

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



Best Public Relations Campaign for an Event



The BTYSTE exhibition reached new heights with virtual staging in 2021.

Campaign

BTYSTE 2021 – Europe's Largest STEM Exhibition Goes Virtual

Description of Campaign

The 57th BTYSTE went virtual in 2021 due to Covid-19. A combination of innovation and adaptability ensured that the event retained its special status. It was a true display of the pivotal role technology now plays in our lives and reflective of the resilience displayed across Ireland throughout the pandemic.

hanover

Public Relations Consultant

Hanover Communications



BT YOUNG SCIENTIST
& TECHNOLOGY Exhibition

Client

BT Ireland / BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition

Background to the Campaign

The vision of the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition (BTYSTE) is to stimulate a passion for STEM within young people and, in a year that a global pandemic dominated our lives, it clearly highlighted how important STEM is and how BTYSTE could help and support young people by providing a positive outlet and project to work on. In March 2020 the courageous decision was made to go ahead with BTYSTE in a virtual format. This was not done lightly and virtualising a tried-and-tested programme of events that had been in operation for 56 years was a major challenge. Our planning sought to overcome these obstacles within a tight timeframe, overshadowed by the ever-evolving threat of Covid-19. Ensuring a smooth transition to receiving virtual entries and making this process seamless for schools was our top priority. Without this, no event could happen. Adapting high quality technology that was fit for purpose was important to our client's reputation as a global expert technology company.

Creating a virtual portal, a virtual judging process, a virtual press office and live opening and awards ceremonies were some of the most challenging and interesting aspects of the campaign this year, all whilst communicating with media at key moments in the lead up to the final event. Driving numbers to the online portal for the exhibition from 06 – 08

January when we would usually have 50,000 pass through the doors of the RDS became a key focus.

Every element of our approach was 'digital first'; how we would run the event, engage with students, teachers, parents, media and the public over the course of the next ten months.

A critical aspect to the campaign was engaging with students while adhering to strict GDPR requirements; initially to keep interest and entry numbers up, but as the event progressed, facilitating interviews with the judges and the media became increasingly important.

The virtual nature of the 2021 event was an opportunity to bring the BTYSTE to a wider audience. We wanted to make sure we reached audiences around the world and in every school in every corner of Ireland.

Statement of Objectives

The BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition 2021 campaign had a clear set of objectives which were established in March 2020, pre-Covid-19. These required adaptations following the decision to host the event online. Running a virtual event for the first time brought a whole new set of objectives and possibilities, outlined below.

- Ensure all parties were informed and communicated with throughout the entire campaign, with following guidance from both the Department of Health and Department of Education.
- Communicate and confirm to all stakeholders in July 2020 that the event would go ahead in virtual format.
- Secure a minimum number of student project entries so the 550 required to proceed with a virtual event would be achieved.
- Raise the corporate profile of BT Ireland as the organiser of the BTYSTE through top tier interviews, land key messaging in broadcast interviews and ensure BT personnel were profiled throughout the entire campaign as key leaders in the Technology sector making a virtual event possible for the BTYSTE 2021.
- Position BTYSTE 2021 as a benchmark for future virtual events and cement BTYSTE's position as one of the largest STEM events in Europe on a global stage.
- Generate significant media coverage and interest in Ireland via print, online and broadcast outlets:
 - > Achieve a PR Reach of 50 million;
 - > Secure a minimum of 1,000 pieces of coverage regionally and nationally to support the campaign.
- Elevate this to reach to a global audience based on virtual format of the event. Key metrics were:
 - > Attract 60,000 unique visitors to the portal;
 - > Leverage the portal to a new global audience and attract viewers from 30 countries;
 - > Garner 3 million hits across the BTYSTE portal and website;
 - > Portal content to be accessed on 25,000 devices.
- Operate a virtual press office that met the needs and requirements of all BTYSTE stakeholders from the launch of the campaign through to exhibition week.
- Adapt our outreach and mindset to 'digital first', enabling us to build and establish relationships with more online media in lieu of physical media on site.

Programme Planning and Strategy

Strategy

The BTYSTE is the epicentre of innovation in science and technology in Ireland. Our communications strategy for this year was to adapt the longest running science exhibition in Europe, into a wholly virtual event centred on a digital first communications approach that would retain the fun, inclusivity, and excitement of previous exhibitions.

This year, the revered national event also had the opportunity to reach a global audience through a virtual platform. Planning took on a new meaning in 2020. Based on the Department of Health and Department of Education guidelines, we adapted our communications plan to centre around Covid-19 restrictions and create a variety of options for what the format could be as the landscape changed at a rapid pace. The first half of the campaign year focused on health and safety, our messaging, GDPR compliance and ensuring the event remained as inclusive and enjoyable as it had been in previous years.

Messaging

#BeyondLimits: In 2019, BT launched their new 'Beyond Limits' campaign. This brought into focus BT's ambition to help families, communities, and companies in Ireland and around the world, thrive in a digital future. This ambition shaped our overall approach to planning BTYSTE 2021 and encouraged us to continuously think outside the box. BT Ireland's goal to '*remove the barriers of today, to realise the potential of tomorrow*' aligns directly with the BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition's ambition to create a platform for students to realise their full potential in STEM. Aligning our shared objectives our teams worked '*Beyond Limits*' throughout the campaign to deliver the first ever virtual BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition.

Another key message to be communicated at all stages this year was the decision taken by BT Ireland to waive the project entry fees and online visitor fees for BTYSTE 2021; a generous move by the organisers to encourage more participation and engagement, while everyone was being impacted by a pandemic.

Planning: The BTYSTE, is a year-long campaign culminating in a week of action and activities during the first full week of January. Owing to Covid-19, there was much adjustment this year of previously set-in stone messaging and timelines.

This year the key moments were:

- March: Schools Closed, alternative planning and monitoring began.
- April/May: Feasibility and scenario planning, including looking at collaboration tools. Portal planning begins.
- June: Decision taken to go 100% virtual.
- July: Public announcement made 'BTYSTE Goes Virtual'.
- August: New website launched.
- September: Entry deadline announced and then extension of deadline to align with schools opening.
- October: Closing date and reviewing projects received and trends.
- November: Project Announcement, those qualified and the trends for 2021.
- December: Reveal release, and third lock down announced and closure of schools in January.
- January: Exhibition week 6th-8th January.
- February: Evaluation and measurement.

The ongoing pandemic meant that the overall regulatory landscape continued to change at a rapid pace in 2020. To ensure that BT Ireland and BTYSTE were best placed to offer reactive and proactive commentary, Hanover provided a constant newsroom and monitoring service which incorporated the media landscape and political announcements from the Department of Health and Department of Education. Not only did this provide opportunities for commentary, it also informed decisions on messaging and communication methods for updates on the exhibition.

Digital First Approach: A top priority was to ensure that our approach to planning was led by digital. When considering the launch of key campaign milestones, the team created collateral which would be utilised alongside traditional PR methods such as social media graphics, embedded links to information on the BTYSTE website, digital content for media, video highlight reels to encourage sharing within online media outlets; all with the overall goal of driving traffic to the website.

Owing to the nature of the virtual event, all communications both internally and externally were conducted through Microsoft Teams. Media interviews were co-ordinated using a digital calendar to allow for seamless communication. All media interviews were supervised by a member of the communications team to comply with GDPR and child protection guidelines. Each interview was recorded and sent to media outlets afterwards. This resulted in great success as TV outlets were able to utilise the recordings and it allowed for transcription for print outlets.

In the lead up to the exhibition, significant emphasis was placed on capturing a variety of content for utilisation during the event. Regional photography was captured of qualified projects in each county in December while restrictions were eased, and each qualified project was requested to record a video detailing their project outline and results.

Key Programme Moments

The BTYSTE 2021 campaign was a great success from start to finish.

Virtual Launch: The launch of our 2021 campaign and announcement produced significant coverage in comparison to previous years, amounting to 45 pieces of coverage with a reach of 3,021,921. The announcement that the BTYSTE 2021 was going ahead was a positive story to inject in a media cycle which was dominated by Covid-19 news.

Project Announcement: Announcing the qualified projects to be showcased at the exhibition is historically one of the most successful milestones each year. Regional media are at the forefront of driving this. The milestone received 212 pieces of coverage with a reach of 5,403,966.

DCCI Partnership: To support Irish artists during a difficult year, we teamed up with the Design and Crafts Council of Ireland (DCCI) to seek a new perpetual trophy designer. Cork artist Darragh Casey's design the 'Flow of Innovation' was selected as the winner. An exclusive interview for Darragh Casey was arranged with the Irish Examiner during exhibition week.

Going Ahead: On the 30th December, the Irish government announced that schools would be staying closed in January. Once again, we responded quickly by letting the students know that they could present their projects to the judges from home. It was a last-minute change but owing to good planning by all, it mitigated any impact on participants or the success of the exhibition.

Winner's Release: The announcement of Greg Tarr as the winner of the BTYSTE 2021 gained significant traction with national, international and regional media. This milestone incorporates two strands, the announcement of the overall winner of the exhibition and regionalised press releases highlighting the success of each county's achievements at the event.

Media Relations and A Virtual Press Office: A huge draw for many media outlets attending the BTYSTE each year is the interaction with students and the ease of access to information and interesting exhibitions in one venue. Early in the campaign, Hanover recognised the need for the same networking and access opportunities to be offered in a virtual format. Thus, establishing the virtual press office was a high priority for the event.

Central to the overall strategy for the entire year was building and maintaining strong media relationships. This was done through a series of virtual meetings in the lead up to the exhibition whereby Hanover and BT Ireland met with journalists to ascertain the type of content and voices they would require for their platform; how we would go about arranging interviews for them; and to give them a breakdown on the type of materials they would find on the virtual press office and the virtual BTYSTE platform.

Additionally, throughout the exhibition week, we ensured that the Hanover team was on call to assist journalists on navigating the virtual platform and press office. This proved extremely successful for us this year and we developed strong relationships with key journalists.

Measurement

The BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition 2021 was a huge success. Over 1,350 projects were submitted with over 550 from 213 schools qualifying to take part in the event.

The three-day event attracted more people than ever before to BTYSTE, with 105,000 unique visitors to the portal from 77 countries, far exceeding our target objectives. Seven million hits were spread across the portal and website; content was accessed from 54,000 devices and over 250,000 minutes of video were watched.

The final PR reach for the campaign was 61,060,112. Media coverage for the entire campaign culminated in 1,246 noteworthy pieces of coverage across regional, national and international outlets.

The BTYSTE occurred during a time when Ireland fluctuated between the lowest Covid-19 rate in Europe to the fastest growing numbers in Europe, while the media cycle was dominated by lockdown 2.0 and the realisations of Brexit. It was fantastic to bring much-needed, light relief and positivity to homes and media around Ireland. We set up and established a virtual press office and platform which retained the fun, credibility, and magic of BTYSTE. We delivered stand out profiling opportunities for BT Ireland via top tier interviews in the Business Post and Irish Independent and communicated the role and commitment of BT to delivering a spectacular event for 2021.

The gains achieved in 2021 will be retained and expanded into 2022 as BT looks to build on a newly found global audience. Journalists this year enjoyed a dedicated virtual area that enabled more time-restricted journalists to 'spend time at the exhibition'; a virtual media centre where they could access press materials, imagery, press releases, FAQ's and our own press office team for instant responses to their media queries.

PARAGON



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