



JAY CHIAT AWARDS 2015





More Than a Costume

HOW DOCTORS OF THE WORLD
TURNED 2014'S MOST
CONTROVERSIAL
HALLOWEEN COSTUME
INTO A DONATION DEVICE



SUMMARY

THIS IS A STORY OF STRATEGY IN REAL TIME. It's messy, iterative, cooperative, exciting and, in an era where slo-mo brand building is a luxury, essential.

In October 2014, Doctors of the World needed to raise money. They were uniquely positioned to prevent the Ebola virus from spreading, but were a complete unknown in the United States. Worse, they'd missed the news cycle, when 90% of giving occurs.

In the days leading up to Halloween, the Ebola protective suit was quickly becoming 2014's most controversial costume. With our campaign, "More Than a Costume", Doctors of the World turned that costume into a donation device and emerged as an audacious, smart non-profit in a matter of days. Their lifetime donor base doubled in 72 hours. In seven days, Doctors of the World raised enough money to equip more than 4,600 doctors in West Africa with real Ebola suits.



*Doctors of the World was one of the most important non-profits fighting Ebola.
Yet most people didn't know it existed.*

BACKGROUND



*“Ebola got a head start on us.
It is far ahead of us,
it is running faster than us,
and it is winning the race.”*

- Anthony Banbury,
Head of the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response

It was October 2014, and Ebola was commanding everyone’s attention. No one said it out loud, but public health specialists considered closing the borders of affected countries. The United Nations warned that the world had 60 days to beat Ebola, outlining specific steps health officials must take to beat the virus.

Our client was Doctors of the World, the US branch of the French aid organization Médecins du Monde. DOTW is different from other aid organizations. They respond to crises, but the heart of their work is building modern healthcare infrastructure in places that have little or none. They send volunteer doctors and other medical personnel to rebuild the infrastructure from the ground up, one community at a time. To do this, they train, educate, and eventually turn over the reins to the local community once it is self-sufficient.

With 45 health centers in Côte d’Ivoire and 16 in Liberia—many of which had been operating for over ten years—DOTW had several advantages when Ebola broke out: they were already in West Africa, they were already embedded in local communities, and they were already connected with regional and national healthcare services. **Having trained local personnel, DOTW was uniquely positioned to help contain and eradicate the Ebola virus.**

BUSINESS PROBLEM

In early October, Doctors of the World asked us to help them raise money to contain Ebola and treat patients. Before they could tackle this strange and aggressive virus, they needed to pivot their clinics from everyday healthcare to Ebola. We wanted to help, but we faced two problems.

The first was that Doctors of the World was a complete unknown. Globally, the organization was 34 years old, but the US branch was established just a few years before. At best, they were mistaken for Doctors without Borders, even, embarrassingly, within our walls.

The second was timing. Ebola became the trending topic in the first week of October. By the time Doctors of the World came to us on October 9th, Ebola was cycling out of the headlines, and the usual suspects had already asked for money.

We were in a tough spot. No one knew Doctors of the World and we'd missed the news cycle-giving moment.

Was it possible to raise any money? Even if people still cared about Ebola and wanted to help, why would they give to an organization they had never heard of?

Here's a little study of the news cycle-giving paradigm:



INSIGHT + STRATEGY

Although combining insight with strategy may be unusual for a Chiat, this was an unusual situation to begin with.

There are times when a strategist can muck around in research, mine analytics, and discuss social theory with academics to uncover the mind-turning insight that sparks the strategy, that then inspires the creatives.



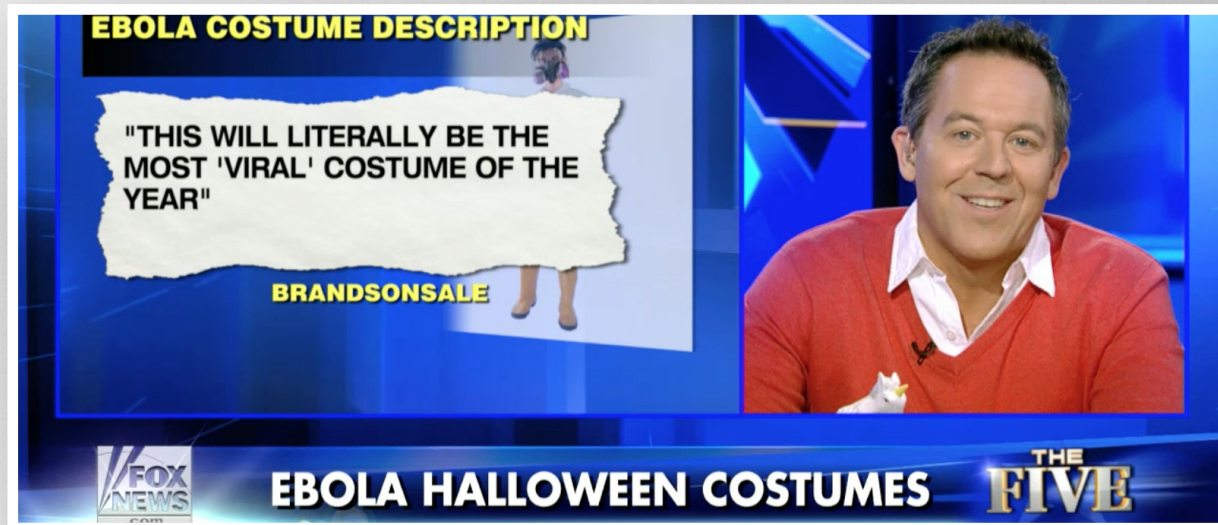
This was not one of those times. The virus was replicating fast. 1,000 people were contracting Ebola per week—that's six every hour. When it's urgent like this, you just move. And that's what we did, strategy and creative joined at the hip, moving together at lightening speed.

The first insight we had involved social isolation. Although our newsfeeds were filled with images of people suffering from unimaginable pain, the most troublesome side effects of Ebola weren't only physical. They were also emotional. Anyone treating an Ebola patient was forced to wear a head-to-toe containment suit. How horrific. Dying patients could not be held, touched, or comforted. **Could we challenge people to go a day without touch?** Would that raise awareness and make people care more? Maybe. But this approach would require a significant number of influential social media stars and a deep involvement on the part of participants.

The second insight we had was right in front of our faces: Ebola is a virus, and we love to talk about social content "going viral." It was an appealing twist. **Could we be "more viral than the virus"?** We'll be honest—we crafted a brief for YouTube stars. We appreciated that a few of them made videos, but the videos were rather lackluster. They didn't capture the ethos of this highly-charged global crisis. There was nothing viral about them.

Neither approach was wrong. But neither was right.

INSIGHT + STRATEGY



During this time, we noticed something trending in the news. Well, actually, you could only have missed it if you were hiding under a rock. In the days leading up to Halloween, the Ebola protective suit exploded across the media landscape and into social media feeds, but for all the wrong reasons. It had become 2014's most controversial Halloween costume.

This is a case of insight and strategy being iterative: we knew how essential these protective suits were. We'd considered "a day without touch" because the suits were present whenever people talked about treating and containing Ebola. Now we had identified the vehicle we needed to help DOTW raise the money they needed. **Strategy is choice, and we chose Ebola protective suits... and Halloween.**

There was just one speed bump: leveraging the controversial Ebola costume was risky (sexy Ebola nurse, anyone?). Although many people were having fun with the fake suits, even more thought they were scandalous. Internally, more than one of us worried that Doctors of the World might look calculating.

Here's where we identified our driving insight. The fake Ebola costumes created loud, volatile pissing matches. Instead of getting involved in the debate, we decided to use it to our advantage: outrage would be our fuel, propelling DOTW into the headlines.

But how to use that outrage deftly? **Our insight wasn't about trying to change behavior. It was about leveraging existing behavior: we would offer those wearing *and* those criticizing the costume a chance to fight Ebola together...without asking either to change their stance.**

This was our leap of faith: we reasoned the fake suits could actually satisfy everybody. For those outraged by the costume, we'd give them an outlet to do good. And for those who wore the costume, we wouldn't wag our finger—we'd give them an opportunity to boost their social image.

As for the green light, DOTW's new CEO, just eight weeks on the job, believed that "impatient advocates" must be willing to provoke. She said, "Yes."

IDEA

“It’s More Than A Costume.”

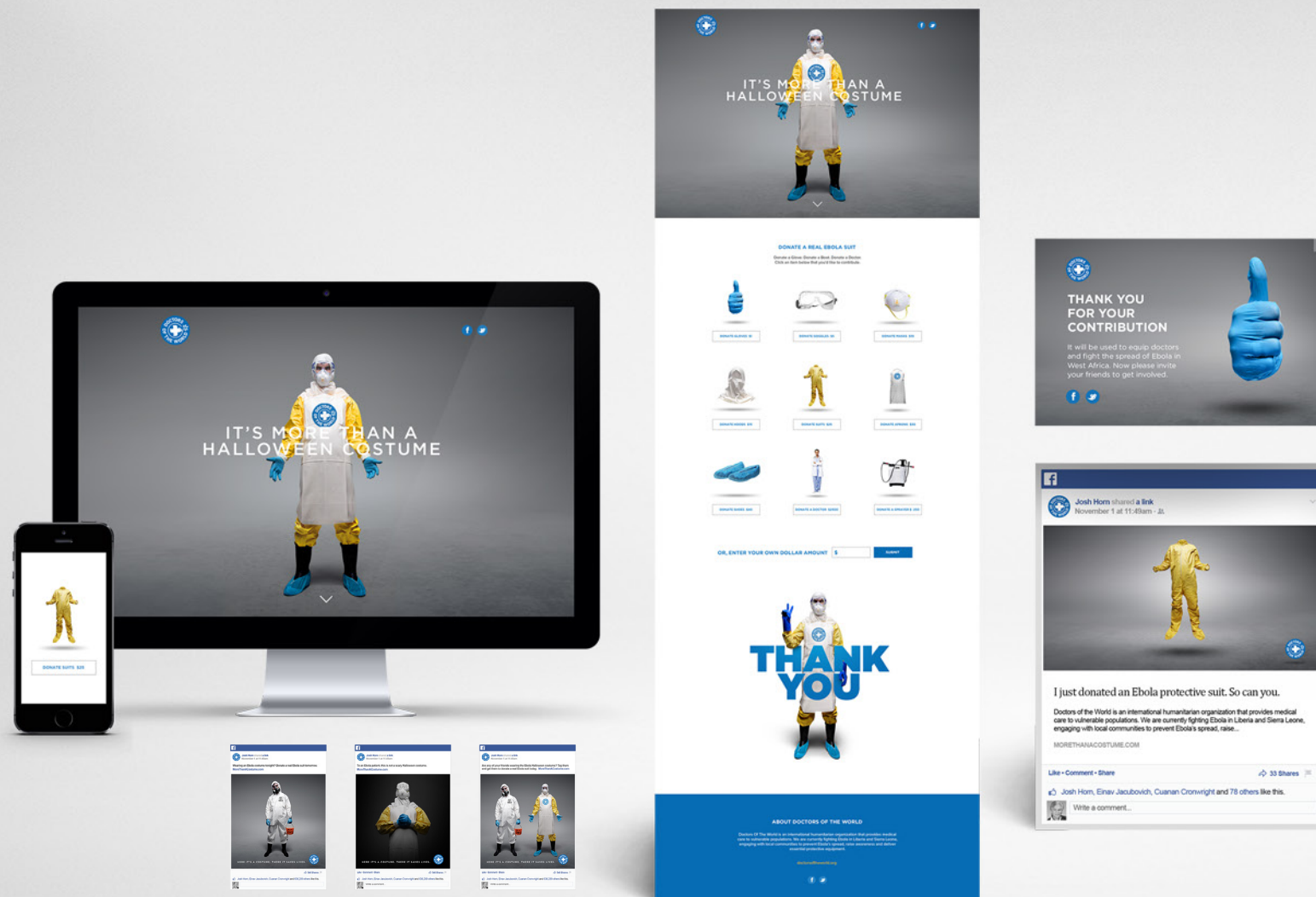
Doctors of the World would turn 2014's most controversial Halloween costume into a donation device.

People were dying, and Halloween was just around the corner. We moved fast, successfully transforming from idea to execution in a week.

We intercepted the exploding news and social conversations, asking everyone wearing the Ebola Halloween costume to donate a real protective suit the next day.

People were directed to our purpose-built online store where they could donate a real Ebola protective suit—or items for the suit—instead of buying a fake Ebola suit for Halloween. We were happy to accept money from those not wearing the costumes, too.

Beyond social media, our clients' media budget—which was exactly \$0—meant all media had to be donated or come from PR. We requested donated space from every big media outlet, even though they rarely, if ever, give it away for free. Then we worked around the clock to produce sizes to fit any space that anyone would give us.



RESULTS

In 72 hours, Doctors of the World:

2x
Lifetime donors

↑ 45%
Social following

215M / \$0
Free media impressions spent

With full-page ads donated from:

The New York Times

WALL STREET JOURNAL

The Washington Post



UNKNOWN NONPROFIT > TRENDING STORY

Publicly praised by heavy hitters, Doctors of the World established itself as a nonprofit that's not afraid to do what's required, as long as it's smart and effective. Not bad for the new kid on the block.

"We love this [Ebola] guy! We loved your campaign. I highlighted it at a recent meeting of NGOs as exactly what donors want to see."

- JUANITA RILLING,
DIRECTOR AT USAID'S CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL DISASTER INFO

"Goddamn this is a great campaign." - ADWEEK



And in just 7 days:

RAISED ENOUGH TO EQUIP
4,600 DOCTORS WITH EBOLA SUITS





THANK YOU.