
BACKGROUND

The National Theatre of Great Britain's War Horse was confirmed to run at Bord Gáis Energy Theatre for a strictly limited season from 26 March- 26 April 2014. Based on the novel by Michael Morpurgo, the internationally acclaimed production is an unforgettable theatrical experience. Hailed by Time Magazine as 'A Landmark Theatre Event', War Horse is a spectacular, powerfully moving and imaginative drama, which features poignant musical pieces. At its heart are astonishing life-sized puppets created by South Africa's Tony Award winning Handspring Puppet Company, who bring breathing, galloping, charging horses to life on stage. To date, War Horse has been seen by over 5 million people worldwide.

OBJECTIVES

The National Theatre tasked the press office at the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre with devising a creative PR strategy to launch War Horse in Ireland and ensuring War Horse was considered to be the must see theatre production of 2014.

The campaign needed to:

- Educate Irish audiences on both The National Theatre and War Horse brands including the brands prestige, previous successes, awards, and reviews.
- Showcase the ground breaking puppetry which features in the show.
- Showcase what Irish audiences could expect from the show.
- Ensure engagement with key target audiences in a robust and engaging way, with a particular focus on:
 - School Children
 - General audiences from ages 4-94
 - Horse Lovers
 - War Veterans
- Ensure widespread media coverage was achieved across all media platforms.
- Convert consumer curiosity into ticket sales with a target of 70% business.

PROGRAMMING AND STRATEGY

To ensure the show captured the imagination of the Irish public and became a talking point, it was important that War Horse became a recognisable brand across Ireland and in turn encouraged ticket sales. The strategy was to introduce the brand and educate Irish audiences through 4 Key Phases as follows:

Phase One - Launch Event - 11 September 2013

In order to successfully introduce the War Horse brand to Ireland it was imperative to make a big media splash and ensure that 'Joey', the life sized puppet horse and central character in the show, was introduced to Ireland and became a big news story. To that end it was decided to hold a media launch event to celebrate the show's impending arrival to Dublin.

- The launch was held on the morning of September 11th 2013 and included the following elements:

A unique photo with Joey at an iconic location in Dublin

- We were confident the image of Joey would be of interest to Irish media outlets, and to give the photograph an Irish link we decided to do the photocall at a Dublin landmark. The National Theatre was keen to make sure the photo said 'Dublin' so the photo could be added to their international portfolio of photos from around the world. The Ha'penny Bridge was chosen as the recognizable Dublin landmark.

Media Call

- Following the photo opportunity at the Ha'penny Bridge, Joey made an appearance at the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre in advance of the main launch event. Joey cantered around Grand Canal Square and demonstrated his skills for the national media including various TV cameras. National Theatre Producer, Stephen Rebbeck, and Puppetry Director Finn Caldwell, were both involved in discussing War Horse and the mechanics of how Joey works for cameras and print journalists.

War Horse launch Event on stage at the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre for Media, Schools and Key Group Bookers

- A month prior to the launch event, invitations were sent to various schools, media and group bookers and over 500 people attended the event. The event included a presentation about The National Theatre brand by Stephen Rebbeck and the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre's Mike Adamson discussed the process of bringing War Horse to Ireland.
- A promotional video along with some facts and figures were presented to the audience before Joey made his big entrance and took part in a demonstration with Puppetry Director Finn Caldwell. Following the event there was a Q & A session with audiences.

Phase Two – Main Campaign – October 2013-April 2014

Michael Morpurgo Press Day

- Michael Morpurgo is the author of the book War Horse. Michael's involvement in the communications plan was key, he was the creator of War Horse who could be better to tell the story behind Joey and the stage show.
- We felt it important that Michael was involved in the press campaign for the show. The involvement of the creator of War Horse was imperative in communicating the story and heart behind 'Joey'.
- On 11th November 2013, Mr. Morpurgo travelled to Dublin for a day of press to promote the stage show and he took part in a number of national TV, radio and print interviews.

Press Trip

- War Horse is an exceptional theatrical experience and it was vital that the Irish media experienced first-hand this truly unique production. A press trip ensured that the selected media could see the show from start to finish and write features around their experience on the press trip.
- On 11th December 2013 our PR Officer accompanied three media outlets, The Sunday World, RTÉ Guide and The Irish Independent Weekend Magazine to The Lowry in Salford to watch the show.

Four Week Out Campaign

- In the four weeks running up to the arrival of War Horse to Dublin, an intense burst of press activity using the cast and creative team from the War Horse Company was organized. The creative teams were best suited for the more arts focused pieces and were able to give a great insight into what went on behind the scenes e.g. the mechanics of the horse, the music behind the show and the creativity that is involved in producing a show like War Horse.
- We also reached out to a wider range of media outlets during the four week out campaign, including travel publications and glossy magazines aimed at female readers.
- As mentioned, the visual element of the campaign was extremely important and to showcase this we secured a slot on The Late Late Show. On 7th March 2014, Joey travelled to Dublin for an appearance on the show. The performance included a piece of the music from the show, an interview with Finn Caldwell, Puppetry Director and a special appearance by Joey himself. This showcased how lifelike Joey was and saw The Late Late Show presenter Ryan Tubridy interacting with Joey and trotting around the studio on the horse, much to the audience's delight.
- Invitations to the Irish premiere of War Horse were sent out during this period.

Phase Three – In Town Activity – March- April 2014

Opening Night

- The opening night of the show was a great opportunity to raise awareness that War Horse had arrived in Dublin. A sense of occasion was created and the red carpet was rolled out to welcome The National Theatre and War Horse to Ireland.
- We invited 300 guests to attend the Irish premiere of War Horse on March 26th 2014. Guests included media, celebrities and members of the theatre community. This increased awareness about the opening night in the weeks running up to the show.
- We encouraged national media to review the show. The magnificence of this theatre experience was evident in the great reviews the production received.

2FM Tubridy OB

- Following the success of the main press campaign and the word of mouth created by the opening night, we were approached by 2FM's Tubridy to partner with the theatre and War Horse. The producers suggested a live broadcast from Grand Canal Square to celebrate the show's run in Dublin. This meant we could continue momentum once the show had opened and ensure that War Horse was kept at the forefront of the entertainment news agenda.
- On 1st April 2014 Tubridy broadcast a live two hour radio programme which included interviews with the cast and director and ticket giveaways. Joey featured prominently in the programme and the presenter, Ryan Tubridy, once again enjoyed some time with Joey by taking a stroll around the square on his back.

The Curragh

- To engage with the national audience of horse lovers in Ireland we created a tailored event that mirrored the ethos of The National Theatre brand. Given the historical, military and equine link we partnered with The Curragh and created the War Horse Race Day.
- Tubridy on 2FM officially launched the partnership on air during an onsite broadcast at the theatre on April 1st. Following this a press release was sent to media detailing War Horse Race Day at The Curragh.
- The War Horse Race Day took place on Sunday April 13th, attracting families, horse lovers and theatre enthusiasts. Joey the horse was in attendance at the event and all races were themed based on the show.

War Veterans Outreach

- The National Theatre was keen to interact with any war veterans living in Ireland, and to introduce War Horse to a very relevant audience. We approached the British Embassy and organised a special meet and greet with embassy staff, veterans residing in Ireland and Joey.

MEASUREMENTS

The following is a list of the results we achieved during and after the campaign:

- The show did 83% business with 38 performance over 4 weeks
- The launch event resulted in increased media interest in the show. The theatre saw an increase of 20% on ticket sales and reservation bookings. We secured five pieces of print coverage from the photocall on the Ha'Penny Bridge.
- Following the launch a number of broadcast pieces ran including The Six: One News, Moncrieff on Newstalk and RTÉ Radio One Arena.
- Michael Morpurgo was received extremely well by the media while taking part in the press day. His trip to Dublin resulted in print and broadcast pieces including, RTÉ One Morning Edition, Today FM: The Last Word with Matt Cooper, Sunday Business Post, Irish Examiner, Newstalk The Pat Kenny Show and Radio One Arena.
- The press trip produced three in depth features illustrating how the show was received by audiences, an insight into the mechanics of Joey and a backstage experience. Each feature included colourful production images giving readers a well-rounded portrayal of what they could expect from the production. These features ran in RTÉ Guide, Irish Independent Weekend Magazine and Sunday World.
- We reached younger audiences through RTÉ Two's TwoTube and Elev8 and older audiences through RTÉ One The Works, TV3's Late Lunch Live and RTÉ Ten and The Late Late Show
- In-depth arts features were secured using the creative team. For example, Irish Independent interviewed puppeteer Craig Leo, Metro Herald interviewed Matthew Forbes, the Directory of Puppetry at War Horse. Dave Fanning on 2FM interviewed cast members and music from War Horse was showcased on RTÉ Radio One Today with Sean O'Rourke.
- Female audiences were reached by pieces in U Magazine, Image Magazine and Irish Tatler.
- The opening night generated 13 pieces of print coverage from photography taken on the red carpet which appeared in Metro Herald, Sun, The Herald, The Star, Irish Examiner, Irish Times and VIP Magazine. There were also a number of radio mentions in the days following the premiere which included 2FM, Today FM, Newstalk, 98FM, and FM104.

- The Tubridy OB involved two hours of radio coverage dedicated to War Horse, with 23 mentions throughout the broadcast. As a result of the OB we captured images of Ryan Tubridy interacting with Joey and these images were featured in four national newspapers the following day: The Herald, Irish Independent, The Sun and The Daily Star.
- The War Horse Race Day at The Curragh successfully reached the equestrian community in Ireland. Media coverage achieved as a result of the event announcement and the day itself included The Irish Field, The Racing Post (front page), Metro Herald (front page), Irish Daily Star, Irish Sun, Irish Mirror, The Herald, Irish Independent, Irish Examiner and Mail on Sunday.
- The event resulted in a 134% increase in show ticket sales post event on Monday April 14th (Compared to April 13th).
- An exclusive with the Irish Independent was secured to cover the British Embassy, war veterans and Joey meet and greet.
- War Horse is one of the most successful PR campaigns implemented by the theatre press office. It was covered in 17 national radio programmes, 75 print pieces and 7 TV items throughout the campaign. We generated an estimated **PR Value of €1.7 million.**
- Through our campaign we successfully engaged with the target audiences, and the star of the show Joey certainly captured the imaginations of Irish audiences.