

Marketing Concept:
Creating a Unique Image for a Medium-sized
Conference Centre and a Second Destination

GRAZER CONGRESS
CONVENTION CENTER GRAZ • AUSTRIA



I. Introduction

25 years ago, at a time when large, purpose-built conference centres in major cities were already all the rage, Graz opened a medium-sized meeting venue in a historic building located in the city centre, named the Grazer Congress.

Graz is Austria's second city with 250,000 inhabitants, located in the south-east of the country.

- It has one of the largest and best preserved historic city centres in central Europe – honoured with the title UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site.
- Graz is a university city, with four universities and more than 40,000 students.
- Numerous scientific institutions and businesses of international acclaim specialising in leading edge technologies have made Graz an international landmark of innovative research and development.
- This city, so rich in history, is an inspiring backdrop for a lively avant-garde in literature, architecture, culture and the arts: Steirischer Herbst avant-garde festival, Graz School of Modern Architecture, center of contemporary German literature, "Graz 2003 – Cultural Capital of Europe"

The **Grazer Congress** is a venue for events of all kinds, in prime city location. It offers a total of 2,900 square metres of highly versatile open-plan exhibition space and 19 rooms with capacities for up to 1,100 guests. The convention centre accommodates conferences for up to 1,500 delegates, as well as balls, gala dinners and special events for up to 2,400 people.

When the Grazer Congress opened in 1980, Graz was a no-name destination for meeting planners, tourism marketing for the city did not exist, and international accessibility was poor.



II. The Task and the Target Market

The Task

The prime task of the Grazer Congress management in 1980 was to effectively position a medium-sized conference center and a second (no-name) destination on the international market. To promote the destination and to strengthen its recognition as a meetings destination were paramount. Grazer Congress had to define a clear USP for the product, to implement international standards and to position a strong brand “Grazer Congress” on the international market. It had to create a marketing and communication strategy that reflected its USP of historic ambience, inner-city location, state-of-the-art conference technology, professional services and progressive ideas.

The Target Market

With a strong university hinterland (four universities including a medical and technical university) and Austria’s second largest independent R&D company in the city, it was evident that Grazer Congress would target the national and international association market. On the corporate side Grazer Congress relies on the many high-tech companies with international acclaim in the automobile industry (Graz is often referred to as the “Detroit of the Alps”), the IT and chip industry, biomedicine or nanotechnology. Grazer Congress combines international marketing activities with a strong local presence. Key markets besides Austria are Germany, Benelux, UK, France, Italy and North America.

III. Marketing & Communication

The crucial point in mapping out a marketing and communication concept for Grazer Congress was to reconcile the emphasis on historic ambience with the modernity of the center in equipment and services. The concept had to get Grazer Congress' USP effectively across to an international audience in a very distinct and unique way and had to meet the center's quality criteria. All this had to be achieved on a limited budget and in a universal language.

The answer was twofold: put a strong emphasis on the historic positioning of the center on the one hand, and convey its modernity through modern art at the same time.



1) Historic Conference Centres of Europe

Grazer Congress' emphasis on its historic ambience and inner-city location led to the foundation of the international marketing alliance "Historic Conference Centres of Europe" (HCCE) in 1996 by the CEOs of Grazer Congress and the Hofburg Congress Center Vienna.

The idea behind HCCE is to draw more attention to

- conference centers in historic buildings
- providing state-of-the-art conference technology and
- have a professional management

The alliance now has 22 members in 12 European countries

It is a quality seal for members and an international marketing platform

The alliance developed and grew from the Grazer Congress based HCCE head office for nine years until 2004.



HISTORIC
CONFERENCE CENTRES
OF EUROPE

Tradition and Progress. It is a widespread prejudice that conference centers in historic buildings are less well equipped and functional than purpose-built centers. Grazer Congress has therefore always invested heavily into the latest communication technology and the new media:

- Website since 1994 as one of the first convention centers worldwide
- 3D model of the center earned laurels even from Silicon Graphics; it was featured on the frontpage of the Silicon Graphics website for several weeks as an outstanding example of 3D implementation
- Grazer Congress provides the latest conference and communication technology, like the most modern digital sound-system, structured cabling since 1996 and WI-FI in the entire building, to give but a few examples.



Lobby: Thomas Stimm "Untitled"
(sculpture, 1999)

2) Modern Art

Modern art plays a crucial role both in the product "Grazer Congress" and in its communication strategy. Why?

Besides emphasising its historic ambience, Grazer Congress needed to convey the modernity of the center. It had to find a balance between tradition and progress. A matching solution was found in modern art.

The personal involvement of Nikolaus Breisach, CEO of Grazer Congress, in the modern arts world contributed to the implementation of modern art at the center. Breisach is a collector of modern art, and since 1985 runs the modern art Gallery CC in the basement of the convention center premises; Breisach is also the chairman of the Austrian Sculpture Park private foundation.



Long Hall: Herbert Schmalix "Untitled", Thomas Stimm "Terranean Wonderwalk", Herbert Brandl "Sunset Congress" (1999)



Exhibition Hall: Dorothee Golz "Standing Tables" (2004)



Beethovenfoyer: Michael Schuster "To whom it may concern" (2005)



Exhibition Hall: Erwin Bohatsch "Untitled" (1999)

a) Modern Art in the Product Design

Conversion works and general refurbishment in 1999 in a part of the building that had lost all its historic applications over the years were the chance to give the "new wing" of the center a very distinct character. Styles in architecture and design come and go and what is fashionable today is out-dated tomorrow. Grazer Congress' answer to the question of what is of lasting or even increasing value was: "Art!"

Artists enlisted for the modern wing of Grazer Congress are among the best of their generation and respective disciplines: Hubert Schmalix, Erwin Bohatsch, Gustav Troger, Herbert Brandl, Thomas Stimm, Michael Kienzer, Stefan Sandner and Tobias Pils

Grazer Congress continues to integrate works of contemporary artists in its halls and rooms - recent additions in 2004 include

- a light and mirror installation in the glass-dome of the historic Beethovenfoyer by Sigrun Appelt/Gerold Tagwerker
- standing tables by the young female artist Dorothee Golz
- a gouache by Herbert Brandl to cover the historic organ in the main hall during conferences
- a neon light sculpture by Michael Schuster (2005) entitled "To whom it may concern"



Foyer Saal Steiermark: Tobias Pils "Untitled", Michael Kienzer "Untitled", Thomas Stimm "Terranean Wonderwalk" (1999)



Beethovenfoyer: Siegrun Appelt, Gerold Tagwerker "Mirror/light.dome" (2004)

Results. The new wing of the center is very well accepted by clients also for prestigious events, which were previously held mainly in the historic part of the center.

- the occupancy rate of the new part raised from 393 occupancies in 2000 to 706 in 2001 and has since remained equally high
- this is also reflected in the revenue statistics which show a noteworthy increase since the refurbishment.



Beethovenfoyer: Erwin Wurm "One-Minute-Sculpture" (2001)

b) Modern Art in the Communication Strategy

Grazer Congress' communication strategy had to mirror the product philosophy of blending tradition and modernity.

The logical step was to continue the art theme in the center's communication and advertising.

Stefaniensaal:
Erwin Wurm "One-
Minute-Sculpture"
(2001)

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GRAZER CONGRESS
Convention Center Graz, Austria

Print Advertising

The "bigger, better, more beautiful" advertising message? Not again!

Niki Breisach asked his friend Erwin Wurm, shooting-star of the modern arts world, to photograph a series of his one-minute-sculptures at the Grazer Congress which could henceforth be used as the center's advertising campaign. A series of exclusive CC Indoor Sculptures was produced, contrasting the Old with the New in the center's halls and rooms. The original photographs also feature as works of art in the convention center.

Erwin Wurm's One-Minute-Sculptures centre on a concern with widening the definition of sculpture to include a psychological approach. He focuses on the essence of sculpture as a human activity. For him, sculpture is not a carefully worked out, final result but action. Erwin Wurm is one of the most internationally acclaimed Austrian artists of his generation; one man shows at major international galleries included the Hayward (London), the Centre Nationale de la Photographie (Paris), the Picasso Museum (Antibes), the Fundacio Joan Miró (Barcelona), or the Guggenheim Collection (Venice), besides leading galleries in the USA, Asia and Australia. The work of Erwin Wurm also figures in the collection at the Pompidou Centre, which owns 48 photographs from the One-Minute-Sculptures series. One of Wurm's latest works is a One-Minute-Sculpture showing Franz Beckenbauer displayed at the Rundlederwelten-Exhibition in Berlin in connection with the FIFA World Championships 2006.



Long Hall: Erwin Wurm "One-Minute-Sculpture" (2001)



Blauer Salon: Erwin Wurm "One-Minute-Sculpture" (2001)



Exhibition Hall: Erwin Wurm "One-Minute-Sculpture" (2001)



Beethovenfoyer: Erwin Wurm "One-Minute-Sculpture" (2001)

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spring/summer 2005



Books on Art and Culture

From the World's Finest International, Independent & Museum Publishers

DANCE



From Thomas (London: Springer, 1999) from the series "Culture". Courtesy: the artist and Just Thinking Gallery, San Francisco

Movement participates in becoming, deterritorialising relationships and rupturing static configurations of power

...reconsidering physical or representational experience based on action and movement. This experience emerges in a series of configurations which engage movement. It is here that the dynamics of these relations within the affective and present. While the impact force of movement is the work of immediate experience and use of the more explicit states for a perception. Deliberate mediation and reaction. These dynamic relations for the movement of a fluid planning form to more solid operation. Inside the composition, the figure within a series of oblonging to emerge from what might seem horizon. The figure within a linear trajectory and movement. The figure within a linear trajectory is relative to an up. The composition depicts: "to move on a plane. It is a linear, open, or which the need to travel upon the line another and, ultimately, on the trajectory. It is a circle.

38 contemporary



warner reeler
the experience of being an art work
filthy architecture: new locke electronic punk and suicide

45.00
40.00
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25.00
20.00
15.00
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Results. Various editorials in the national and international daily and trade press, in arts magazine and economic special interest press, e.g.:

- Front page of D.A.P art catalogue spring/summer 2005 edition (USA)
- "Contemporary" Magazine No. 73/2005 (UK)
- Spanish and Japanese arts magazines
- books published on Wurm's opus

Such publicity is an added value and has led to a broader recognition of the Grazer Congress venue, beyond its core areas of business.



TV Spot

conceived by Erwin Wurm

direct continuation of the center's advertising line created by the artist's one minute sculpture series

aired several times at the Austrian TV channel ATV+

now used as a promotional tool

the TV Spot can be viewed on the Grazer Congress-website under:

www.grazercongress.at

Results. Jury's special prize at the International Grand Prix for Tourism Marketing 2003. Presented as an outstanding example for positive customer impact in the lectures of the media expert Dr. Christian Mikunda on congress and event dramaturgy.



Finally we all ended up among the dark barrels of an old wine cellar where everybody sat sipping the fine vintages, already rather tired. Yet the general air of contemplation was again drowned out by the roaring voice of the Munich bank manager. I wanted to shut him up somehow so I tried to hypnotize him, though I had never hypnotized anyone in my life. "Ping! You're hypnotized!" I shouted at him and continued my amateur hypnosis with murmured phrases and what I imagined to be the right gestures. All of a sudden he began to cluck and strut around like a chicken. But suddenly, too, all the others in the group began making all sorts of animal noises – clucking, barking, mooing and chirping. The wine cellar had become a madhouse and the landlady stood at the door and commented: "I ain't seen anything like it in all my born days!"

Soon, however, this animal opera died down and all was quiet again – the bank manager, too. Now he was exceedingly pleasant, quiet and courteous. I wonder, was that a specifically "Styrian" experience? I've no idea. I don't know what goes on in the dark forests, on the stormy mountain tops and in the cold gorges of Styria.

Quite likely it is different to what happens in other provinces and countries. At any rate, it is interesting and well worth a try for tourists. How sweet and harmless this green patch of land looks!



Grazer Congress Catalogue

Produced in cooperation with art photographers like Bernhard Fuchs, Helmut Tezak or Christian Wachter

The late Styrian poet Wolfgang Bauer wrote a charming story about Graz and the province of Styria

Available in a German and an English version

No agency or scriptwriter was involved in the conception of the catalogue

Grand Prix for Tourism Marketing 2003 in the respective category



Direct Mail: Flipbook “25th Anniversary Grazer Congress”

- direct mail to 2,500 personalized contacts of the corporate and association market on the occasion of the center’s anniversary in 2005
- two-piece production in a neat slipcase: one flip book is a one-minute-book-sculpture by the artist Erwin Wurm; the second flip book displays the halls and meeting rooms, introduces the centre’s team and gives contact details.
- compact information on the venue for target market presented in a playful and entertaining way
- high-quality communication tool produced on a limited budget (at €4,70 per piece)
- attracts attention and has lead to the desired response



Results. The response from addressees indicates that the life span of this production is much longer than that of most direct mails

- the campaign has lead to a noticeable increase in requests for information from national and international meeting planners
- the flip book was featured in several editorials in the trade press and national newspapers
- Special Prize of the Jury at the International Grand Prix for Tourism Marketing 2005

Some examples of reactions to the flip book mailing:

A. Reber, Swisslog (CH): *"Many thanks for the two flipbooks. What a fantastic idea! "*

Ch. Brünner, European Center for Space Law (A): *"Many thanks for the funny flipbooks, which I most enjoy!"*

Eurocongres (NL): *"Nice to hear from you and congratulations on the 25th anniversary [...] the coming years a few of our congresses will take place in Vienna, but perhaps Graz can accommodate them as well"*

T. Trenkler, art critic at Der Standard daily newspaper (A): *"what a fantastic addition to the CI of Grazer Congress and just the ideal present to those considering to hold an event at your venue [...] to commission and support artists from Graz: carry on with it!"*

O. Kitz, Casinos Austria (A): *"what an amusing way to get your message across; by reviving an emotionally positively charged retro-technique. Score on a playful note! My high-tech world had a rest for a few moments".*

A. Kresch, Remus Corporate Group: *"every time I hear from you, it is something new and witty! Congratulations!"*



Art for Christmas

Grazer Congress presents works of modern art as Christmas presents to its clients and partners

Artists who have created special Christmas editions for the convention center in recent years include Erwin Bohatsch, Hubert Schmalix, Tom Carr, Tobias Pils, Erwin Wurm, Jakob Gasteiger, Alois Mosbacher or Heimo Zobernig, to name but a few.



www.grazercongress.at

- user-friendly service pages that convey the atmosphere of Grazer Congress [by Alexander Kada (design) and digital_context (programming)]
- pictures are streamed in parallel right from the start; the section chosen by the users is given priority
- functional and festive design
- portrayal of Grazer Congress with a strong dash of charm that reflects the center's philosophy

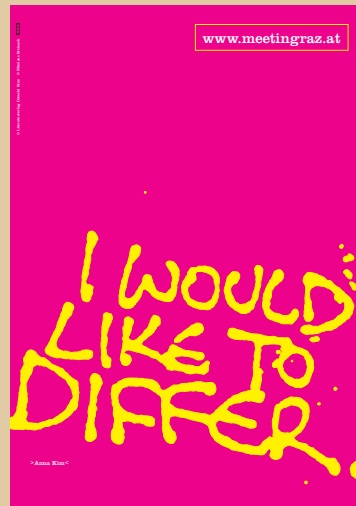
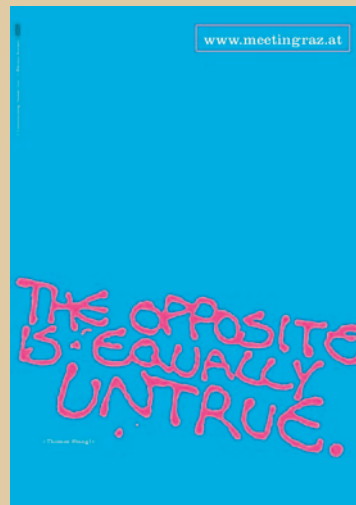
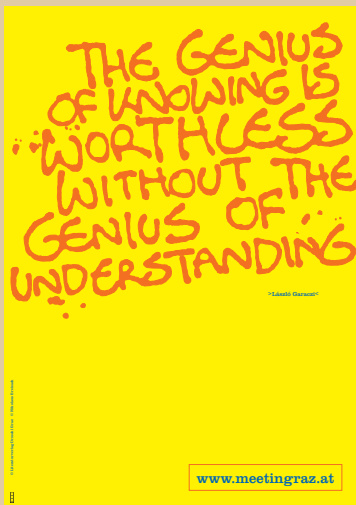


IV. Effectiveness of the Marketing Efforts

- During the 1980s and 90s Graz became **Austria's second conference destination** after Vienna and until today is competing with Innsbruck for this position.
- The **awareness** of Graz as an international meetings destination has increased considerably
- The **local conference infrastructure** and suprastructure continues to improve not least because of the successful international activities of Grazer Congress: accessibility, hotel infrastructure, quality and effectiveness of destination marketing by a dedicated tourist office
- The "Historic Conference Centres of Europe" alliance has led to a broad international recognition of historic conference centers fulfilling the alliance's strict criteria. **HCCE has become a strong brand** that gives member centers a clear profile among international competitors.
- The marketing activities of Grazer Congress have gained recognition at various **national and international competitions**:
 - International Grand Prix for Tourism Marketing 2005 and 2003 (flip book direct mail; TV spot and catalogue)
 - Grand Prix Events Award 2002 for the center's overall marketing efforts
 - Lorenzo dei Medici Award 2002 to Nikolaus Breisach for outstanding services to the international conference tourism industry
 - Several AIPC's APEX Awards in various categories

V. Business Results

- 246 events per year (or 6.158 events on 9.349 events days in 25 years)
- 200,000 visitors every year
- 50 – 60 annual meetings and conventions (20 – 30 of which are international or with a strong international delegation)
- 40% of the overall turnover at Grazer Congress is from convention business (as compared to an international average of 30%)
- +20% in congress turnover for 2006 over this year (current booking situation)
- EURO 20 Million per year in added value for the city of Graz that can be assessed to the activities of Grazer Congress (based on a survey by the ÖHT Österreichische Hotel Treuhand)
- 12 – 15% of all overnight stays in Graz, or approximately 100,000 bednights per year can be accounted for by the conference business (the international average is at 10%). Half can be allocated to the activities of Grazer Congress.



VI. www.meetingraz.at

The number of conference and event locations in Graz has multiplied over the past years – not least as a result of “Graz 2003 – Cultural Capital of Europe”. This brought about the **need for an umbrella brand** and an integrative USP for Graz as a meetings destination that covers all local suppliers.

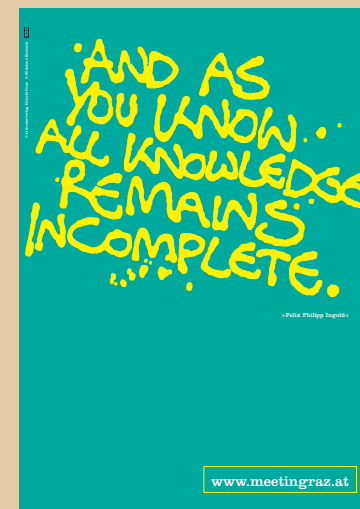
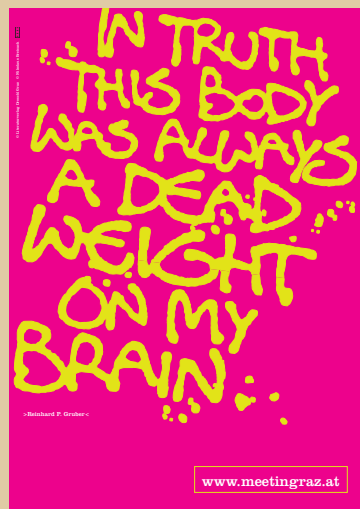
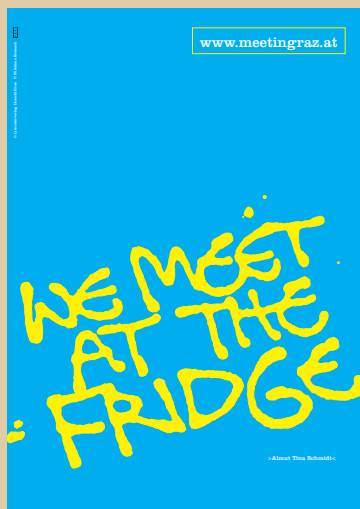
The management of Grazer Congress developed and introduced the trademark Meetingraz.at

The destination marketing campaign **continues the arts theme**, but with the **focus on literature**. It conveys the quality and competence of Graz as a communication center through the city’s reputation as the capital of modern German literature.

Ten quotations by contemporary poets, all dealing with “communication” in the broad sense, were selected together with the local publishing house Droschl to form a print advertising campaign. The graphic design is by Perndl + Co (Vienna).

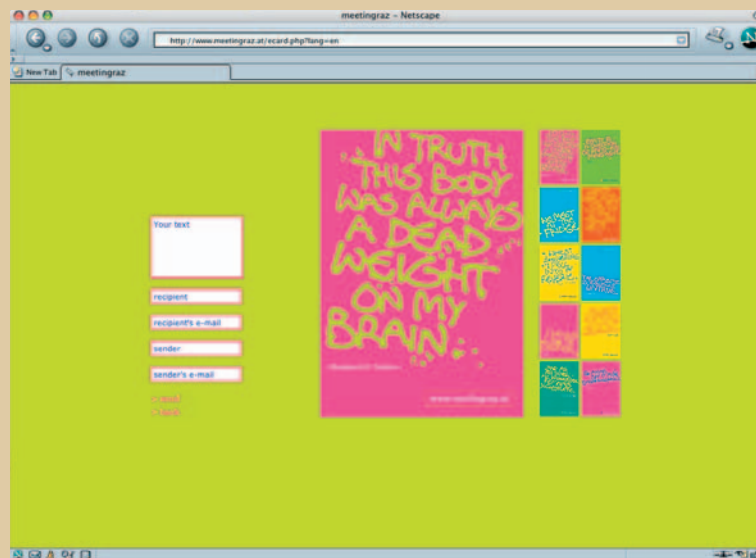
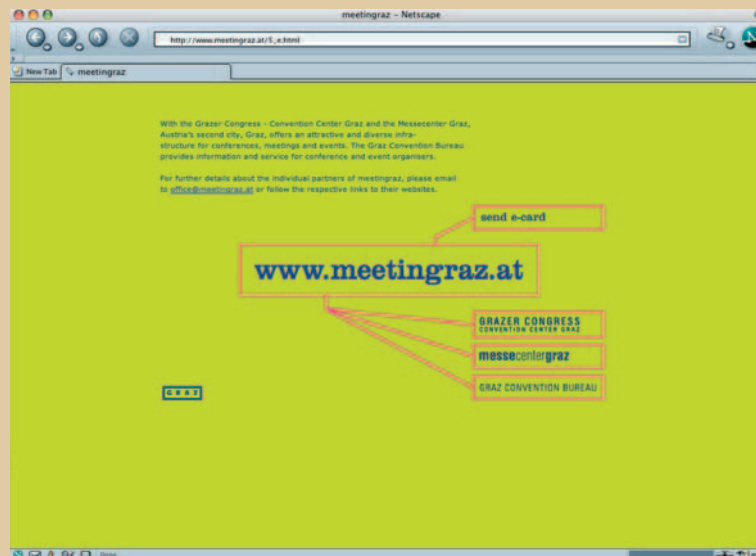
The portal **www.meetingraz.at is a one-stop-shop** for meeting planners interested in Graz and for further information links to the three partners of meetingraz, Grazer Congress, the Graz Convention Bureau and Messecentergraz. All executions are available as e-cards on the portal in German and English.

T-Shirts and stickers were produced as **merchandising** and give-aways for clients.



Meetingraz **exploits existing synergies**, and **reduces marketing costs** for the partners. Until now the costs per partner amount to EURO 20,000 including copyright, all production costs for artwork, website and merchandising and including ten 1/1 4C print advertisements.

The meetingraz campaign aims at the national and international **corporate, association and exhibition market**. The goal of the campaign is to increase the number of overnight stays accounted for by the conference business to around 120,000 over the coming years.



Results (so far)

The campaign was launched in April 2005

Print ads have appeared in the German trade magazines events (1/2005), CIM (2/2005) and Convention International (September 2005), and the English trade publication M&IT (June 2005), besides some Austrian publications. More ads in trade magazines will be run in autumn in Tagungswirtschaft (5/2005) or M.I.C. (October 2005).

Response is measured via the portal site www.meetinggraz.at. Statistics show that the publication of advertisements clearly corresponds with an increase in visits to the website; 2,000 individual users visited the website until mid-October 2005 viewing an average of 6 pages per visit.

By joining the budgets of all three partners, the **representation of Graz** in the press and thus on the international market is much **broader and more frequent**.

The creative idea and implementation of the campaign have already led to a couple of **editorial features** about "meetinggraz".

The **jury's special award at the Austrian State Awards for Advertising** is the latest success of this very young campaign. The jury's explanation of its decision states: **"What appeals about this campaign is the way that it captures the essence of the message despite a modest budget. It highlights the city's artistic and intellectual aspirations (city of culture) without indulging in the usual tourist hype."**

The objective of the Ministry of Economics and Labour's State Prize for Advertising is to showcase the Austrian advertising industry and strengthen its competitiveness. The jury assesses and commends advertising campaigns in terms of their creative design, efficiency and impact. Meetingraz – again developed without an advertising agency - competed with leading agencies like McCann Erickson, Ogilvy & Mather, Lowe G&K, or Saatchi & Saatchi in this competition.

ICCA Best Marketing Award 2005

Campaign Details

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