

728 x 90

What makes a great display campaign?

WATCH THIS SPACE.

Google

**CARD**online  
www.cardonline.ca  
[ CLICK HERE ]

# MARKETING

ADVERTISING, MEDIA and PR in Canada

 

- Home
- News
- Events
- Marketing Group
- Community
- JobZone
- Resources
- Contacts

News > Agency News

## MARKETING EXECUTIVES TREK THROUGH SAHARA FOR NABS CHARITY RACE

September 29, 2011 | Chris Powell | Comments



At the end of the second day, perhaps while contemplating their severely swollen fingers and toes, maybe while slowly drilling through a toenail with a needle to drain the blood trapped underneath, participants in the Sahara Race will begin seriously questioning their ability to continue.



From L to R: Colin Nanka (Salesforce.com), Sandy Johnson (NEXCareer), Gavin Lucas (Bell Canada), Alison Simpson (Maritz), Stefan Danis (Mandrake)

Make no mistake, the Day 1 trek through the World Heritage Site Wadi Al-Hitan, or Whale Valley, was also excruciating. Often, though, the surge of adrenaline that comes with embarking on a 250-kilometre run across some of the most inhospitable terrain on the planet helps most of the runners power through temperatures that can reach 50 degrees Celsius, innumerable blisters, and shoulders and backs rubbed almost raw by backpacks (all participants are required to carry their own equipment and food).

But it's usually at the end of Day 2, every muscle on fire and nearly 200 kilometres of sun-baked desert still lying ahead – including a torturous 80-kilometre slog on Day 5 that bears the foreboding title The Long March – that racers begin to truly comprehend the magnitude of the task before them.

“That’s when a very unsettled voice seeps in and starts questioning what you’re doing there and wondering how this is going to be possible,” said **Stéfan Danis**, who has recruited a team of Canadian marketing and communications executives to participate in this year’s Sahara Race with a goal of raising \$100,000 for the National Advertising Benevolent Society (NABS). To date, more than \$86,000 has been raised.

Danis, CEO of Toronto-based executive search firm **Mandrake**, speaks from experience. In 2009, he finished 14th overall in the Gobi March, a similarly grueling trek across the Gobi Desert which, along with races in the Sahara, the Atacama desert in Chile and the Antarctic, comprises the 4 Deserts ultramarathon – recognized by *Time* magazine in 2010 as one of the world’s top 10 endurance competitions.

Up to a quarter of participants in the Sahara Race will ultimately end up dropping out, said Danis, who recently released a book about his Gobi March experience entitled *The Gobi Runner*.

ComFree general manager **Patrick Sullivan**, a member of the Canadian team who worked alongside Danis at Procter & Gamble in the mid 1980s, recently read *The Gobi Runner* and admits to being taken aback by Danis’ tales of losing most of his toenails and frazzled runners sitting in the sand weeping.

Sullivan is apprehensive about the race, but said that “about 90%” of conquering the Sahara will come from mental fortitude. “I know my body is going to suffer during this period, but I think it’s about having my mind power me through,” he said.

The physical toll the race takes on participants is immense, but Danis agreed that success in the Sahara is ultimately determined by how runners cope with the mental anguish of running the equivalent of four marathons plus a double marathon in the span of a week – in the world’s hottest desert.

This, he believes, is an area where the team of battle-hardened marketing executives will excel – their experience in an uncompromising, often brutal profession helping them realize they’re a lot tougher than they imagined.

“Everybody has that realization,” he told *Marketing* via telephone from Jerusalem Tuesday, where he had spent the day visiting religious shrines including the Wailing Wall and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. “But people that work in marketing services will have a lot of life experience to draw upon to help them plough ahead and just roll with the adversity.

More ways to get Marketing Magazine

- MAGAZINE
- AM/PM DAILY
- FACEBOOK
- RSS FEEDS

**How do we reach 8-million people? However they like.**

Click here to find out more about National Post's audience across multiple platforms in the 2nd edition of ABC's Consolidated Media Report

Audit Bureau of Circulations **NATIONAL POST**

@GoogleDisplay Follow Us >

What makes a great display campaign? Send us your view.

SEE THE TRENDS > Google

"It's just another tough day at the office."

Completing the Sahara Race will also have a transformative effect on participants' lives, he said, predicting that at least two of his teammates will ultimately go on to run another desert race (according to the 4 Deserts site, about 25% of the participants in this race have competed in a prior event).

The impact on participants' professional life can be equally profound, he added. "They become less patient of people that struggle to overcome adversity in general, but they also become far more patient when they face adversity themselves, because they know they can see themselves through it," he said. "They know that whatever they're going through will work itself out."

Alison Simpson, executive vice-president at Maritz Canada and a NABS board member, agreed to participate in the race because she was curious to see what she would discover about her capabilities.

"When you push yourself physically to accomplish something you didn't think you could do, it's incredibly gratifying and also incredibly freeing – you start to see potential in yourself that you really didn't think was there," said Simpson, who has completed 29 marathons – including the famous Boston Marathon and the Midnight Sun Marathon in Norway – since taking up the sport 10 years ago.

"This is taking my running to a whole new level," she said on Tuesday, less than 48 hours before boarding a plane for Egypt. It was, she said, a "completely emotional" decision that saw her accept Danis' offer to run in the Sahara Race within seconds of him asking.

"I don't think this is something you sign up for if you actually think it through like a rational human being," she said with a laugh, confiding that she is both "really excited and absolutely terrified" by the race.

Like Danis, Simpson believes the race will yield dividends in her professional life. "We're in an industry where you're only as good as your last campaign or marketing initiative and the results it drove," she said. "An ability to see potential where others can't is a huge part of what made me successful and will continue to make me successful. With that as my foundation, doing something like this on a personal level can only benefit my career and give me a different way to go about solving different client issues."

Sullivan, meanwhile, is confident that by the time he crosses the finish line in the shadow of the Pyramids at Giza, he will have learned more about coping with adversity and gained an understanding of how to best achieve goals he sets for himself.

The first step in his journey begins at approximately 7 a.m. Sunday, with the first blister occurring shortly afterwards.

Originally published by MarketingMag.ca on September 29, 2011

## RECENT COMMENTS

[See all comments](#)

### Marie Lerant

What an incredible undertaking and a worthy cause! I'll be tracking your amazing adventure and lending my spirit to yours that you succeed and reap many benefits. Blessings to all of you. Go Alison!

Thursday, September 29 @ 10:08 am | [Reply](#)

### serge rancourt

As an Industry it would be great if we could close the gap between \$86K to \$100K.

People can give by going to the NABS website.

Thursday, September 29 @ 9:30 am | [Reply](#)

### Darlene Simpson

You all deserve a lot of credit for attempting such a challenge. A lot of people will be thinking about you & lots of us will be praying for you.

You are an exceptional group of people.

Darlene Simpson (Alison's Mom)

Thursday, September 29 @ 9:21 am | [Reply](#)

### JB

Godspeed to this courageous and dedicated team.

Thursday, September 29 @ 8:00 am | [Reply](#)

## Comment

Your name:\*

Your email:\*

Your message:

Have your say on this topic!  
Comments that are thought to be disrespectful or offensive may be removed by our Marketing Magazine admins.  
**Thanks!**

\* These fields are required.  
There is a character limit on comments.

[Submit my comment](#)

[Customer Service](#)

[Contact](#)

[Advertising Opportunities](#)

[Subscribe](#)

[Give a Gift](#)

[About Us](#)

[Privacy](#)

[Terms & Conditions](#)

[Site Map](#)

Copyright © 1996-2011 by Rogers Publishing Limited. All rights reserved.

**MARKETING**  
marketingmag.ca

Canada's premier sources for news and insights that span the marketing, advertising, media and PR industries.

To access the 2011 editorial calendar [\[click here\]](#)



ROGERS DIGITAL MEDIA  
NEWS & BUSINESS

---