

What were we doing? We were staging a PR stunt so surprising that it would fascinate the media. For weeks before this morning, we'd been secretly building a small island in New York City's Hudson River. This tropical island was complete with tons of sand, palm trees, a thatched-roof hut with hammock and hot tub, and a life jacket-wearing dog.

Before the big reveal, we'd towed the island into place under the black of night. As the sun rose, the press caught on. As I watched the island, my hair blew in all directions from the CNN news choppers churning the air overhead. Dozens of TV reporters filmed live segments and streamed early-morning updates to their stations. The CBS morning show called it New York's "sixth borough."

Blowing warm breath into my cupped palms, I watched as the couple took a break from playing volleyball to relax in the hot tub. They reached for their margaritas topped off with tiny paper umbrellas. We sent messages to the couple with a trained carrier pigeon.

My client, Scripps Networks (the company behind HGTV and the Food Network), wanted the world to know that it was all about creating extraordinary life experiences. This untold piece of marketing was nothing short of extraordinary. Knowing this, I'd given my team a challenge: create something so audacious, so newsworthy, that it would be impossible for the media to ignore. The annual advertising budget was \$3 million. As the advertising director, I asked my client to put aside 10% of the overall budget to develop one idea that was risky yet promising.

In twenty-four hours, this \$300,000 investment earned an estimated \$30 million in free media exposure: one hundred times the original investment.

Infuse a Dose of Vice

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That devil sitting on your shoulder, whispering in your ear? He's whispering vice.

Rules are rarely fascinating, but bending them, very much so. When you push a boundary, or reinvent an expectation, you fascinate with creativity. You're stepping your toe over the line, flirting with the unexpected.

If you want to tap into one of the oldest forms of persuasion, have a dance with the bad girl. The word "vice" comes from the Latin *vitium*, meaning "failing or defect," because vice reveals our delight with bad behavior or mischievousness. (You might have a vice for *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*, or late-night karaoke, or McDonald's Sausage McGriddles. No judgments on my end.)

Let's see how a boring product can apply a zing of vice, and turn a commodity into a fascinating experience. Let's travel to Las Vegas, where we'll speak the language of creativity to serve a different type of candy.

Hard Rock Hotel: Advanced Partying
Peter Morton, the heir to the Morton's steakhouse fortune, had a dazzling jewel in the crown of coolness: the Hard Rock Hotel in Las Vegas. At the time, the Hard Rock Hotel was the epitome of everything young/cool/beautiful.

The Hard Rock Hotel was not just a hotel. It was more of a commitment. Only once you'd mastered beginner skills were you ready for this experience. Everything from the exclusively dark lobby to the "Rehab" pool party every Sunday challenged guests, even goaded them, to step it up a notch. (Tequila shots? Been there. Beer bongos? Done that.)

Yet the hotel also faced its own challenge: how to advertise to this jaded audience, without looking like the brand was trying