



PRCA Awards Entry for Business to Business

"Greenstar stays top of the pile"



A - The Brief

Established as a new player in the waste management industry in 1999, Greenstar's communication objective from the outset was to present itself as a credible company that would set the waste management standard.

Between 1999 and early 2005, Drury Communications worked closely with Greenstar to successfully achieve this objective. Misperceptions about the industry traditionally viewed as the "hump and dump" sector meant that Greenstar needed to battle both for itself and the sector it represented which, in reality, was a rapidly evolving and technologically sophisticated industry that is today valued at €1.4 billion – a far cry from images of lone bin men and dusty trucks. The company itself evolved rapidly over this period, growing from a start up organisation with one landfill employing 50 people to becoming the market leader in the waste management sector (turnover c. €100m) and employer of over 500 people in 39 locations nationwide.

By early 2005, Drury's had successfully positioned Greenstar as *the* market leader and most visible waste management company in the sector. However, it was becoming obvious that Greenstar's communications success had given rise to a serious challenge: encouraged by the profile Greenstar had achieved, other waste companies began to emulate Greenstar's approach and proactively seek publicity opportunities. One of the communications challenges for the year ahead, therefore, was to maintain share of voice in an increasingly crowded space and to continue to differentiate Greenstar from its competitors in the eyes of all concerned. This included the corporate financiers that Greenstar would be approaching later in the year for substantial refinancing, making it all the more important to maintain Greenstar's presence and visibility across the business media in the preceding months.

In addition, there was a sense internally that although communications had achieved a lot in developing a strong corporate reputation for the company, there was a need to broaden out the agenda to support the sales and marketing function and ultimately the core business objectives of the company. This would involve raising awareness and enhancing understanding of Greenstar's product and service proposition among the business community.

B – Statement of Objectives

The objectives for the period April 2005 to March 2006 were:

- To up the ante on corporate communications to ensure continued differentiation between Greenstar and its competitors
- To maintain share of voice through effective news flow and profiling opportunities
- To increase focus on the exact nature of Greenstar's customer proposition (in support of Sales and Marketing) and reinforce that Greenstar "sets the standard"

C - Programme Planning and Strategy

While prospering and expanding rapidly, the waste management industry was seriously impeded from progress by a number of regulatory and planning difficulties, particularly the lack of a comprehensive government national waste plan and local objections to the development of waste infrastructure. Correspondingly, the cost for businesses and consumers of complying with ever increasing waste management legislation was rising rapidly. To date, no waste company had taken ownership of these issues and opened up debate on the future infrastructural needs of Ireland. The opportunity existed for Greenstar to thrust itself to the fore on widespread industry issues, thereby increasing its visibility and breadth of comment and reinforcing its leadership position. This became the overarching communications strategy for the period April 2005 to March 2006, underpinned by the following key strands of tactical activity:

- 1) To proactively seek strong, meaningful positioning articles or interviews with Greenstar chief executive Steve Cowman that would allow him to express his thoughts on industry challenges or trends and bring issues to the fore
- 2) To complement these pieces with a healthy flow of news coverage that would further demonstrate the vigour and progressive nature of the company and reinforce its leadership position
- 3) To create a new focus on marketing communications to grow understanding of Greenstar's specific product offering and advise on how businesses can best manage waste costs
- 4) To actively manage issues and meet them head on so that Greenstar's reputation would be enhanced rather than harmed and the public's understanding of the need for infrastructural development would increase

1) Impactful profile or platform pieces

The profiling strategy took flight in April 2005, when Drury's secured a comprehensive article in the Sunday Times, "*Waste Not Want Lots*", which overviewed the industry and its value; the problems caused by the fragmented and unregulated marketplace; the dearth of Irish infrastructure; and the resulting spiral in costs for business and consumers. Greenstar's chief executive Steve Cowman was extensively quoted throughout the article and commented authoritatively on the needs of the industry as a whole, thereby assuming the mantle of industry leader. Steve was also able to communicate his opinion that 2005 would be "the year of consolidation" and that Greenstar was in the market. This piece provided an excellent platform for Greenstar's messages and set the tone for communications throughout the year.

In all, Drury's achieved seven such profiling pieces in the year, including "*Not Just A Junk Business*" (Business Plus, May 2005), "*Doing Business in the Waste Land*" (Irish Examiner, September 2005), "*Greenstar Adds More Value to Waste*", (Business & Finance, October 2005), "*Consolidating Rubbish Firms – Something is rumbling in Ireland's trash heaps and dump piles*", (Business & Finance, February 2006) and "*A Trashy Business with Sex Appeal – Irish garbage firm seeks to brighten up industry's image*", (International Herald Tribune, March 2006).

In March 2006, the success of the communications strategy in achieving a platform and profile for the company and industry issues was confirmed with the securing of a Friday back page interview with the Irish Times, "*Greenstar Looks to Clean up on Waste*".

2) Healthy flow of news coverage

Throughout the year, Drury's also created a solid flow of news announcements that further demonstrated the progressive outlook and business savvy of the company. From acquisition announcements (Kelly Recycling, April 2005 and WDS, October 2005) to Greenstar's proactivity in harnessing the opportunity of the new WEEE waste directive (August 2005); multi-million investments in ambitious bio-energy strategies (€12 million in Greenstar's first landfill gas to energy facility in Co. Kildare, September 2005) to strategic alliances with bio-waste infrastructure providers (€40 million partnership with Bedminster International, November 2005), Greenstar was never far from the national news pages or airwaves. The final piece of news coverage for the year was a substantial piece exclusive to the Irish Times business pages, "*Greenstar Raises €200m for More Acquisitions*" in March 2006.

3) New focus on marketing communications

In 2005, marketing communications entered the communications agenda for the first time. In consultation with the marketing function, Drury's penned a best practice article on waste management legislation and what businesses could do to most effectively manage their waste. This article became a template that could be adapted depending on the specific interest of the audience and was successfully pitched to Smart Company magazine, the Vintners magazine, Professional Insurance Brokers magazine and Irish Hardware magazine, reflecting the industry sectors that Greenstar was interested in targeting.

Further opportunities to highlight Greenstar's product offering and position the company as setting the standard came about through a "My Job" interview in the Irish Examiner business supplement with Greenstar's sales and marketing manager, "Greenstar Offers a Full Range of Waste Management Services" (May 2005), and pitching waste management as a topic for the Business 2000 piece in the Irish Times Friday business supplement, "Wasting Money on Waste" (March 2006). A key element of Drury's ability to attract such articles and sell in best practice pieces was the use of statistics on the waste management sector from IBEC and Deloitte that were publicly available but not being utilised by other waste management companies to support their communications activity.

In March 2006, Drury's developed a feature with RTE's Capital D programme that examined the recent and rising phenomenon of recycling in Ireland and included a visit to the Ballyogan recycling park in South County Dublin, which is owned by Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Council but operated and managed by Greenstar. The resulting piece, broadcast nationally, included interviews with Greenstar staff, covered their recycling and waste disposal offering and captured multiple images of Greenstar trucks and branding.

4) Proactive issues management

Building and maintaining reputation for Greenstar has underpinned all communications activity over the years. A key element of this has been in the area of issues management. The development of waste management infrastructure tends to become a contentious and emotive issue for the communities in which development is proposed – the NIMBY (Not in my back yard) principle is never better illustrated. Accordingly, concern existed in December 2005 that Greenstar's plans to develop a €75 million state of the art anaerobic digestion facility in Co. Cork would be met with strong local opposition. A communications strategy for the announcement was thus devised, which concentrated on transparency around the announcement and ensuring engagement with the local community.

An important element in setting the tone in which the announcement would be received was the work Drury's did to brief the local press and also the two environment journalists with the Irish Examiner, Sean O'Riordan and Donal Hickey. The resulting coverage in the Irish Examiner, "Firm Plans €75m 'Green' Waste Development" and "High Hopes for 'Green' Treatment Plant", was well informed, positive about the benefits of the development and enhanced rather than harmed Greenstar's reputation as a forward thinking, environmentally conscious company.

D – The Measurement Stage

- As illustrated fully in the enclosed coverage table (Appendix F), Greenstar generated substantial national coverage throughout the year in everything from Morning Ireland to the RTE News, Irish Times to Business and Finance.
- Greenstar remains *the* undisputed industry leader and authoritative voice, as proved by the fact that, when a major competitor secured profiles in both the Sunday Tribune and Sunday Business Post at the beginning of 2006, the relevant journalists in both publications sought comment from the chief executive of Greenstar for inclusion in the pieces.
- Greenstar successfully secured €200 million in debt refinancing in February 2006, giving it "sprint capacity" whenever buyout opportunities emerge and allowing it to consolidate its national footprint

The client's perspective

- "We measure the impact of public relations by how it assists the business meet its objectives. As a result of, in particular, the media relations activity carried out by Drury Communications, Greenstar is generally regarded as a successful, professional and responsible company. The reputation that PR has helped the company build is a key strength in our effort to attract and retain customers, employees, partnerships and indeed funding – all of which are fundamental to the success of our business." Judith Hally, Head of Corporate Affairs, Greenstar

- *Waste management is not an area traditionally associated with marketing communications but we have achieved great success in this area throughout the past year. Being first to market with a WEEE self compliance guide for business gave us a unique positioning in the industry and the publicity that Drury Communications created around this generated substantial awareness of our services. The trade publications exposure and other activities created further consideration and leads that will translate into sales and future customers.* Keith McCormack, Head of Marketing, Greenstar

E - Budget

The budget, over a one year period, was within the band of €32,000 to €64,000.

F – Appendix – attached