

International Talk Dress Like a Pirate Day

SEPT. 19, 2020
DOWDY-FICKLEN STADIUM

GREENVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA



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SUMMARY

In 2009, “pride, which had given way to anxiety among many in Pirate Nation, has been restored” (Miller, 2009). Fast forward ten years, and a 2019 letter from ECU athletic director Jon Gilbert reads the following:

“We constantly look for ways to improve fan and student engagement. It’s imperative we continue to listen, take feedback and better understand the needs of our customers. Hey, we are a little different in Eastern North Carolina, so our focus is on US, not what another school is doing. Plus, no one tailgates like the Pirates.” (East Carolina University Athletics)

These letters, titled “From the Helm,” have continued into the spring of 2020. Indicatively, ECU has made strides in expanding its target market and in the process, coming up with new ways to do so. Like any department, we are not without our challenges, and therefore, our ways of getting past them.

The following is an outline of a day in East Carolina football that will bring together fans both young and old, as well as families on ECU’s Family Weekend.

In 1992, the now-famous holiday, Talk Like a Pirate Day, was born (How it all started). This year, the day is being celebrated on September 19, when the Pirates’ football team hosts Norfolk State on family weekend.

Coincidence? We think not, matey.

OBJECTIVES

- Put on a people-specific and result-oriented event that caters to all of Pirate Nation
- Attract anywhere from 500 to 1,000 prospective students
- Increase in ticket sales 25% for this particular game due to the nature of the promotion and the occurrence of family weekend
- Increase merchandise sales at stadium concessions by 25%
- Increase social media followers by at least 500 after September 19
- Increase attendance average from fourth among non-Power Five conference teams (Ryan, 2018)

These goals and objectives will help us not only monetarily, but also with fan support in a way that can uniquely draw people to ECU and Pirate Nation



MARKETING RESEARCH

COMPETITION

Our target market for this event is quite broad, which has been our goal all along. Because of the competition with other Division I programs in the state of North Carolina and its professional teams, we cater to a large array of fans and market such as “family marketing,” something that we pride ourselves on when it comes to inclusivity. Other schools have their fan fests on the day of their spring football games, but why should we be like them? We’re ECU, and we do things a bit differently.

LOCATION AND SPORTS

Sports are a part of life in our great state of North Carolina. We are no doubt faced with competition on the collegiate level: UNC, NC State, Duke, Wake Forest, you name it. All fine institutions like ECU, and all very competitive when it comes to athletics marketing. However, we are the only school within 80 miles, and no one else in the Tar Heel state can call themselves the Pirates. Our closest competition in the region would probably be the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, but when it comes to North Carolina, we are in a class of our own.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Greenville is undoubtedly a college town, with 15.6% of its residents aged 21-24 (People in Greenville, North Carolina). The city is quite diverse, with 54% of residents identifying as white and 36.6% identifying as black. Greenville’s cost of living is 16.8% less of that in the United States as a whole, so discounted tickets would be an extra incentive, especially for families. The comfort index in September hits at an 8.5 out of 10, making mid September an ideal time for a family get-together.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- Only Division I athletic program within 80 miles
- Greenville in September is an 8.5 out of 10 on the comfort scale
- It’s an internationally-celebrated holiday that aligns with our athletic identity

OPPORTUNITIES

- Isolation from other Division I programs gives us access to a unique population of potential fans
- This day gives us an opportunity to build on our mascot name, “Pirates”
- Unique giveaways, like pirate bandanas to keep fans cool on a hot day
- It’s a great time and a great way to bring families together

WEAKNESSES

- Competition with other Division I athletic programs in North Carolina, particularly those from power conferences
- First time doing this promotion
- Potential for low ticket sales due to possibility of low on-field performance

THREATS

- Immense competition from other Division I programs
- Nothing to base this promotion off of results-wise since this is the first year for it
- Weather may be too hot

VALUE PROPOSITION

One of our main values we want to reinforce with this promotion is family and inclusiveness. There is no age limit for imagining you’re a pirate, and there is absolutely no age limit for being an ECU Pirate! Being that it *is* family weekend, we wanted to come up with something that would bring families together while creating a few jokes and making long-lasting memories they can forever associate with East Carolina.

We also wanted this promotion to inspire the youthfulness in all of us. The back-to-school season is stressful enough for students, parents, and faculty/staff alike. Whether you’re associated with a university or not, you can always go back to your childhood when you wanted to be a pirate sailing the seas. In fact, “previous research has shown a positive relationship between good memories and good health in young adults, including higher quality of work and personal relationships” (Happy Childhood Memories Linked to Better Health Later in Life). In a world where promotions are all about bringing in money and showing off what you have, we want to be on the offensive when it comes to making sure people enjoy themselves in a healthy manner while focusing on the lifelong values that will never die. As we said before, we’re East Carolina and we do things a bit different around here.

MARKET STRATEGY

VERBAGE

From the start, every piece of marketing material we distribute will have pirate language attached to it. After all, it wouldn't be a pirate-themed promotion without it! The language dictates not only our tone of voice, but also our excitement, commitment to the day's activities, and our spirit for the holiday and our school.

POSTERS

This is an event encompassed around an idea, not something tangible or costly. Not to say money will be an issue, but posters are a cost-effective way for us to get the word out. These posters will not only be plastered on campus, but will also be in the windows of local businesses and on classroom doors.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Ah, social media. In 2020, social media is king. For this event, we're going heavy on Facebook, ranked as the number one social media site by Buffer Marketing Agency in 2019 with 2.23 billion BAUs (Lua, 2019). From Facebook, we will create the event, post videos and graphics, hold chats, and more. We will be cross-posting between Twitter and Instagram as well, but Facebook will be our main channel of marketing.

VIDEOS

Video content is all the rage nowadays, with 83% of consumers would consider sharing video content with their friends if it is specific to their interests (Chowdhry, 2018). This isn't going to be some Pirates of the Caribbean gimmicky video content either. We are not any other school in the country, and this promotion shows that. Yes, family and inclusivity is the name of the game with this promotion, but so is uniqueness.

GIVEAWAYS

Free stuff is the best stuff, but free *practical* stuff is even better. That's why we'll be giving away pirate bandanas to cool down on a hot day and ECU Pirate-themed mugs for that cold beverage.

IN-GAME ANNOUNCEMENTS

Leading up to the event, word of mouth will spread to Pirate fans not just over the web and on billboards, but at events as well. The event will be a part of in-game public address scripts, whether those scripts are used for women's soccer or volleyball matches.

TARGET MARKET

Our target market for this event is those who may not be familiar with East Carolina (yet). Not only is this a celebration of a youthful holiday and ECU in general, but it's an opportunity for those on the outside to learn more about ECU both as a university and as an athletic department.

We have a broad market size, since we are alone on the eastern side of North Carolina. As Shane Ryan from Our State once put it, "The vibrant bubble around football is less like a loose confederacy of fans, and more like a labor union, where only solidarity ensures their continued existence" (Ryan, 2018). The fans are the backbone of ECU. Our fans are our family, and what better weekend to put on this event than family weekend.

Speaking of, our other main target market is families: families of ECU students, families in the general Greenville area, families who just want to enjoy a fun Saturday afternoon.

Dr. Rick Niswander of ECU's College of Business noted that the stock market will continue to see ups and downs many eastern Carolina counties are still facing challenging times, but that the Greenville area is continuing a years long pattern of growth (WITN, 2019). In an economy that's on the upswing, it's our hopes that a day at the stadium being a kid again will brighten up their day and take their mind off any economic hardships.

Studies showed that people are happier on the weekends and that "small drops in happiness were certainly associated with the economic recession" (Stellar, 2011), but studies also show that we as humans have a better sense of self esteem in adulthood if we had affectionate relationships with our parents when we were kids (Happify, 2015).

Moral of the story? Hug your parents and hang out with them. September 19, 2020 is the perfect day to do that.



STRATEGIES, TACTICS, AND INFLUENCE

STRATEGIES

Strategically, we will be as prepared as ever for an event like this. Personnel-wise, we will have an intern in charge of all social media content creation for this event. Why an intern? Because they can connect to the younger generation more, which is who this promotion is primarily geared towards.

Operationally, we will look at our competitors in and around North Carolina and the greater Southeast US and look at what they're doing. Are they doing their fan fest at the beginning of the season? We'll do it in season. Are they just giving away towels? We'll give away towels and then have an in-game promotion that uses the towels as part of a card stunt. It's all about standing out from our competitors, which is why we decided in the first place to go ahead with this promotion.

TACTICS

We're going to be aggressive in our campaign for this. We're going to rely heavily on social media to get the word out, but we will do so in an orderly fashion with a social media calendar. Each day will have a different theme for its post, highlighted by Trivia Tuesday.

PA announcements will be made at all ECU athletic events. The football team may even wear eyepatches to practice and see if they can still throw a spiral or juke a defender. Fun is the name of the game here, and we're making sure our target market knows that through various channels.

INFLUENCE

Our consumers, or "family members," will become incentivized to attend through relationship marketing. After all, "the best overall strategy for loyal customers lies in deepening the relationship" (Stotlar, 2013).



IMPLEMENTATION, CONTROL, AND EVALUATION

IMPLEMENTATION

This stage will involve a product calendar. Like the social media calendar previously mentioned, our product calendar will lay out everything we do on every day in order to successfully and efficiently put on this event. From an operational, content, marketing, facilities, and food and beverage standpoint, everything will be mapped out. We like to call this phase of the process "mapping our course to the treasure." When all is said and done, X will have marked the spot.

CONTROL

Think of our control phase as a quality control or quality assurance person that keeps the plan up to date with all the finest details and all the loose ends tied up. We work in sports and nothing ever goes according to plan, so there will be loose ends here and there that will need to be resolved. If we don't have control on gameday or especially before gameday, we end up with a subpar product that isn't doing its due diligence of catering to and growing our fan base to the highest potential.

EVALUATION

As fans are exiting Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium after the game, they'll be handed a slip with a link to a survey about International Talk Dress Like a Pirate Day. If they fill it out, they'll get a discount at a local food establishment or a discount off their next visit to the ECU team store at football games.

The purpose is to help us. We want to keep raising the bar for future years. If after this year the event is a dud, we simply won't do it again. If we receive a lot of positive feedback, we'll use a tactic I've learned called "yes and." It's a technique where you take an idea you have and try to expand on it to make it even better. For instance, what if we gave out bandanas but each of them had a number on them for a raffle? Or we had a halftime show with a local cosplay group reenacting a pirate scene from a movie?

This is all part of our continuous process to grow every day, and the feedback we receive from fans is invaluable in helping us in future endeavors.

FINANCES

Agorapulse

- \$1,908 per year (\$1,308 if you include Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, \$129 per month)
- COMPARED TO: Hootsuite (\$189/month), Sprout Social (\$289/month), and Buffer (\$229/month)

Feature	Agorapulse	Hootsuite
Full-featured social inbox (filter by content type, automation rules) for all plans	Yes	No
More scheduling options including queue categories	Yes	No
Customer support average response time: 16 minutes	Yes	No
Affordable pricing for teams	Yes	No

Feature	Agorapulse	Sprout Social
Repost and requeue options (including Queue Categories)	Yes	No
Inbox assistant and saved replies on all plans	Yes	No
Complete Facebook ad comments capturing	Yes	No
Affordable pricing for teams	Yes	No
Support for YouTube (inbox, monitoring, CRM)	Yes	No
Support for Facebook Groups (publishing)	Yes	No

(data according to agorapulse.com)

Apparel

- \$20.25 each for 25 shirts
- A volume discount ends up being \$16.50 per shirt, or \$16,500 for 1,000 shirts (courtesy of Custom Ink)
- A volume discount in bandanas ends up being \$5.23 per bandana, or \$5,230 for 1,000.

(data according to customink.com)

Five Expenses

- Apparel
- Social media marketing
- Bounce house
- Liability insurance
- Extra food



PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITY

THE EVENT BEFORE THE EVENT

I think it's safe to say that everyone loves a good halftime show. During said show at a 2020 ECU football game, there will be a "pirate fight" on the field, as a Pirate attempts to take down a ram, a devil, a wolf, a deacon, and a 49er (other North Carolina collegiate mascots). After the fight, ECU's real life PeeDee the Pirate will make an announcement with the camera on him. It will go a little something like this...

"I just took down some of North Carolina's worst. Want to help me? Come to the next football game and help us celebrate our very own holiday by dressing like me and helping me rule the seas!"

The event will be sponsored by that game's sponsor, and they will supply us with flyers after the game that list "tips" on how to best show your pirate spirit and dress like a pirate at the next home game.

It's a fun halftime show that involves fan interaction and a show. It's kind of like the circus, kind of like Disney on Ice, but it's here in our own backyard. Most of all, we hope it gets fans wanting to participate and join us at our next home football game.

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