

# AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN **PUBLIC RELATIONS** **2021**



# Best Healthcare Campaign



Singer Mary Byrne, pictured at the launch of The Irish Cancer Society's *Your Cough Could Be Masking Something Else*, lung cancer awareness campaign supported by AstraZeneca and Bristol Myers Squibb.

## Campaign

Your Cough Could Be Masking Something Else

## Description of Campaign

During the first lockdown, lung cancer referrals in Ireland fell by over a quarter. To address this concerning trend, the Irish Cancer Society in partnership with Edelman, launched a campaign, *Your Cough Could Be Masking Something Else*, to engage with high-risk communities and to encourage them to contact their GP.



## Public Relations Consultant

Edelman



## Client

Irish Cancer Society

supported by



## Background to the Campaign

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related deaths in Ireland, accounting for 19% of all cancer-related deaths in women and 23% in men. This is due to seven in ten sufferers receiving their diagnosis at a late stage. Every year, more than 2,500 people in Ireland receive a lung cancer diagnosis, with 1,800 people dying annually. However, during the first lockdown (March – August 2020) referrals fell by over a quarter, compared to the same period in 2019.

The Irish Cancer Society, supported by AstraZeneca and BMS, invited Edelman to devise a compelling communications campaign, with the simple aims of increasing awareness and addressing this concerning trend.

In delivering the campaign, Edelman discovered that a significant barrier to early detection is a failure to understand a key symptom: a recurring cough. Coughing can be confused with many health ailments – and this was compounded by Covid-19. With public health guidelines focusing on the need for people to stay at home, many individuals chose not to go to the doctor and cancelled appointments.



The HSE reported that e-referrals for suspected lung cancer cases fell by over 50% during this period. Modelling by the Irish Cancer Society suggested that up to 244 people with suspected symptoms – representing a 27% decrease, year on year – failed to visit their GP, and were not referred to specialist cancer clinics.

The paradox was that Covid-19 also presented an opportunity. Where people might previously have ignored a recurring cough, the virus made many hyper-aware of their health. This created a strong case for a public awareness campaign, targeted at high-risk communities, which would build on this awareness, increasing referrals and early intervention.

Fundamentally, the campaign needed to prompt GP attendance, using thought-provoking symptom information distinct from public health messaging.

But how could we focus the public on another potential health threat during a pandemic? As we wrestled with this question, the Edelman team focused on the need to alert the public that a persistent cough could be masking something else – and reassure them that it was safe to contact their GP.

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## Statement of Objectives

To create a razor-sharp focus, we established two core campaign objectives.

- 1. Increase the number of e-referrals for lung cancer by at least 20%.** This would address the need to take action in the easiest way possible. Knowing that early intervention is critical, our pivotal goal was to reassure those with symptoms that it was both necessary and safe to contact their GP.
- 2. Increase general awareness of lung cancer symptoms and the importance of early detection.** Awareness was, and remains, vital. Our task was to engage readers via the most relevant media and platforms, directing them to the Irish Cancer Society's informative resources: the website, the online lung checker and the nurse support line.

The Irish Cancer Society and Edelman would assess success in terms of increased awareness and changed attitudes, measured against clear objectives and targets. This involved:

- **Conveying clear messaging** that a persistent cough could be masking other symptoms;
- **Cutting through Covid-19** public health advice with a differentiated message;
- **Reaching a mass audience** through earned media story placement in titles relevant to our audience. We set out to generate a scale of reach equivalent to 18 million readers – enough to embed the story in the national news agenda;
- **Boosting visits to the Irish Cancer Society's website** by at least 25% by the end of the campaign period;
- **Achieving at least 5,000 click throughs to the lung checker**, via paid-for digital channels;
- **Maximising calls to the support line**, receiving at least 5% more calls than usual on launch day;
- **Writing and producing compelling radio advertising** for regional placement, with a target reach of one million people;
- **Generating a strong social media impact**, measured by KPIs of:
  - > €4 CPM and 125,000 impressions on Twitter
  - > €6 CPM and 250,000 impressions on Facebook.

Hitting these objectives drove every aspect of campaign planning, activation and evaluation.

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## Programme Planning and Strategy

Edelman and the Irish Cancer Society identified two audiences. The primary group was drawn from the National Cancer Registry Ireland's (NCRI) lung cancer map.

This featured people over 50, skewed towards women, living in areas of high disadvantage with an existing prevalence of lung cancer.

We gained buy-in for the campaign and its content from influential healthcare stakeholders including the Irish Medical Organisation (IMO); the Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP); and the HSE's National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP).

In addition, through patient engagement, we honed the appropriate tone for the campaign: empathetic, reassuring and delivered by peer groups, not just healthcare professionals.

This target audience wanted to hear from people like themselves who had been through similar experiences. The campaign's secondary audience comprised the family, friends and carers of the primary audience – who could gently nudge the primary group into action. In advance of the launch, we also alerted doctors nationwide to ensure that they were prepared for a spike in calls.

To formulate a strong campaign identity, we were driven by the insight that people were so consumed by Covid-19, they were not thinking about other health threats. This led us to the campaign proposition that there could be more to a cough than Covid-19: *Your Cough Could Be Masking Something Else*.

This proposition directly addressed the fact of shared symptoms. People were hyper-conscious of Covid-19 symptoms, which include coughing. We set out to raise the possibility that a cough associated with the pandemic might in fact be an early sign of lung cancer. We introduced the symbol of face masks as a visual representation of the idea of one thing potentially 'masking' something else, in this case a possible virus masking potential cancer.

The campaign also supported the point of taking instant action. The earlier the intervention, the better the future. Having learned that this call to action would resonate most strongly if it came from those directly affected by lung cancer, we engaged real people to tell real stories about their lung cancer diagnosis or that of a family member.

We recruited Mary Byrne, an ambassador with a highly personal connection to the disease, whose experience would resonate most powerfully. A former X-Factor contestant and singer, Mary had lost a brother-in-law and two sisters-in-law to lung cancer.

With such a poignant personal story to tell, Mary delivered the importance of early diagnosis, not as a concept, but through her own harrowing personal experience. This established a trusted connection with our audiences. Alongside Mary's narrative, we shared real-life experiences. The more voices heard from lung cancer patients and their families, the less easy it would be to ignore the call to action. This real-world feedback established momentum, but it also needed to be backed by science.

To drive the call-to-action home, we enlisted the support of healthcare professionals on the pandemic's frontlines. Dr Una Kennedy, General Practitioner and GP advisor with the NCCP agreed to be the lead medical spokesperson. Many people felt that contacting their doctor about non-Covid-19 health issues would add pressure to an already overburdened health service. Therefore, our healthcare spokespeople made it clear that health professionals explicitly wanted people to come forward, if they suspected that coughing might indicate the first signs of lung cancer. They were also able to clarify how to identify the different symptoms of lung cancer and Covid-19.

Having established our strategy, identity, objectives and team, we were now ready to go to work. Execution involved three integrated strands: earned; digital; and regional radio.

## **Earned**

In advance of launch, the Irish Cancer Society and Edelman partnered with NCCP to create content for Partner Packs. We developed a one-page mailer highlighting the impact of Covid-19 on those most at risk of lung cancer while signposting the key components of the awareness campaign. This content alerted and informed healthcare professionals of the campaign and the likelihood of an increased volume of calls about lung cancer.

Edelman interrogated Kantar Media for insights around our target audience. This revealed that they are heavy consumers of TV (watching just over three hours per day). 77% cent had watched RTE and 66% Virgin TV in the previous week. Our target group are also keen radio listeners, with 84% listening daily for more than two hours. They are also avid readers, with 40% reading a newspaper daily and 31% accessing publications online.

Research also indicated that 69% of over 50s have a Facebook account and 27% use Twitter regularly.

These insights helped us to target tailored content to receptive audiences, through a media strategy largely, but not exclusively, focused on traditional platforms.

- Our press collateral material clarified:
- The signs and symptoms of lung cancer;
- The differences between lung cancer symptoms and Covid-19 symptoms;
- The importance of early detection;
- The fact that diagnostic services were open and safe to visit throughout the pandemic;
- The advice to engage with the Irish Cancer Society's lung cancer support services;
- The alternative of visiting your GP to discuss concerns.

These points were highlighted in the launch press release and supported through visually emotive photography featuring Mary Byrne. These images highlighted the importance of investigating a persistent cough – using mask imagery more commonly associated with Covid-19 alongside the line explaining that *Your Cough Could be Masking Something Else*. This was the first time such mask imagery had been used in a public-facing campaign in Ireland, increasing its appeal to national and regional picture desks.

Our media day activities were calibrated to match our audience's media consumption patterns. We echoed across the tabloid press, daytime TV and the major morning national news shows.

Leveraging the fact that (according to a 2020 Reuters survey) Irish people have a strong relationship with local national news, our first launch-day interview took place on RTE's Morning Ireland, Ireland's most popular news broadcast programme. This established the campaign as an important and relevant topic of national conversation. To reach our at-risk group, features were secured across the tabloid press including full page coverage in the Irish Daily Star, the Herald, the Irish Daily Mail and the Irish Sun.

Throughout launch day, Monday 14th September, and the rest of the week, we engaged our distinct sets of trusted voices (Mary Byrne, peer groups, the Irish Cancer Society and healthcare experts) to land our messages in relevant media and in a language that resonated with our audience.

## Digital Content

The second activation strand required a powerful vehicle to attract attention online and across social media. We created a compelling, memorable 'hero' video which brought the creative element of the campaign – the face mask – to life across social channels.

The storyline began with a woman coming home from the shops, still wearing her mask. As she starts to cough in her kitchen, this appears to be a worrying sign of the coronavirus. Only in the last frame are we told that the cough could be masking early signs of lung cancer.

The video was targeted at those in the over-50s age group potentially experiencing similar symptoms and was shared across the Irish Cancer Society's social platforms. In addition, Edelman created two video cut downs and one static image, which were promoted through paid social media channels. These easily absorbed but hard-hitting assets helped to drive awareness and land the campaign call to action.

## Regional Radio

The third element of our activation involved using radio, known to resonate strongly with our target audience. Edelman scripted, produced and placed a compelling 30-second radio ad, featuring Mary Byrne, encouraging listeners to respond to the call to action. This aired across 16 key regional stations within areas of high lung cancer incidence.

This three-stranded approach ensured that we brought a high-impact message to the right people, in the right ways, with enough relevance to inspire action.

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## Measurement

Audiences duly responded. *Your Cough Could Be Masking Something Else* was an overwhelming success, not only in terms of exceeding expectations, but more importantly in positively impacting referral figures.

These **action metrics** demonstrate success in increasing general awareness of lung cancer symptoms and the importance of early detection:

- Key messages carried in 95% of all earned stories – differentiation between Covid-19 public health advice and lung cancer symptoms was crucial in closing the gap between action and inaction;
- Earned media reached 22.5 million readers – exceeding the KPI of 18 million – in titles actively chosen by our target audience;
- Highly targeted radio advertising exceeded the KPI of 1,000,000 reaching 1,367,000;
- Social media reach and costs per impression also exceeded targets:
  - > Twitter benchmark impressions by almost 50% achieving 246,460 hits.
  - > Our effective creative approach reduced our CPM from €4 to €3.25;
  - > On Facebook, we tripled our benchmark achieving 603,335 impressions. Our CPM reduced from €6 to €1.37 – a resounding endorsement of the creative.

While not a primary objective, **attitude metrics** demonstrated overwhelmingly positive sentiment on social channels. People actively responded to Mary Byrne's sharing of her experiences of lung cancer. Both Mary and the Irish Cancer Society were commended, with audience feedback highlighting how the campaign encouraged them to act.

The stand-out achievement though was an **action metric** – the 29.3% increase in e-referrals for lung cancer services, exceeding the benchmark KPI by almost 10%.

Other crucial audience actions included:

- 1,519% uplift to the ICS lung cancer landing page during launch week (2,429 page views compared to 150 page views the week prior);
- 34% increase in interactions with the lung checker the week of the launch (111 interactions compared to 83 interactions the week prior);
- 119% increase in the number of lung checker report downloads, indicating intent to speak to a doctor. (59 downloads compared to 27 the week prior) ;
- 6,485 link clicks driving to the lung checker tool through paid push of content (exceeding the target minimum of 5,000 click throughs);
- Calls to the support line on launch day reached 6%, exceeding targeted uplift of 5%.



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