

# The \$2.6 million Dalí circus comes to town: No-holds-barred promotion of exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art

A credit card company has spearheaded the massive publicity campaign for the centennial retrospective

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André Breton's famous shuffling of Salvador Dalí's name into "Avida Dollars" disparaged the Spanish painter's penchant for self-promotion, but the barb has become the unofficial mantra for the city of Philadelphia this month.

To capitalise on the tourism potential of the Philadelphia Museum of Art's centennial retrospective of Dalí (on view until 15 May) a consortium of local sponsors and non-profits have mounted a \$2.6-million marketing campaign to promote the show.

Philadelphia is the only North American venue for the Dalí retrospective, the first in the US for more than six decades, which was first seen at the Palazzo Grassi in Venice where it closed on 16 January. It includes some 200 paintings, sculptures, writings, set designs, and films.

Philadelphia-based Advanta corporation, which provides MasterCard credit cards to small businesses, is the main engine behind the initiative.

Its chairman and CEO Dennis Alter is also vice chairman of the museum's board, and through Advanta's affiliated foundation he has steered \$1 million to sponsor the show at the museum, "about half the overall cost", according to the museum's chief operating officer Gail Harrity.

In addition, Advanta has spearheaded a collaboration with the Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation (GPTMC), the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau (PCVB), and the Philadelphia Museum of Art to promote the exhibition and the region.

The corporation is also providing money in addition to the foundation's museum sponsorship, but would not disclose how much. And the museum is adding marketing funding as well. "In mounting a major exhibition, the museum tries to commit around \$200,000 to marketing if resources are available", says Ms Harrity, "but Advanta's generosity has enabled a larger campaign".

The GPTMC has added \$650,000 to the project and the PCVB another \$50,000, according to spokesmen for those agencies, both of which are private non-profit organisations funded in part by a city hotel tax.

The total value of the national advertising and marketing campaign is \$2.6 million, including in-kind donations of ad space, says Advanta's vice president of communications Alison Grove.

The campaign includes television, radio, internet, billboard, taxi-top, magazine, and newspaper advertising in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Harrisburg, with promotions in the UK, Spain, Germany, and France, as well.

GPTMC president Meryl Levitz says the four organisations developed an integrated media campaign with the museum's New York-based marketing consultant LaPlaca Cohen. "Our job was to develop a consistent image and message for the campaign", says consultant Arthur Cohen, who adds that a Philip Halsman portrait of Dalí was selected as the primary image for the campaign and a lobster phone will be featured in the second wave of ads. The museum handled the licensing of the images from the Dalí Foundation in Spain.

The campaign goes well beyond print ads to include seminars and events "with a surreal theme" and hotel packages that include VIP tickets to the show. Two giant inflatable lobster phone balloons are making appearances around town, buses and trolleys are decked out in Dalí ads, and a Dalí Deals

programme has issued “Surreal Saver Cards” offering discounts at 150 local shops, restaurants, and arts organisations.

Dalí’s face welcomes train travellers in stations from Boston to Washington, DC and gigantic banners hang outside Philadelphia’s station and covered the façade of New York’s Madison Square Garden in January—promising “Philly’s more fun when you sleep over with Dalí”. Another slogan is “Sometimes Philadelphia goes surreal”.

“This is Philadelphia doing what Philadelphia does best—fostering collaboration between a museum sponsor and the city to transform a great exhibition into a great event”, says Mr Cohen, who worked with the Advanta Foundation to promote the Philadelphia Museum’s 1996 Cézanne retrospective which attracted more than 500,000 visitors. “They set the standard with “Cézanne” and it has become the template for this kind of cultural collaboration”, added Mr Cohen.

Since 1990, the Advanta Foundation has given out \$12 million to a variety of community activities in the arts, education, health, human services and civic development”, says Ms Grove, but the pooling of resources for Dalí is unprecedented.

“There’s an inextricable connection between the arts and marketing targeted at tourists”, says Ms Levitz. “The arts need tourism marketing and tourism marketing needs the arts. We always describe the Philadelphia Museum as a ‘destination definer’, a blockbuster all year round in its own right”, she says.

Advanta expects the Dalí campaign to generate millions of dollars for the local economy. “In addition to being an artistic genius, Salvador Dalí was an astute entrepreneur who employed creative ways to promote himself and his art, an approach that resonates with Advanta and our unceasing effort to deliver innovative solutions and unique opportunities to our 1.4 million small business cardholders”, says Ms Grove.

Some critics feel that such an extensive campaign is crassly commercial and inappropriate for museums, but Ms Harrity says the partnership between the arts and business communities has a ripple effect on the city that is both

educational and profitable.

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