

Big Apple Awards

Insights + Analysis

As one of the largest retailers in the country, providing clothing items to those in need had long been a natural extension of JCPenney's philanthropic initiatives. While other retailers had also developed programs focused on donating clothes to students in need, JCPenney needed a way to stand out from competitors to break through with the target Gen X mom consumer.

In a conversation with the YMCA (The Y), one of JCPenney's long-time philanthropic partners, JCPenney learned of a less talked about and recognized apparel need: low-income families were suffering from a shortage of socks and underwear.

To get a better understanding around the need, JCPenney commissioned a comprehensive audit of secondary research among low-income families. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty*, nearly half of all kids under age 18 are living in low-income households. The audit found that lack of access to basic items such as socks and underwear is a pressing issue among low-income families and children, and not having these basic items is believed to have a detrimental impact on children's emotional wellbeing and potentially their outcomes in school and life.

Planning

Now understanding that this was indeed a real issue, JCPenney and the nonprofit partnered together towards the goal of developing a solution that would have a real impact and set program strategies:

- **Quantify the issue through data:** In addition to the audit, conduct further study to develop the right strategy to combat the issue.
- **Unveil the issue through the right content vehicles and partners:** Create compelling content, along with the right storytellers to share to help educate on this issue, which had only been minimally discussed in the public domain.
- **Take a test-and-learn approach:** Carefully introduce the program to the target to gauge receptivity and identify ways to better utilize funds to maximize impact in the coming years.
- **Create an easy call-to-action:** Make it easy for consumers to engage and support the cause.

Execution

JCPenney devised an integrated cause marketing program inviting shoppers to "Pair Up With JCPenney."

The Consumer Call-to-Action: The customer call-to-action was simple: you buy one, we give one. From August 1 through August 15, for each pack of socks or underwear sold, JCPenney donated a pack to the Y, up to 750,000 pairs.

Study: JCPenney commissioned a U.S.-wide online survey to understand the current state of need for basic items, such as socks and underwear among American youth. The survey was fielded across the U.S. between April 27 – May 1, 2017. "America's Youth: The Need for Basic Necessities" survey found that a high percentage of underserved kids across the country are going to school without these basic clothing fundamentals and it's a problem that directly impacts a child's self-esteem and the academic achievement gap. Results found that:

- 40% of low income parents worry about their child having enough socks and underwear.
- Of the parents that reported sending their children to school without socks or underwear, 51% shared they did so because they could not afford to provide their child with enough pairs of socks or underwear to make it through the week.
- 55% of parents whose children did not have underwear or socks said their children wanted to skip school or refused to go to school because they were embarrassed by not having any.

Anthem Video: JCPenney knew that a compelling video was key to bringing this untold story to life, but that simply sharing statistics as an animated infographic would not emotionally engage its intended target for the campaign -- today's Gen X mom.

The retailer opted to create a video around one "day in the life" of a child who struggles with the impact of not having socks and underwear. Expert partners at the Y consulted with JCPenney to ensure the video would cast the right tone, and that the content would feel authentic and relatable to families in need. JCPenney was particularly sensitive to the role of the mom, aiming to tell a story that would not cast blame on her, but show her strength, resiliency and role as a key facilitator helping her child get through their day and feel proud.

The video depicted a child waking up in the morning and starting to get dressed, prompting him to contemplate the day ahead in the context of his lack of access to the basic necessities of socks and underwear. He then reflects on some of hard times at school; we see him disconnected in class, sitting out from recess and pausing before going into the bathroom. His story ends back in his bedroom, with his mom coming in to lift his spirits. The entire video is interspersed with key statistics from the national survey "America's Youth: The Need for Basic Necessities."

Launch: To break through during the cluttered back-to-school timeframe, JCPenney began telling its story a few weeks before the promotional call-to-action went live. On July 19, JCPenney teased the upcoming cause marketing campaign with an anthem video on its YouTube channel. On July 28, JCPenney posted the video across its other social channels and launched the website, jcpennypairup.com. This was followed along with a national press release that highlighted the issue and campaign and directed readers to the results of the "America's Youth" The Need for Basic Necessities" survey.

Editorial coverage began rolling out immediately following the launch of the promotion on Aug. 1. JCPenney leveraged a year-long media integration with the *TODAY Show* on Aug. 2 to design a segment on teaching kids kindness, and highlighting the campaign. PR-driven feature stories ran in targeted outlets including *Parents* and *Parade*.

Social posts also began immediately following the launch, encouraging moms across the nation to learn more and calling on them to Pair Up with JCPenney.

Evaluation

- 2.4M pairs sold throughout program duration
- Beat competitors during critical back-to-school timeframe
 - Video garnered the #1 spot in advertising effectiveness for July 2017 according to the ABX Advertising Benchmark Index, pulling in a Reputation score +201% over the norm
- Video received more than 1.2 million YouTube views, 2.1 million Facebook views with an abundance of positive consumer comments
- 61 million earned media impressions spotlighting JCPenney for addressing the need for socks and underwear
- Met donation goal of 750,000 pairs of socks and underwear, distributing to Ys in 107 communities in 35 states