

KPR Case Study

MRINetwork

The First Friday Preview

Background

Complex marketing challenges must be addressed on multiple corporate levels and marketers must collaborate closely with C-level executives to create powerful solutions. KPR faced the challenge of helping MRINetwork, one of the largest search-and-recruitment organizations in the world, a) support its 1,100 franchisees in 35 countries with a results-oriented communications program, b) establish the company as a global expert in the labor markets and c) generate media coverage for the firm's president in national business media.

This marketing problem clearly required more than just publicity. It required joining with MRINetwork's top executives to create a multi-level program to address all three objectives. The result was the First Friday Preview—an authoritative monthly report that has helped the company make franchisees happy, attract the regular attention of top business media and place its president on prestigious, high-visibility TV business shows.

As MRINetwork's long-time PR counsel, KPR has generated millions and millions of media impressions over the years and firmly established the company as an industry thought leader in the jobs, recruiting and workplace space.

While MRINetwork has always enjoyed its fair share of media coverage, in coordination with the company's public relations and marketing executives, we decided it was time to broaden MRINetwork's horizon even more by developing a program specifically around the monthly release of the Employment Situation Report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). On the first Friday of each month, the BLS announces the total number of jobs created or lost in the previous month and the increase or decline in the national unemployment rate. The report is considered a critical economic barometer and is widely anticipated and reported by the media. As we will describe, not only would this become an important component of our ongoing efforts to firmly establish and reinforce MRINetwork as an industry expert and thought leader, it would also serve as an important business tool for the franchise offices to promote their services and expertise.



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Challenges and Opportunity

Our initial strategic discussions focused on the challenge of cutting through the clutter of other staffing firms' efforts to promote themselves as expert commentators on the jobs report. How were we going to differentiate ourselves? In reviewing what other competitors were doing, we noticed that most were rolling out rather trite surveys about hiring trends and employee confidence. These surveys really didn't provide much insight and analysis into what was actually going on in the job market. We did not simply want to reach workplace reporters, but also those reporters who covered a more "macro" approach to the labor markets and economics.

From a more internal perspective, we also could not lose sight of the fact that as a franchise organization, the firm at times spoke in disparate voices, with clients sometimes not even fully aware of the global reach of the organization. In fact, due to a conciliation made years prior, some of the franchisees no longer used the MRINetwork name as their primary brand. This posed a unique challenge for us to ensure that the organization would be united to speak as one voice, at least when it came to the dissection and analysis of the monthly employment numbers.

Strategy and Tactics

One of the core strengths we recognized through our entire relationship with MRINetwork was the wealth of institutional knowledge had by the literally thousands of recruiters with countless years of recruiting experience. We had already been engaged in a program to place franchisees as experts in state unemployment stories and the president of the company on television to speak about national unemployment.

As a franchise organization, the company is faced with unique messaging challenges. Though MRINetwork has many offices around the globe, most clients work with only one of those offices. We wanted to develop a program to ensure that its clients know that they are, in fact, benefiting from an international network of top professionals. And, with most of the global growth of the recruiting industry not occurring in the United States, MRINetwork's worldwide position put them in an ideal situation to capitalize on this trend.

As the program progressed we developed the concept of a monthly report that could serve a variety of purposes. Called the First Friday Preview (FFP), its first use would be to provide the entire network a monthly "Cliff Notes" on the labor market. While the FFP might not apply to all local areas, it would help to set the tone for how MRINetwork's local offices and corporate spokespeople would talk about the labor market for the month.

To show the frequent placements MRINetwork received in both national and local media and their expertise, we decided to highlight one or two quotes from the last month on the front page that both clients and franchisees could see.

As the concept developed, so did the possibilities of how a simple two-page document could help achieve many of the organization's primary objectives. A regional and international section was added that would help educate franchisees about unique labor market conditions in different parts of the country and the world.

To achieve one of our primary communications objectives, we decided to not just distribute the newsletter to media (more than 100 are currently on the opt-in list including CNNMoney, The Wall Street Journal and CNBC) but directly to the thousands of hiring authorities around the world who are MRINetwork's clients. Ideally, our goal was by consistently delivering timely, compelling and relevant articles featuring MRI-Network franchisees, media and clients alike would begin to discover that MRINetwork was on the same level of the better-known brands that they compete with every day. This way, it branded MRINetwork's offices as part of an organization with global reach and expertise by providing clients and prospects with valuable and interesting information about the current state of the job market.

So we created a two-fold approach—the FFP is, of course, distributed to top workplace and economics reporters around the country and has generated significant press attention. And second, the FFP would be used by the franchise offices to help them promote their individual practices and achieve their desired business results.

Results

In November 2007, we drafted the first issue of the First Friday Preview, a name chosen after asking the offices for suggestions (which came to hundreds of possible titles). The issue referenced the national labor statistics that would be released on the Friday after our document came out. On Monday, December 3, 2007, it was sent to a list of media who covered workplace and the economy and the 1,100 MRINetwork offices. Initially, few people saw it.

Undeterred, we began drafting January's edition. Slowly offices started to incorporate the FFP into their communications with clients and stories started to filter back to MRINetwork about how it was being used. During a breakout session about marketing held at one of MRINetwork's annual, regional meetings for franchisees in March 2008, a disgruntled franchisee got up to talk about what he was getting for his royalties. As he raised concerns about a variety of marketing projects that he felt he got limited benefit from, he finally got down his list to public relations and said "But this FFP is the best thing I've ever seen."

We also designed the FFP so that individual offices could easily adapt the document and customize the branding of their individual office operation, using just Microsoft Word.

Reports continued to come in from around the network about the FFP being used in a variety of ways. Some offices, which had never even sent it to their clients, were simply using it to be more informed when talking about the workforce as a whole. Others reported sending it to clients that they hadn't spoken to in years and it created conversations, which led directly to new business.

In an agency meeting with MRINetwork's vice president of marketing in May, the FFP was called "the marketing department's most significant achievement in the last year." Increasingly, as offices started to understand the benefits of being profiled in the FFP, requests started coming in not just from around the U.S. but from offices around the world.

On the media side, whenever the president had a sit down briefing with a reporter, the FFP was used as a “leave behind,” to give his take on the labor market. Then the monthly email became a frequent reminder of his range of commentary. He began to regularly appear on Fox Business’s Money for Breakfast and other morning shows to discuss the national labor report each month, and the FFP would give segment producers a road map for talking points.

Many media outlets have “white listed” the address the FFP was sent from in order to prevent it from being caught by their SPAM filter, meaning that not only the FFP but other MRINetwork pitches throughout the year would be coming through the infamous newsroom SPAM filters unscathed.

Despite being just one part of our overall public relations program with MRINetwork, the FFP, among franchisees, has become the most visible arm of the public relations efforts. Internally, the FFP has become such an effective tool that both franchisees – and departments from Home Office – have lobbied to be included.

The best indication of the FFP’s media benefit is the increase of in-bound queries from reporters from top tier outlets like The Wall Street Journal, The Associated Press, San Diego Union-Tribune, Philadelphia Inquirer, Fox Business, CNBC and others since we began distribution.

The monthly release of the First Friday Preview has been met with great enthusiasm by MRINetwork’s target audiences and has created a great many media opportunities that it otherwise would not have received. Furthermore, the FFP has become an important tool as offices develop and maintain relationships with clients and secure business from them.