

Only on Airbnb

THE CHALLENGE

While Airbnb was maturing from Silicon Valley unicorn to travel industry leader, its competition evolved. Traditional hospitality companies and lookalike startups were beginning to replicate its unique inventory and offer the promise of authentic cultural experiences. Meanwhile, regulatory hurdles created a challenging landscape for the brand to activate on its purpose without generating backlash that compromised Airbnb's ability to do business in key markets.

The "Only On Airbnb" campaign represented a strategic shift in Airbnb's brand expression to emphasize its unique inventory – delivering exclusive, once-in-a-lifetime experiences that drove positive awareness of Airbnb's value for guests.

THE SOLVE

It started with a potato. In 2019, tiny-house designer Kristie Wolfe turned a 28-foot-long Idaho potato into an Airbnb. The roadside attraction, created as part of an agricultural promotion, had been sitting idle for years. Seeing the outsized media response to this story, we audited past coverage of Airbnb and discovered that organic listings like these did a better job highlighting our diverse inventory than our advertising ever had.

So, we transformed our hosts' inspiration into a proactive strategy aimed at getting unique, exclusive and talk-worthy stays onto the platform so we could craft more of these "viral" moments. Like Wolfe's potato, the unique listings should spark positive memories – temporarily resurrecting a piece of our past or bringing something to life that only ever existed in our imaginations. If that rubric was met, we knew the stays we featured were the kind available "only on Airbnb."

Following our pilot, we launched stays in the Barbie Malibu Dreamhouse, the City Palace of Jaipur, the "Fresh Prince" mansion, the world's last Blockbuster Video, the original "Home Alone" house, Carrie Bradshaw's New York City apartment, Bad Bunny's big rig and the "Hocus Pocus" cottage, among many others.

Leading with earned media versus paid promotion, Only on Airbnb transformed Airbnb's local inventory into viral global stories, underpinned by memorable key visuals that helped each promotion travel far and wide.

THE RESULTS

Since launch, the global campaign has generated 73K+ original stories, with 90% expressing positive sentiments like excitement and curiosity. With more than 30M listing views, the program has been the most effective favorability-driving effort within Airbnb ever. This strategy also helped Airbnb's business rebound after COVID-19. With only this campaign running in 2020 and all paid media switched off, Airbnb still recovered 95% of its pre-pandemic traffic. CEO Brian Chesky credited the comeback to PR in Airbnb's first post-IPO earnings call – and announced paid spending would never return to prior levels.

