

S'pore firm gets UN award for prison-rehab campaign

Burson-Marsteller lauded for efforts in leading Yellow Ribbon Project

BY NICHOLAS FANG

IN A first for Singapore, a local public relations (PR) campaign aimed at boosting support for the rehabilitation of former offenders has been recognised by the United Nations (UN) for its ground-breaking work.

Burson-Marsteller Singapore led the campaign which received an honourable mention at the 2007 United Nations Grand Award. The honour is conferred on campaigns that address what the UN considers priority issues before the global organisation does so itself.

The Yellow Ribbon Project was created in response to the 11,000 former offenders released annually from Singapore jails. Sponsored by the Singapore Prison Service, it aims to drum up support for the rehabilitation and re-integration of former inmates into society.

It also addresses the stigma and prejudice surrounding former inmates, and promotes the notion of giving them a second chance. The campaign, which started in 2004, includes TV docu-dramas and advertisements, print ads and community activities such as talks at schools.

Burson-Marsteller Singapore managing director Allison Lim, a former Straits Times health correspondent, said a key reason for the campaign's success was an open relationship with the client.

"The Community Action for the Rehabilitation of Ex-offenders Network, which oversees the Prison Service, involved us very intimately from the start," said Ms Lim.

"This included having us sit in on the actual planning stages so that we would have a very clear understanding of what they were trying to do.

"In return, we would be very open about what they



PHOTO: BURSON-MARSTELLER (SOUTH-EAST ASIA)

SECOND CHANCE: Events organised as part of the Yellow Ribbon Project include walkathons, TV docu-dramas, print and TV ads as well as community activities such as talks at schools.



were trying to achieve through the PR campaign and if we felt something was not going to work, we would tell them so."

Besides this emphasis on honesty and openness, Ms Lim, 36, said a focus on action enabled the campaign to gain wider recognition.

"Whenever we pitched stories to the media, we tried to make sure we had concrete actions to talk about, such as firms or families re-accepting

former offenders. This made the stories more realistic."

She added that the UN award was a validation that their efforts have been on the right track. "I now have a line of people in the company who want to work on this project."

A Singapore Prison Service spokesman said: "The UN accolade is testament to the progress we have made in helping inmates and former offenders rehabilitate and re-integrate

Showing the way

THE HONOUR

Burson-Marsteller Singapore led the Yellow Ribbon Project which received an honourable mention at the 2007 UN Grand Award. The honour is conferred on campaigns that address what the UN considers priority issues before the global organisation does so itself.

THE CAUSE

The campaign aims to drum up support for the rehabilitation and re-integration of former inmates into society.

THE SUCCESS

Burson-Marsteller Singapore MD Allison Lim says a key reason for the campaign's success was an open relationship with the client. A focus on actual action rather than hyperbole also enabled the campaign to gain wider recognition.

into society."

The award was established in 1990 and is sponsored by the UN Department of Public Information and the International Public Relations Association (Ipra). It will be presented at Ipra's Golden World Awards in London in November.

The main winner in the UN award category was a media relations campaign promoting consistent condom use in India.

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