UN congratulates LEMZ on the global impact of ‘Sweetie’ campaign

Amsterdam, February 18, 2014

Last week, the United Nations congratulated us for the impact that our latest international campaign had on a growing new form of child exploitation. We hesitated for several months about whether to reveal the fact that we were behind the Sweetie campaign for Terre des Hommes Netherlands, but we decided to go public after the UN strongly encouraged us to share what we have learned with the marketing world.

We believe that businesses, and creative agencies in particular, should use their talents and resources to make this world a better place. The Sweetie campaign proves that creative agencies can have significant impacts on global problems that may seem to have no relevance to our industry or to our daily lives. We call upon the worldwide creative industry to dedicate more of their creativity and passion to solving the many problems that face humankind; because the power of creativity can provide new solutions and new hope to a world in which deepening crises, growing inequity, and profound injustice are increasingly met with cynicism, apathy, and paralysis. We have an opportunity to forge a better future…and to have fun doing it together.

In early 2013, we offered to help Terre des Hommes Netherlands when we first learned about this new form of child exploitation that is spreading like an epidemic. Men from rich countries pay children in poor countries to perform sexual acts in front of webcams. We conducted research for nearly a year and we called this crime Webcam Child Sex Tourism (WCST).

WCST happens tens of thousands of times a day, but prior to this campaign, only 6 men had ever been convicted of the crime. We developed a 3D model that looked and moved like a 10-year-old Filipino girl and we called her “Sweetie.” With Sweetie, we went on public chat rooms and interacted with over 20,000 predators. We gathered incriminating evidence and information about them. In two months, we caught in the act and identified 1,000 predators from 71 countries. Governments were urged to act after the world witnessed us handing over our short movie (youtube.com/sweetie), research findings, and the 1,000 names to Interpol.

This campaign put a spotlight on an unknown form of child exploitation and it reached over 1 billion viewers on every continent, putting WCST firmly on the world agenda. As a result, governments are now taking action: policies have been changed, the Philippines National Police announced that WCST is the country’s number one crime, online predators are being arrested based on the evidence we collected, and child victims are being rescued.

Since finishing this campaign, we have moved on to other radically innovative projects that address different problems, but the Sweetie campaign was a profoundly inspiring and educational experience for all of us at Lemz thanks in large part to the passion, determination, and professionalism of everyone at Terre des Hommes Netherlands. Working for a client of that caliber was a true honor for us and we wish them further success in their endeavors.

We would also like to thank the following partners who helped make the Sweetie campaign such a massive success: Google, Avaaz.org, Brouhaha, Eyehear, JDBgraphics, Motek Entertainment, Brekel 3D, Michiel van Iperen, Khitan Digital, Code d’Azur, MediaMonks, Soundcircus, Studio De Keuken, STORM post production, Tetteroo Media, Integis, Helena Verhagen, Mark van der Werff, Brian van Rosmalen and Stéphane Jeannet Human Solutions Consulting.

We are grateful for their enormous contributions, both in energy and in money, to making this happen. For more information about this campaign and to view the short movie seen around the world, please visit: youtube.com/sweetie. And please sign the global petition on avaaz.org/wcst to encourage more governments to adopt pro-active policing policies. The struggle to eradicate Webcam Child Sex Tourism is not yet over, but the world is now moving in that direction.

With great hope,

Mark Woerde
Strategy director and co-founder LEMZ, founder Letsheal.org