



**ONLINE MASTER'S DEGREE IN STRATEGIC PUBLIC RELATIONS**

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY WASHINGTON DC

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## Algae becomes a fuel alternative

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While ethanol might be a media darling and go-to biofuel among politicians campaigning on a green platform, it's not the only alternative fuel in play.

Global Green Solutions and Valcent Products developed a push to spread awareness of Vertigro - an algae-to-biofuel technology that mass produces algae and extracts algae oil.

"Algae biofuel needed to be part of the alternative biofuel dialogue," says Nancy Tamosaitis, president of Vorticom, Vertigro's PR agency.

### Strategy

Initial media reaction was lukewarm, at best. Algae biofuel was eyed suspiciously by media, relegating it to the category of con men who were bathtub algae enthusiasts, Tamosaitis says.

"Top-tier media were not going to write or broadcast about the... algae biofuel story without going to the algae biofuel farm," she says.

Therefore, Vertigro's PR campaign focused on a pilot algae biofuel farm built in Anthony, TX, featuring a 6-acre facility with a "closed-loop" algae-production system designed to draw media interest and demonstrate the technology's viability and, ultimately, the investment potential of the venture.

### Tactics

Immediately after Labor Day, Vorticom issued a media alert inviting journalists to visit the farm.

A broadcast video producer was hired to shoot b-roll and interview Glen Kertz, plant physiologist and Valcent president and CEO.

The b-roll and release were distributed via PR Newswire and picked up by blogs and Web sites. Early coverage, such as Reuters' "Green fuel solution lurks in pond scum" story, was packaged and sent to media outlets to create buzz.

## Results

"The media exposure helped generate an upswing in deal flow," Kertz says, adding that numerous companies are calling to be a part of the venture.

Coverage also included the *El Paso Times*, *The Globe and Mail's* Report on Business, *Fuel Magazine*, *Biodiesel Magazine*, and *Biomass Magazine*. Broadcast media included CNN, Marketwatch, and Telemundo. Also, the Discovery Channel and *Farmer's Almanac* spent several days at the farm for segments.

## Future

"We are firmly established as a market player to watch," Kertz says. "The interest that the public relations outreach has secured is amazing. There is no advertising equivalent that could equate with the critical positive visibility that PR achieved."

The Vertigro algae farm continues to be an attraction for many media outlets.

## PRWeek's View

*This is the type of campaign where only PR could achieve such successful results.*

*This effort demonstrated that with the right approach, a late-entry to the market can easily get its name known and become a viable possibility.*

*The key here, though, was to create a destination, such as the algae farm in Texas, where the media can experience the topic first-hand and learn about the positives it has to offer.*

**PR team:** Valcent Products (El Paso); Global Green Solutions (San Diego); and Vorticom (New York)

**Campaign:** Cutting Against the Grain to Build Awareness of Algae Biofuel

**Duration:** Spring 2007-ongoing

**Budget:** \$100,000