

REACHING FOR THE #sy

#sy





**THE #sy  
LAUNCH  
STORY**



#sy LAUNCH PHOTOS by @jameshancox





## THE #sy LAUNCH STORY

*On November 20, 2009, social media consultancy #sy launched itself into the New Zealand market. It did so with an ambitious project: a party at a luxury house north of Auckland, and an online teaser designed to ensure that, even if people couldn't be at the launch, they would still be part of the fun.*

## OBJECTIVES: FUN FOR EVERYONE

### THE #SY LAUNCH HAD FOUR MAIN OBJECTIVES

- *To launch the #sy brand*  
*Although #sy's founders are well-known and well-respected in New Zealand's marketing community, the #sy brand is new. It needed to be introduced to the market with a bang.*
- *To relaunch the iJump brand*  
*#sy was formerly known as iJump, which was also known as a blog and video podcast. The multiple roles were causing brand confusion for iJump, so this event aimed to relaunch and reposition iJump as a not-for-profit information resource for the social media community in New Zealand.*
- *To launch a marketing programme to sell Carista House primarily using social media*  
*Carista House is beautiful, but has been on the market for some time, without a buyer. While it's understandable that some properties don't sell in a recession, there's an opportunity to market this property differently, in a way that will stand out from the crowd. We felt that the launch offered the opportunity to capture images and video that were more human than traditional real estate photography. This content could then be used in future activity online.*
- *To include both online and offline communities in the launch event .*

*The #sy database includes many people outside of Auckland, and we wanted them to be part of the evening as much as the guests who could be there. Social media offered ideal options for this, with live streaming video, live tweeting and live photography.*



## ***“Interesting to see how people respond to a surprise.”***

*We planned three stages of buzz-building leading up to the launch:*

- 1. **Introducing the Twingle** - a little red triangle with the #sy hashtag to go on people's Twitter avatar*
- 2. **Emailing a few people** to ask for their support in wearing the twingle and creating buzz on the #sy hashtag*
- 3. **Promoting a web video series** on Friday as a lead-in to the main event*

*As a buzz-building device, the Twingle went better than we could have imagined. Our core team began wearing the twingle on Monday 16 November, 4 days out from the launch.*

*On the evening of Tuesday, 17 November, we emailed a few friends and supporters to ask for their help in building buzz.*

*On Wednesday, 18 November the questions started flying. “What is #sy?” “Why do you have that red thing on your avatar?”*

*It was a delicate balance between suspense and transparency. Anyone who asked, we would send a direct message with a brief explanation, and ask for their email address to send more information.*

*While a few decided not to wear the twingle, many more did. More than 30 people chose to wear the twingle in support of #sy, somewhat in on the story (they knew about the #sy brand launch) but not aware of the Carista House tie-in.*

*Thirty people doesn't sound like a lot, but in New Zealand's highly interconnected Twitter community, those 30 people combined to make a lot of noise, and garner a lot of curiosity. On Wednesday evening, I got a phone call. It was from someone well-known on Twitter, who had been getting private feedback from others that they didn't know why they didn't have a twingle. Social dynamics were coming into play, and even though our intention was to invite people into the mystery, people felt excluded.*

*So, we put a message out saying anyone could find out more by sending a direct message to myself or @jameshancox - which again netted more twingle-wearers. On Wednesday night we put out an event invitation on Facebook to join the media team for a web video series entitled "Race to Carista".*

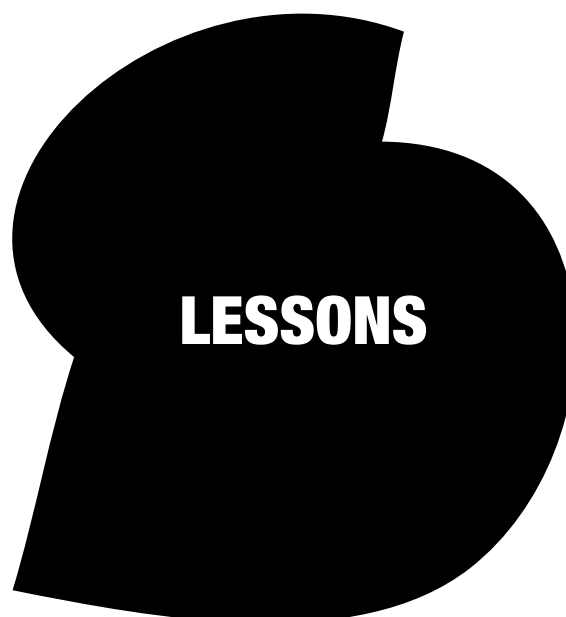
*The invitation clearly showed a connection to the #sy tag, and made for even more mystery. Some embraced the mystery and were willing to wait, others wanted to know right now.*



**LESSON:** *Twitter is a place to see and be seen. Being excluded can be a source of shame and confusion, even if you don't intend to cause it.*

**LESSON:** *Mystery, the colour red, and tribalism are powerful ways to get interest and buy-in to an idea.*

**LESSON:** *There will always be some people who see it as their role to go against the flow.*



## **“Very luscious”**

*On the morning of Friday the 20th, we launched our website, [www.sy-engage.com](http://www.sy-engage.com), as well as a blog post on iJump explaining the change.*

*At last, some light had been shed on the meaning of this mysterious hashtag. Positive feedback began to pour in throughout the day (including the phrase “very luscious”). It was the high point of the campaign. We had successfully launched a website, and the community was finally seeing some answers as to what the mystery was all about.*

## **“This is episode one of our webseries”**

*At 4:53pm, the first episode of “Race to Carista” began after a day where the media team shot and edited what had been planned in the days running up to the launch.*

*It was a brief (less than 2 minute) episode showing the team’s plans to get to Carista, but being foiled by lack of directions and then a change of plan at the last minute - which would turn out to be a helicopter ride.*

*The videos were well-produced, but because of the real-time, transitory nature of Twitter, people missed them.*

*The story was told, but it was not received by more than a few people.*



**LESSON:** Know the strengths and weaknesses of your medium. If you’re broadcasting across multiple platforms, have a single “collection point” for viewing (or catching up to) dynamic, real-time channels like Twitter or YouTube.

## **“Just got off the helicopter!”**

*The real-world event was beginning. Our guests, chosen from our previous, existing and potential clients, as well as some in the Twitter community who had offered their help and support, got into some very social conversations.*

*In terms of a simple, real-world event, the launch was a smashing success. People networked, participated in some activities to help them understand not only social media but also the future of business. And they had fun. Winding down the event was not easy - the conversation and buzz just kept going.*

*But outside the walls of Carista, trouble was stirring. Not only were people not seeing the videos, because they went past too fast, they weren’t participating in the action at the event. Before the night’s action had even finished, a blog post critical of the evening went up, scoring far more attention than the live-streaming video from the event.*

# ***Our carefully planned brand was in tatters***

*On Saturday morning, the #sy hashtag stream was full of questions why and recriminations. A second blog post went up. At that moment, our carefully planned brand was in tatters.*



**LESSON:** *Connecting diverse groups of people is easier when you have them in the same room. And the converse is true - geographical barriers can be hard to break down.*

**LESSON:** *Mixing online and real-world takes a lot of planning, technology and people-power. It is easy to underestimate it!*

## ***“My thoughts on your thoughts”***

*I began Saturday by adding a comment to the critical blog post. It was still a raw moment, but it was important to respond and bring some context.*

*The next few hours were spent driving back to Auckland and returning equipment, so it wasn't until early afternoon that we were able to respond in more detail.*

*I made a YouTube video, and Marie wrote a blog post. Our tone was philosophical, and we acknowledged we may have been too ambitious in our intentions for the launch.*

*We also said we'd rather be too ambitious, and make mistakes, than never try anything at all. We received helpful responses from the bloggers who had given their thoughts on the event, and enjoyed the benefits of being part of the conversation, and admitting where we'd made mistakes. For our candour we received a lot of helpful, constructive feedback.*

*Our demonstrated willingness to learn turned people in our favour - not as mindless fans, but as constructive co-creators, which is the future of business we were trying to paint all along. We just didn't know we'd be doing it this way!*

## ***Sunny and pleasant***

*An interesting sideline to the hashtag was the weather forecasts from Damascus, which used #SY to signify Syria.*

*Our brand weather began to warm after our thoughtful messages went out. We had effectively silenced those who just wanted to complain (a small minority), encouraged those with constructive feedback, and we also had attendees of the evening beginning to comment, like: Had the most amazing time last night at #Sy. So many energizing people from different backgrounds.*





## So was it a success?

*Let's look at our original objectives:*

### **1. Successful launch of the #sy brand**

*Our key audience is not on Twitter - it is the people who want to understand Twitter (and other forms of social media) and see if it will work for their business.*

*Those who were able to make it on the night had a mind-altering experience. They learnt, they grew, and they're hungry for more.*

*Meanwhile, online, more people know about #sy than knew (or cared) about iJump. Although the number of people involved is low by world standards, the intensity of discussion and the length of the conversation - 5 days - is extraordinary.*

*Not only do people know about #sy, they also know what kind of company we are, because we have demonstrated it. We are the kind of company that will stretch ourselves in order to learn. We will take risks with our brand, so our clients can safely follow in our footsteps. We are pioneers. On a bottom line level, we've received a significant number of high quality sales leads from the event, both from people who were there, or others who have heard about what we're doing online.*

*What's important to note is that none of this is in isolation. Relationships are relationships, wherever they happen. Social media just offers many more ways to have relationships.*

*Finally, this launch event has reinvigorated our database. This is web 1.0 marketing, or even pre-web digital marketing.*

## **So was it a success?**

*Let's look at our original objectives:*

### **2. Relaunch of the iJump brand**

*We weren't so successful at relaunching the iJump brand, a situation aggravated by the fact we ran out of time and resources to redevelop the iJump site.*

*By contrast, #sy launched with clarity because it was supported by a strong website. It once again shows the increased need for planning, resourcing and coordinating online and offline channels.*

### **3. Launch a marketing programme to sell Carista House primarily using social media**

*We raised awareness of the house, both among guests of the event, as well as through the ill-fated web video series. However there was some misunderstanding about the nature of the promotion. People seemed to think we were trying to sell the house on the night. Now that would be ambitious! However it showed up to us the need for more clarity in our communications.*

*The only goals we had set for Carista House on the night, was to gather some content showing the house with people in it - something that would allow for an emotional connection, rather than sterile Real Estate photos. It's part of the ongoing marketing experiment to make Carista stand out from the crowd, so she can find the right buyer, somewhere in the world.*

## So was it a success?

*Let's look at our original objectives:*

### **4. To include both online and offline communities in the launch event**

*In this, we admit: we failed.*

*In perfect hindsight, it should have been far more interactive, with the opportunity for guests to tap into the Twittersphere and ask questions.*

*We also saw the need to either: A) have an extra person in our media team - someone solely dedicated to monitoring and responding to social media activity, particularly Twitter, or; B) Ensure each of the existing team took turns doing this. We needed to keep our fingers on the pulse of our Social Heartbeat to ensure we were still on-message.*

*Once again, it underscores that doing this stuff right is neither easy nor cheap in terms of people resources. Facilitating a real-life event is a consuming enough activity. Being an interface to another world, that's a real challenge. But we believe it is possible, and we will continue to push those boundaries.*





## Overall lessons learnt

*Mystery works, but handle it with care! People - especially Generation C people who use social media - don't like to be kept in the dark.*

*Keep it simple. In retrospect, we had too much going on. If we'd done half the things we did, but done them excellently, maybe we wouldn't have had a crisis on our hands on Saturday morning. However....*

*Controversy works. If we had created a safe, normal event, it wouldn't have received the attention it did. Yes, we made a mistake, but responding to that mistake gave us a platform to explain ourselves. And we can now assure our clients who face misrepresentation and hostility, we can relate.*

*Branding has changed forever. The 20th century brand manager was concerned with ensuring a situation like ours never happened. The 21st century manager needs to have not only a plan, but a culture in place to ensure that when crises happen, they will be able to respond with honesty, integrity and humanity. Otherwise, they might as well stop doing business.*

*The most successful outcome of the whole event was what we learnt. Social media gave us an opportunity to hear the well-reasoned, constructive feedback we otherwise wouldn't hear.*

---

### **About #sy**

**#sy is a social media consultancy based in Auckland, New Zealand, that enables organisations around the world to build two-way relationships and engagement with the people they want to reach. Find out more at [www.sy-engage.com](http://www.sy-engage.com)**

#**Sy**

[www.sy-engage.com](http://www.sy-engage.com)