

BAM!

**A Strategic Public Relations Plan
for Books-A-Million**

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Executive Summary

This strategic public relations plan aims to create meaningful, lasting relationships on Books-A-Million's behalf in order to protect its future as a traditional brick-and-mortar bookstore in a digital era. While it exists in a world that is dominated by online shopping and technology, Books-A-Million's real problem resides in the reality that it is not connecting with the large group of people who prefer reading paper books and enjoy the feelings that they experience in bookstores exclusively. Online shopping cannot provide the same atmosphere, vibes and tangibility that bookstores provide, and studies show that millennials, especially, prefer paper books to e-books. This plan capitalizes on these truths in a simple yet impactful way.

Over the course of six months, the goal of this plan is to significantly strengthen Books-A-Million's online presence and its image as a welcoming and inviting bookstore full of hard copy books. Through creative strategies, tactics and compelling messages that speak directly to three key publics (millennials, educators and the traditional media), the ideas proposed in this plan would stimulate significant conversation both online and in person. These key publics were chosen based on secondary research that revealed their unique relationships with bookstores, paper books and Books-A-Million.

At the heart of this public relations plan is a social media campaign titled, "Get Cozy With BAM!" In more detail, this campaign is all about key publics "getting cozy" with Books-A-Million through interactive social media engagement that draws users to stores but also encourages discussion on paper books. "Get Cozy With BAM!" highlights the timeless attributes of the bookstore by utilizing popular social media features and by publicizing contests, sweepstakes and new activities. Under the guidance of a public relations director, campaign manager, media relations specialist and their staff members, a careful execution of this plan will not only help Books-A-Million reach its goal, but the campaign will generate interest among the traditional media, whose coverage could lead to the promotion of the campaign on a larger scale.

The campaign would cost \$70,566 and would run from December 2018 to May 2019. Before and after the campaign, the public relations team would conduct surveys and focus group sessions to test reception of messages and gain insight on attitudes from millennials and educators. Regarding the traditional media, the team would analyze positive media coverage using media monitoring tools on an ongoing basis.

Introduction

Client:
Books-A-Million

Headquarters:
Birmingham, Alabama

Established:
1917

This strategic public relations plan for Books-A-Million is a comprehensive publication that contains a detailed look at the client's history, its strengths and weaknesses, its competitors, critical factors in the industry and book-reading trends and preferences that relate to the purpose of this campaign.

The strategies, tactics and key messages in this plan are designed to target key publics that are essential to reach in terms of achieving the primary goal of the campaign: to significantly strengthen Books-A-Million's online presence and its image as a welcoming and inviting bookstore that offers the pleasures of reading paper books.

This plan benefits not only Books-A-Million, but the campaign messages reconnect people to the timeless value of an American bookstore experience and the books within.



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Issue Background¹

Books-A-Million relies on people who are loyal to the century-old brick-and-mortar bookstore. However, it must keep up with the times and establish itself with key publics through engaging and exciting social media content that showcases what makes shopping at the store a psychologically satisfying experience. Unfortunately, Books-A-Million does not have a distinct brand personality or a strong online presence. But competitors like Amazon and Walmart interact resourcefully with social media users daily, and they are cultivating powerful and personalized online presences while simultaneously building relationships with people.

To secure its future, Books-A-Million needs to bank on what online shopping and e-books cannot offer: cozy bookstore vibes and the comforting characteristics of hard copy books. More specifically, Books-A-Million needs to publicize these benefits with a relationship-building social media campaign.

Promisingly, for Books-A-Million, most people prefer the attributes that paper books embody. A 2018 study on book-reading habits showed:

Participants described being more emotionally attached to physical books, and said they use physical books to establish a sense of self and belonging. Participants across age groups frequently spoke about their nostalgia for certain childhood books. They also talked about experiencing physical books through multiple senses—describing, for example, the sound, smell, and tactile experience of opening a new book, and the ability to highlight or write notes on paper pages. Participants also said they use their physical book collections to express their identity to others who might be perusing their shelves. E-books did not have these associations. (Blue, 2018)

While online shopping is extremely popular due to its speed and convenience, and while e-books take up around 25 percent of total book sales, the results of the book-reading study are encouraging for companies like Books-A-Million (Statista, 2018a).



¹ See section Appendix A for sources in this section.

External Analysis²

In an environment that is continuing to become more and more technologically advanced, some people still long for the nostalgia of a physical book. According to an Inc.com article, people prefer reading physical books to e-books for many reasons, but most notably, for their durability and potential to make meaningful gifts (Leibowitz, 2017). As a result, in the book industry, physical book sales are increasing compared to those of e-books. According to a Wall Street Journal article, e-book sales in the United States were down 17 percent in 2017, and physical book sales were up 4.5 percent (Turner, 2017).

This shows the changing environment where people prefer to hold a physical book versus picking up a Kindle. Here, Books-A-Million has a significant advantage and can tap into the market of nostalgia people are longing for. Even though sales for e-books are dropping, there are still many supporters of digital copies. For example, in an opinion piece, Michael Angier (2018), stated that e-books are easier to attain, portable and help the environment by reducing paper. Across many articles, this seems to be a common trend as to why some people prefer e-books to physical books. People can access e-books from essentially any electronic device they have, and they make searching within textbooks or dictionaries much easier.

² See Appendix A for sources in this section.

The Client³

Books-A-Million: History

Books-A-Million was founded as a newspaper stand in 1917 (Books-A-Million, 2018). After 14-year-old Clyde W. Anderson dropped out of school to support his family after the death of his father, his first job was delivering newspapers to residents within his hometown of Florence, Alabama. Shortly after, he learned from a large group of construction workers who came from the north to build the Wilson Dam that they missed reading their hometown newspapers. After this conversation, Anderson saw a business opportunity. He contacted northern newspapers and made a deal with the railroad to have the papers delivered to Florence. As a result, he built his newsstand using old piano crates and began to run a successful business. A few years later, Anderson and his brother invested their profits in a bookstore.

In 1950, Charles C. Anderson, Clyde W. Anderson's son, inherited the store and expanded it into a chain of stores called Bookland; he incorporated it under that name in 1964. By 1980, the company had 50 stores. Eight years later, in 1988, Bookland acquired the Gateway Books retail chain and opened its first superstore. Eventually, Charles C. Anderson's sons, Charles Jr. and Clyde B., began working at the wholesale store and bookstore.

In 1992, Bookland changed its name to Books-A-Million and became a public company through an offering of 2.6 million shares, costing 13 cents each. That year, Clyde B. became CEO, and Charles Jr. took over the family's wholesale book distributorship. By 1993, Books-A-Million operated 113 stores throughout the southeastern United States. In 1998, the company continued to expand by launching its e-commerce website. One year later, Books-A-Million acquired NetCentral, the designer of its website, and became a book wholesaler and distributor (Books-A-Million, 2018). In April 2010, Books-A-Million paid \$3 million for a 40 percent stake in Yogurt Mountain, which is a frozen yogurt retailer and franchise known for its self-serve frozen yogurt and a vast variety of flavors and toppings. Six months later, Books-A-Million opened Yogurt Mountain locations in all of its bookstores (Yogurt Mountain, 2018).

In September 2010, Books-A-Million launched 2nd and Charles, which is a trader of used books and media (2nd & Charles, n.d.). In December 2015, Books-A-Million was acquired by Clyde B. Anderson and his family for \$21 billion. In November 2016, Books-A-Million began to sell self-published books (BAM! Publish, n.d.).

³ See Appendix A for sources this section.

Products and Services

Today, Books-A-Million is known as the premier book retailing chain in the southeastern United States and is the second largest brick-and-mortar book retailer in the country (Peterson, 2017). Headquartered in Birmingham, Alabama, Books-A-Million operates over 260 stores in 32 states and the District of Columbia. The company operates in three aspects: retail stores, wholesale distribution and e-commerce.

Retail Stores

Each Books-A-Million retail store offers books, magazines, cards, toys, games, music, DVDs and electronics. This segment also retails self-serve frozen yogurt stores and the Joe Muggs Cafe, which is a full-line coffee and espresso bar offering a large variety of gourmet coffees, teas, desserts and brewing supplies.

Wholesale Distribution

American Wholesale Book Company is the direct wholesale distributor for Books-A-Million. Based in Florence, Alabama, American Wholesale Book Company provides book wholesale and distribution services for retailers across the southeast (Books-A-Million, 2018). Every year, American Wholesale Book Company works with publishers to review and submit new titles for placement in Books-A-Million stores. In addition to American Wholesale Book Company, Books-A-Million works with Book\$Smart, which is a full-service bargain book distributor. Also based in Florence, Alabama, Book\$Smart services retail and wholesale clients throughout the country and offers an immense assortment of value-priced books for their consumers (Books-A-Million, 2018).

E-commerce

In addition to retail, Books-A-Million sells its products through its e-commerce website, which launched in 1998 (Books-A-Million, 2018). Through this segment, the company's objective is to maintain its status as a leader in book electronic retailing (Books-A-Million, 2018). Books-A-Million strives to achieve its goal by enhancing its website design, product offerings and customer service system on a regular basis. Also, it continues to develop e-commerce solutions through its American Internet Services Division to meet the needs of customers, clients and business partners. One of its most notable e-commerce solutions is NetCentral, which it acquired in 1999. NetCentral assists the company in internet development, systems solutions and web development (Books-A-Million, 2018).

Current Reputation in the Marketplace

According to Time magazine, Books-A-Million is rated America's worst company to work for (Frohlich & McIntyre, 2014). Just like the majority of retailers with unhappy employees, Books-A-Million has commission-based pay structures. Through this salary structure, an employee's commission depends on a percentage of total sales, leading to a direct correlation between the sales an employee makes and their salary (Magloff, 2018). As a result, high stress and low pay are the most common complaints among Books-A-Million employees (Frohlich & McIntyre, 2014). One employee wrote on Glassdoor (n.d.) that their experience at the company was "too much stress for the pay, very low pay, low chance of promotion. ... Even if you're normally good, if you have a bad week you get cut." According to Glassdoor, only 35 percent of employees would recommend this company to a friend, and 26 percent of employees had a positive business outlook on the company (Glassdoor, n.d.). Also, Books-A-Million's culture and values and career opportunities were rated a 2.7 and 2.5, respectively (Glassdoor, n.d.). Books-A-Million's overall rating was just a 2.6, which is average among companies reviewed (Glassdoor, n.d.). Over the past few years, Books-A-Million struggled to compete with large retailers and bookstores including Barnes and Noble and Amazon. Based on this information, there is a correlation between job satisfaction and Books-A-Million's reputation in the marketplace.

Market Share

According to Hoovers, Books-A-Million's annual sales are \$804.82 million (Hoovers, 2018d). According to Statista (2018b), the book industry produced \$26.3 billion in revenue in 2017. This means that Books-A-Million has about a 3.1 percent market share in the book industry. Compared to Barnes & Noble, which has a 14 percent market share, Books-A-Million's share is significantly lower (Hoovers, 2018d).

Media Analysis

Books-A-Million does a mediocre job of staying in the news and garnering coverage from traditional media outlets. In fact, a simple Google search of "Books-A-Million" in the news section produces a decent amount of press releases and articles, but nothing commendable. Most of the press releases tend to be welcoming authors to speak or read at different locations, and a small collection of news articles over the past few months, mainly from Alabama Business, cover the company's sales initiatives and its occasional book donations.

Books-A-Million is active on Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and Instagram. The company typically delivers the same messages across all of its platforms — posts about new books and new deals. It might even be perceived as money-driven because of its almost exclusive emphasis on sales and products; it does not have a distinct brand personality.

In addition to its social media platforms, Books-A-Million has a blog. The topics of its most recent blog posts are similar to its social media posts, where Books-A-Million discusses its trending products. For example, a recent blog post discusses the company's top five cookbooks for the holidays. When evaluating the company's five most recent blog posts, one post is an author Q&A. In addition to providing content about each product and the author, each post has a "buy now" button hyperlinked, where readers can buy the books mentioned in the post. This tactic can be perceived as user-friendly, as it allows consumers to easily find the products mentioned in the posts.

Despite its imperfect public relations and social media strategies, Books-A-Million strives to build interest and loyalty in its brand through campaigns targeting a variety of publics. For example, one of Books-A-Million's most recent campaign was the 12th annual "Coffee with the Troops" program in partnership with Soldiers' Angels. The campaign, which ran from Sept. 30 to Oct. 27, allowed Books-A-Million customers to honor U.S. soldiers for every bag of Joe Mugs coffee they purchased at Books-A-Million stores or online. As a result, customers purchased over 60,700 bags of coffee (Business Wire, 2018b). Also, Books-A-Million contributed one bag of coffee for every fifth customer-purchased bag, bringing the total number of donations to over 73,000. All donated bags of coffee will be distributed to U.S. troops overseas and V.A. hospitals across the country (Business Wire, 2018b).

Research

Before creating this campaign, our team brainstormed various methodologies of how we would evaluate the success of this campaign. With this being said, the main primary research method we would utilize is the survey, calibrated through Qualtrics. Survey questions would be created with the goal of revealing how people truly see Books-A-Million as not only a bookstore, but as a brand. Additionally, we would ask participants questions about their reading preferences, including questions on whether they prefer reading digital or paper books and what genres of books they like to read. While the goal of this campaign is not to sell books, knowing what genres target publics prefer will help in the execution of details regarding tactics (such as what types of DIY days to host and what books to feature in the social media video). Our team gathered a significant amount of secondary research while researching Books-a-Million and its competitors.

We would also incorporate focus groups with millennials and educators into our primary research methodologies to get a better idea of what representative publics think of Books-a-Million in terms of atmosphere, reputation, social media engagement and online presence. Additionally, we would interview external experts in the industry, book bloggers and influencers to gain additional perspectives and feedback regarding the company's threats and opportunities.

Competition⁴

Books-A-Million has three major competitors topping the list: Barnes & Noble Amazon.com and Walmart.

Barnes & Noble

While it is much larger, Barnes & Noble is perhaps the competitor most similar to Books-A-Million. With a history dating back to 1873, Barnes & Noble was the first bookseller in the United States to sell discounted books, and with the help of television advertising, the company began to rapidly expand (Barnes & Noble, 2016). It acquired 797 retail bookstores in the 1980s, helping it to become the “second-largest bookseller in America” (Barnes & Noble, 2016). Realizing its success, Barnes & Noble developed a superstore strategy that encompassed key elements such as real estate operations, marketing and merchandising (Barnes & Noble, 2016). According to Barnes & Noble (2016), its mission is “to operate the best omni-channel specialty retail business in America, helping both our customers and booksellers reach their aspirations, while being a credit to the communities we serve.” However, the company does not have communications executives at the C-level. It has a senior vice president of corporate communications, five corporate communications executives and a public relations manager (D&B Hoovers, 2018a). On social media, the company is customer-centric: “With respect to the digital platform, one of the things we’re trying to do at Barnes & Noble is serve our customers in ways in which they’d like to consume content” (Carey, 2014).

Barnes & Noble has experimented with several strategies to stay relevant in an evolving market. In 2015, it tried to rebrand itself as “more than just a bookstore by expanding its offerings of toys, games, gadgets and other gifts and reshaping the nation’s largest bookstore chain into a ‘lifestyle brand’” (Alter, 2015). Furthermore, in 2016, Barnes & Noble announced that it would launch Barnes & Noble Kitchen, which is essentially a restaurant inside of a bookstore. Many media outlets called the initiative a desperate effort on Barnes & Noble’s behalf to save itself from collapsing. But David Deason, vice president of development at Barnes & Noble, stated that the restaurants are not a response to dismal sales, but part of an initiative to enhance the customer experience (Glover, 2016). Despite positive words from Barnes & Noble representatives and executives, current performance indicators look unfavorable. Andria Cheng (2018) wrote of Barnes & Noble, “The largest U.S. specialty bookstore said ... that sales fell 6.9% to \$795 million in the quarter ending July 29, hurt by declines in both its retail and Nook e-reader business.”

The company could take steps to overcome failing numbers, but Barnes & Noble Kitchen is not the answer, partly because it is not well received by target publics such as food bloggers. In a negative review of the bookstore’s restaurant, food journalist Whitney

⁴ See Appendix B for sources in this section.

Filloon (2018) wrote, “Barnes & Noble’s latest attempt to stay relevant in a space that’s increasingly losing business to online retailers like Amazon ... is an unlikely Hail Mary for the nation’s largest bookstore chain.” In order to redeem itself, people may see Barnes & Noble take drastic measures.

Business and finance journalist Danielle Wiener-Bronner (2018) wrote, “Slumping sales, closing stores, and a big swing and a miss on digital have hurt the book chain.” Wiener-Bronner (2018) suggested that, in order to save itself, the bookstore should shut down a few locations, drop its partnership with Starbucks, build a community with fans of hit books, expand merchandise to home goods, and drop Nook, its digital arm. Economics journalist David Leonhardt (2018) wrote, “Barnes & Noble is in trouble. ... You feel it when you walk into one of the chain’s stores, a cluttered mix of gifts, games, DVDs ... and books. And you really see the problems if you dig into the company’s financial statements.” Barnes & Noble is not weathering well in today’s economy, has struggled over the past three years and is a much lesser threat to Books-A-Million than it used to be.

Comparison Factors	Barnes & Noble	Books-A-Million
Employees	23,000	5,400
Employee Growth	-11.54 percent	N/A
Assets (in millions)	1,750	N/A
Market Value (in millions)	383	N/A
Sales (in millions)	3,662.28	804.82

Data insight: Barnes & Noble versus Books-A-Million. Data from D&B Hoovers (2018a).

Amazon.com

It might surprise some that Amazon.com, founded in 1994, began as a bookstore (Packer, 2014). Amazon.com’s predominant advantage amongst competitors is the fact that its product variety and sheer convenience in online shopping are unparalleled. It was recently revealed that Amazon.com has over 100 million Prime (Amazon.com’s membership program) members (Kelly, 2018). With a dedicated consumer base, substantial employee growth and impressive market values, the internet retailer giant is a force to be reckoned with. According to MarketLine (2018) in an industry profile regarding books, “Online retailers are able to exploit economies of scale as well as reduced operating costs to offer more competitive prices. Most retailers also sell other products ..., so rivalry is alleviated somewhat, as players are not so reliant on book sales.” Online, Amazon.com offers almost everything Books-A-Million offers and more, all at competitive prices. However, regarding physical bookstores, Amazon.com does not stack up. Amazon.com opened its first physical store, Amazon Books, in 2015, and the physical store initiative is less successful than its online counterpart in terms of revenue. Beside the fact that there are not many locations, Amazon Books stores greatly cater to Prime members (Green, 2017).

Amazon.com's mission is to be "Earth's most customer-centric company, where customers can find and discover anything they might want to buy online, and endeavors to offer its customers the lowest possible prices" (Amazon.com, 2018). Regarding communications executives at the C-level, the company has over 24 senior marketing and advertising executives (D&B Hoovers, 2018b). Amazon.com has a good reputation, and its publics view the company positively. According to a Statista (2017) survey, 67 percent of survey respondents reported that they liked using Amazon.com, and 57 percent said that with Amazon.com, they "get what [they] need." The company has grown tremendously within the last three years, and competition with Amazon.com is likely to increase within the next three.

Comparison Factors	Amazon.com	Books-A-Million
Employees	566,000	5,400
Employee Growth	65.79 percent	N/A
Assets (in millions)	126,000	N/A
Market Value (in millions)	981,000	N/A
Sales (in millions)	177,866	804.82

Data insight: Amazon.com versus Books-A-Million. Data from D&B Hoovers (2018b).

Walmart

Although it is just over 50 years old, Walmart is the top retailer in the world, and it has a whopping 2.3 million employees (D&B Hoovers, 2018c). With thousands of stores across the world, a massive number of employees and incredibly low prices, Walmart is not only Books-A-Million's competitor, but the competitor of countless other companies. The store has enjoyed rapid growth throughout the years, and is a "retail force that has yet to meet any immovable objects" (D&B Hoovers, 2018). Recently, "Walmart ratcheted up its battle with Amazon, planting a stake on the e-commerce giant's turf by selling e-books for the first time" (Jones, 2018). It is too early to tell, but the combination of low prices and a wide selection of e-books could hurt both Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble and Books-A-Million alike.

Regarding its image and reputation, Walmart is perceived negatively by its publics and has struggled with branding. The company has one senior communications officer at the C-Level, and 78 communications executives in total (D&B Hoovers, 2018c). On social media, the company is dedicated to open dialogue: "We engage with our customers and stakeholders beyond the walls of our stores. ... We are committed to having a dialogue with our followers" (Walmart, 2018). However, despite public relations efforts, public perception of the retailer giant has consistently declined over the past two years (Boyle, 2018). The company has taken steps to improve its reputation, but so far, has not succeeded: "Walmart has boosted wages, set ambitious sustainability goals and is pledging to promote more women into senior leadership – but Americans are still souring on the iconic brand" (Boyle, 2018). Despite an imperfect reputation, Walmart has

generated tremendous revenue over recent years and can be expected to remain a substantial competitor of Books-A-Million over the next three.

Comparison Factors	Walmart	Books-A-Million
Employees	2,300,000	5,400
Employee Growth	0 percent	N/A
Assets (in millions)	204,927	N/A
Market Value (in millions)	282,867.94	N/A
Sales (in millions)	500,343	804.82

Data insight: Walmart versus Books-A-Million. Data from D&B Hoovers (2018c).

SWOT Analysis

<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attracts consumers averse to online shopping • Shopping is an inviting, personalized in-store experience • Tangible products invoke sentimentality in customers of all ages • Customers come to physical bookstores to test out products before buying • Excellent reputation maintained — no past scandals (unfavorable employee relations not considered a scandal) • Good selection of products offered in terms of books 	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of marketing and publicity initiatives — there is not enough interactivity with users on social media • Store locations limited to southeastern United States • Public relations does not have a seat at the management table • No stated ethical ideal • No green initiatives to offset selling of paper books • Unfavorable employee relations
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent demand for traditional, paper books • Consumers willing to go to bookstores • Above-average visibility in combination with positive reputation allows for ability to expand base • Massive millennial audience to target through social media to generate revenue and build online presence (millennials prefer paper books to e-books) • Capable of garnering strong media coverage in the future (Recent Penny-A-Page sale was heavily covered by media) 	<p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amazon offers more product variety • Environmentally conscious consumers oppose paper books, and will flock to e-books regardless of nostalgic elements of physical bookstores • Competitors (Walmart and Amazon) often have better pricing • Online shopping is becoming increasingly popular • Walmart and Amazon are giants in not only the book industry, but in several other product categories

Key Publics⁵

The primary target publics for this public relations plan are (1) millennials and (2) educators located in the southeastern United States. The secondary target public (3) is the media. These publics are analyzed in further detail, demonstrating how each is integral to the success of the campaign.

Primary Target Public: Millennials

Millennials are a group of people who continue to mystify the world. Psychologists, advertisers, marketers, public relations people and other professionals in communications and related fields are constantly trying to find effective ways to reach this massive and influential public. With over 75 million millennials, this generation is America's largest (Frey, 2018).

Though they are often branded as free-spirited and adventurous, a Pew Research Center study (2010) showed that millennials are cautious individuals: "Whether as a by-product of protective parents, the age of terrorism or a media culture that focuses on dangers, they cast a wary eye on human nature. Two-thirds say 'you can't be too careful' when dealing with people." They witnessed the effects of 9/11, they see the increasing amount of mass shootings, and they hear the constant news of terrorist attacks around the world. Along with a cautious outlook on life, millennials are predicted to become the "most educated generation in American history" (Pew Research Center, 2010). Armed with educations and diversity, the millennial generation provides a unique contribution to society: "While its lasting legacy is yet to be determined, this generation is set to serve as a social, economic, and political bridge to chronologically successive (and increasingly) racially diverse generations" (Frey, 2018).

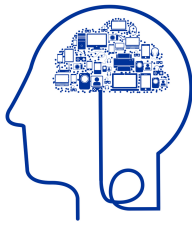
"While its lasting legacy is yet to be determined, this generation is set to serve as a social, economic, and political bridge to chronologically successive (and increasingly) racially diverse generations."
Frey, 2018

Regarding behavior and values, millennials are "confident, self-expressive, liberal, upbeat and open to change" (Pew Research, 2010). In terms of relationships with others, they get along with their parents, respect older generations, think technology brings people closer together, and they place great value on helping others in need (Pew Research Center, 2010). While millennials have some traditional values, they also embrace living with an open mindset and are accepting of nontraditional behaviors relating to marriage and parenting, especially. However, though many millennials embody liberal values, when it comes to going green, they are not exceptionally environmentally responsible. In fact, it has been found that most millennials "lag behind their older counterparts in terms of recycling" (Pew Research Center, 2010).

⁵ See Appendix C for sources in this section.

Current Relationship: While there are currently no brand awareness statistics regarding millennials and Books-A-Million, it is logical to assume that people in this target public embrace brick-and-mortar bookstores, based on their physical book preferences and affinity for bookstores. For example, according to a Pew Research Center study, 84 percent of U.S. adults ages 18 to 29 say they read print books versus e-books or audiobooks, and 74 percent of U.S. adults ages 30 to 49 (which encompasses part of the millennial generation) say they read print books versus e-books or audiobooks (Perrin, 2018). College students, especially, prefer physical books: “Despite the embrace of e-books in certain contexts, ... many people just don’t like them. ... When students were given a choice of various media — including hard copy, cell phone, tablet, e-reader, and laptop — 92 percent said they could concentrate best in hard copy” (Robb, 2015). Regarding bookstores, millennials are considerable supporters. Trish Caudill, a Books-A-Million store manager, said she has seen a “resurgence of young customers and more sales of physical books at her store” (Reuters, 2016).

Regarding its online relationship with millennials, Books-A-Million unquestionably needs to be more active with this public, which uses social media heavily. In fact, a whopping 85 percent of millennials use social media (Jiang, 2018). To take advantage of popular social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, Books-A-Million must keep up with competitors by engaging with online users more frequently and consistently. Amazon.com and Walmart, two of Books-A-Million’s main competitors, respond to at least a few Twitter mentions every day. Engaging with social media users helps companies establish stronger relationships with key publics and helps build online presence, and Books-A-Million needs to improve its communication efforts in this area.



Influentials: Unsurprisingly, tech-savvy millennials are greatly influenced by social media, but they also highly esteem peer recommendations (Arnold, 2017).

Motivating self-interests:

Ultimately, millennials value experience more than convenience or price. They are also image-driven and find fulfillment and satisfaction in the cool, vintage characteristics that books and bookstores provide in an overwhelmingly tech-consumed era. They want to connect with others in a setting that only bookstores provide: “Millennial customers at Books-A-Million and other retailers are missing out on online discounts ..., but they are more interested in the group experience, with the bookstore becoming a social destination” (Reuters, 2016).

Table 1: Characteristics of Millennials

Main dimension	Segment	Breakdown
Demographics	Age Cohort	18 to 34
	Gender	Male, Female
	Race	White, Black, Hispanic, Asian
	Life Stage	Adult/Young Adult
	Birth Era	Millennials (born 1981 to 1997)
	Marital Status	59 percent are single/have never been married
	Household Size	2 to 3
	Homeownership	37 percent
Socioeconomic	Household income	\$35,592
	Education	Over a third of all millennials (ages 25 to 34) obtained college educations by 2015
	Occupation	Most popular occupations: statisticians, bartenders, financial analysts, advertising and promotions managers, emergency medical techs and paramedics
Psychographic	Personality	Tech-savvy, commitment-phobic, independent, tolerant, self-confident, cautious, educated, health-conscious
	Values	Racially diverse, averse to large institutions, prefer delayed marriage, politically liberal, open to change, less religious than other generations, financially stable

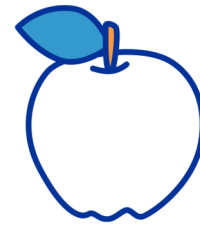
Demographic, socioeconomic and psychographic information on millennials (Chero, 2018; Choi, Goodman, Zhu, 2018; Hill 2017; Fleming, 2016; Frey, 2018; Josephson, 2018; Pew Research, 2010).

Primary Target Public: Educators

The second primary public for this public relations plan is educators. Educators are highly valued in the U.S., and according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), over 3.2 million teachers are currently employed full time at public schools.

Books-A-Million continuously interacts with this public when selling its products and brainstorming new public relations campaigns and company initiatives. On its website, Books-A-Million has a page for educators where teachers can obtain resources and ideas for enhancing their curriculum (Books-A-Million, n.d.b). These resources include boxed sets, graphic novels for children and reference books.

Additionally, Books-A-Million offers a vast variety of business services to educators, and personal sales representatives are available each business day to guide them through the ordering process. By opening a business-to-business account through Books-A-Million, educators are eligible for free custom quotes for orders of all sizes, best cost shipping options, varied payment options (including check and purchase orders), order invoice and tracking, sales-tax-free accounts (with proof of tax exemption), fundraising events (in-store and online) and gift card purchases in bulk quantities (Books-A-Million, n.d.a).



Current Relationship: Books-A-Million values educators because of the influence they have on students' lives. They do more than just educate — they help solve problems, sponsor school clubs, coach after-school sports teams, and most importantly, they are role models to their students. To thank educators for the vital roles they play within their schools and communities, Books-A-Million honors teachers annually through its Educator Week. As part of Educator Week, educators receive a 25 percent discount on their purchases from April 7 to 14 (Business Wire, 2018). In addition, if they present their school ID at any Books-A-Million location, they are eligible to register for an official Educator Card. By doing so, they will obtain special access to member benefits and discounts offered throughout the year (Business Wire, 2018).

Influentials: There are several influentials within this primary public. These include students, parents, other teachers and school administrators.

Motivating self-interests: Educators prefer materials that promote learning and personal development among their students. In addition, they like to communicate with others by teaching, giving advice and helping others. They also favor activities that involve various art forms, mediums, designs and patterns. They are dedicated to helping their students be creative and self-expressive in the classroom.

Table 2: Characteristics of Educators

Main Dimension	Segment	Breakdown
Demographics	Age cohort	30 to 49 years old
	Gender	74.6 percent of educators are female, while 25.5 percent are male
	Race	78.2 percent of educators are white. Educator demographics are shifting slowly in comparison to students, which indicates a lack of diversity
	Life stage	Adult
	Birth era	Generation X (born 1965 to 1980)
	Marital status	More than two-thirds are married
	Household size	3
	Homeownership	66 percent
Socioeconomic	Household income	\$54,550 to \$72,470
	Education	Bachelor's or greater
	Occupation	Educators can teach within the following grade levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary (Kindergarten to fifth) • Middle (sixth to eighth) • High (ninth to 12th) • Special education • Postsecondary
Psychographic	Personality	Strong interpersonal skills, knowledgeable, caring, friendly, organized, strong work ethic
	Values	Integrity, self-learning, respect, persistence, achievement, responsibility, leadership

Demographic, socioeconomic and psychographic information on educators (Klein, 2017; National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).

Secondary Target Public: Traditional Media

The secondary target public for this public relations plan is the traditional media. It is clear that Books-A-Million does not regularly engage with local and national journalists, who, if stimulated, could shed light on Books-A-Million's noteworthy initiatives with book lovers in the southeastern United States.

This target public is not complex or unpredictable in the sense that news outlets are simply looking for notable, newsworthy stories and content that will speak to their followers. In a time where journalists are often accused of generating fake news, it is more important than ever to foster strong relationships with the traditional media. Over the past six months, Books-A-Million's press releases have communicated topics like sales and promotions, garnering coverage from a few Alabama newspapers. However, the messages and tactics laid out in this campaign are expected to grab the attention of not only local journalists, but journalists from national newspapers such as The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal.

Current relationship: By failing to capture target publics with fun, engaging posts, and by making minimal effort to stay relevant throughout the seasons, Books-A-Million leaves local and national journalists with little to cover. Therefore, because of the overall lack of creativity and innovation surrounding Books-A-Million's public relations efforts, media coverage is unimpressive. While the company fortunately does not have a history of past scandals or reputation blunders, it also does not try to stay in the news through public relations tactics that could help boost the company's image and keep it relevant in the eyes of key publics, including journalists from media outlets.



Influentials: Influentials for this public are wide-ranging, as media outlets and journalists are influenced by everything happening around them. This public is influenced by other journalists and media outlets, the government and people in general (in their various roles as consumers, citizens, etc.).

Motivating self-interests: Media outlets are always looking for good stories to cover, and they are ceaselessly seeking newsworthy content that will satisfy their readers, inform citizens and keep their news organizations running.

Goal and Objectives

The **goal** of this plan is to significantly strengthen Books-A-Million's online presence and its image as a welcoming and inviting bookstore that offers the pleasures of reading paper books.

Rationale: While research shows that most people prefer physical books over e-readers, the convenience of online shopping could kill the existence of physical bookstores, and this goal supports the longevity of Books-A-Million's status as an inviting brick-and-mortar American bookstore.



Motivational Objective

To increase positive attitudes among millennials toward the appeal of the paper book aspect of the Books-A-Million store experience by 15 percent in six months.

Rationale: Millennials are active social media users and have paper book preferences — increasing the positive attitudes of this target audience will be instrumental in helping Books-A-Million build a strong brand image and online presence.

Motivational Objective

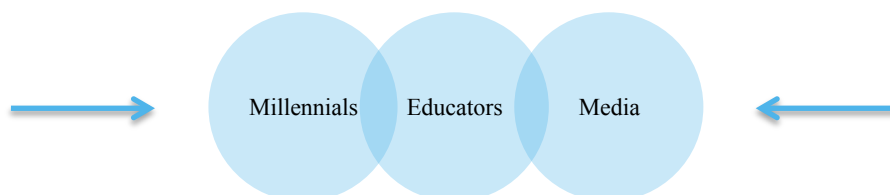
To reinforce favorable attitudes among educators toward the appeal of the paper book aspect of the Books-A-Million store experience by 15 percent in six months.

Rationale: Books-A-Million connects with educators through discounts, primarily; however, with messages that are not money-centered, reinforcing favorable attitudes among teachers will persuade them to see Books-A-Million as more of an experience — for themselves and their students — than a store.

Behavioral Objective

To increase positive media coverage of Books-A-Million's outreach initiatives by 20 percent in six months.

Rationale: This objective supports the goal of strengthening Books-A-Million's online presence and brand image because articles about the campaign, written by credible journalists, will connect key publics to campaign messages and social media content.



Strategies and Tactics

Public: Millennials

Strategy: Engage millennials on Books-A-Million's social media platforms with entertaining and interactive content that stimulates online conversation about Books-A-Million.

Rationale: This strategy and the following tactics support the first motivational objective because connecting with millennials through interactive social media content is one of the best ways to connect with this public and increase positive impressions.

Tactics:

- Create a social media campaign that harnesses Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat, all unified through the hashtag #GetCozyWithBAM.
- Schedule daily content on all four social media platforms, but differentiate platform content with features exclusive to each platform.
- On Instagram, have a book author do an Instagram story takeover on the day of a book signing in one of the larger cities that the author is touring in, giving a behind-the-scenes look at the inviting atmosphere and sense of community at physical bookstores.
- With the Instagram author takeover, use the phrase, "Get Cozy With (author's name)" to tie in the campaign theme.
- On Snapchat, deliver a daily story that involves staff members from stores around different states sharing pictures and videos of staff members flipping through "staff picks," which are new books that staff members favor.
- Have Snapchat geofilters available at physical stores, featuring the campaign slogan: Get Cozy with BAM!
- On Facebook, along with daily posts and responses to comments, host a Facebook Live Q&A session once a month (throughout the duration of the campaign) that features authors and book vloggers answering questions from an oversized, comfortable couch, with books piled on each side of them on the couch, in a setting that is clearly a Books-A-Million store.
- On Twitter, along with daily tweets and responses to mentions, host a sweepstakes. Ask Twitter users to enter by tweeting pictures of themselves and friends at Books-A-Million stores using the hashtag #GetCozyWithBAM. Award one person a \$500 Books-A-Million gift card, and award five people with \$50 Books-A-Million gift cards.

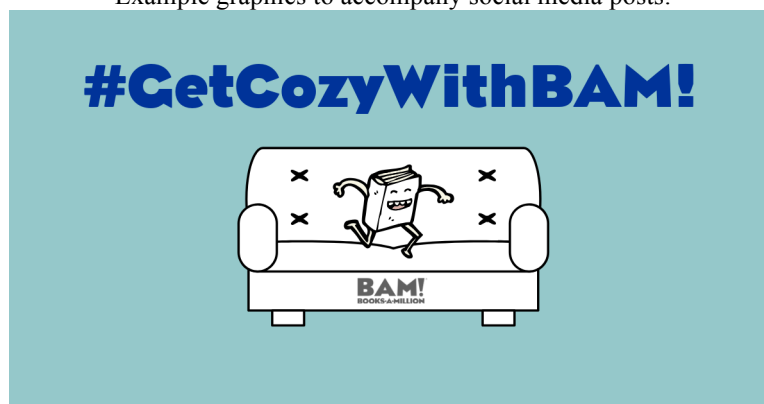
Strategy: Encourage visits to store by illuminating the appeals and charms of the exclusive physical bookstore atmosphere and experience at Books-A-Million.

Rationale: This strategy supports all three objectives; drawing people in to visit stores showcases Books-A-Million's existing appeals as well as exposes new atmospheric aspects (as a result of implementing campaign tactics). This strategy is instrumental in increasing and reinforcing positive attitudes among millennials and educators and sparking interest among journalists.

Tactics:

- Host “Books-A-Million DIY Days” where staff member demonstrate how to do simple DIY projects from DIY books sold at stores. Publicize DIY days with posts on Twitter and Facebook, and post videos of the DIY sessions on Snapchat and Instagram.
- Have photo opportunities at each store, consisting of frames that people can stand behind that feature the #GetCozyWithBAM! campaign slogan and a friendly, anthropomorphized book graphic leaning into the frame, suggesting the “coziness” of books.
- Create a social media video that shows a book fanatic running down aisles of books at a Books-A-Million store, opening up tons of books, smelling the pages, hugging the books, etc. Feature a narrator at the end of the video that says something along the lines of, “Crazy about books? We are too. Get cozy with Books-A-Million.” Incorporate an animated version of the anthropomorphized book from the in-store photo frame setup.
- At Books-A-Million stores with Joe Muggs cafes, have the campaign hashtag, #GetCozyWithBAM, printed on drink sleeves, encouraging customers to enter the Twitter sweepstakes by tweeting the hashtag.
- Create a golden bookmark initiative that involves each store hiding 10 golden bookmarks inside various books at the kick-start of the campaign. Announce: “We’ve hidden 10 golden bookmarks inside books at all of our stores this week. Find a golden bookmark, get a free book of your choice!”

Example graphics to accompany social media posts:



Public: Educators

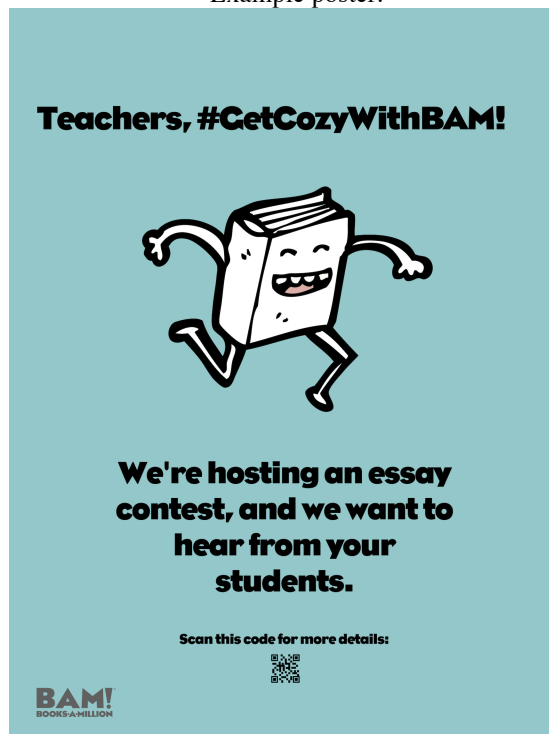
Strategy: Express gratitude for educators in the southeastern United States who instill an appreciation for books within their students.

Rationale: Books-A-Million already has a good relationship with educators, but this strategy aims to reinforce positive attitudes among this target public by strengthening Books-A-Million's relationship with teachers through thoughtful, two-way dialogue.

Tactics:

- Mail brochures to top public schools in Jefferson County, Alabama, (where Books-a-Million is headquartered) providing information about the #GetCozyWithBAM campaign.
- Contact top public schools in Jefferson County, Alabama, by mailing them posters about an essay contest, where students submit an essay describing how books make them feel and why they like to read.
- Link a QR code on the posters to a new page on Books-A-Million's website, where teachers can learn more details, including how to submit students' essays
- Award the student with the best essay with a first-place prize of a \$75 gift card to Books-a-Million.
- Award the second-place and third-place prize recipients with a \$50 and \$25 gift card to Books-a-Million.
- Feature the winning essay on social media platforms along with the campaign hashtag.
- Inform schools that they can request a private DIY day as a field trip.

Example poster:



Public: Traditional Media

Strategy: Generate interest in the #GetCozyWithBAM campaign among journalists to promote the campaign on a larger scale.

Rationale: This strategy aims to support the behavioral objective by getting journalists interested in the campaign so that they feel compelled to cover Books-A-Million's new initiatives.

Tactics:

- Build relationships with journalists by communicating with them regularly on social media platforms.
- Email the local news editor from The Birmingham News, inviting the editor to the debut of the first DIY day at a Birmingham, Alabama, store.
- Distribute multimedia press kits to local news outlets.
- Write a press release to inform the local community about the #GetCozyWithBAM campaign.
- Have CEO Terrance G. Finley hold a news conference at the start of the campaign to interact with journalists in person and strengthen connections.
- Pitch a story idea to journalists at larger news organization (such as USA Today, The Washington Post and The New York Times) regarding a feature story on the winning student of the essay contest.

Messages⁶

Primary Message 1: Millennials

In an overwhelmingly tech-consumed world, Books-A-Million is a place where browsing for books is not a chore, but a warm experience. At a bookstore, you can escape reality or connect with fellow book lovers in an inviting setting, enjoying the pleasures of the timeless paper book.

Secondary Messages:

- A 2018 study showed that while almost all participants felt a “strong attachment to physical books, and no one embraced a fully digital reading experience,” younger participants were more averse to e-books than older participants (Blue, 2018).
- There is a science behind the beloved scent of your favorite old book or the new one you’re flipping through at Books-A-Million: “Since paper is made of wood and is constantly decomposing, it releases chemical compounds into the air that mix together to form a unique scent” (Blakemore, 2017).
- Bookstores provide a way for you to connect casually, face-to-face, over shared interests, which is more physiologically satisfying than online interaction.
- You have to browse through emails, online documents and e-textbooks all of the time for work and school — take a break from the blue light of a screen and relish in the tangible joy of a classic book at Books-A-Million.

Primary Message 2: Educators

Educators: Books-A-Million recognizes all you do for students in southeastern schools. Instilling a love for books within your students is a priceless educational contribution that Books-A-Million values and respects.

Secondary Messages:

- Books-A-Million honors teachers annually during its Educator Week, but it will now extend opportunities for educators and their students with monthly DIY days and private DIY days that schools can request for field trips.
- U.S. cities that are the most “book crazy” are located primarily in the western and northeastern U.S. But with the help of teachers, cities in the southeast can catch the book bug, too, if educators can get students reading, and remind them of the benefits of books (Open Education Database, n.d.)

⁶ See Appendix C for sources in this section.

Primary Message 3: Traditional Media

Books-A-Million is creatively involved with millennials and educators with its Get Cozy with BAM! campaign, which is based on building relationships with book lovers who are vital to the longevity of bookstores.

Secondary Messages:

- Journalist David Streitfeld (2017) wrote in an article for The New York Times, “Readers are increasingly ordering ... books online, getting them delivered with their clothes and peanut butter and diapers.” Books-A-Million recognizes this and is dedicated to keeping brick-and-mortar bookstores alive by engaging with book-lovers and showcasing the joys of bookstores.
- Books-A-Million’s dedication to educators is commendable; it actively maintains a good relationship with teachers by providing not only discounts, but educational activities for their students.
- Communication from Books-A-Million is exciting and original; it interacts with social media users imaginatively and with enthusiasm.

Timetable

This campaign would run for six months — from December 2018 to May 2019.

Time Frame	Project
Dec. 3	<p>Launch #GetCozyWithBAM social media campaign on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat by posting the book fanatic video on all platforms, and begin posting and responding on all platforms daily, including scheduling Instagram takeovers by book authors according to book signing dates.</p> <p>Release the Snapchat geofilters.</p> <p>Unveil photo opportunity setups at stores as well as #GetCozyWithBAM drink sleeves at stores with Joe Muggs cafes.</p> <p>Mail brochures to public schools in Jefferson County, Alabama, with information about the campaign.</p> <p>Send press releases and multimedia press kits to news outlets.</p> <p>Hold the CEO's news conference.</p>
Dec. 3	Launch the Twitter sweepstakes.
Jan. 5	Announce the sweepstakes winners.
Jan 7.	<p>Invite photojournalists to the first Get Cozy With BAM: DIY Day (to be held the next week).</p> <p>Inform schools that they can request a private DIY day as a field trip.</p>
Jan. 12	Hold the first DIY day, and unveil calendar on social media platforms with dates for the next five DIY days.
Feb. 11	Launch the golden bookmark initiative, and announce it on social media.
Feb. 16	Hold the second DIY day.
March 8	Announce the dates of the three Facebook Live Q&A sessions.
March 16	Hold third DIY day.

March 17	Hold the first Facebook Live Q&A session.
April 6	Hold the fourth DIY day.
April 13	Hold the second Facebook Live Q&A session.
May 3	Mail posters to public schools in the southeast with information regarding the essay contest.
May 4	Launch a website page with information about the essay contest. Email a link to the website page to schools, and post about the essay on social media.
May 10	Hold third and final Facebook Live Q&A session.
May 11	Hold the fifth and final DIY day.
May 18	<p>Announce the essay contest winner and feature his/her essay on the essay website page and social media platforms.</p> <p>Send gift cards to second- and third-place winners.</p> <p>Send book donations to first-place winner's school.</p>
May 19	Pitch a story idea to a journalist at a larger news organization (such as The New York Times) regarding a feature story on the student essay contest winner.
May 31	Completion of campaign. On social media, thank followers for "getting cozy with Books-A-Million."

Budget and Resources⁷

Personnel:

Public relations team (public relations director, campaign manager, social media manager and two public relations interns) at \$5,000 for six months = \$30,000

Graphic designer/website manager = \$4,000

Materials:

Photo op setup: $260 \times \$40 = \$10,400$

Coffee sleeves: $\$0.11 \times 30,000 = \$3,300$

Posters: $\$10 \times 182 = \$1,820$

Brochures: $\$1 \times 182 = \182

Press releases: \$2,000

Prizes:

Books-A-Million gift cards for sweepstakes winners: $\$500 + \$50(5) = \$750$

Books-A-Million gift cards for essay winner: $\$75 + \$50 + \$25 = \150

Free books redeemed with golden bookmark (up to \$15 each): $\$10 \times 50 \times 15 = \$7,500$

Social media and bookstore activities:

Book vlogger Q&A sessions = \$3,000

Social media video: \$5,000

Snpachat geofilters: $\$5 \times 30 \times 6 = \900

Book signings: \$0 (arrange with publishing companies — author benefits)

Media monitoring tools: $\$30 \times 6 = \180

Mailing:

Envelopes for brochures: \$19

Mailing brochures: $50 \text{ cents} \times 182 = \91

Tubes for posters: \$0

Mailing posters: $\$7 \times 182 = \$1,274$

Total: \$70,566

⁷ See Appendix D for sources in this section.

Evaluation

This plan was created based on secondary research that revealed a need for Books-A-Million to communicate more creatively and intimately with key target publics that appreciate the aspects of physical bookstores and traditional hard copy books. But with the approval of Books-A-Million C-level executives (and with funding for surveys and focus groups), additional research would be conducted before the campaign, and messages and tactics would be adapted accordingly.

However, we are confident the strategy proposed in this plan is solid and reliable. The goal, objectives, messages, strategies and tactics were devised with the purpose of connecting with key publics through research that illuminated the best ways to reach people based on the following criteria:

- Demographics
- Socioeconomic factors
- Psychological factors
- Motivating self-interests
- Current relationship with Books-A-Million

Throughout the campaign and after, the public relations team will evaluate the impact and success of this public relations program using before-and-after surveys, focus groups and a thorough media coverage analysis.

Breakdown:

- Measurement of motivational objective 1: before-and-after surveys and focus groups conducted with millennials Dec. 1 and June 7 to evaluate if positive attitudes increased by 15 percent.
- Measurement of motivational objective 2: before-and-after surveys and focus groups conducted with educators Dec. 1 and June 7 to evaluate if favorable attitudes increased by 15 percent.
- Measurement of behavioral objective: media coverage analysis through media monitoring tools throughout the duration of the campaign and final media coverage analysis executed June 7.

In addition to monthly progress reports, a comprehensive written evaluation will be presented to C-level executives June 12, and then results will be shared with employees through an emailed memo June 14.

Conclusion and Summary

The Books-A-Million “Get Cozy With BAM!” campaign encourages individuals to pick up and read traditional books, experiencing the nostalgia and warm feelings that they inspire. This campaign will not only authentically promote the Books-A-Million brand, but it will help secure the future of one of southeast United States’ most beloved bookstores. This plan was created to target millennials, educators and the traditional media.

Because millennials were raised with both hard copy books as well as tablets and e-books, this public relations plan combines the sentimental feeling of old books with new trends on social media to create a social media campaign that encourages people to get cozy with their favorite books. Educators are targeted through the student essay contest, especially, in which teachers encourage students to write essays to win gift cards and prizes that will ultimately put the spotlight on special students within public schools in Jefferson County, Alabama, where Books-A-Million is headquartered. Because the relationship between Books-A-Million and the media is fairly minimal, building a relationship during this time will be crucial to the success of the campaign. Tactics such as DIY days, hosted monthly at Books-A-Million stores, will give the traditional media an intimate look at some of the campaign initiatives.

This cost-effective six-month campaign will start with the social media campaign and end with the golden bookmark initiative and the announcing of the essay contest winners. Overall, based on our research, this plan is expected to creatively connect Books-A-Million with people who play a critical role in the traditional bookstore’s future in a digital age.

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