

Halo 4 Public Relations Campaign

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The public relations campaign for the science fiction shooter video game *Halo 4*, property of Microsoft, was one of the most successful PR campaigns in video game history. The campaign didn't coordinate just one large stunt, but 3, all of which on massive scales that went viral across on all media. The PR campaign was split up into four different stunts. These stunts were, a tie in movie towards the game, turning Lichtenstein into a real life UNSC base, and flying a halo symbol over the London Bridge at the games release. These stunts within the campaign brought in a very large amount of media coverage and this created massive interest about the game. The game's PR campaign was one of the largest media campaigns of 2012. The game was released on November 6, 2012 with massive success, both critically, and financially, with the PR campaign acquiring praise and respect.

The *Halo* franchise is a bestselling science-fiction first-person shooter video game that was developed by Bungie and now by 343 Industries. The main focus of the franchise is centered on the character of Master Chief John-117, a super soldier and his artificial intelligence companion, Cortana who are fighting alongside humanity against the onslaught of an alliance of aliens called the Covenant. The series is considered Microsoft and Xbox's flagship game due to its popularity and its complexity. The series alone has a massive impact on the video game industry due to its game mechanics and being one of the more revolutionary game series due to it implementing several new mechanics. The *Halo* franchise has sold 46 million game copies worldwide since the first game launched in 2001, with Microsoft estimating the franchise is worth three billion dollars.

The first event in Microsoft's and 343 Industries' PR campaign for Halo 4 was the tie-in movie *Forward Unto Dawn*. The film itself had a \$10 million dollar budget and was Microsoft's largest investment towards a live-action promotion. It was split up into several part that were released onto YouTube starting on October 5th, and ending on November 5th, a day before the games release. The several parts of the series were uploaded weekly until the games release to carry anticipation and interest about the game. The film was a prequel that centered on Thomas Lasky, a prominent character in Halo 4, and his rise in

the UNSC and his friendship with the Master Chief during a Covenant invasion on a planet. The series went viral and was well received for its story, special effects, and for the lore it explored within the Halo universe, and was even nominated for a Primetime Emmy.

The second event in the PR campaign was when Microsoft kicked off the Halo 4 launch by transforming some of the most iconic landmarks in the country of Liechtenstein into a UNSC (United Nations Space Command, the Human government in Halo) Command center for the night of Tuesday Oct. 30, more than 70 media and fans from 16 different countries were taken on a dramatic “Halo 4”-inspired adventure in frigid temperatures as part of a UNSC military crew. Liechtenstein’s iconic Balzers Castle was transformed into a futuristic UNSC fort, a working mine became a battle ground, and finally hundreds of props, pyrotechnics, and actors helped welcome the arrival of Master Chief. The event was recorded live on various platforms of social media such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and on the Xbox website.

The final PR event was the most elaborate of the PR stunts enacted by Microsoft for the game. This event was that Microsoft created a 50ft wide, 3.2 ton orange logo of the Didact/Halo 4 symbol, and flew it over London during the evening of November 6th, 2012, which was the release date of the game. This logo became the biggest man-made object to be flown over a capital city. “The helicopter flew at a height of 600 feet with the Glyph suspended 350 feet above the River Thames.” (xxxx) The logo was flown over many of London’s more famous landmarks such as: Tower Bridge, Tower of London, Canary Warf, and over various location along the Thames. This sparked a ton of buzz and confusion over the streets as many thought that the logo was a UFO. Over 500 people came to see the logo fly over various landmarks and buildings along the Thames.

The PR campaign for *Halo 4* was massively successful. The stunts themselves were well received on all platforms of media and by those who attended and participated. *Halo 4* grossed over \$220 million

on its launch day and over \$300 million in its opening week, a record for the franchise. More than one million people played Halo 4's multiplayer on Xbox within the first 24 hours of release. As of October 25, 2014, *Halo 4* has sold over 9 million copies, the most the series has ever sold.

The first reason for the campaign's success was for the level of creativity involved within the stunts and videos. These stunts were original in their ideas and execution. Other than the *Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* Trilogy, no PR company has tried to recreate the world from which their franchise exists in. This drew many to the UNSC military base in Lichtenstein because it was a chance to experience the scenes and battles shown within the franchise. It created an action-packed atmosphere with excitement and intrigue, which is what the franchise is well known for.

The massive Halo 4 logo flying over the Thames River also brought a massive amount of media attention that lasted for several days even after the release. The massive scale of the logo generated buzz throughout the internet and local news for days, continuing to spark interest about the game even after its release date. The level of scale of this stunt proved that Microsoft will do anything to promote the game, including spending millions of dollars on this massive stunt.

The return of the Master Chief helped the campaign's success immensely. The last game that Master Chief was in was Halo 3 which was released in 2007, so it had been 5 years since the very popular character had been seen on the video game screen. The character of Master Chief is an iconic character not only in video game culture, but in popular culture and the media. The character is a staple to Xbox culture and its history, as well as being almost a brand himself due to his recognizable armor and stoic personality. Thus the return of this character is an important not only to the game and its creators, but to the fan base who loved the character. For his arrival, Microsoft went all out on the marketing and PR stunts to alert the world of the character's return. Microsoft spent millions of dollars on the stunts themselves to make an impact in the media world.

The universe of the franchise is vast and contains thousands of stories, places, and events. The ability to experience them in a first-hand account was well received and appreciated. Fans of the game felt that Microsoft was giving fans an opportunity to live through their favorite game. This manifested not only in the Lichtenstein stunt, but with the *Forward Unto Dawn* web series. Ever since the first game, Hollywood has been trying to create a *Halo* film with famous people like Stephen Spielberg, Peter Jackson and James Cameron attempting to green light their own Halo films, but to no avail. The dream of a live action *Halo* movie came true with this series. The aspect of it being a web series allowed it for mass viewing across the internet by anyone at any time, with unlimited views. Its mass advertisement all across the internet also contributed to the series' success. From social media platforms to even ads on YouTube, the series was advertised and allowed for a massive online audience base that stood around for an entire month of watching the film. People wanted to tune in and watch the series to prepare for the game.

The amount of time, effort, and creativity that went into Halo 4's PR campaign helped make it the massive success that it was. No other game has this much publicity and attention towards its own release. Needless to say, *Halo 4's* PR Campaign will be one that video game companies will look to reference on as the industry moves forward.

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