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WEIRD NEWS

Naked Ambition: How PETA's Strategy of Nearly Nude Protesting Pays Off

Apr 22, 2011 – 8:36 AM

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The letters P-E-T-A stand for "People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals," but you're forgiven if you thought they stood for "Publicity Events involving T and A."

After all, it seems every time there's a slow news day, [PETA](#) is there to take up the slack by doing a publicity campaign revolving around attractive and scantily clad people -- usually women.

The most recent, which took place last month on "[World Water Day](#)," featured some of PETA's vegan vixens taking showers in public places to illustrate how much water is wasted in meat production.

Lindsay Rajt, PETA's campaign department manager, said having attractive women take showers in public serves two purposes.

"We want our demonstrations to show what an attractive, healthy, fit vegan looks like," Rajt told AOL News. "In the case of World Water Day, we were coming up with ideas for a new campaign and wanted to find a way to bring boring statistics to life.

"We crunched the numbers and discovered that the amount of water needed to produce one pound of meat is equivalent to six months of daily showers," Rajt said. "So we thought having members take showers would be a fun way to show that."

Apparently it was a success, according to PR professional Anthony David Adams.

"Having the women take the showers brought that statistic alive," he said. "I still remember it, so it was very effective. PETA is very good at getting free cheap exposure."

Nearly Naked PETA Protests

GOLDFISH RACING SUNK AT BAR

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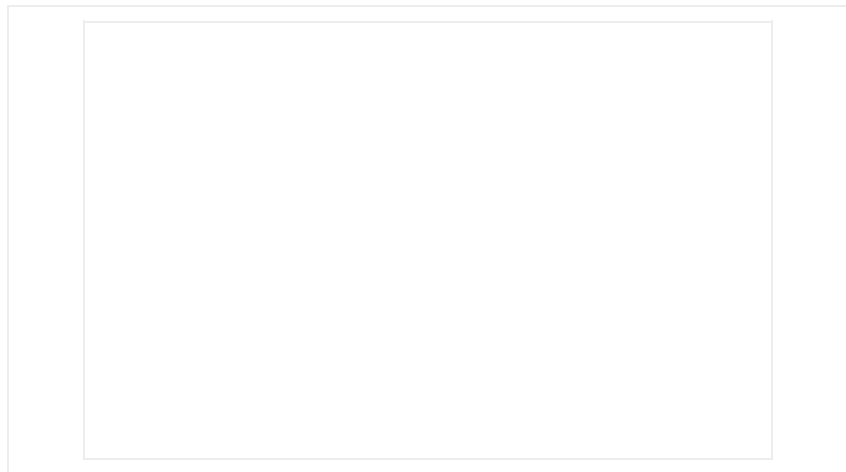
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PETA

8 photos



In the three decades since People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals was formed, the animal rights organization has garnered lots of publicity for protests involving scantily clad women. This protest was

(Note: Please disable your pop-up blocker)

Exposure is a natural double entendre, and while PETA has been around since 1980, it didn't really get international exposure until 1993, when it started its now famous "I'd rather go naked than wear fur" campaign.

That's the one in which various attractive people, including celebrities like supermodel Christy Turlington and actress Pamela Anderson, showed their support by posing au natural.

Before that, PETA did have some success arousing the interest of the fashion world by organizing concerts featuring celebrity supporters like 10,000 Maniacs and Howard Jones.

PETA's efforts helped make fur unfashionable among the fashionistas, but things really took off the day PETA execs decided to start the "I'd rather go naked" campaign by doffing their drawers in Japan.

"It was an idea born of desperation," admitted Dan Mathews, now a senior vice president at PETA. "We were at a fur convention in Japan, trying to arrange a protest, only to discover that the Japanese wouldn't protest. It's looked down upon there and actually gets sympathy for those being protested against.

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Mathews said. "We figured if it caused this much of a sensation, we should do more."

A few months later, they convinced Turlington to pose and the rest is history.

"The great thing about it is, you never get sick of it," Matthews said.

"So we thought to ourselves, 'What can we do to get attention?'"

Well, taking off one's clothes always works in a pinch and that's what they decided to do. With the help of some Japanese student supporters, Mathews and his colleagues printed up signs declaring "I'd rather go naked than wear fur" in Japanese and English.

The media attention the signs garnered was even bigger than they expected, resulting in worldwide news coverage.

"We had more press than we had ever had and animal rights groups from all over the world called us,"

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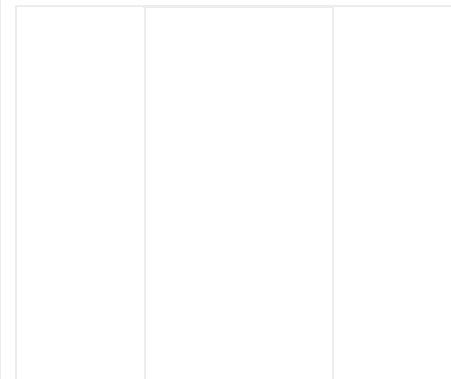
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Women In Jumpsuits Take on Elvis



Courtesy of Jacqueline Feilich

6 photos



Jacqueline Feilich, a lady Elvis tribute artist from Australia, is known as "She Is The King." She's been moonlighting as a female Elvis for the past 12 years, performing modern-day versions of the rock 'n' roll icon's classic songs. [\(Read More\)](#)

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The organization continues to use that campaign while devising new ones, including the recent World Water Day event and the current campaign offering [free vasectomies](#) to men who get their dogs spayed and/or neutered.

Meanwhile, PETA also has local chapters do their own versions of past stunts. One standout was the infamous "meat tray" event, in which PETA covered a scantily clad woman in fake blood and cellophane to resemble packaged meat purchased at the local grocery store.

"It shows that animals, like us, are all flesh and blood," Rajt said. "It's very effective."

Or is it? Well, that depends on what PETA is going for, according to media relations expert [Amy Malin](#).

"They are very effective in getting eyeballs," said Malin, who happens to be vegetarian. "But I'm not always sure if their message gets across."

"For instance, having naked women on a barbecue is interesting and sexy, but I think more people may focus on the sexy women than the idea they're trying to convey that meat is murder."

Malin also wonders if PETA campaigns -- like the one in Germany that compared killing chickens to murdering people in concentration camps -- go a bit too far.

"I understood the point (of that campaign), but I don't agree with the execution," Malin said.

Extreme as it was, Rajt had no regrets about that one.

"It's said that the only thing we learn from history is that we don't learn from history: we simply change the victims and keep the behavior," she said. "The mindset that allowed the Holocaust to happen is present today in the form of factory farming."

But Gary McCormick, former president of the [Public Relations Society of America](#), said PETA would do well to remember that not all publicity is good publicity.

"If you are extreme in measures, you limit the audience," he said. "Several stunts ostracize people who otherwise support animal rights."

Whether or not PETA's stunts actually gain supporters is immaterial to activists like Chris Wangro, who specializes in political theater.

He said the PETA people won a place in his "trouble-making heart" when they organized a protest at an event for the [Council of Fashion Designers of America](#).

"They took over the [Cipriani](#) building at a big, fancy, high-security event, having a bunch of their people show up dressed in furs," Wangro said. "Then they had some other followers attack them with fake blood at the exact same moment other members handcuffed themselves to the door."

Although PR types like McCormick and Malin believe PETA hurts itself with such outrageous stunts, Wangro wholeheartedly approves.

"They raise awareness, not just sympathy," he said. "I'm tired of people being sympathetic. I like how they're making people afraid to wear fur or design it."

On the other hand, professional prankster [Alan Abel](#) thinks PETA might be better off contemplating whether its stunts actually compromise its message.

"They're rabble-rousers with a mission," Abel said. "And they know how to attract attention on slow news days, when there are no ax murderers or invasions of foreign countries. However, I think they should try to create their campaigns on a higher level. I don't know if it gains support."

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Abel speaks from personal experience. Back in the 1960s, he created a satirical protest against censorship in which he protested against animals being naked.

"Our slogan was 'A nude animal is a rude animal' and the media fell for it," he said. "Even Walter Cronkite. It went six, seven years before there was an expose. We got tons of publicity, but we failed in getting the original point across," Abel said.

But Mathews believes PETA's formula of hot women protesting meat-eating still has plenty of mileage left.

"We're a very aspirational society and it makes sense for us to use attractive, vibrant people," he said. "The press and public seem to respond to women and more than half of the people who visit our site click on the pictures showing attractive women."

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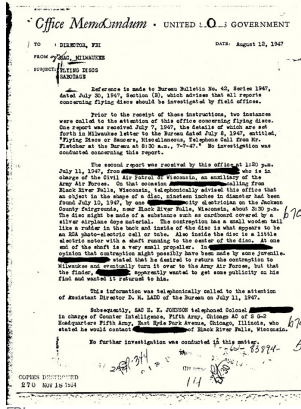
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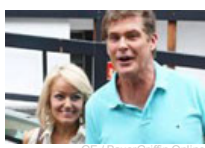



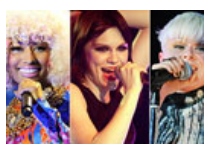




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