

CLIENT: FHM & CNX
PROJECT: ForeheADS

BACKGROUND

At CUNNING we think it's important to take time out of our busy schedules to comment on social and cultural issues.

Often this is done in conjunction with a charitable organisation. Sometimes however, if it's relevant to their market, product or audience, we use existing clients as a vehicle to create a talking point.

BRIEF

In 2003 there was a great deal of focus on the plight of students and their ever-increasing debt. Indeed, a number of our own staff were afflicted, having recently left university themselves.

As part of our day-to-day work we're constantly dreaming up unusual, quirky and clever ideas. Inevitably, ideas to alleviate student debt were soon bandied around. The concept was to help students get maximum reward for minimum effort.

IDEA

One idea that struck a chord with us was the notion of forehead advertising. Students would be paid to display branded messages on their foreheads.

How silly would it be if we helped students pay off their huge loans by becoming human billboards? The notion of students walking around with ads on their foreheads was as bizarre as it was bold, intriguing and (quite deliberately) controversial. We knew it would be provocative and polarising, but that was the point. It was about highlighting a social issue by generating debate.

We called this idea ForeheADs™.

But who would do it? Who would take it seriously? And what would it say about our society?



ForeheADs™

CUNNING researched the proposition in detail, speaking to both university officials and students. Having received some very positive feedback and a pile of applications from students, CUNNING was able to develop a network of students that were eager to display brand logos or strap lines on their foreheads.

Students were required to display the advert for a minimum of 3 hours per day in high visibility locations such as the student bar, local pubs and high street shopping areas. In return, they were paid £88 for a week's work.

CUNNING approached FHM and CNX (both CUNNING clients) with the 'new media' opportunity of effectively using student foreheads as billboards, using non-permanent transfers. Both FHM and CNX jumped at the media opportunity, recognising that it spoke to their audience in a tone of voice they'd respond to positively.

RESULT

A media explosion surrounding the supposedly 'new media' channel reached the pages of both the tabloids and the broadsheets, as well as Radio and TV in the UK.

Overseas it was also a global phenomenon featuring on the front page of the Wall Street Journal, in Time magazine, in Le Figaro and the Moscow Times among others.

In fact, it clocked up millions of media coverage from around the globe. Added to this were cries of outrage and, ultimately, a debate that questioned both the morals of advertising and the realities of student debt.

Let's not forget that even today, many years later, debt is still the dominant theme for the majority of students in England.