatest strengths of the campaign was its core purpose of celebrating the *Mean Girls* fandom, and catering programming to their preferences and what makes *Mean Girls* special to its audience. Most notably, the success of the campaign came in its ability to accomplish not only their goal of increasing accessibility but also keeping *Mean Girls* culturally and commercially relevant while promoting the Broadway show.

Case Comparison: SXSW Bleed for the Throne

When HBO and the American Red Cross partnered to ask fans and blood donors to "Bleed #ForTheThrone" at SXSW, they also managed to promote their product while supporting a greater cause, all in a condensed event. By employing more than 80 actors and musicians, using original costumes and props from the show, and providing free food and drink to make the experience as immersive and specific to *Game of Thrones* as possible, all while promoting blood donations, shows that special events featuring a social cause can be beneficial in multiple avenues. Red Cross provides entertainment partnerships like this give their partners the opportunity to, as *Mean Girls* does, the opportunity to support causes they care about while simultaneously making a meaningful connection with fans.

Main Point #4

A marker of a strong spokesperson is their strength of connection and association with the brand

Tina Fey may not be the star on stage at Mean Girls, but she still serves as a leading lady in her own right as a highly effective spokeswoman for the production.

Tina Fey has long stood as an icon of female comedy, but one of her brightest career highlights came from writing and starring in the *Mean Girls* film in 2004. Her work is beloved by many and her personality and wit have always made her a crowd favorite, so it's really no wonder that the *Mean Girls* Broadway team makes such a point to showcase her whenever they can. When the show first premiered, Fey was the one sitting down with talk show hosts to discuss her own adaptation of her own movie. It was Fey unveiling the street sign and making a profound speech on stage in 2018 and enthusiastically handing out the cheese fries in 2017. This is Tina Fey's baby if you will, there would be no *Mean Girls* without her, and thus she makes the most qualified spokeswoman to represent the show, its cultural meaning, and the production's initiatives. If her expertise and literal ownership over *Mean Girls* weren't enough, the humility and vulnerability that come out of her self-deprecating humor boosts her relatability to audiences. Being the only original cast member involved in the Broadway production, this also gives fans of the film an enticing, nostalgic connection between the *Mean Girls* film they know and the musical version they may not have experienced yet.

Case Comparison: Tiger Woods Scandal

Tina Fey's relationship with *Mean Girls* very closely mimics Tiger Woods' relationship with Nike Golf, minus the rampant adultery. Just as *Mean Girls* wouldn't be *Mean Girls* without Tina, Nike Golf would cease to exist as we know it without the close ties with Tiger as the face of the brand. Powerful individuals with such close ties to the brands they represent could never be removed from them, no matter how scandalous one's actions may be in Tiger's case, nor with age as Tina's connection to *Mean Girls* is just as strong today as it was going on 15 years ago. The two highly successful spokespeople are perfect examples of the power of strong association and brand representation, and the security that comes from being the irremovable face of an organization.

Main Point #5

Making your product more accessible will in turn make it more successful.

Mean Girls emphasis on accessibility not only for show itself but also for 'Mean Girls Day' festivities shows a true commitment to inclusivity

The Broadway theatre industry is by nature very exclusive, mostly due in part to its heavily centralized location in NYC and ridiculously expensive ticket prices (sometimes upwards of \$1000 depending on the show.) It takes a good amount of financial stability and locational luck to be able to experience professional theatre on an even semi-regular basis. For many theatre fans that don't have certain abilities or privileges, getting to engage with the performers they love or see the shows they're passionate about is a very difficult feat, and in recognition of this, the industry has shifted towards emphasizing accessibility. Broadway lotteries, where individuals can enter to win free or heavily discounted tickets to shows, have become increasingly popular over the past few years, and theatre journalism, social media presence, and other forms of digital content have become crucial tools in keeping shows not only relevant but also connected with their fanbase that may not be able to come to NYC and/or afford a show ticket. With this growth in engagement, the Broadway fanbase, and the industry as a whole, has also grown, which supports the basic principle that if a product is made accessible to the publics that want it, that product will only see growth and increased prosperity. This principle greatly applies to the entirety of the 'Mean Girls Day' campaign and every smaller aspect that gave fans the opportunity to either see the show for free (a big win for financial accessibility) or still be made to feel a part of the celebration through events and promotions throughout the country and within NYC.

Case Comparison: Mountain Dew: "A Can Has No Name"

Mountain Dew's celebration of *Game of Thrones* Season 8 could've been a unique fan experience for the more loyal fan, as only the most up to date viewers would understand the plot arc referenced in the design. However, the cans not being available for widespread purchase in stores, compounded with the only available opportunity to win one being a tweet challenge, the campaign ultimately fell short as an effort to engage with *Game of Thrones*' fanbase. This campaign as a whole appeared to be a misstep on Pepsi Co.'s part, as with a limited time, hard to obtain product, while increasing demand, ultimately means fewer people will get their hands on it and in turn fewer people will be generating hype and shareable content surrounding your campaign. With every smaller event hosted in NYC and other parts of the nation throughout 'Mean Girls Day', and every effort made to make all fans feel included in the festivities through digital content offerings, *Mean Girls* represents what brands should do when attempting bring the fandom to the fans.

Main Point #6

Find a way to make a lasting, meaningful impact on your audience

Mean Girls' ongoing partnership with YWLN allows them to personally connect with and benefit their audience.

In May of 2018, Mean Girls announced a partnership with the Young Women's Leadership Network to create the 'Fearless Leaders' initiative, a program beginning in September, to further the YWLN's goals of "empowering young women to achieve their dreams of higher education, and to fulfill their learning and leadership potential." According to a report from BroadwayWorld, as a part of this initiative, *Mean Girls* pledged to invite 500 students across all five New York City school districts the opportunity to attend a matinee performance of the show at a reduced rate of \$10 per ticket. The students, some who would be experiencing their first Broadway show, would also get the chance to meet the cast in an interactive talkback following the performance. The program also included in-school visits by *Mean Girls* cast members to bring lessons from the show into the classroom via interactive workshops and discussions. Teachers were invited to see the production prior to the student trip to help plan student curriculum around the themes of the show, with potential focus on relational aggression and bullying. In the midst of the initiative, YWLN served as a primary sponsor for 'Mean Girls Day', and the 'Fearless Leaders' program remains consistent with the overall mission of the production to increase theatre accessibility and female empowerment. This type of work is an excellent example of how an organization or company can use their platform or resources to have a deeper relationship with their audience, shifting from a simple exchanging of goods/services to one of mentorship and empowerment. 'Fearless Leaders' gives *Mean Girls* the opportunity to let young women use their experience with the production as a jumping off point for personal growth as well as provides support and solidarity for the YWLN's advocacy work.

Case Comparison: Bumble's "The Ball Is In Her Court"

The principle of empowering your audience is a strong theme in Bumble's collaboration with tennis superstar, Serena Williams. According to Bumble's official statement regarding the campaign, the purpose is to "help women worldwide do the same: to own their power, and to know that they don't have to wait for permission, whether in their love lives, their friendships, or their careers." This reflects the values seen with Mean Girls' partnership with the YWLN: to encourage women to reach their fullest potential and live their best lives. This type of public relations work allows relationship apps like Bumble and Broadway shows like *Mean Girls* to evolve beyond their basic missions to change peoples' lives for the better and make a lasting impact on society and culture on the whole.