

CPRS Hamilton Pinnacle Awards 2020

Category 1a:

Marketing & Communications Campaign of the Year

Title:

Blown Away – Partnering on a Netflix Reality Show to Highlight Sheridan’s Expertise in Glass Education

Entrant: Sheridan College

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Summary

Despite having taught the craft of working with glass for 50 years and playing an instrumental role in establishing a community of glass artists and glassblowers throughout Canada, Sheridan’s glass program had experienced declining enrolment for the past several years. Partnering with Marblemedia Inc. to create a ‘first-of-its-kind’ competition-based TV series about glassblowing that made its worldwide debut on Netflix on July 12, 2019, Sheridan was able to share its expertise with new audiences around the globe and generate excitement about this intricate art form, leading to tremendous visibility for – and interest in- our program.

Campaign Period: August 2018 – November 2019

Recognizing the Contributions of

- Faculty, Staff, Students and Alumni of the Honours Bachelor of Craft and Design – Glass
- Communications, Public Affairs and Marketing
- Alumni Relations and Advancement
- Marblemedia Inc.

Background: Sheridan is one of three post-secondary institutions in Canada renowned for glass education, and the only one that teaches the art form as a four-year baccalaureate degree in which students are immersed in all aspects of the medium, including glassblowing, sand and kiln casting, flame working, cold working and electroplating. As an intensive, studio-based program that requires dedicated facilities with specialized equipment (including a variety of kilns, furnaces and ovens), enrolment is capped at 25 students per year, for a total cohort of 100. Graduates work as professional artists, with many owning studios coast to coast. Some are contemporary visual artists, while others make a living creating functional objects, vessels, sculptures or commissioned works of art. Faced with a slow, year over year attrition in enrolment, Sheridan seized the opportunity to become an investor and collaborator on *Blown Away* – a new, ten-part, made-in-Canada competition series that features 10 talented glassmakers from across North America who are challenged to create unique works of art and avoid elimination. As the show was slated to stream globally on Netflix in July 2019 and featured a medium never explored before on reality TV, it allowed us to join a movement aimed at rebooting interest in the glassblowing profession by showcasing the beauty and complexity involved in this intricate artform. It also allowed us to go beyond traditional tactics in post-secondary program marketing such as digital remarketing, geotargeted social media ads, high school visits and recruitment fairs, and use our affiliation with a globally-aired, reality TV series to widely expand our potential reach and generate excitement about our program with prospective students.

Research and Planning: Reality TV has existed for [20 years](#) and continues to be [on the rise](#), in part due to its [higher potential for revenue return](#) than scripted shows. Due to the steady popularity of the genre with both viewers and producers, a number of media companies have tried to create a competition series about glass blowing – similar to ones about cooking and baking - though efforts were abandoned due to the non-existence of a facility large enough and the seemingly insurmountable production challenges of filming around multiple kilns and furnaces that each operate at 1300C. The Studio Head of Sheridan’s Glass program, Koen Vanderstukken, who holds a Master of Fine Art in Glass, and whose works are in public collections in the US, England, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, France and Canada was hired by Marblemedia as the show’s Creative Consultant during his sabbatical year in 2018/19. With Vanderstukken and his high artistic standards as part of the production, Sheridan felt confident the series would live up to its promise to be “a love letter to glass” basing its drama on the excitement of working with this challenging medium (in which pieces that take hours to fabricate can easily shatter, rendering hours of work useless), rather than on the inter-personal conflict that anchors many reality TV shows today. News that the series contracted Mike Bickerton as the show’s director (known for his work on *Amazing Race Canada*) provided further evidence that the show would have high production value. As such, Sheridan was comfortable aligning its name and brand (which rests on a commitment to quality and excellence) with the show, and confident it would eventually achieve the requisite international sales required (projected to take five years) for the college to recoup its cost, making the \$50K investment worth the risk. In return for its contribution, Sheridan’s negotiated agreement would give the school new visibility and credibility. It included a production credit and ‘product placement’ such as the meaningful mention of the school’s name on three episodes, the opportunity for its President to serve as a guest evaluator, and the involvement of 14 of our glassblowing students and alumni to showcase their talents as assistants to the competitors in every episode apart from the finale (each wearing Sheridan branded T-shirts for eight of the episodes). Given the school’s applied teaching orientation and its desire to educate glassblowers who can manage their own studios, Sheridan further provided seven students and alumni to work in advance of the show’s filming, starting in October 2018 to help build what is now North America’s largest hot shop located in the east end of Hamilton, Ontario. They helped to construct two large glass-melting furnaces, 10 reheating furnaces and 10 individual workstations that allowed the competitors to work simultaneously. Sheridan also loaned the production \$15K worth of equipment for the competitors to use including blow pipes, shears, pincers, paddles, Kevlar sleeves, face shields, heat suits, optic molds and colour crushers. Deepening Sheridan’s on-camera involvement was the participation of alumnus Benjamin Kikkert (Glass ’05) as one of the show’s 10 contestants. To ensure the show’s credibility among the glassblowing community and help attract the calibre of competitors that would be needed to make the show a success, Vanderstukken was insistent that the series should also feature the Corning Museum of Glass – a competitor of Sheridan’s - whose glassblowers served as the assistants in the finale. Through this arrangement, Sheridan would be positioned alongside what is arguably the world’s most famous centre for glassblowing, helping to elevate its name and stature among the international glassblowing community and Netflix’s global audience.

Analysis: Our audience included:

- Internal ambassadors whose pride of association could be leveraged to share news of Sheridan’s involvement on the show, namely 23,000 students, 3,500 employees, and 175,000 alumni (reachable via email and social media)
- Canadian news media, TV critics, arts reporters, Oakville media (location of our program) and Hamilton media (location of facility) who may wish to cover a first-of-its-kind, made-in-Canada glassblowing series
- Netflix’s 139M worldwide subscribers, who could learn of our renown for teaching this intricate artform
- Global news media, who could be informed about our 50-year track record in glass education
- Sheridan’s social media following, which includes prospective students (50K on Facebook, 18K on Twitter, 31K on Instagram, 2K on Snapchat and 124K on LinkedIn) who could be inspired to share our rich visual content, enticed to watch the series, and encouraged to visit our glass program page to learn more about our educational offering.

Overarching Goals: Leverage *Blown Away* to increase people’s exposure to Sheridan’s capability and expertise in teaching glassblowing. Generate interest in Sheridan’s glass program among prospective students. While increasing program enrolment is a long-term goal, the effects of our association will not be fully known until the 2020/21 recruitment cycle. The show aired several months after admission offers for our September 2019 intake were made.

Communication Strategy	Program Objective
Secure positive earned media coverage for our program. Connect our name to the series.	-Achieve an open rate of 20% on materials sent to media who had not previously connected Sheridan to the show in their reporting -Earn at least 1 national broadcast and 3 national print stories about our involvement -Earn an overall MRP score of 80% or higher with a total media reach of 2M+ and a 100% positive/balanced tone
Use events and social media promotion to generate awareness of Sheridan’s contribution to the show and interest in the series to cultivate ambassadors.	-Have 75 people attend a daytime viewing party at Sheridan, coinciding with the show’s release on Netflix on July 12, 2019 -Have 120 people attend the <i>Blown Away</i> panel discussion with the show’s creators and glassblowing demonstrations by the stars at Sheridan on October 19 -Achieve 100,000 impressions and 5,000 engagements (video play-throughs, likes, comments, reactions, shares) from organic posts and 75,000 impressions and 15,000 engagements on boosted posts
Leverage our owned channels to spread knowledge about our expertise for teaching the discipline.	-Generate 2,500 views of the glassblowing program page through inbound links embedded in our promotional content -Achieve 500 views of the <i>Blown Away</i> backstory on our institutional blog, summarizing Sheridan’s involvement in the show and surpass the average time spent on page -Share our glass-blowing dictionary, aimed at educating people on the technical aspects associated with the artform, with all internal audiences and media outlets

Budget: The entire campaign was planned in-house. We invested nominally in the creation of three short videos (outsourced to a vendor but filmed in Sheridan’s hot shop) featuring alumni who spoke of their involvement on the series and why they love working with glass, to help build excitement. We leveraged our partnership with Marblemedia to gain permission to share their assets (professional sizzle reel and stills from the series) on our channels and were deliberate in our consistent use of their established hashtags to insert our name into the growing conversation regarding the show. We created a significant amount of assets for paid and organic social media efforts using in-house software. All events were planned by and held at Sheridan. All materials for news media were written and distributed by us. Combined staff time amounted to 162 hours of effort by salaried employees. Hard costs were \$71,650. See appendix for full break down.

Communication: While Sheridan was able to promote the series in advance of July 12, details regarding the outcome of the show were embargoed until then. Our promotion began on July 2 with a teaser campaign on social, featuring a

different connection to the show almost daily. Our content also highlighted the strong visual appeal of glassblowing to capitalize on people's fascination with the [maker movement](#). One week prior to the show's launch we inserted ads about our involvement on our homepage banner and our dedicated program landing page for glass. We uploaded our backstory on Sheridan's connection to the show (featuring interviews with the show's director and the glassblowing assistants from Sheridan) to our institutional blog and released our glassblowing glossary to highlight Sheridan's expertise and authority and to help audiences get the most out of their viewing experience. These assets were also purposely created for news media to make it easier for them to share our story, given increasing pressures from shrinking newsrooms, as cited in the [CPRS Whitepaper](#) on the Elevation of PR. The glossary served the additional purpose of creating something of value for TV newsrooms, who are often owned by conglomerates that also create original content and might not be inclined to promote a show airing on a competitor's network. Three days before launch we held a glassblowing demonstration for media that allowed them to try their hand in the studio. On launch day, we held a community viewing party which was followed by a moderated Q&A featuring Sheridan personalities who appeared on the show. The entire series was made available on launch day (meaning that viewers could binge watch the series in its entirety on the first day). As Netflix advised that the first 21 days following release are the most critical for building a fan base, we promoted the show heavily during this time on social. Leveraging the appetite for stories about education that surfaces each fall, we planned a third event, bringing two stars of the show and two of its creators to campus for glassblowing demonstrations and a panel discussion on October 19. We promoted the event to our original media distribution list and targeted a new list that we had built of reporters around the globe who had written about the show over the summer but had not mentioned Sheridan. While they were unlikely to write a second story about the series based on our event months after the series was available for streaming and the winner was widely known, our hope was to educate them about Sheridan's involvement to prime them to mention us in stories they might write about a possible Season Two. On November 21, Marblemedia issued a public call for new contestants, marking an end to our campaign. Marblemedia and Sheridan are partnering again on the next season though no formal announcement will be made until next year.

Evaluation: By all accounts, our campaign was a success and our objectives were met.

- Sheridan earned 32 news clips, predominately national, all positive or neutral in tone, increasing exposure to our key messages to a potential audience of 4.2M, earning an MRP score of 80.47% (see appendix for details)
- Two broadcast and 1 print media outlet attended our media glassblowing demonstration on July 9
- Achieved an open rate of 31% on our media advisory inviting outlets unfamiliar with Sheridan to the October 19 live event at Sheridan and an open rate of 29% on our recap news release about the event
- We achieved an attendance of 104 people (including Oakville's Mayor) for the July 12 viewing and 148 for the October 19 panel discussion and glassblowing demonstrations featuring the stars of the show at Sheridan
- Achieved 295,614 impressions and 10,427 engagements (video through-plays, likes, comments, reactions, and shares) from organic posts and 130,788 impressions and 29,451 engagements on boosted posts.
- Generated 8,190 views of the glass program page between July 3-August 4, an increase of 1,130% over the previous month. Sustained daily average of 59 visits to page since August 5, doubling average page traffic since the launch of *Blown Away*
- Achieved 6,063 views of the backstory on our institutional blog, summarizing Sheridan's involvement in the show with an average time of 3:44 on the page (vs. blog average of 1:20) indicating content relevance
- Glass-blowing dictionary shared with 23,000 students, 3,500 staff, 100,000 subscribers to alumni newsletter, and embedded in three media advisories and two news releases

Given that the show aired in July, long after our applications are received in January and program acceptance offers start rolling out in February, we cannot conclude that the show influenced people to enrol in our program. However, program applications rose to 83 for the 2019/20 enrolment cycle (which ends in August 2019), representing a 60% increase over 2018/19. While the application format does allow us to determine whether or not the series inspired late applicants to apply, it is possible that our participation in the series influenced late-in-cycle conversions by those students who were initially unsure as to whether or not to accept our offer of admission. Sheridan will continue to promote its connection to the series (including a partnership on Season Two) in the hopes of realizing additional program growth next year.