

AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN **PUBLIC RELATIONS 2020**



Best Use of Sponsorship

PR Budget was Over €50K



Picture shows from left Yomiko Chen; Irish rugby player Dan Leavy; and traditional Japanese drummer Aidan Skelly at Vodafone's "Ireland's Ball" launch event in Ukiyo-e. Photo by Naoise Culhane.

Campaign

Vodafone Ireland

Description of Campaign

Ahead of the Rugby World Cup in Japan, Vodafone and the IRFU set out to grow the game of rugby and its support base beyond traditional rugby fans. Through a brilliantly executed PR strategy, Vodafone made sure that everyone in Ireland felt part of the Team of Us.



Public Relations Consultant

Teneo



Client

Vodafone Ireland

Background to the Campaign

In 2016, Vodafone became principal partner to Irish Rugby. Our ambition, as with all sponsorships, is to drive brand consideration and engagement.

In a category characterised by paralysing inertia and competitive pricing, growth for Vodafone is most efficiently delivered when brand consideration is strong, placing it top of mind amongst consumers. In Red C research, consideration is strongest amongst those who are aware of Vodafone's sponsorship (+10% versus those who don't). The business challenge was maintaining this level of consideration by growing awareness of the sponsorship amongst as wide an audience as possible.

During the Rugby World Cup (RWC), rugby interest would be at its peak, but so would other sponsor activity, both locally and internationally, so the pursuit of awareness and potential consideration was a much greater challenge.

Vodafone has a shared ambition with the IRFU to grow the game and attract a wider audience to rugby. 2019, an RWC year, with the sport at peak popularity, was an opportunity to go beyond the heartland and target non-traditional rugby

fans. Expectations were at an all-time high. 26% of the population named the RWC the most anticipated sporting event of 2019.

However, there were challenges to be addressed. Vodafone, as official team sponsor but not a tournament partner, was not permitted a presence at the RWC. There would be no logo on the jersey, no broadcast rights, we couldn't use the term 'Rugby World Cup' in our marketing. There was incredible pressure on the team, meaning access to players was limited. Also, with the tournament taking place in Japan, 5000+ miles away, fans would be tuning into games in the early hours of the morning.

Statement of Objectives

Vodafone needed to carve out its role on the road to the RWC. The answer was 'Everyone In' a multi-channel campaign and Ireland's Ball, a PR led activation idea designed to rally support for the Irish team and feel connected to Irish fans as they left for Tokyo.

Moving into the period when interest in Irish rugby was likely to peak since the beginning of their sponsorship, Vodafone set out a number of ambitious objectives focussed on growing awareness of the partnership, mobilising diverse support for the Irish team and driving brand consideration.

The campaign objectives were:

- Make rugby more inclusive, grow support beyond the Irish rugby heartland and extend the campaign to non-traditional rugby fans.
- Deliver 80 pieces of media coverage media coverage, but not just in sports pages and traditional "Rugby" publications.
- Firmly position Vodafone as the number 1 supporter of rugby in Ireland in a year when rugby, sponsor and competitor activation would be at an all-time high.
- Abide by RWC sponsor guidelines.
- Support Vodafone's diversity and inclusion agenda.
- Deliver on Vodafone's mission to build the most interconnected team and fanbase on the planet.
- Increase Vodafone's Irish Rugby Sponsorship Awareness from 53% to 60%.
- Increase Affinity Outcome of Activation from 53% to 57%.
- Increase "I would consider using Vodafone for my communication needs" from 62% to 65%.
- Increase "Vodafone is a brand for me" from 54% to 57%.

Programme Planning and Strategy

Team of Us represents the power of rugby to unify 6 million Irish people of all ages, class, and gender, as one with the team that represent them. However, we were aware that some people felt more welcome than others. To grow the game and connect with a wider audience we needed a campaign that everyone could feel part of.

'Everyone In', is a multi-channel campaign designed to rally support for the Irish team and feel connected to Irish fans as they left for Japan, but simply inviting Ireland to 'be in' wasn't enough. PR's role was to take the campaign out of the paid-for space and create a tangible and symbolic demonstration of Irish fans' support.

Ireland's Ball

A unique rugby ball was commissioned with a bespoke grip containing the fingerprints of people from every county in Ireland. Using the Vodafone network and a tailor-made app, we collected their digital fingerprints and created a ball that would travel with the team to Japan.

We scoured the country to find 32 people to represent the diverse fabric of modern Irish society. Contributors included Maeve Cox, the first baby born in Ireland in 2019; Ciara Griffin, Captain of the Women's Rugby team; John Burke, who summited Everest in 2017; Brian John Spencer an artist from Belfast, and Matt Ni Griofa an Irish speaking lobster fisherman and founding member of An Ghaeltacht Rugbaí, the only Irish speaking rugby team in the world.

We launched **Ireland's Ball** with a hero film and released a new film every week for 4 weeks telling the story of the people on the ball. In partnership with a Japanese Cultural organisation we hosted a Japanese themed event to reveal Ireland's Ball to an audience of 100 media, influencers, and customers. As part of the event, Vodafone ambassador and Ireland international, Dan Leavy was made available to sports and lifestyle media for interview.

We told the story at a local level, crafting 32 media releases to hero each representative in their local media, bringing the story to all corners of Ireland. To make it more inclusive we launched a search for someone to present **Ireland's Ball** to the team on behalf of the nation. Alex McHugh (11) handed **Ireland's Ball** over to the team before they departed for Japan at an event attended by Vodafone customers and the entire Irish Rugby team. Media interviews and photography with players along with video content extended the experience to the nation.

Sponsorship Extension

Ahead of the team departure, Vodafone announced a four-year extension of the sponsorship with Irish Rugby and the new sponsorship of the IRFU Women's Interprovincial competition. The announcement landed across national business media and along with Vodafone's role as sponsor of the Union Cup (Europe's biggest LGBT+ inclusive rugby tournament hosted in Dublin in 2019), demonstrates how sponsorship supports Vodafone's inclusivity agenda.

Joe Schmidt Permission Slip

Throughout the pool stages, tactical activity rallied support for the team. Ireland v Russia, the only Ireland pool game played during the working week, presented an opportunity for Vodafone to engage B2B and a wider consumer audience. We created a permission slip from Head Coach Joe Schmidt, granting the Irish public 2 hours off work to watch the game. The note from Joe appeared as a print ad in the Irish Times. We seeded it to media and across Vodafone social with Anne O'Leary, Vodafone CEO, encouraging business leaders to join in. The permission slip was the best performing piece of content on Vodafone's Instagram ever, and one of Anne O'Leary's top performing posts on LinkedIn ever.

An intensive media marketing campaign during the period amplified Vodafone as the main sponsor of Irish rugby. We placed over 15 pieces with key media spokespeople across sport, business, and lifestyle publications, bringing the key messaging of the campaign to a wide audience.

Measurement

This campaign has proved to be both a commercial and brand success surpassing all but one KPI by September 2019 before the RWC had even begun.

- Increase Vodafone's Irish Rugby Sponsorship Awareness from 53% to 60%→(59%).
- Increase Affinity Outcome of Activation from 53% to 57%→(66%).
- Increase "I would consider using Vodafone for my communication needs" from 62% to 65%→(69%).
- Increase "Vodafone is a brand for me" from 54% to 57%→(58%).

(Source: ONSIDE, Sept 2019)

PR has been the driving force of the campaign. Creative ideas such as Ireland's Ball and the Permission Slip as well as new partnerships with the Union Cup and Women's Interprovincials have taken the sponsorship beyond traditional rugby supporters, opening it up to a new audience. An excellent media and PR strategy generated media coverage beyond sports pages, in local media and lifestyle media delivering 101 pieces of media coverage.

Aside from the core business metrics, the campaign has connected with the Irish public and cut through the noise surrounding the RWC:

- Vodafone was the No.1 most admired sponsor among the Irish public associated in some way with the RWC 2019 in the week preceding kick-off of the Tournament (Source: ONSIDE, Sept 2019).
- Vodafone was voted the No.1 most appealing sports sponsor in Ireland by Irish adults in Q3 2019 (Source: ONSIDE, Sept 2019).

Commercially, 'Everyone In' delivered significant return on investment with massive brand consideration generated from the campaign:

- From the data gathered so far 274,850 (approx.) additional incremental Irish adult consumers have been moved to consider Vodafone in 2019. Where this consideration is successfully converted into acquisition, this revenue will generate an uplift in business of up to €100m to Vodafone's turnover in the short to medium term.

The Team Of Us platform evolved this year to extend the support of the Irish team even further when it needed it most. The future of rugby is looking more exciting than ever.

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