Union Square Alliance

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Established in 2022, Union Square in Bloom celebrates the district's floral legacy with a modern twist. For decades, flowers, particularly daffodils, were handed out to visitors walking through Maiden Lane, an alleyway with historic appeal. Macy's previously hosted its annual flower show, established in 1964, and several flower stands brightened up the district. The times and challenges have turned these great traditions. Union Square in Bloom commemorates the floral legacy of Union Square while encouraging residents, workers and visitors to rediscover and patronize our vibrant, full-circle offerings of hotels, restaurants, retail establishments, theater, fashion, cuisine, nightlife and beyond. The campaign actively engages the surrounding businesses to collectively transform Union Square with surprising bursts of floral displays, adorning buildings, canopies, bus stops and even our city's famous cable cars, alongside elements such as cocktails and couture. These efforts culminate at moments of gathering and community in Union Square Plaza, where music and dance elevate the experience. Navigating the transition from our first to second year posed a significant challenge as the number of participants expanded from three sites to 33. With this growth came the necessity to implement ways to keep track of all the sites. The Union Square Alliance faced the task of establishing communication channels between florists and stakeholders while simultaneously maintaining oversight over installations that were executed independently of the organization. While this expansion was exhilarating, it also demanded efforts to ensure inclusivity within the Union Square Alliance's programming initiatives to represent all of the businesses.

INNOVATION

Union Square in Bloom not only revitalizes the urban landscape with its vibrant colors and intricate designs but also serves as a spectacle for the eyes and imagination. This fusion of tradition and innovation not only preserves the essence of floral displays but also pushes the boundaries of creativity, ensuring that the event remains fresh and relevant year after year. What sets Union Square in Bloom apart is its commitment to sustainability. Unlike traditional floral arrangements that wilt and require constant replacement, the use of silk flowers significantly reduces waste and environmental impact. Additionally, the decision to reuse silk flowers annually underscores the importance of resource conservation and responsible consumption. Furthermore, the Union Square Alliance engages local florists from the SF Flower Mart to support their businesses and city, rather than outsourcing, fostering community connections and economic growth within their own neighborhoods. As a result, Union Square in Bloom continues to surprise spectators while leaving a minimal footprint on the environment, ensuring that their traditions remain vibrant and relevant for generations to come.

OUTCOME

Union Square in Bloom had a significant impact on various stakeholders, benefiting the public, retailers, developers, property owners, visitors and residents. The project successfully addressed the challenge of revitalizing Union Square and keeping the space dynamic by creating tradition and a reason to return while honoring its floral heritage. At the Westin St. Francis, Bloom generated over 105 million media impressions, boosting hotel package sales by over 100. The hotel experienced a 48% increase in Instagram followers during the campaign, attracting influencers and visitors who shared their experiences online. The establishment received prestigious recognition at the 2023 Bloomies Awards for its social media presence and overall excellence. Parc 55 and Hilton San Francisco Union Square saw a 30% increase in bar sales, showcasing the economic benefits of participation. Their sustainable approach ensured long-term viability, with plans to expand activations annually. Parc 55's Bloom cocktail earned accolades at the Bloomies Awards, further highlighting their success. And they were honored as a finalist at the Visit California Poppy Awards. Similarly, 291 Geary Street's budget-friendly floral installations drew widespread admiration, enhancing the area's aesthetic appeal. Additionally, Union Square in Bloom's events, including Mother's Day festivities, bar crawls and harvest celebrations, attracted significant attendance. The passport program, which encouraged visitors to explore Bloom installations, garnered 5,000 downloads, further promoting community involvement and exploration of Union Square. Vasily Vein, a celebrated local designer renowned for his innovative creations designed the first annual Bloom Gown, featured in Haute Living Lifestyle Magazine.

EXECUTION

The execution of Union Square in Bloom involved strategic steps to ensure successful outcomes. Beginning a year before, the Union Square Alliance initiated communication with local businesses, and began connecting with florists from the SF Flower Mart, a local business enterprise. The organization conducted extensive outreach efforts to educate stakeholders about Bloom, building upon the momentum from the previous year's participation. Expanding participation, the organization introduced Bloom cocktails and hotel room packages, simplifying involvement for businesses and broadening campaign accessibility, resulting in 32 bloomed cocktails along with four bloomed room offerings. Information sessions clarified costs and addressed queries, complemented by targeted outreach via member newsletters. To incentivize participation for bars and restaurants, the Union Square Alliance organized a bar crawl. Throughout Bloom, the organization promoted businesses and engaged attendees with a passport book updated monthly, which garnered 5,000 downloads. With ample planning time, participation surged. Beginning in April, the Blooms went up. The campaign launched on Mother's Day, featuring a lively park party with a salsa band, food trucks and a bar garden. The campaign extended until harvest, culminating in a closing concert with a jazz band, pumpkin patch, a wine/art crawl and a "Bloomies" award show recognizing the best blooms, attracting foot traffic and fostering community engagement.

REPRESENTATION

Union Square in Bloom prioritized inclusivity through various means. With over 33 partner locations spanning hotels, restaurants, bars, retail outlets, bus stops, a cable car and Moscone (the city's convention center), the project engaged stakeholders at multiple levels. Collaboration with the SF Flower Mart facilitated a diverse range of floral offerings at various price points, ensuring accessibility for all businesses interested in participating. The initiative extended beyond traditional business collaborations, to delight the broader community and the public. Public realm installations provided an inclusive experience for all visitors to Union Square, regardless of background, for all to enjoy. Partnerships with organizations like the SF Municipal Transportation Authority and United Airlines further enhanced inclusivity by extending floral displays to bus stops and the airport, welcoming travelers from diverse backgrounds. Affordability and encouragement of bloom re-use promoted equitable participation, enabling businesses of varying sizes to participate in the initiative year-over-year. In addition, the Bloomies award presentation recognized diversity through multiple categories, highlighting achievements across different sectors, including hospitality, culinary arts, entertainment and fashion. Overall, Union Square in Bloom exemplified inclusivity and equity by engaging a wide array of partners, involving the community and fostering opportunities for diverse participation and recognition.

REPLICATION

Union Square in Bloom offers a replicable solution for other downtown areas seeking to revitalize their districts while honoring local heritage. The initiative demonstrates the effectiveness of leveraging neighborhood history and cultural significance to create a modern and engaging experience. Replication is achievable by adapting the concept of Union Square in Bloom to suit the unique characteristics and heritage of other neighborhoods. By identifying and celebrating local traditions, such as floral legacies or historical events, communities can create their own versions of Bloom. This could involve collaborating with local businesses, cultural institutions and community groups to design and implement vibrant activations that resonate with residents and visitors. Furthermore, the project's focus on inclusivity and sustainability provides a framework for replication in other districts. Utilizing eco-friendly materials, encouraging participation from diverse stakeholders and fostering community engagement can be applied to similar initiatives elsewhere. The scalability of Union Square in Bloom lies in its flexibility to adapt to different locations and contexts while maintaining its core principles of celebrating heritage, fostering community pride and revitalizing urban spaces.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

Transitioning from the Union Square Alliance's first to second year proved challenging due to the success of the campaign and a rapid increase in participants, expanding from three sites to 33. Managing the removal of blooms after the campaign's end-date posed logistical challenges, necessitating numerous reminders to team members to dismantle installations and prepare for reuse in subsequent years. Despite these challenges, some businesses innovatively re-bloomed with thematic twists, injecting freshness and excitement into the initiative. Expanding participation beyond the district lines by welcoming Moscone Convention Center and United Airlines SFO Lounge introduced complexities that required us to visit these sites and seamlessly integrate them into our promotional efforts alongside Union Square in Bloom. Through this process, the team learned valuable lessons and established numerous relationships spanning from store-level to executive-level, effectively educating stakeholders on the essence of Union Square in Bloom. These experiences and connections will undoubtedly streamline planning for future iterations, laying a solid foundation for even smoother operations in the years to come.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Mother's Day Launch Event:

https://secretsanfrancisco.com/union-square-in-bloom/

https://sf.funcheap.com/sfs-union-square-bloom-free-mothers-day-festival-2023/

https://www.sfstation.com/union-square-in-bloom-mothers-day-celebration-e2461387

https://www.marinatimes.com/event/union-square-in-bloom-mothers-day-celebration

https://www.chatterblock.com/events/369150/union-square-in-bloom-mothers-day-celebration/

https://thursd.com/articles/union-square-in-bloom

https://www.floom.com/us/flower-delivery-union-square

https://www.trekaroo.com/guides/mothers-day-celebrations-in-and-around-the-san-francisco-bay-area

https://mommypoppins.com/san-francisco-bay-area-kids/event/events/union-square-in-bloom-mothers-day-celebration

Mother's Day Post Event Coverage:

https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/union-square-in-bloom-san-francisco-downtown-18094359.php

Bloom Dress:

https://www.hautelivingsf.com/2023/05/05/union-square-in-bloom-a-budding-new-tradition/

Overall Bloom:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrH8s1Lzp0s

https://www.kron4.com/live-in-the-bay/union-squares-free-summer-music-series/

https://dothebay.com/events/weekly/sat/union-square-in-bloom-summer-music-series-tickets

S.F. business operators hope free concerts in Union Square draw foot traffic downtown - CBS San Francisco (cbsnews.com)