Behind the Campaign: Fire Safety VR Experience

This Campaign was the Winner of Four International ECHO Awards.
Introduction

When ADT began losing its “share of attention” to competitors, the brand decided to articulate its point of difference in an impactful, memorable, and even frightening way.

Instead of relying solely on traditional advertising channels, ADT engaged Harte Hanks to help create an omnichannel campaign that immersed viewers in a paranoia-inducing VR experience.
“We were lucky to have a client who, like us at Harte Hanks, wanted to challenge the norm and appreciated our thinking differently and pushing the boundaries beyond typical advertising.”

Keith Sedlak, Chief Growth Officer at Harte Hanks
ADT’s Four Main Objectives

ADT competitors, Nest and Ring, offer self-install, self-monitor security systems, which are attractive to first-time homeowners but focus on peripheral dangers, such as parcel theft.

To highlight its point of difference, ADT created a VR experience that called attention to the life-threatening perils in the home it is better suited to address, such as carbon monoxide and fire.

This campaign had four main objectives:

1. Differentiate ADT from other brands that offer do-it-yourself monitoring.
2. Educate young homeowners about ADT’s comprehensive 24/7 home monitoring solution.
3. Engage with those researching home security monitoring systems, especially the 28- to 35-year-old demographic.
4. Create a digital buyer journey from a physical activation and compel hard-to-impress millennials to connect with the brand.
“VR was a spec concept from our original RFP pitch, so applying this big idea later to solve a real project’s need for ADT was the ultimate rush of adrenaline. Taking home four ECHO Awards is a testament to everyone’s passion—from agency to client to film director, every person was inspired to create something truly amazing.”

Chris Castano, Creative Director at Harte Hanks
ADT conducted experience-mapping research and discovered that first-time homeowners often lack the support to assess risks and determine their home security system’s best specifications. By diverting attention to content that demonstrated severe risk in their homes (e.g., carbon monoxide and fire), and offering expert installation and home monitoring, ADT believed it could capture market share from Nest and Ring.

ADT’s approach was inspired by French cultural anthropologist Clotaire Rapaille, who challenged brands to imprint their messages on the “reptilian brains,” or amygdalae, of audiences. Neuroscience research indicates that unpleasant virtual reality experiences activate the amygdala and, when triggered by paranoia, compel the viewer to take action as a means of protection.
With this research in mind, Harte Hanks and ADT partnered with BAFTA-winning director Martin Percy to shoot a VR video depicting a real-world fire scenario. The idea was to transform the concept into an action-packed VR video, showcasing the advantages of having an ADT system if or when a house fire should occur.

The VR experience shows a distraught young mother struggling to evacuate her home as she receives a call from a calm, decisive ADT professional. An 8K VR camera rig was used to capture the scene in a way that allowed the viewer to truly feel every moment of panic up close.

To launch its creative experiment, ADT mailed 85,000 Google Cardboard dimensional mail kits to select targets. The direct mail package contained a cardboard viewer that recipients could use to view the immersive 360-degree video on their phone. During the same period, ADT also took advantage of Facebook’s 360 video integration and executed a series of orchestrated posts showcasing the content.
“It’s another example of how Harte Hanks is raising the bar on how to leverage data to inspire innovative, creative thinking in this omnichannel world we live in.”

Keith Sedlak, Chief Growth Officer at Harte Hanks
This Campaign is on Fire

ADT’s PR and activation teams drove interest at the Consumer Electronics Show in 2019 by creating a booth experience with Oculus Go headsets. This experience helped position the brand as innovators and drove coverage in PR Week, DM News, and home security publications.

The campaign also won four 2020 ANA International ECHO Awards in multiple categories, including the highly coveted Golden Mailbox Award, which distinguishes one campaign as the most innovative use of the mail medium.

Additionally, ADT and Harte Hanks made a strong case for psychology and marketing. Most brands often appeal to the “cortex brain” with offers and features. This campaign proved that activating the amygdala with an unpleasant virtual reality experience triggered paranoia, compelling the consumer to take action. And while the video used a fearful scenario like a house fire as an example, the overarching message was really about preparation and safety in an emergency.

ADT’s VR campaign was a massive success, achieving the following results:

- **51X more audience actions taken** (compared to typical mailers)
- **425K Facebook 360 post views**
- **24% increase in sales year-over-year**
“Be fearless in your thinking. And when a client encourages you to go for it, push harder than you’ve ever pushed before. In the end, the result is so incredibly humbling and rewarding for both the agency and the client.”

Keith Sedlak, Chief Growth Officer at Harte Hanks
How did the idea and strategy for the campaign develop? Was there an “ah-ha” moment?

The original idea goes back to our initial agency RFP pitch to ADT! As part of our big-idea thinking, we shared a fresh campaign concept centered around a 360-degree VR video that would transport viewers right into the action of a possible real-life home event. Flash forward a year later, when discovering the need to showcase ADT’s fire and safety benefits, and the “ah-ha” moment was to restart the creative idea from the RFP pitch. We found that a small percentage of people’s first instinct during a home fire was to vacate the premises instantly, so it got us thinking. In concert with our ADT client, the idea was to transform the concept into an action-packed VR video, showcasing the benefits of “why ADT” in terms of a home fire.
Did everything go as planned regarding the campaign development/execution? What starts, stops, pivots, etc., did you experience? Feel free to share challenges here.

With 360-VR being a relatively new medium, it empowered us with the creative freedom to truly go for it. We hired the award-winning, well-known director Martin Percy to capture the essence of our dramatic 360-VR video. For our direct mail component, which contained the VR viewing assembly cardboard, we conducted focus groups to see how easy it was to put the VR viewer together and use a smartphone to view the action. The feedback was critical, as we simplified our messaging and assembly instructions due to a few focus group candidates having trouble with the VR experience.
What role does company culture play when it comes to leveraging innovative marketing ideas?

Company culture is critical. We were lucky to have a client who, like us at Harte Hanks, wanted to challenge the norm and appreciated our thinking differently and pushing the boundaries beyond typical advertising. Simultaneously, the inherent ADT culture of always being there for its customers was paramount in framing the campaign’s entire story arc.

What KPIs did you use to measure success? How did you determine them, and did they evolve?

We looked at a range of business success metrics. After all, the unconventional medium of VR called for a unique way for us to measure success. Sure, we had to look at those traditional methods like research and calls to ADT or clicks on the website, but we also had to do things like social listening to view what consumers were saying about ADT when our campaign went live. How many people viewed our video on YouTube, and how do you overlay that data with visits to the homepage? How did people respond to one Facebook post from our campaign? The campaign helped get people thinking differently about preparing for a home fire and positioned ADT in a thought leadership role.
What is one key learning from this campaign that you would like to share with marketers?

Be fearless in your thinking. And when a client encourages you to go for it, push harder than you’ve ever pushed before. In the end, the result is so incredibly humbling and rewarding for both the agency and the client.

Specific to this campaign, had ADT done anything like this previously?

This was ADT’s first foray into a 360-VR campaign. We were proud to see this project through every step of the way, and the successful results only make it that much more worthwhile.

Can you talk about who was involved in the back-end VR technology? How did you select a vendor to handle the tech?

Hiring the right director was vital for us. We spent a good amount of time researching and interviewing a handful and narrowed it down to Martin Percy, an award-winning director across a wide swath of video campaigns.
What was the approval process like for the content and VR tech?

Like any video, story-board visuals played a significant role in the initial approval process, but just as meaningful was the honest dialogue between the agency, the client, and the director early on in the process. Everyone was on the same page and offered their expertise from day one, and it made for a seamless process along the way.

Was there any concern about the content being too realistic?

Not really, because we needed our video to be authentic for it to be believable. We were transporting consumers into a real-life fire scenario in a home, so realism was the only way to pull this off. But at the same time, we were careful to avoid any “fear factor” emphasis and consciously stayed clear of any fear-based tactics here. It was about preparation and safety.
SOURCES
