



CASE STUDY: BEST PRACTICES

**Everyones Internet Art Car Weekend  
Orange Show Center for Visionary Art**  
Sponsorship Case Study  
***Doing Good and Doing Good Business!***  
Houston, TX

By Susanne Theis and Kim Stoilis

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**Section I. Profile / Background**

Organization Name: Orange Show Center for Visionary Art, Houston, TX

Founded: 1980

Profile:



The Orange Show Center for Visionary Art is a non-profit organization, founded to preserve and present works of extraordinary imagination and provide people the opportunity to express their personal artistic vision. The organization's programs for children and adults include hands-on workshops, music, storytelling and performance, the award-winning Eyeopener Tour program and Houston's most popular public art event - the Art Car Parade & Festival. The Orange Show's internationally acclaimed stewardship efforts preserve two of Houston's most famous cultural icons The Orange Show Monument and the Beer Can House and its archive and library are used by students, scholars, the media and artists.

Annual Budget: \$823,100 (FY03 revenues)

Annual attendance:

Mission Statement: Vision

The Orange Show Center for Visionary Art preserves works of extraordinary imagination and celebrates the artist in everyone.

Mission Statement

The Center preserves, promotes and documents visionary art environments, provides opportunities for the expression of personal artistic vision and creates a community where that expression is valued.

## Section II. Description of the Project

Everyone's Internet (Ev1. Net) Art Car Weekend is an annual public art festival in Houston, Texas that celebrates the drive to create. It draws more than 1,400 participating artists from around the U.S., Canada and Mexico and a live audience of more than 150,000 for a parade and related events. Now 18 years old, this event has inspired other art car events throughout the US, but Houston's Art Car Weekend is a signature event, the biggest and best.



The Art Car Weekend is produced by the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art, which also maintains two beloved folk art environments in Houston and carries on an active program of hands on art education and visionary or outsider art education. Ev1.net Art Car Weekend is free and open to the public. Its cash budget is nearly \$200,000 which is paid for by sponsorship fees, public and private contributions, concessions and souvenir sales.

In its current form, the event began in 1988 when the Houston International Festival (a large, well-known performing arts festival held in downtown Houston) proposed that the Orange Show Foundation organize an artists parade. The Orange Show, having been involved with art cars since 1984, agreed to produce a parade focusing on the art car. There were 40 cars and 2,000 spectators that first year. HIF covered all \$5,000 of the direct production costs. In a few short years the parade grew to 250 cars, tens of thousands of spectators and a production budget of \$15,000 from HIF that didn't begin to meet the expenses. The Orange Show instituted an Art Car Ball to help make up the difference in 1991. At that time it was considered to be an unsponsorable event.

All that changed in 1997 when the Houston Art Car Parade landed on the front page of the Sunday *New York Times*. The next year, both Orange Show and HIF had sold sponsor properties to the parade. Afterward, by mutual agreement, it was decided that HIF would no longer pay the production costs, but the Orange Show would generate all sponsor revenue.

With the help of an Orange Show board member who was a Vice President at Pennzoil, that company became our first title sponsor in 1999. Because the Orange Show did not want to sell the title of the event, it gave Pennzoil title to the umbrella event and sold to them the presenting sponsor of the parade. It was a subtle distinction, but one that was important to the artists.

As Pennzoil went through business transitions over the next six years of the relationship, the Orange Show learned more about sponsorship and what was important to this sponsor. Since Pennzoil was based in Houston, they wanted to give their employees the opportunity to be involved with a fun automotive-related event. In time, they wanted to communicate through their involvement with our event a new corporate image. They also liked being visible in their hometown community. But when Pennzoil became part of Shell, some of those reasons no longer applied, so after six years of partnership, the Orange Show found itself looking for a new sponsor in August 2003. Art Car Weekend 2004 was already scheduled for May 2004.

### Section III. Strategy and Implementation

"Send your proposal to Houston's 100 biggest companies" someone told the leaders of the Orange Show.

Susanne Theis, executive director of the Orange Shows, recalls that it wasn't that easy. For one thing, Houston's biggest companies tended to do business with other companies (from wholesale energy to one of the largest ports in the nation, most of Houston's corporate sector focuses on business-to-business activities), while in its quest for a corporate sponsor the Orange Show was looking for a company that targeted consumers. For another, Houston's local business economy was still reeling from the changes caused by Enron's fall and the decline of the energy industry. Some of the most likely candidates were out of the running due to preoccupation with the Super Bowl to be played in Houston in January 2004. The Orange Show leadership brought in a sponsorship expert, developed new packages, visited several public relation agencies and business leaders and made up a list of likely candidates and followed every lead.

The Orange Show looked for companies based in Houston that seemed to be a good fit for their wonderfully unique event. A sense of humor was a must. So was a product compatible with the values and lifestyles of the organization's artists and audience. A title sponsor had to be large enough to afford both the fee and the "activation" costs on their side. The Orange Show developed a fairly extensive database with more than 35 companies and some very good looking proposals tailored to what the arts organization they perceived as their needs.

"But no one returned our phone calls," notes Susanne Theis. "Not our top three contenders identified through our research. Not any of the people who were friends of our friends. Not the people whose names we got from the list of top companies in Houston. Not any of the potentials mentioned in our meetings with pr agents, city officials, or other sponsors."

As the first cool weather of the year made the Orange Show aware of how time was slipping by, the organization decided to ignore the experts' advice about going public with our dilemma. "Spend your time making contacts with sponsors, not publicizing your need for a sponsor," Theis recalls being told by the experts. "But now we figured, what did we have to lose? So we called our friends at the *Houston Chronicle* and told them that we were in a fight for the life of the Art Car Parade."



The story came out on the day of the Orange Show's annual gala, one of the most successful fundraisers in Houston. The organization heard from Roy Marsh, co-owner and CEO of Ev1.net, a Houston-based internet service provider, at 10 a.m. "We'd like to buy a couple of tickets to see Little Richard tomorrow night" he said. "Let's talk about this Art Car Parade." And, as Theis summarizes: "So he did and we did and now it's the Ev1.net Art Car Parade."

#### IV. Results

Even though Everyones Internet (Ev1.net) was not on the Orange Show's well-researched list of prospects, the company made a great fit. Started by two young brothers, Ev1.net is a fast-growing young company that hadn't been around long enough to be on the list of "usual suspects" for such a sponsorship, so they weren't tapped out. Their business model of providing inexpensive internet access was really compatible with the virtual and real art car community. They were based here in Houston, and had lots of young staffers who would have great fun being involved with the Art Car Parade. They had a corporate identity built around a fleet of interesting new cars such as the VW Bug and the Hummer. Best of all, they would bring with them access to a subscriber base of 400,000 customers and a clever radio campaign.

What could the Art Car Parade do for Everyones Internet?

**Exposure.** We negotiated the title of the event to give Ev1.net exposure in both the umbrella name and the parade title. Banners and signage along the parade route, entries in the parade and coverage on the television broadcast were the major ways that they would see this exposure.



**Branding.** As a cultural event embraced by the city of Houston with a broad, diverse audience, presented free of charge to the public, the Art Car Parade reinforces Everyones Internet brand identification as an inexpensive internet service provider.

**Employee Involvement.** Ev1.net employees do everything from help make the company art car entry to drive in the parade.

#### VI. Personal Observations

"The first year of our three-year partnership was a successful base on which to build and improve. We learned that we have to work harder than ever to encourage the media to use the official name of the event to assure Ev1 that they get the exposure that is important to us. We've also learned that building our partnership with the City of Houston helps strengthen the event and helps our sponsor achieve their goals. And we are having fun planning a bigger and better event for 2005!"

-- Susanne Theis and Kim Stoilis

Case Study provided by the **Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County.**

Study from the National Arts Marketing Project workshop "Philanthropy vs. Sponsorship: Navigating the Corporate Mind Set," presented in Houston, Texas on December 1, 2004.