

NewsMAKERS

Veteran public relations professionals have been making sure the RV industry's message gets heard for more than four decades.

By Steve Bibler

When sponsors of the California RV Show were looking for a way to build interest in the 61st annual show, held Oct. 11-20, in Pomona, they called upon George Carson of Carson Marketing for some help.

The show's attendance had been falling for the past eight years and a fresh approach was needed, everyone concluded.

The veteran public relations and advertising specialist suggested that the RV Industry Association link the show to a popular charity to put a different spin on the annual event. Carson arranged to bring in rock star Bret Michaels, who had starred in the popular "Rock My RV" on the Travel Channel the previous summer. Michaels also is a diabetic and vocal supporter for research into the disease.

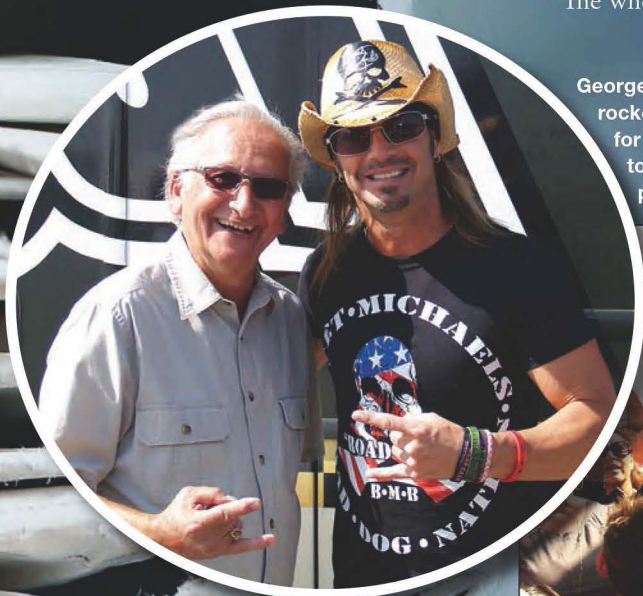
Michael's regular appearance rate of \$75,000 for an hour-long appearance was outside the show's budget, but Carson had an idea.

"We didn't pay that," stresses Tom Gaither, RVIA's western show manager. "The way George worked it, we got Bret to come down to a reduced rate."

The plan was a stroke of genius.

"The whole idea of Bret Michaels coming to the show was to promote the advo-

George Carson (left), president of Carson Marketing, enjoys a moment of levity with rocker Bret Michaels at the 61st annual California RV Show. Carson arranged for Michaels, star of the popular "Rock My RV" TV show on the Travel Channel, to make an appearance at the show in exchange for the show donating proceeds to support diabetes research, a cause Michaels champions.





Gayle Anderson, KTLA



Josh Rubenstein, CBS



cacy of the American Diabetes Association (ADA),” says Gaither. “While Bret greeted our guests at the show, we pledged the gate proceeds from one day at the show to the ADA.”

During his appearance, Michaels met two brothers with Type 1 diabetes whose dream of meeting Michaels was realized at the show. Carson helped to arrange the meeting.

Several of the rare RVs that were rebuilt and redesigned with unique interiors and wild exterior designs from Michaels’ reality television show also were displayed at the show.

Carson arranged for extensive media coverage each day during the first week of the show. His efforts created quite a buzz throughout Southern California.

One result of Carson’s efforts was a 39 percent jump in attendance and rave reviews by participating RV dealers.

Gaither reports, “Mike Thompson’s RV reported 195 sales in 10 days – 65 were Tiffin Class A motorhomes. McMahon’s RV was over 150 units. Giant RV sold over 150.

Richardson’s RV Centers donated \$100 for every unit to the Komen cancer

fund and made a donation of \$14,000, so that’s 140 units.”

Subsequently, the Orange County American Diabetes Association presented its Top Third Party Event award to the RVIA.

Efforts like Carson’s have helped put a different spin on the image of RVs and the RV industry in general in recent years. While the Go RVing campaign has changed the way the RV lifestyle is promoted and garnered much publicity and praise, there remains a lot of other day-to-day advertising and promotions and basic PR that someone has to do.

“It’s difficult when a client has a particular mindset and can think of only one way of doing things,” says Carson, a 40-year veteran advertising and PR executive in Southern California. “I was pleased the client (RVIA) gave us the freedom to express what was needed.”

This doing “what was needed” has been the challenge for not only Carson, but also other firms that provide PR and advertising services for the RV industry.



Bret Michaels and Dan Caldwell, president at Tapout, tossing T-Shirts to the crowd.