

Montreal tourism campaign aims for the rooftops

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Aerial hoop artist Alexandra Royer gets ready to soar over the city (YouTube/Tourisme Montréal)

Heading into Montreal's 375th anniversary celebration last year, the city's tourism team had a challenge on its hands. A blow-out marketing blitz was warranted, but what should be the theme? 'We're older than Toronto and way more fun than Ottawa' would surely be true though arguably not the most gracious or persuasive angle. Similarly limiting, says Francois Poulin, [Tourisme Montreal's](#) Director of Communications and Interactive Media, is absence of landmarks on the scale of as a Paris or London. No Eiffel Tower, no Buckingham Palace. Of course, the city has the French language, the distinct culture, the history, yet how best to express that?



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As the team dug deeper, a few key selling points emerged. Montreal boasts more students and more festivals per capita than any other city in North America and is second only to New York in the number of restaurants. All of that contributes towards a nightlife and a penchant for the party lights that define the place, though that may not be universally known, or at least not in the U.S., a much-desired market for the tourism department. That joie de vivre became a rallying point of the 375th celebrations, and a theme Montreal is now building on with its Never Grow Up campaign.



The concept is captured in a [recently-released video](#) produced by [lg2 Canada](#), a Montreal-based creative agency. The ad features a young woman piloting a 21-foot-wide helium balloon high above downtown, in the moonlight, to the music of local band Half Moon Run. Over patios and parties, she glides, above cyclists and soccer players, before soaring past the Old Port. She is a tinkerbelle, lending a sense of magic to the night, and yes, showcasing the city as she floats between the

festivities. There is a grace and whimsy to her flight, a high-wired panache, that evokes the city's famed circus heritage.

Indeed, the fairy guiding the balloon, 28-year-old aerial hoop artist Alexandra Royer, performed with the [Cirque du Soleil](#) when she was 16, appearing in *Quidam*. Royer is now with [The 7 Fingers](#), a mini-Cirque of sorts, spun off from the mothership, that emphasizes emotion and intimacy, rather than superhuman athleticism. However, no small amount of rigor was required for this shoot.

The balloon could carry a maximum of 130 lbs, and that had to include everything: harness, wings, Royer... and most crucially, warm clothes. Those would prove an especially important element over the two nights of the production.

Designed as a summer marketing pitch, the video highlights the incredible outdoor energy on Montreal's steamiest evenings. The sidewalks are packed, the patios are full, there is a huge bash happening on a downtown plaza and the party's going late. Except that in this case, the shoot happened in mid-April, when any possible happiness to be had outside is either on the ski hills or, for many Montrealers, miles away in south Florida. It doesn't typically appear when you're tethered to a team of quad ATVs, flying 30-feet over a closed-off street.



Setting up at the Place des Festivals

Yet in keeping with the Peter Pan theme, a certain make-believe needed to be stirred into the mix. A dancing throng was conjured up and al fresco diners were enticed out. Then Royer was set aloft. Poulin says the nights were so cold that Royer could only float around for about 30 minutes before they had to haul her back in and warm her up. Weather aside, Poulin says the biggest issue wasn't keeping her up, but instead ensuring she didn't drift away with the balloon.

As it was, the team would float her over a street scene, then jump into the trucks and drive over to the next location, repeating the process, until 6 am. "We shot it

like a stunt,” says Poulin, by which he means quick takes and a minimum of staging. All in, including Ig2’s fee, Royer’s time, the balloon rental, and the production costs, the budget for the two-minute video was \$200,000, a pittance by industry norms.

The clip was released on May 24, serving as the centrepiece for the city’s Never Grow Up campaign. Additional elements of this youth-oriented effort will include Montreal-inspired outdoor art in Toronto as well as twelve LED bikes ridden through Toronto and New York to promote the city. As for the video, Poulin says it has already proven a success, garnering a steady stream of media mentions and almost 1m views on YouTube in the first week.