

Effective Public Relations Campaigns

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Introduction

The definition of Public Information Campaigns, or Public Communications Campaigns, I have found most useful is that provided by Rice & Atkin (2013), who define them as efforts to "inform or influence behaviors in large audiences within a specified time period using an organized set of communication activities and featuring an array of mediated messages in multiple channels generally to produce non-commercial benefits to individuals and society" (p. 3).

They go on to mention the Social Marketing framework and the Communication-Persuasion Matrix as providing two useful theoretical perspectives. Social marketing emphasises a consumer focus similar to commercial advertising campaigns in attempting to package the social product in an attractive manner. Kotler & Lee (2005), in outlining Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, characterize corporate social marketing as the support of behaviour change campaigns which are generally intended to improve public safety, health or the environment with the focus being on the behavioural aspect.

The McGuire Communication-Persuasion Matrix mentioned by Rice & Atkin (2013) identifies the input variables and output steps that "make up the process of being persuaded." (p. 134). Inputs factors include source, message and channel. Output stages vary from the initial exposure and processing through learning, attitude and behaviour changes.

Tench & Yeomans (2009) note that public communications campaigns attempt to change "an individual's attitudes and knowledge (known as *cognitive* change), feelings (known as *affective* change) and behaviour" in respect of social issues.

In this report I have chosen to focus on two Public Information Campaigns targeted at the general public in Ireland. Furthermore I have chosen recent campaigns - both were conducted in 2013 - as they ought to evidence the most relevant and up-to-date PR campaign tactics. I deliberately picked two PRCA Awards for Excellence winners because, while it is entirely possible to learn valuable lessons from the tactical errors made by others, I submit that it might be more productive and beneficial to absorb and, if possible, replicate successful campaign techniques.

Synopsis of Campaigns

Pembroke Communications (*now PSG Communications following a 2014 merger with Slattery Communications*) were commissioned by A.Menarini and Daiichi Sankyo (two pharmaceutical companies) to develop and implement a

communications plan to coincide with World Hypertension Day on May 17th, 2013 (Psgplus.ie, 2015). The intention was to reinforce the importance of knowing one's own blood pressure (BP) and raise awareness of the very real dangers of high blood pressure. The new public information campaign to be undertaken was the first in Ireland to be linked with World Hypertension Day, and the hope was to repeat the campaign annually. The challenges, as identified by Pembroke, associated with addressing the issue of hypertension were identified early on and included that it is not a health condition seen as either very dangerous or terribly trendy; it is not typically covered by consumer media in Ireland; a campaign would need to reach a younger, school-age audience who would not have high blood pressure on their collective radar; and the stigma of association with a poor diet would have to be overcome.

Insight Consultants was tasked by WEEE Ireland with creating a re-imagined version of a previously run campaign to increase awareness of the significance of battery recycling and the resulting impact on the environment, and in the process raise much-needed funds for LauraLynn (Ireland's Children's Hospice) through donations by WEEE for every battery recycled.

Aside: it may be helpful to know that WEEE Ireland is a compliance scheme organising the environmental management of Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment and waste batteries on behalf of its members who are producers for the Irish Electrical and Electronic Equipment (EEE) and batteries market (WEEE Ireland, 2015).

A previous multi-month campaign in late 2011 and early 2012 had resulted in the recycling of 450 tonnes of waste portable batteries and LauraLynn receiving €45,000 in donations. The challenges facing Insight were how to breathe life into what was perceived as a tired campaign - public interest was noted as having waned since the first campaign - and how to differentiate this new campaign from other charitable endeavours during a typically hectic Christmas season.

Purpose of Campaigns

The World Hypertension Day campaign had a number of very clear objectives:

- To raise Irish awareness of World Hypertension Day.
- To strengthen the relationship with the Irish Heart Foundation.
- To secure the Irish Heart Foundation's endorsement.
- To create an online hypertension information centre and drive traffic there.
- To improve understanding of hypertension with the public including:

- that it is a concern at any age
- that it is High Blood Pressure
- how vital it is to know your blood pressure (BP) and what healthy BP readings are
- how important it is to have your BP checked regularly
- the dangers of unhealthy BP levels
- how to get help
- To positively associate A.Menarini and Daiichi Sankyo with World Hypertension Day.

The Battery Recycling/LauraLynn campaign objectives are no less clear and perhaps even more simply expressed:

- To outdo the original campaign's €45K in donations to LauraLynn.
- To increase the number of batteries recycled in 2013 beyond the 472 tonnes recycled in 2012.
- To increase public awareness of the need for battery recycling, and understanding of the environmental impact.

Campaign Strategies and Messages

The timeframe for the World Hypertension Day campaign was extremely tight but still needed a multi-pronged plan to target several audiences. Pembroke developed the message "**Ask your GP about your BP**" for 2013 World Hypertension Day. The theme was designed to encourage the public's active involvement in their own health monitoring and make their blood pressure a key part of that monitoring.

Strategically partnering with the Irish Heart Foundation (IHF) was regarded as critical, and their endorsement was secured after a joint presentation by Pembroke Communications, A.Menarini and Daiichi Sankyo. To accommodate the IHF's existing commitments a detailed schedule of proposed activities was formulated at an early stage. The partnership was announced a week in advance of World Hypertension Day and achieved broadcast coverage in addition to daily, regional and trade publications.

A Battery Recycling/LauraLynn campaign message as articulated by Insight Consultants was "**Spread a Little Sunshine**". One of Insight's stated strategies was to generate significant media coverage of the campaign, both nationally and regionally, across print and online platforms. Another was to generate support of battery recycling through engagement with community groups such as county councils and schools. Considerable thought was given to the choice of a celebrity

ambassador to revitalise the campaign and fulfill the mandate of appealing to children, adults and the media. Ultimately Bosco the puppet was chosen as an ideal fit, and Bosco's creator persuaded to take part without a fee given the not-for-profit nature of WEEE Ireland and the fact that LauraLynn was to be the beneficiary of all monies raised.

Campaign Tactics Employed

For the World Hypertension Day campaign a number of innovative activities were undertaken:

- Dedicated online information about hypertension was added to the Irish Heart Foundation website, both to enhance the stakeholder relationship with the IHF and to increase public knowledge around the condition.

The online guide is now a permanent part of the site and contains multiple user-friendly sections on the various aspects of hypertension.

- An informative booklet (WHD Day Z-Card) was developed for the campaign. The booklet was distributed to GPS surgeries, hospitals and testing facilities nationwide, and was made available through the week free of charge. It contained:

- A clear endorsement by the Irish Heart Foundation
- A recording tool to allow the user note their blood pressure
- Links to the new website URL
- Easy to read information on BP, the measurement of BP and the prevention of high BP

- A WHD roadshow, intended to promote public awareness, provided free blood pressure checks in high traffic areas including Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford shopping centres.

The roadshow events were advised to the media in advance which resulted in print and broadcast interviews with GPs and/or the provision of case studies. More than 400 attended the events, some of whom had heard about the free BP check on local radio. Significant national and regional publicity was garnered. The roadshows were set up to ensure:

- A booth meeting location health and safety guidelines which was adequate to the needs of private consultants
- High location visibility
- The availability of hypertension-trained nursing staff through liaison with the Irish Heart Foundation

- Co-ordination of BP check activity with the shopping centres' marketing staff
- Photos were taken at each event for local media distribution
- Media campaigns were put in place for WHD including promotion of the partnership with the Irish Heart Foundation and the availability of the new website information, and promotion of the official launch.

New Amarach consumer research, focusing on the extent of diagnosed hypertension and the public's ignorance of their BP, provided additional news value. Regional GPs were made available for interview as were significant national spokespeople such as the IHF Medical Director and a hospital Consultant Geriatrician.

Celebrity ambassadors - a RTE Radio One DJ and a Leinster/Irish coach - were brought on board as they worked in environments that could potentially contribute to hypertension and it was felt they could provide varying perspectives to the target publics.

Multiple photocalls were conducted to coincide with the Irish Heart Foundation partnership, to launch WHD and present the research results, and to publicise the celebrity ambassadors.

- In what Pembroke Communications refers to as "experiential activity", the celebrity ambassadors along with two media personalities - from the Irish Medical News and the Irish Times - were persuaded to wear portable blood pressure monitoring devices (ABPMs). The results were analysed by a prominent doctor and the participants reported and tweeted on the experience.
- A street campaign promoted WHD to commuters. Promotional staff wore campaign t-shirts and hypertension booklets were distributed. Five train stations in five cities were targeted on the morning of May 17th and later that evening at an RDS sports event.
- Pembroke Communications also provided:
 - design of digital ads and placement of same on web and social media sites
 - drafting of 3rd party briefs
 - securing a voiceover talent for radio ads
 - recording of radio ad in studio and prep of script

Insight Consultants' Battery Recycling/LauraLynn campaign tactics included:

- A media campaign was launched with a LauraLynn photocall with Bosco, the ambassador, and one of the children using the LauraLynn services. The pictures and an accompanying press release were widely distributed and covered by various media. TodayFM, specifically Ray D'Arcy's show, was granted an exclusive first interview with Bosco, primarily because of D'Arcy's history with children's programming and his LauraLynn relationship. Specifically tailored regional releases were also distributed with county-specific battery stats provided and photos of Bosco with each county flag. Bosco was pitched for multiple interviews and profile print pieces in both national and regional media outlets.
- A whole segment of the Late Late Toy Show with Ryan Turbidy was created specifically for Bosco and the recycling campaign. The chat with Turbidy, which was scripted as impromptu, saw Bosco trend on Twitter and generate significant online comments. The recycling message was clearly delivered and the association with LauraLynn was made.
- Stickers branded with LauraLynn and Bosco were placed on WEEE Ireland battery boxes in retailers across the country to remind shoppers about the campaign and the link with the charity.
- A campaign reminder for national and regional media was released just before Christmas coinciding with the volume of battery-operated toys given as gifts. Newstalk were persuaded to interview Bosco on Christmas Eve. The reminder about post-Christmas battery recycling was extended into January.
- Social media was addressed using LauraLynn and WEEE Ireland accounts. Insight Consultants managed WEEE's Facebook and Twitter accounts. A Facebook page competition was run to increase awareness and promote recycling with branded Bosco t-shirts provided as prizes. The competition received hundreds of entries and had the added advantage of reinforcing the puppet's association with the campaign. Campaign updates were posted regularly and a major social media uptick was recorded the night of the Late Late Toy Show. LauraLynn's social media channels were also employed with recycling batteries encouraged via an updated Facebook cover photo.
- To close out the campaign a private Bosco performance for LauraLynn children, their families and staff was held in February of 2014.

Assessment

The World Hypertension Day campaign was deemed a success as evidenced by:

- The strengthening of the relationship with the Irish Heart Foundation (IHF).
- 420 people received BP checks at the five locations with 26% referred on to their GPs.
- 22,000 of the z-cards were distributed, some through the roadshows, some (10,000) on the street.
- The generation of 56 plus pieces of media coverage with an equivalent value of €94K. An estimated 4.23M opportunities to see or hear were registered.
- The new website URL had over 2,500 unique visitors over the week.
- The Facebook campaign generated over 1,200 actions (comments, likes, posts etc.) and the YouTube campaign delivered 932 clicks.
- The online ad campaign generated over 4,000 clicks. Click throughs from RTE.ie and Independent.ie were particularly strong, and the CTRs (click through rates) overall were higher than is typical.
- The radio campaign reached 34% of total audience with Today FM at 21% and UTV local at 14%.

The Battery Recycling/LauraLynn was also, by any reasonable measurement, hugely successful:

- As a result of the public response in returning batteries for recycling WEEE Ireland were in a position to donate €94K to LauraLynn, doubling the previous amount raised.
- 25 million waste batteries were recycled by WEEE Ireland in 2013 which represented in excess of 500 tonnes and an enormous increase of 34 tonnes over the 2012 number.
- Tidy towns and schools were actively involved in the campaign, conducting events such as sales where waste batteries were swapped for baked goods. The success of school involvement persuaded WEEE Ireland that a dedicated 2014 recycling campaign for schools was merited.
- Advertising Value Equivalency (AVE) in excess of €180K was achieved over the course of the three month campaign.
- The campaign was prominently featured in national press, radio and TV, highlighted by The Late Late Toy Show appearance (1.4 viewers). The Ray D'Arcy Show (250K listeners) interview with Bosco emphasised the work of LauraLynn and the positive impact on the environment of battery recycling. Newstalk Breakfast also broadcast a Bosco interview on Christmas Eve.

- The regional media response was very positive with 40 plus pieces printed in addition to online coverage and local radio station Bosco interviews.

Closing Remarks

The degree of success of the two public information campaigns above speaks well to the diverse tactics employed. However I did want to add a note about one particular aspect of both campaigns which struck me in reading the relevant PR literature, and that is the low-key presence of the sponsoring organisations - A.Menarini and Daiichi Sankyo in the case of the World Hypertension Day campaign, and WEEE Ireland in the case of the Battery Recycling/LauraLynn campaign.

Indeed in the former campaign, the bulk of the attention was quite noticeably, and I think cleverly, focussed on the Irish Heart Foundation connection. I believe that strategy was entirely deliberate, and, the obvious advantages of trusted third party endorsement aside, it speaks to something I had read previously about motivation in connection with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes.

L'Etang (1994), was warning of the moral problem at the centre of CSR when she wrote that if a programme is chosen to “to appeal in the first instance to some public other than the recipient then both the motivation of the company with regard to its stated intention and its commitment to the project must be questioned.” (p. 116). She went on to note that “motivation in corporate social responsibility is identified as paramount in determining the worthiness of such programmes” and warned that the “decision to develop and publicize programmes of corporate social responsibility ... must be accompanied by a substantial and real change in reality or it will be seen as mere window-dressing or even an attempt to deceive.” (1994, p. 121).

L'Etang likely did not have public information campaigns in mind when she wrote that journal paper but I feel her cautions are entirely appropriate here. Contrast the perfectly pitched involvement of the two pharmaceutical companies behind the World Hypertension Day campaign with that of Diageo in the ongoing Stop Out-Of-Control Drinking campaign. Even the most generous of interpretations would have to allow that the latter has, *at least to date*, been a public relations nightmare, from the questions surrounding Diageo funding, through the board resignations of Dr Ciara Kelly and psychologist Krystian Fikert, to, most recently, the departure of Diageo Director David Smith.

Public perception of corporate motivation does matter.

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