



Pierce Team Succeeds in Garnering International Attention for Mountain Bike World Cup

Summary

After competing against several other sites and organizing groups across the world, the Windham Area Recreation Foundation and Windham Mountain in Greene County, N.Y. were selected by Union Cycliste Internationale (the international association of the National Cycling Federations) to host the 2010 Mountain Bike World Cup Finals. The world's best professional mountain bikers would converge on Windham Mountain in August 2010, marking the event's return to the United States after a five-year absence. The World Cup finals had never before been held in the U.S. "The Windham Mountain Bike World Cup and Festival" was arguably the most important international sporting event to come to Upstate New York since the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid.

In April 2010, with only four months until the event, the all-volunteer organizing group realized that it could not handle media relations efforts on its own and contacted Pierce Communications to assume those responsibilities. As an international event with journalists from dozens of countries expected to attend, it was important that the pre-event outreach and actual event days' media relations efforts run smoothly. As soon as we were on board, we reached out to the chief media relations person at UCI and the media relations staff at USA Cycling for assistance on best practices at World Cup events and on what to expect when 100+ international journalists converged for the event. In addition, the organizing group sent a team to Houffalize, Belgium, where one of the other World Cups was being held earlier in the summer; part of the team's goal was to assess the media room and report back on what worked and didn't.

In addition to handling all media relations around the event, we had a goal of helping recruit non-professional racers and ensuring significant spectator attendance for the festival attached to the World Cup and including a concert, a vendor and food expo, fireworks, a block party, a kids' race and citizen's race, among other things. We immediately began researching print and online publications and broadcast media that cover mountain biking, mountain bike clubs and shops, bike forums and blogs, healthy living and outdoor activities publications and blogs, regional bike races and other avenues that we could pursue to get the word out.

While there was a limited budget for paid advertising and collateral materials, all of our public relations efforts had to be focused on getting the word out at no cost to the organizing group. We knew from the start that our success would depend largely on the quality of the lists we generated for our outreach efforts.

Execution

Using all the information we gathered in the research phase, we began a series of planned news releases that were distributed not only to media outlets but also to bloggers, forum posters, bike clubs, bike shops, and anyone we thought might have an interest in an international biking event of this nature. In addition to the initial announcement, releases focused on the announcement of major title sponsors, concert performers, the arrival of an internationally recognized course designer, and details on the citizen's race and kids' race, among others. We also reached out to local media in the areas from which we thought we might draw spectator attendance with story pitches on local racers, especially Todd Wells, who grew up minutes from Windham. In order to generate some excitement regionally before the event, we held a media day at the mountain and provided an opportunity for reporters to get a preview of the race courses, talk with the organizers and some racers, and even take a ride down the course (two daring TV reporters actually took us up on that offer!).

We worked closely with the ad agency engaged by the organizing group to create collateral materials and place a very limited number of ads, and we ensured that all messaging was consistent and that paid and earned media efforts were compatible and supportive of each other. While that agency created the event

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website, we worked together to constantly update the site with new announcements, releases and media placements.

A major part of our responsibilities was in credentialing the media. Individuals could fill out an accreditation request form on the website, but several contacted us directly. Requests came in daily and we ultimately had a list of 146 media representatives registered for the event. Together with UCI, the World Cup governing body, we had to select a small number of photographers and videographers to receive a very limited number of "bibs" that allowed them access to more areas on the courses than other journalists. Managing expectations, disappointments and reassignment of the bibs throughout the weekend became an exercise in diplomacy and patience and put our communications skills to high use.

The Pierce Communications team staffed the media room from Thursday, August 26 through Sunday, August 29 from 7 am to 10 pm and worked closely with media from four continents. We provided them with regular updates (several times a day) on race standings, trials, and results for three different disciplines (cross country, four cross and downhill). In addition, throughout the weekend we arranged media interviews with the race director and various high profile racers.

Results and Evaluation

Throughout the event, the Pierce team received high praise from the organizing group, members of the media, and UCI for our work. We were held to very high standards by UCI (outlined in a very precise standards guide) and the governing body's lead media person on staff said our efforts exceeded those of other teams at World Cup events across the globe that had several years' experience with the events. As the final mountain bike World Cup of nine held throughout the world in 2010, Windham garnered a great deal of attention from UCI and the media. At the conclusion of the series, riders, UCI mountain bike teams, media, sponsors and UCI officials voted the Windham event as the best of all nine for the four cross discipline: "The small city in New York State seduced everyone with its four-cross track, but also and above all because of the excellent organization as well as the welcome and enthusiasm of the local population."

The organizing group's goal for spectator attendance was 10,000; actual turnout was more than 15,000. Racers participated from more than 30 countries across the world and actual attendance by the 146 registered journalists topped 125. Together with the award mentioned above, these numbers made it clear that our efforts – and those of the entire organizing team – were a huge success. Windham area hotels and restaurants, which are often fairly quiet during the summer months in this ski resort town, were filled to capacity throughout the weekend and the entire week before the event began as racers, teams, and spectators poured into Greene County. Our efforts to get economic impact numbers from Greene County Tourism were unsuccessful but anecdotally it's well accepted in the region that the economic impact to the region was enormous.

The best proof of our success is that we had very happy clients who remarked:

"When we met the folks at Pierce Communications, we knew we had found the missing link to the success of the Windham Mountain Bike World Cup. They jumped into our daunting project with both feet, providing critical guidance in all facets of organization and planning, public relations and event promotion. In their friendly and patient way, the staff of Pierce Communications supported the Windham Area Recreation Foundation in every possible way in the organization of an award-winning event attended by elite athletes from all over the world. The Windham Area Recreation Foundation has been privileged to have the staff of Pierce Communications as members of our team."

**-Lori Torgersen
Assistant Race Director and Executive Board Member
Windham Area Recreation Foundation**

NOTE: We were asked to again manage all media efforts for the 2011 and 2012 World Cups at Windham those events were equally successful!