

CASE STUDY

Promote Success Leverages Spaceflight to Launch Prodea Systems

Serial entrepreneur Anousheh Ansari was about to realize her lifetime aspiration of seeing the Earth from space, and she wanted her experience to inspire women and girls worldwide to reach for their dreams. She also was about to launch her latest business venture, Prodea Systems, a company that combines technology and services that will change the way people connect with each other at home and on the road.

Promote Success launched Prodea Systems to the marketplace by tying it to Ansari's space launch, and creating local events to leverage her celebrity status with the company. In addition, we helped her reach women and girls through selective story placements like "Oprah" and interaction with students.

SITUATION

Like all entrepreneurs, Anousheh Ansari was multitasking. She was training hard for a journey in two years to the International Space Station as the first female space tourist, and developing a new company called Prodea Systems in Plano that would revolutionize how people connect to each other outside of work. Ansari was also busily encouraging the world to look to space as the planet's future. She and her family were the founders of the Ansari X Prize, which awarded in 2004 its first \$10 million to winners of the race to launch a private reusable manned vehicle into space twice within two weeks.



In September 2006, illness sidelined the space traveler ahead of her, so as his backup Ansari suddenly had only three weeks to prepare for liftoff. She realized the incredible opportunity this was to launch Prodea Systems as well. She even had a plan for testing some of the company's technology during the trip to demonstrate that they would work anywhere and everywhere – even space.

But three weeks was not a lot of time. Prodea Systems was still in product development and months from being ready to launch.

As an added wrinkle, Ansari was cloistered in Russia preparing for launch and an intense schedule after her spaceflight meant it would be virtually impossible to conduct many media interviews. Most of her interaction with her own employees was by email because of the time difference.

Prodea Systems called on Promote Success because of previous work together when Ansari built and sold *telecom technologies, inc.* to Sonus Networks. They had confidence that Promote's senior team of publicists could position and launch the company, and pull together the materials and work with expected intense worldwide media attention. Prodea knew our technology background and familiarity with telecom and datacom would help us understand the products and services under development – and help others understand as well.



"Promote Success understood our urgency. Their work ethic, their dependability and reliability was fabulous to help us put together this successful launch of not only the company, but also Anousheh."

*-Terri Giffin
VP of Marketing, Prodea Systems
Business Manager for Anousheh Ansari*

SOLUTION

Time was the biggest challenge. Promote Success put in place an experienced team and broke the projects down.

Working closely with management, we quickly created a press kit including multiple press releases, a corporate fact sheet, background on the products under development, bios of key executives and a company history. We made these materials available to everyone and included some of the Prodea materials in Ansari's celebrity press kit, which we also developed. The celebrity kit used the same letterhead and packaging as Prodea Systems' to link the two closely in the media's mind.

With more than 27 million viewers worldwide, we knew that an interview with Oprah Winfrey would be the best way to inspire women and girls in Ansari's native Iran and in countries around the world. The celebrity PR firm Ansari hired to handle TV talk shows and celebrity press events informed Prodea that they had no contacts for "Oprah" and did not believe they could get her on the popular show.

One of our team members who specialized in entertainment and had Hollywood experience at major studios called her contacts and arranged a personal introduction to an "Oprah" producer. We developed several angles and offered an exclusive interview plus footage from the space station.

In addition, our strategy was to hold several local events related to the space trip to build excitement for the new company.

- 1. Launch party** – We created a watch party at Prodea Systems' headquarters in Plano, Texas, the night of the launch and invited the media to mingle with excited employees, their families, friends of the company and local community leaders, including the city's mayor.
- 2. Phone interviews** – We arranged a few rare interviews with key business reporters before the launch with *The Dallas Morning News* and the Associated Press.
- 3. School kid event** – Children selected from two schools talked to Ansari while she was over Australia – using Prodea's

technology. Media interviewed the students to get their impressions. This accomplished two PR goals – inspire children to study math and science, and promote Prodea.

- 4. Public event** – After her return, we coordinated a major event at Dallas' Frontiers of Flight Museum that included a personal appearance. As a Smithsonian Museum, they had the expertise and security measures in place to display one of her spacesuits safely. We held a press conference in the afternoon, plus one-on-one interviews with the media afterwards. There was an event just for kids with Ansari that included footage from her trip to space and a gift of an autographed book about space for each child. The evening event featured presentations to Ansari from Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison and other notables. After her program, Ansari stayed for hours to hand out personally signed pictures, pose for photos and meet every attendee.

In addition, we helped coordinate much of Ansari's celebrity press after her return. We coordinated hundreds of media inquiries and helped compress the time required to respond to them by:

Arranging phone conferences with multiple reporters and setting a weekly two-hour session for interviews. We filled the slots with the highest priority media.

Supporting press conferences and media opportunities in cities where she traveled. Sometimes we worked with a host in each country who handled local arrangements.

SUCCESS

Anousheh Ansari's extraordinary story was covered by thousands of TV, radio, print and online media worldwide. Of these, Prodea Systems appeared in more than 150 stories. Many reporters asked to be informed when the company was ready to launch its products.

Her blog was the No. 1 blog in the world while she was in space (and for a while afterwards).

Business and local media attention was strong:

1. Major TV and radio outlets covered Prodea Systems including *Fox*, *CNN*, *ABC's Good Morning America* and many more.
2. *The Dallas Morning News* published more than a dozen stories.
3. More than 100 newspapers around the globe picked up an Associated Press story.
4. Two Dallas TV stations and a radio station covered the watch party – surprising considering the liftoff was at midnight local time.
5. The schoolchildren's event drew so many media we had to put them in a separate room. There were four TV stations and several print reporters, including a local Persian-language publication, among others.
6. Twelve TV and print reporters covered the Frontiers of Flight Museum event including the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, the *HDTV Network* and affiliates of *Fox*, *ABC*, *CBS*, *NBC*, *NPR* and others.

Her "Oprah" appearance was the second longest segment of the show and producers promoted it heavily. In addition, it has aired at least twice since the original broadcast Oct. 12, 2006.

From an intense three weeks of preparation, Prodea Systems has an incredible media platform from which to launch its new products. Anousheh Ansari is an ongoing inspiration to children and women, and her conviction and passion has advanced the cause of the commercialization of space. **ps**

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