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**ORGANIZATION:** Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association  
**TITLE:** 2011 Stanley Cup Riot – The Vanlover Campaign  
**DIV/CATEGORY:** CSAE Awards of Distinction: Category 6: Products & Services  
**TIMELINE:** June 2011  
**DESCRIPTION:** On June 15, 2011, outdoor viewing parties for Game 7 of the Stanley Cup resulted in a riot and millions of dollars in damage to 60 downtown businesses. What followed was a crisis communication response to address shaken confidence in safety in the downtown.

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### **Opportunity/Need:**

Downtown Vancouver, BC, Canada, is home to 80,000 residents, 140,000 employees and 8,000 businesses in a 90-block catchment area in the city's central business district. Downtown is at the heart of the region's economic engine with over \$9 billion in commercial properties accounting for more than 63% of the City's properties and contributing more than \$129 million in property taxes. Approximately 88% of downtown businesses are considered small with 20 employees or less.

The Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association (DVBIA) represents all the downtown businesses through a levy paid on their property taxes. It advocates on its members' behalves in the key areas of access & mobility and place making & marketing.

Safety and security are also key indicators of economic vibrancy for a downtown, in particular, its *perceived* safety. According to the 2008 Accessing Downtown Survey commissioned by the DVBIA, 71% of Metro Vancouver residents say they 'always feel safe' or 'feel safe most of the time' in downtown Vancouver. This rating has been consistent since 1997. (See *Appendix 1*) Maintaining and improving this impression is an ongoing strategic focus for the DVBIA to keep downtown competitive for consumers' dollars and attention with other nearby retail districts. .

During the 2010 Olympics, after years of planning and preparation, downtown become 'centre ice.' It welcomed 150,000 people a day, including an unprecedented 50% of locals or 1 million people with few safety incidents. In that spirit, the naïve hope was to keep that celebratory atmosphere going during the 2011 Stanley Cup series as festivals/events create vitality, a sense of community and raise awareness for downtown businesses.

However, on June 15, 2011, downtown Vancouver basically became a stadium when it hosted the final and deciding game of the National Hockey League's Stanley Cup. The game itself was played live at Rogers Arena, an 18,000-seat stadium in downtown. Simultaneously, the City of Vancouver hosted an outdoor viewing party with four large screens in the middle of a major intersection. About 140,000 people attended.

While Games 1 – 6 of the series were hosted with only minor incidents, Game 7 resulted in a full-scale riot. Crowds became too big for the fenced-in designated viewing area, advanced liquor consumption by attendees and on-site open drinking was evident, and there was palpable tension and lawlessness permeating downtown.

Before the end of the losing game for the Vancouver Canucks, cars were rolled over and set on fire, store and office windows were smashed, wide-spread looting took place, access into and out of downtown was compromised, and police became overwhelmed by the size and behaviour of the crowd. The situation deteriorated for three hours until police re-gained control.

The value of the damage and looting to 60 member businesses – half of them small businesses – was estimated in the millions of dollars. The emotional toll on employees forced to physically defend their businesses was immeasurable. And, the reputations of downtown, the city and province were tarnished.

Within a day of the riot, we were getting intelligence from our members that potential local visitors were cancelling reservations at restaurants with no explanation other than seeing the horrendous images being replayed on TV and online. Downtown no longer looked or operated like that, but the unsafe perception was the reality.

Businesses unable to operate, employees unable or unwilling to work and customers unwilling to come downtown to shop/do business because of a perceived lack of safety created by the riot would be a worst case scenario.

To change the story, a crisis response by the DV BIA was implemented.

**Goal:**

To quickly restore the reputation of downtown in the minds of Metro Vancouverites as a safe destination do to business and visit.

**Objectives:**

1. Maintain the 71% 'confidence in safety downtown' rating (2008) by respondents of the 'Accessing Downtown' survey a year after the riot.
2. Negative online impressions of "Vancouver" are restored to pre-riot levels (9% on Twitter; 24% on blogs) within a week of the riots.
3. DV BIA social media engagement with consumers increased at least 10% from before the riot.
4. Daily pedestrian counts of visitors/employees in downtown are returned to pre-riot levels of 150 people / over five blocks / per 30-minute count.

**Audience(s):**

1. Consumers of the downtown experience. These are residents of Metro Vancouver that may work downtown but primarily like downtown and frequent it as consumers both during the day and at night. They go to the newest restaurants and follow sales or interesting happenings. They're active on social media and use Twitter and Facebook to share their experiences. They included 12,000 Twitter and 30,000 Facebook followers of our @ downtownvan accounts.
2. DV BIA members and their employees. Approximately 8,000 businesses are members of the DV BIA with 140,000 employees. The majority of members are inactive (it's an automatic membership based on geographic location); 3,000 are active members – they attend networking events, vote at the association's AGM, sit on our committees/board, receive our e-newsletter, follow us in the media etc. They include both property owners and tenants. About 46% of members represent the service industry (legal firms, for example, that work in the office towers); the remainder are in retail and hospitality primarily at street-level.

**Implementation:**

*Solution Overview*

The DV BIA has a staff of five. On the night of the riot, the Executive Director and myself were in constant contact. We drafted a message for our website that was also emailed to the 3,500 registered DV BIA members and stakeholders. It contained a positioning statement condemning the riot, reiterating the usual safety of downtown, and support for our impacted members. Our social media staff person was able to update the website and produce the email from home. This was a system we'd put in place in 2010 for the Olympics. (See Appendix 2)

The morning after the riot, City of Vancouver crews had done yeomen's service in cleaning up the majority of the roads so buses and cars were running again. DVBIA staff did a walking tour documenting the damage and talking with members, creating a list of impacted businesses, liaising with city staff, media and members of the public.

This 'boots on the ground' documentation of the damage enabled us to create a Google Map denoting the 60 impacted businesses to drive customers and create a resource list for local media. Views went from 0 to 11,000 in 6 weeks. It resulted in at least four impacted businesses hosting on-site live radio broadcasts and about six media-savvy businesses did dozens of interviews telling their stories.

That morning, hundreds of Vancouverites saddened and outraged by the previous night's events, started a Facebook campaign and came out to spontaneously clean the sidewalks of glass and graffiti. As hoarding boards went up on broken windows, citizens took to them to write their notes of sadness, outrage and apologies. It was clear: Vancouverites love their city; they love their downtown. They wanted to show their support for our members and let the world know this was not the city they live and play in and not the city we had showcased to the world the year before during the Olympics.

The DVBIA Executive Director was invited by the Mayor and provincial Premier to do a walkabout with media in tow visiting the impacted businesses that morning. We used the opportunity to state our continued support for hosting celebratory events downtown; that this event wouldn't turn Vancouver back into 'no fun city,' – a moniker that had plagued the city before the Olympics.

An updated statement was emailed to members by mid-day, posted to the association's website and sent via Twitter & Facebook reiterating condemnation for the riot, but sharing stories of generosity, outpourings of kindness and support.

But this wasn't enough as some businesses began to experience reservation cancellations. An intervention was needed. The DVBIA saw the window was closing to get ahead of a possible 'dead downtown' scenario where locals avoided the core out of fear of what they'd seen or experienced – a potentially devastating situation that could take months to recover from.

#### *Implementation and Challenges:*

As Director, Marketing/Communications, I pulled together a team supported by a local PR and ad agency who wanted to donate their services and help, but wondered how. A call to the publisher of the local major daily, the Vancouver Sun, secured a free full-page ad for the DVBIA for the Saturday, three days after the riots. (See Appendix 3)

Citizens and media were still wallowing in the sadness of events as evidenced by the thousands of messages on storefront hoarding. Contrarily, the 'Vanlover' (a play on Vancouver) campaign captured the prevailing sentiment of civic pride and invited people that love their city to post the heart icon on their business, or car or home.

But more importantly, it simply invited people to come downtown and do things they'd normally do like shop and dine – and post their pictures online. To create a more complicated campaign, such as an event or contest or the like, was beyond our capacity and time was of the essence. Restoring a sense of normality was at the core of the Vanlover campaign. (See Appendix 4)

A media kick-off event at an affected T-shirt shop was held with the DVBIA Executive Director and Mayor. Vanlover T-shirts were available for sale and quickly became a hot seller exceeding the store's total 2010 sales by comparison. Media relations with local online and traditional outlets were employed resulting in upwards of a hundred local, national and international media interviews within the first five days of the riot.

The collective media attention prompted four unaffected businesses to donate \$120,000 to help small businesses unable to cover damage costs or pay their insurance deductibles. The Vancouver Economic Commission managed the fund; the DVBIA one of the fund administrators.

The cost of the campaign was primarily staff time plus \$5,000 for one full-page newspaper ad and \$1,000 in Vanlover T-shirts.

A challenge – although a good one to have – was that Tourism Vancouver was also creating a separate campaign rallying Vancouverites with more media connections and donated services than the DVBIA. However, its print and online campaign featured ‘virtual’ hoarding that people could right messages on perpetuating the sadness theme vs. helping people move on.

**Results:**

<i>Objectives:</i>	<i>Results:</i>
1. Maintain the 71% ‘confidence in safety downtown’ rating (2008) by respondents of the ‘Accessing Downtown’ survey year after the riot.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seventy-six per cent of Metro Vancouver residents say they ‘always feel safe’ or ‘feel safe most of the time’ in downtown Vancouver according to the ‘Accessing Downtown’ survey commissioned by the DVBIA in July 2012. (See Appendix 5)</li> </ul>
2. Negative online impressions of “Vancouver” are restored to pre-riot levels (9% Twitter; 20% blogs) within a week of the riots.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During the riot, online negative sentiment for ‘Vancouver’ (given the only event happening was the Stanley Cup and the only location for the viewings/riot was downtown, the inference is presumed) rose from 9% to 26% on Twitter; blog sentiment rose from 24% to 40%. Post-riot negative references reduced to 5.2%, 3.8% lower than pre-riot levels, for Twitter; blog sentiment reduced 34% from pre-riot levels to 20%. (See Appendix 6)</li> </ul>
3. DVBIA social media engagement with consumers increased at least 10% from before the riot.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DVBIA Twitter followers – and picture posting Vancouverites – rose from 4,800 to 6,037 (26% increase); 1,500 Facebook ‘likes’ were generated; post views increased by 396%; feedback rates skyrocketed by 1,610%; and website traffic increased 200%. (See Appendix 7)</li> </ul>
4. Daily pedestrian counts of visitors/employees in downtown are returned to pre-riot levels of 150 people / over five blocks / per 30-minute count.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For years, the DVBIA’s Downtown Ambassadors (eyes and ears on the street) have done pedestrian counts daily for 30 minutes over five blocks to track activity on the street. Pre-riot, counts averaged 150 people per 30-minute count. Counts dropped about 33% the day after the riot but returned to about 100 people one day later and stayed consistent throughout the following week. (See Appendix 8)</li> </ul>

**Hindsight is 20/20:**

- If impacted members hadn’t been so pre-occupied with getting back on their feet after the riot, and we weren’t busy helping businesses cope, we would have tried harder to measure the direct impact of the campaign to their businesses. Informally, a number of businesses surveyed said they saw a 10% increase in business due to the negative exposure and/or the Vanlover campaign.