

AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN **PUBLIC RELATIONS 2020**



Best Communications Campaign by a Not-for-Profit or Non-Governmental Organisation



Campaign

A dog is for life, not just for Christmas ®

Description of Campaign

'A Dog Is For Life' was a multifaceted Media Relations campaign by Dogs Trust to reinforce their slogan, 'A dog is for life, not just for Christmas'. The goal was to see a reduction in the number of people looking to surrender their dog post-Christmas through awareness and education.



Organisation

Dogs Trust Ireland

Background to the Campaign

Every year, Dogs Trust Ireland launches a campaign in the run up to Christmas as unfortunately this is typically the time of year when people are most likely to rush out and impulse buy a puppy.

Following a high number of surrender requests in 2019, with January seeing the largest volume of people looking to relinquish their dog, the charity felt compelled to launch "A Dog Is For Life" to remind people of their slogan "A dog is for life, not just for Christmas ®". This phrase was coined by Dogs Trust over 40 years ago and sadly, is still as relevant today as it was back then.

Each year, Dogs Trust experiences a large number of people looking to surrender their dog into their care in the months after Christmas, as the reality of dog ownership and the long-term commitment involved begins to set in.

The charity revealed from January to October 2019, over 1,900 people across Ireland contacted them looking to relinquish their dog. The most common reason given was that people just didn't have enough time anymore. Their

'A Dog Is For Life' campaign urged people to think about the lifelong commitment and responsibility that comes with owning a dog and also, to wait until after Christmas to consider taking on a new addition to the family.

The most recent Dog Control Statistics sadly revealed that 9,848 dogs entered Irish dog pounds in 2018, 2,642 of them were surrendered by their owner and 6,984 were abandoned. While there are people with genuine, extenuating circumstances who need to rehome their dogs, many people across Ireland are still taking on the responsibility of dog ownership without fully considering what it entails. The campaign aimed to raise awareness of this worrying reality and remind people that 'A Dog Is For Life, Not Just for Christmas ®'.

Statement of Objectives

The primary campaign objective was twofold, to educate the public about the long-term commitment of dog ownership, while also growing vital financial support to fund the charity's life-saving work.

The specific campaign objectives were as follows:

1. Reduce post-Christmas surrender requests. **Goal:** 5% reduction.
2. Increase 'Sponsor A Dog' monthly supporters via Facebook tote bag offer. **Goal:** 120 new donors.
3. Drive traffic to campaign webpage educating the public about the long-term commitment of dog ownership. **Goal:** 10,000 views.
4. Generate high profile media coverage across national, regional, online, radio and tv media. **Goal:** Reach 5 million.
5. Target a wider audience with adverts via, TV, cinema and digital. **Goal:** 10M reach.
6. Increase overall fundraising income online compared to last Christmas. **Goal:** Increase online donations by 10%.
7. Increased visibility 'A Dog Is For Life' message via tote bag. **Goal:** 2,000 Tote Bags.
8. Generate exposure for #ADogsForLife across social media. **Goal:** 1 million impressions.
9. To increase brand awareness. **Goal:** Increase by 1%.

It was important that the campaign objectives were in keeping with the charity's objectives and mission statement. The following organisation objectives were carefully implemented across all aspects of this campaign:

1. Educating the primary audience of parents with young children about the long-term commitment of dog ownership and why Christmas is not a good time to welcome a dog into the home.
2. Highlight the upsetting reality of the number of unwanted and abandoned dogs in Ireland.
3. Creating an attitudinal change towards getting a dog at Christmas.
4. Reinforcing the Dogs Trust slogan "A Dog is for life, not just for Christmas ®".

Instilling preventative measures to fulfil the charity's mission; "To bring about the day when all dogs can enjoy a happy life, free from the threat of unnecessary destruction"

Programme Planning and Strategy

The campaign was led by the in-house Communications team of four, who created, developed, and implemented the PR and Marketing strategy and oversaw all aspects of campaign delivery. The challenge they faced was creating a campaign that was compelling and stood out at the busiest time of year for brands and charities alike. They needed to create a multifaceted Media Relations campaign to reach and captivate the Irish public.

The creative concept behind this campaign stemmed from the primary reason that people gave when looking to surrender their dog. 'Not enough time' was recorded as the most common reason given, so Dogs Trust felt compelled to create a campaign which aimed to tackle this problem and reduce the number of surrender requests that they see post-Christmas.

Identifying Target and Media Audiences

The primary target audience was parents, particularly those who have young children that might ask for a dog at Christmas. Although they had identified their primary audience in the early planning stages of how to target their messaging, they also identified additional audiences to reach who are the following:

- Extensive and existing dog loving supporter base.
- Dog Lovers – people who are passionate about dogs and have an interest in animal welfare.
- Women and men aged 25-35 who would be thinking of getting their first dog, having just moved out of the parental home.
- The key media focus was identified as national and regional, with an emphasis on securing a TV appearance, Radio News Bulletins and National Newspaper coverage.

Campaign planning

The charity conducted in-house research from their own records of emails and phone calls that they received from the public looking to surrender their dog, to evaluate the extent of this issue. The results showed January continues to have the highest number of surrender requests each year. This confirmed that their message needed to be strongly promoted in the weeks leading up to Christmas in order to 1) Urge people to think about the long term commitment and responsibility of dog ownership and 2) Deter anyone who is thinking of getting a dog as a Christmas present for their children, from doing so, and encourage them to wait until the New Year.

Key messaging

The charity developed emotive key messages highlighting the upsetting reality of the plight of unwanted dogs in Ireland. They also developed educational and informative messaging to emphasise the importance of careful consideration needed before bringing a dog into your life, and why Christmas is not a great time to do so. To help the public emotionally connect to the upsetting reality of surrendered and abandoned dogs in Ireland, they released shocking CCTV footage of a dog named 'Pudsey', who was callously abandoned right outside their Rehoming Centre by a man, who tied him to a tree with washing line and walked away. The charity seeded the footage along with imagery of the event taking place, out to national and regional media as well as on their social media platforms.

Campaign Delivery

PR Strategy

The strategy was a crucial tool that cut across the marketing mix with ATL and BTL activation activities including a TV, cinema and digital Ad campaign, seeded press releases and content, extensive use of social media and digital platforms, a compelling case study, leveraging user generated content and garnering influencers. An integrated interactive social media campaign was executed across the charity's various platforms, with planned content to connect with their target audience through shared values, to form brand affinity and lasting emotional connections.

Independent freelance journalists were selected and provided the opportunity for an exclusive on different case studies, which they pitched to National newspapers. This plan worked extremely well, having secured several pieces of coverage in national newspapers including, *The Irish Examiner*, *Irish Daily Star*, *Irish Daily Mirror*, *The Herald*, as well as multiple radio news bulletins (national and regional) and online articles, at no cost to the charity.

Dogs Trust also reached out to their contacts in Television and identified Virgin Media's, Ireland Am as an appropriate programme to target with viewership for this programme being popular amongst parents with young children. They secured a 10-minute slot on the show where a member of the PR and Communication team, joined by a puppy 'Rachel' were interviewed and discussed the campaign in detail. PJ Gallagher and Holly Carpenter, who are ambassadors for Dogs Trust, were also invited to talk about the campaign and why adoptions were suspended over the Christmas period. This secured two additional TV interviews on The Six O Clock Show on Virgin Media which helped reach a wider audience.

Online and Social Conversation

To drive the online conversation, the charity created the hashtag #ADogIsForLife which trended in Ireland on Twitter the day the campaign launched.

As part of the integrated social media strategy for this campaign they also asked people to share the first photo they took of their dog, along with the most recent photo. This symbolised the important aspect of 'time' and reinforced our message that #ADogIsForLife.

Prior to the campaign launch, the charity reached out to Irish Celebrities and Influencers and asked if they would share and tweet about the campaign using #ADogIsForLife.

The charity created targeted ads on Facebook using captivating and emotive storytelling to convey the heart-breaking anguish of Pudsey who was abandoned right before Christmas. They split test their ads and used a mixture of different content and copy to ensure the message was performing to the best of its ability.

To help further spread the message that A dog is for life, not just for Christmas® they created a social media campaign that people could sign up to receive a free 'tote bag' that displays their slogan 'A Dog Is For Life' on them. Not only would this highlight the slogan and brand when people carry them around but it also provided the opportunity to have a conversation over the phone, with the people who signed up, about the work that the charity does and ask them if they would like to become a supporter.

To highlight how well the charity loves and looks after the dogs in their care over the Christmas period, as they put a pause on adoptions at this time, they created a heart-warming social media video of some of their dogs picking their own Christmas presents which had been donated by their staff and supporters and this went viral! This video was shared by Ricky Gervais and George Takei and was viewed globally over 47 million times on Fox News, ABC News, It's Gone Viral, UniLad etc.

Brand Building

As 'A dog is for life, not just for Christmas ®' is a phrase coined by Dogs Trust, they felt it was necessary to build a campaign around their slogan to strengthen the brand association with this famous phrase.

To build their brand further, it was important to target a wide audience and reach a cold cohort who may not be familiar with the work Dogs Trust does. To do this, they placed an advert on all Irish and UK television platforms, cinema, digital and social media channels to help portray the campaign messaging. The TV advert was a collaborative project, created by Dogs Trust UK. It featured a puppet dog who brings to life the message 'A dog is for life, not just for Christmas ®'. The animated dog, who was made from a champagne cork, provides fun for the family on Christmas Day, but is discarded with the rubbish the very next day and rescued by Dogs Trust.

As the primary target audience was parents of young children, it was decided that to effectively target this cohort, the advert was specifically run during 'Frozen 2' in Cinemas across Ireland.

Measurement

Not only did the charity meet their objectives for this campaign, it exceeded all expectations.

Goal 1: Reduce surrender requests post-Christmas. **Goal:** 5% reduction.

Achieved: From the 26th December until January 31st, the charity recorded a 12% reduction in the number of requests to surrender a dog to them, in comparison to the same period last year.

Goal 2: 120 'Sponsor A Dog' monthly donors via Facebook.

Achieved: They achieved a 465% increase with 558 new monthly donors.

Goal 3: 10,000 webpage views.

Achieved: 36,000 views to the campaign webpage reassured the charity that the key messages reached a wider audience and educated the public about the long-term commitment of dog ownership.

Goal 4: Reach 5M via media coverage across national, regional, online, radio and tv media.

Achieved: 29M reach. 17 national newspapers, 94 radio, 69 online publications and 1 interview on Ireland AM and a further 2 on the Six O'clock Show.

Goal 5: 10M impressions via Social Media, Digital and ATL campaign.

Achieved: 31,863,178 impressions. #ADogsForLife trending number 1 on Twitter. The video of the charity's dogs choosing a Christmas toy went viral and was shared by Ricky Gervais and George Takei. Viewed globally 47 million times on Fox News, ABC News, It's Gone Viral, UniLad etc.

Goal 6: Achieve an uplift in overall donations and income by 10% online compared to last Christmas.

Achieved: Online donations increased 40% and income by 34%.

Goal 7: Increased visibility 'A Dog Is For Life' message via tote bag with 2,000 tote bags distributed.

Achieved: 6,354 distributed.

Goal 8: To increase brand awareness by 1%.

Achieved: Brand Awareness increased by 2% that period from 75% – 77% (Prompted Awareness). Results published by the Irish Charity Engagement Monitor.

With the phenomenal reach achieved in Ireland and worldwide, combined with the reduction in requests to surrender a dog after Christmas, the charity is confident that their primary objective of reducing the number of unwanted and abandoned dogs in Ireland was achieved.

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