

Belinda Booker looks at how the Sainsbury's annual conference encouraged the Paralympic spirit

Getting Sainsbury's colleagues excited about the upcoming London Paralympic Games was one of the key objectives of the supermarket's recent annual conference. Sainsbury's is the first ever stand-alone sponsor of the Paralympic Games and drpgroup was briefed to assist with spreading the word to the 4,700 delegates from nearly 1,000 stores and depots attending the one-day conference at Birmingham NEC.

To do this, drp created a Paralympic



Sainsbury's is sponsor of the 2012 Paralympic Games

Village people

Village, where delegates were able to enjoy live game demonstrations presented by multi-medal-winning Paralympic athletes Marc Woods and Ellie Simmonds.

Matt Franks, project manager at drpgroup, says: "The colleagues were each allocated a colour, green or red, which represented the teams they would support during the games. The central court hosted three individual events: wheelchair basketball, wheelchair fencing and then the British sitting volleyball team, involving a short demonstration and a mini game to bring the sport to life.

"Delegates were shown how colleagues are already getting involved in stores across the UK and were made aware of other opportunities of how they could get involved."

But support for the Paralympics wasn't the only message colleagues needed to take from the conference: with Christmas around the corner, there was a whole range of new products to launch.

Drp chose to showcase these by creating a second 'village' decked out as an interactive Christmas wonderland.



Matt Franks
drpgroup

The client: Sainsbury's
The event: Sainsbury's Our Conference 2011
The venue: Birmingham NEC
The participants: 4,700 Sainsbury's colleagues

"The area was themed as a Swiss Alpine mountain range," says Franks. "Incorporating four log cabins, a traditional Swiss house and 16 market stalls, all mixed with real snow and 350 Christmas trees to really set the scene.

"Each of the log cabins adopted its own theme to suit the business area. As a centrepiece, four 20-metre Christmas trees, overflowing with presents underneath, showed the wide range of gift ideas that Sainsbury's colleagues would be selling in store in the coming months. The house, meanwhile, provided the perfect setting to show what Christmas at Sainsbury's is like for its customers."

A third and final village completed the 'Sainsbury's World' experiential

area, and introduced Sainsbury's new 'by Sainsbury's' food range and its clothing and home offering.

Says Franks: "To celebrate the launch of 'by Sainsbury's', there were three themed restaurants together with 12 market stalls, all offering information about the products as well as sampling opportunities. A fashion shop was also created, which held regular presentations from Gok Wan talking about his new range."

The centrepiece to the 'Our Sainsbury's Village' was the grand final of the Sainsbury's Big Bake Off, a baking competition open to all staff.

"Seven finalists that had successfully made it through a series of heats and semi-finals held earlier in the summer all baked their signature dishes live for colleagues to see, sample and vote on," explains Franks.

"The Villages were a high point of the whole experience and really brought to life Sainsbury's business."

Meanwhile, as part of Sainsbury's and drpgroup's commitment to sustainable events, the project management team helped Sainsbury's reduce the event's environmental impact wherever possible.

Continued on page 48

'drp created a Paralympic Village with live game demos'

Continued from page 47

Says Franks: "Materials from previous years were reused, a lanyard recycling programme was implemented and the team worked with the FareShare charity to ensure all unused food would go to the needy rather than to landfill.

"In addition, more than 250 of the Christmas trees were replanted by Solihull council."

Inside the main conference auditorium, things got super high-tech with multiple LED and projection screens and tiered seating to offer optimum viewing angles from all seats.

"These screens were used to full effect as the creative and technical teams employed their latest technology, including the 16-input 8-output Christie Spyder, allowing for a multitude of jaw-dropping projection combinations across the screens," explains Franks.

The conference, branded 'We are Sainsbury's', reviewed the journey the business had been on and unveiled plans for the future.

Drp worked with Sainsbury's on the development of content, producing



Birmingham's NEC as an interactive Christmas wonderland - including 350 real Christmas trees, most of which were replanted

'Multiple LED screens allowed for jaw-dropping projection combinations'

graphics and slides and more than 40 videos all in high definition.

During the presentations, CEO Justin King hosted the Sainsbury's Star Awards alongside special guest host Paralympian swimmer Marc Woods.

"The awards received more than 15,000 nominations and recognised colleagues from across the business in 13 different categories," says Franks.

He added: "Following the awards, as a way of reinforcing the new business

goals, the staff were treated to a surprise full-scale fashion show.

"This final treat was the perfect way to end the event and leave delegates feeling truly uplifted and ready to share their experiences with colleagues on return to their individual stores, depots and offices."

The event received much positive praise, according to Franks – but the real acid test of the success of the entire event will be a positive sales uplift over the Christmas period. ■

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