Marketing Everywhere Lesson Plan

Freddy Became the Campaign

At-a-Glance

Kit: Current Events Kit: World Cup 2026

Case: Freddy and the viral World Cup road trip through everyday America

Core thesis: Freddy shows how influencer marketing and modern PR now overlap. The most effective brands did not interrupt his story. They added to it.

Main marketing principle: Influencer Marketing as Modern PR

Supporting concepts: Earned media, source credibility, parasocial interaction, social proof, authenticity, place branding, cultural translation, brand participation, real-time PR

Best-fit courses: Social Media Marketing, Digital Marketing, Public Relations, Integrated Marketing Communications, Consumer Behavior, Sports Marketing, Global Marketing, Brand Management

Suggested class length: 50 minutes

Historical parallel: Humans of New York

Lesson Overview

This lesson uses Freddy, a German World Cup fan traveling through the United States, to teach influencer marketing as modern public relations.

Freddy became one of the early viral side stories of the 2026 FIFA World Cup by posting his reactions to ordinary American experiences: Taco Bell, Waffle House, Buc-ee's, Bass Pro Shops, country radio, air-conditioned stadiums, road trips, sports teams, and everyday hospitality.

That is what makes the case useful. Freddy did not create a polished tourism ad. He created a discovery narrative.

Old PR tried to get people to repeat the brand's message. Modern PR creates moments that people want to narrate in their own voice. Freddy's value was not just reach. It was believability.

Learning Objectives

1. Explain how influencer marketing can function as modern public relations.
2. Identify the difference between paid promotion, earned media, and creator-led storytelling.
3. Explain why Freddy's outsider perspective made ordinary American brands feel interesting.
4. Apply source credibility and parasocial interaction concepts to a viral creator moment.
5. Evaluate how brands, teams, celebrities, and public figures joined Freddy's story.
6. Identify the risks of over-commercializing an organic creator moment.
7. Design a brand response that adds to a viral story without hijacking it.

Key Terms

Influencer marketing: using individuals with audience trust, visibility, or cultural relevance to shape awareness, attitudes, or behavior.

Earned media: attention a brand receives without directly paying for the placement.

Modern PR: real-time participation in cultural moments, creator relationships, social conversation, reputation management, and earned attention.

Source credibility: the degree to which an audience sees a communicator as believable, knowledgeable, trustworthy, or authentic.

Parasocial interaction: the one-sided relationship audiences form with media figures, celebrities, and creators.

Cultural translation: helping an audience see a familiar place, product, or behavior through a new lens.

Place branding: shaping how people perceive a city, region, country, or destination.

Brand participation: entering an existing cultural conversation or creator story in a way that adds value.

50-Minute Pacing Guide

0:00-5:00 | Cold Open

Ask: “What is something totally normal in America that might feel strange, exciting, or ridiculous to someone visiting for the first time?” Let students name examples: Waffle House, Target, Buc-ee’s, free refills, huge drinks, college football, drive-thrus, air conditioning, tipping, flags everywhere. Then say: “That list is the campaign.”

5:00-10:00 | Set the Scene

Explain Freddy quickly. German soccer fan. World Cup road trip. Face hidden. X account. Posts about ordinary American life. Goes viral. Brands, teams, celebrities, and news outlets pile in.

10:00-18:00 | The Viral Flywheel

Walk students through the flywheel: ordinary moment, outsider wonder, audience validation, brand participation, media amplification, cultural meaning.

18:00-27:00 | Framework

Introduce the three-part framework: authenticity, cultural translation, and participation window. Explain that Freddy’s value is not just audience size. His value is that he makes ordinary America feel worth noticing.

27:00-32:00 | The Complication

Bring in the authenticity problem. If this format becomes valuable, people will copy it. Ask: “When does authentic content become a performance of authenticity?”

32:00-43:00 | Group Activity

Students choose a brand, city, team, artist, or organization and design a PR response to Freddy or a similar World Cup visitor.

43:00-48:00 | Group Debrief

Have 2-3 groups share. Ask: “Did your brand add to the creator’s story, or did it try to steal the story?”

48:00-50:00 | Final Takeaway

Close with the whiteboard line: “Freddy became the campaign because he wasn’t trying to be the campaign.” Add: “The brand does not always need to be the narrator. Sometimes the best PR move is to give the narrator something worth saying.”

Opening Script

Today we’re talking about the best accidental PR campaign for America during the 2026 World Cup.

It did not come from a tourism board. It did not come from FIFA. It did not come from a host city agency with a drone shot and a tagline like “Experience the Spirit of Something.”

It came from Freddy.

Freddy is a German soccer fan who came to North America for the World Cup and started posting about ordinary American life like he had discovered another planet.

Taco Bell. Waffle House. Buc-ee’s. Bass Pro Shops. Country radio. Air-conditioned stadiums. American road trips. The kind of stuff a lot of Americans barely notice because it is just the background noise of living here.

But Freddy noticed. And because he noticed, everyone else started noticing too.

That is why this is not just a funny internet story. It is a marketing lesson.

Freddy shows us what happens when influencer marketing and public relations become the same thing.

The brands that won this moment did not shove ads into his feed. They joined the story carefully. And that is what we are unpacking today: when should a brand enter a creator’s story, and when should it stay out of the way?

Core Teaching Explanation

Freddy is useful because he shows a shift in how public relations works.

Traditional PR often starts with the organization. The brand has a message. The brand wants coverage. The brand pitches journalists. The brand hopes the public hears the intended story.

That still exists. It still matters. But Freddy shows a different model. The story did not start with the brand. It started with an audience watching someone discover a place in real time.

Freddy’s posts worked because they made everyday American life feel surprising. He did not need to visit only famous landmarks. Ordinary places may have been more powerful than famous ones. Anyone can say the Grand Canyon is impressive. That is not a fresh take. But when a German soccer fan reacts to Buc-ee’s like it is a national monument with brisket, people pay attention.

The magic is the reframe.

For Americans, Waffle House is normal. For Freddy, it is a cultural experience. For Americans, Buc-ee’s is a massive gas station. For Freddy, it is proof that the country is not operating at a normal scale.

That is cultural translation. The influencer is not just distributing content. He is changing what the audience sees.

Bad brand participation says, “Look at us.” Good brand participation says, “Here is something that makes your story better.” That is the lesson students need to catch.

Board Framework: The Freddy Flywheel

1. Ordinary moment: Freddy notices something Americans see as normal.

2. Outsider wonder: He reacts with surprise, humor, or delight.
3. Audience validation: Americans share it because they feel seen, proud, amused, or relieved.
4. Brand participation: Brands, teams, cities, and public figures enter the story.
5. Media amplification: News outlets cover the viral story.
6. Cultural meaning: The creator moment turns into a reputation story.

Group Activity: Join the Story Without Killing It

Prompt: A World Cup visitor is going viral for loving something ordinary about your city, brand, team, campus, restaurant, or category. Your job is to create a PR response that adds to the story without making it feel fake.

Brand options: Waffle House, Buc-ee's, Taco Bell, Bass Pro Shops, Hilton, Ford, Houston Rockets, New Orleans Saints, New Orleans Pelicans, a host city tourism board, a local restaurant, an airline, a university near a host city, a country music artist, a college football team, a regional grocery store, a barbecue restaurant, a hotel chain, or a state tourism office.

Group questions:

1. What brand or organization did you choose?
2. What is the existing story the creator is already telling?
3. Why do people care about that story?
4. What should the brand do to add to the story?
5. What should the brand absolutely not do?
6. What would the creator naturally want to post?
7. How do you keep the response from feeling forced?
8. What could go wrong?
9. How would you measure whether the response worked?

Debrief Questions

1. Did your brand add to the creator's story or try to steal it?
2. What made your idea feel authentic?
3. What would make your idea feel fake?
4. Why would the creator want to post about it?
5. What audience emotion are you trying to create?
6. What would success look like beyond views?
7. Where is the line between smart PR and cringe brand behavior?

Final Instructor Takeaway

Freddy is not a strong marketing case because he went viral. He is a strong marketing case because he shows what happens when a creator makes ordinary experiences feel meaningful.

He did not sell America. He made America feel discoverable.

Modern PR works when a brand recognizes a story people already care about, adds something worth talking about, and resists the urge to make itself the main character.