
A Day in the Life of 'Day One'

By Amy Stansbury Tue, Jun 26, 2012

To show that Prudential understands retirement and empathizes with retirees, the insurer created a series of warm, image-building ads in which real-life retirees show-and-tell their own stories.(Above, Linda Guthrie.)



When Kevin Brady began to shoot video for Prudential's ambitious "Day One" ad campaign, the actors surprised him. But then, they weren't actually actors. They were real people. And that's a rarity in advertising.

Brady, the group creative director at Droga5 advertising agency, began filming for Day One in the summer of 2011. That was over a year after Prudential had solicited ideas for a new branding campaign and Droga5 had submitted an idea built around short documentaries, radio clips, and photos that depict or recreate, with an unusual sense of realism, the first day of retirement of a sampling of real retirees from across the country.

If you've hurried through the concourse of almost any major airport lately—Chicago Midway, for instance—you've probably wheeled your carry-on past one or more of the Day One poster ads, which look like giant collages of family snapshots.

The Day One video spots typically begin at sunrise on the first days of retirement of 10 Americans. As the camera studies their faces, the retirees reflect on their grandchildren, on spouses who have died, on beloved pets, on big themes like happiness, loss and the future. They seem, and are, genuine.

Which was what Prudential wanted. "There is something fascinating and unexplored about that unique moment of entry," said Colin McConnell, vice president of advertising at Prudential. "We decided that rather than stylize it, we would find out what Day One of retirement is like through the eyes of the market and let real people tell the story."

The commercials themselves do not mention Prudential's Highest Daily variable annuities or its retirement plans or the company's size and strength. Most of them don't raise the topic of money at all. With Day One, Prudential isn't trying to sell; it's trying to build name-recognition and trust among retirees.

"We want to become more on the top of peoples' minds," McConnell told *RIJ*. "We want people to credit Prudential for being a company who gets it." Other Prudential ad campaigns, produced by in-house teams, talk specifically about Prudential products and often run in trade publications.

Using real retirees in commercials was an outside-the-box approach. Fidelity has its "Green Line" ads with pre-retirement couples and ING has its fence-clipping neighbors who talk about their "numbers", but those ads feature actors and obviously fictional situations. Other companies prefer symbols like whales (Pacific Life) or cartoon characters (MetLife) or day-trading babies (E*Trade) or, more often, white-haired couples sitting on a dock in the Adirondacks. "Retirement tends to be presented as highly stylized and idealized

with yachts," said McConnell. "I think we all realize that's not what retirement is."

Droga5's realistic approach has garnered praise. Day One was chosen as one of 10 ads deemed "worth spreading" in 2011 by TED (Technology, Education and Design). It also won a bronze Clio Award for "integrated advertising campaign" and filled Creativity Online's number eight slot for best television ad in the same year. "We are very proud of this," said McConnell. "It shows that our advertisement holds a social value as well."

An estimated \$50 million media budget

The video spots are gracefully executed, to be sure. But do they help build the Prudential brand or, in the long run, drive sales? According to an August 2010 news story in *Adweek*, Prudential intended to buy \$50 million worth of media alone for the branding campaign. The story noted that Prudential made the unusual move of paying each of at least three advertising agencies \$300,000 for the creative concepts they developed, so that Prudential owns all of the concepts regardless of whether it uses them.

"The campaign is definitely working for us," responds McConnell, who said he plans to continue to expand it and produce even more videos and radio clips.

Prudential used the tool of crowdsourcing to integrate the public into the production of the campaign. The idea was to allow as many people as possible to have a say in the creative direction of the advertisement, thereby garnering more hits on the website and ensuring that Day One is an accurate reflection of the lives of real retirees.

"With crowdsourcing we wanted to start a conversation," said McConnell. "It is a scary and exciting time for baby boomers. We wanted to build commentary around that. It is a hard time to retire."

Prudential and Droga5 created a Day One website and invited people to submit photos of the sunrise on their first day of retirement. After receiving over 5,000 photos, Droga5 created 10 short documentaries and commercials, as well as several radio clips.

The campaign has grown to include an electronic billboard in New York's Times Square showing digital images of the retirees who appeared in the videos, as well as a billboard over the Midtown Tunnel between Manhattan and Queens that passengers in more than one million vehicles see each day. In tourist-jammed Times Square, a camera facing the Prudential billboard photographs each retiree's moment of fame and e-mails them the picture as a memento. The e-mail sparks the retirees to post their photos on Facebook and at www.dayonestories.com.

The Day One website is, in part, a testament to hard times. It hammers home two troubling metrics: that 10,000 Americans are retiring each day and that two-thirds of them don't feel financially prepared for it. "On the website, we want people to hear others' stories and see their pictures and relate to them," said McConnell. "At the same time, at the core of it all is optimism and the belief that there is always something you can do to make retirement better."

Linda Guthrie's Day One

Until camera crews arrived at her house in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on July 22, 2011, Linda Guthrie was not even certain that she would appear in one of the Day One commercials. She had submitted her bio and a short video to a casting agency, and there were hints that she had been chosen. But the crew never called to formally announce its intended arrival. They wanted it to be a surprise.

Guthrie had volunteered at the urging of her husband, Tom, who recently passed away. When she was younger, Guthrie had dabbled in the film industry. Before her husband died, he had encouraged her to give it another shot. "You can just tell what a love she had of her husband," said Brady, noting that, despite his death, "there is still such joy in her. She is all about enjoying each day."

For her part, Guthrie thanks Prudential for giving her a chance to share her own experience in her own words. "People need to realize and admit upfront that retirement is a lifestyle change," she said. "It is not a vacation. People need to realize that there are still going to be hard times. I've had days when I woke up and felt like I wasn't needed."

Guthrie appears to embody the optimism that McConnell referred to—an optimism that infuses the videos and leavens the ads' implicitly gloomy message that most Americans aren't ready for retirement. If effective, the ads will inspire hope and motivate viewers to take action. "Happiness is a momentary thing," Guthrie muses in her Day One video. "It comes and goes. But I think that contentment is there all the time, underneath, even when you're having a problem. And, to be content, you've got to want what you've got."

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