

GILLIAN SMALL PUBLIC RELATIONS

CASE STUDY

PENELOPE BOURBON LAUNCH - 2019-2020

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

In late spring 2019, New Jersey-based Penelope, a new, four-grain straight craft bourbon whiskey brand, approached GSPR to help its namesake Penelope Bourbon (then available in New Jersey, only) gain national exposure through the placement of strategic earned media features.



Since Penelope would be its first client in the spirits space, the GSPR team spent weeks researching the liquor industry's inner workings as it related to PR and dove into creating a custom plan to help set Penelope apart from other craft bourbon brands in the whiskey aisle.

PLANNING

After completing a thorough media landscape analysis, GSPR concluded that Penelope Bourbon was entering a PR sector that was over-crowded with big brands with even bigger advertising budgets. Nevertheless, GSPR was up for the challenge to help Penelope increase its exposure and obtain third-party validation, through strategic, top-tier earned media placements.

One of the biggest challenges the PR team faced early on ended up playing in Penelope's favor - *Penelope's bourbons quite literally appeal to everyone*. The namesake Penelope Bourbon is light, under 100-calories per serving, and designed to please the palate of bourbon novices and enthusiasts, alike. Its later Barrel Strength release, on the other hand, caters to consumers with a more mature taste for bourbon.

EXECUTION

With so many angles and opportunities to chase, nailing down a clear plan of action was not easy. The PR team carefully backed out a pitching calendar for the year, and to start, took a grassroots approach. They thoroughly researched and offered early samples to key members of the media that had written, *or even tweeted*, about enjoying bourbon or whiskey. By taking the time to understand each and every media target, the team was able to ensure its communication was well-received.



Once samples were in the hands of relevant members of the media, the PR team pivoted to tell Penelope's story on the local level, since at the time, Penelope was only available in the Garden State. The brand was founded by two best friends from Basking Ridge, New Jersey, so it was important to place its origin story with local news, first. GSPR landed an interview for the founders with the *Echoes-Sentinel* in June 2019—a newspaper serving Long Hill Township, Millington, Stirling, Gillette, Meyersville, Homestead Park, Warren Township and Watchung (where one of the founders currently resides).

The PR team then fleshed the business story out to industry trade publications to coincide with Penelope's Barrel Strength release and distribution expansion.



Placement over placement, GSPR grew Penelope's story in the media until national media began to take note. The first significant national placement landed with [Forbes](#) in August, followed by features on [Cosmopolitan](#) (syndicated to [Yahoo](#) and [MSN](#)), [Eat This, Not That!](#) (syndicated to [MSN](#)), [Paste](#), [Best Products](#) (syndicated to [MSN](#)), [The Manual](#), and [OK! Magazine](#), to name a few.

It didn't just stop there. Penelope Bourbon blasted into 2020 with even more consumer media impressions and top-tier earned placements. In fact, in 2020 the GSPR team secured more top tier placements for Penelope than the year before, with features included in [Gear Patrol](#), [Men's Health](#) (syndicated to [Yahoo! Lifestyle](#)) and [The Manual](#), to name a few.

RESULTS

GSPR helped generate over 120 million earned media impressions for Penelope during its launch year (2019) alone. By the end of 2020, the total reach more than doubled with over **270 million earned media impressions**. The Penelope team was able to leverage key media placements to help amplify its image across marketing (e.g. social media) and sales (e.g. solicitation of retailers and on-premise partners).

Mike Paladini, a co-founder of Penelope Bourbon, said about working with GSPR, "We have been impressed by the GSPR team's hustle and ability to secure valuable media coverage on our behalf. GSPR is a great team partner."