



# AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN **PUBLIC RELATIONS 2022**

# Best Consumer Public Relations Campaign

€20,000 or Under



Oh Ship! A Fresh Voice on Water Safety for Dublin Port.

## Campaign

Oh Ship! A Fresh Voice on Water Safety for Dublin Port

## Description of Campaign

This campaign showed strategic flair and imaginative content creation to reinvent the message of water safety for a digital generation, stemming the tide of “Oh Ship!” incidents involving young men in the waters of Dublin Port and Dublin Bay in Summer 2021.

**GIBNEY**  
COMMUNICATIONS

## Public Relations Consultant

Gibney Communications

 **COMHLACHT CHALAFORT**  
**ÁTHA CLIATH**  
**DUBLIN PORT COMPANY**

## Client

Dublin Port Company

## Background to the Campaign

By May 2021 Covid restrictions had been in place for more than a year, causing the public to rediscover the great outdoors, including the natural beauty of Dublin Bay. However, the Bay is also home to the country's biggest and busiest working port. There are more than 17,000 ship movements in and out of Dublin Port every year which equates to almost 50 per day.

The early summer saw more people flock to Dublin Bay for sailing, kayaking, and paddleboarding. Small motorboats and leisure craft which had lain idle in back yards were suddenly out for leisurely spins across the Bay. Unfortunately, not all were well-equipped, nor their owners well-prepared. Many were complete novices, oblivious to the busy shipping lanes of Dublin Port and at risk of causing accident or injury to themselves or other port users.

While Dublin's maritime community, comprising sailing, yacht and rowing clubs and experienced boat operators are adept at navigating local waters having co-existed with the constant heavy-duty shipping activity of Dublin Port for years, the average leisure user is an entirely different prospect.

Dublin Port's marine operations team began to observe an increase in the number of people, particularly young men aged 18-35, venturing out into Dublin Bay and veering into the port's shipping lanes who ultimately required assistance, and in some cases rescuing, to avert potentially dangerous encounters. These enthusiastic leisure users were simply unaware of the rules of navigating the shipping channel and Dublin Port faced a new challenge to communicate an important safety message to an audience outside its traditional base. To address the issue, we devised a PR campaign to raise awareness of water safety.

As the campaign came in response to an emerging issue, it was essential to launch as soon as feasible. A launch date of July 12th was agreed, leaving just weeks to develop an integrated campaign to best deliver the Port's message. With more good weather forecast, time was of the essence.

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## Statement of Objectives

### The Client Brief was to:

- Decrease the rate of incidents requiring intervention by Dublin Port teams taking place in the port's shipping channel and immediate surroundings of Dublin Bay.
- Increase awareness and use of the Vessel Tracking System (VTS) radio channel, which is a number used by leisure craft users to call Dublin Port for permission to cross Dublin Bay, in a similar manner to air traffic control, in order to manage safe navigation across the shipping lanes.
- Show a strategic approach, creativity and a fresh take that challenged the look and feel of a traditional safety campaign message from a corporate entity.
- Identify the target audience - young men aged 18-35 living in the Dublin region – and maximise engagement and reach, with a target to achieve over 500,000 impressions for campaign ambassador Darren Conway's Water Safety sketch.
- Achieve Retweets from at least five verified Twitter accounts with more than 5,000 followers each.
- Receive acknowledgement and endorsement by port stakeholders for having taken steps to proactively address the issue in the interests of supporting a wider water safety message for ports.

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## Programme Planning and Strategy

In developing a campaign, the first challenge was to reach the target audience of young men aged 18-35 in Dublin who were not part of the port's traditional community. How media is consumed by younger people has changed so much that identifying the most effective channels would be critical to the campaign's success. We chose to use social media as the predominant medium to reach this audience.

The second challenge was the tone for this important safety message. At the time, young people were being openly criticised for "congregating" outdoors to socialise following a prolonged Covid lockdown. It was important to Dublin Port that its message would not be misconstrued as an attempt to discourage young people from enjoying the amenities of Dublin Port and Dublin Bay.

It was agreed that the tone would be encouraging and playful and not authoritarian. Following more than a year of restrictions the public would not take kindly to being told what to do, so the tone needed to support leisure users in enjoying the waters of Dublin Bay, but in a responsible manner. The key message was to think water safety first and encourage people to plan their outing having regard to basic safety measures designed to keep them and other port users safe.

Featuring a social media collaboration, we set about developing a multi-faceted campaign to target the demographic most at risk, young men aged 18-35 in Dublin.

### Voice & Authenticity

We had observed during lockdown comedian Darren Conway's growing fanbase, particularly among young men. His sharp humour and distinctive Dublin accent made him an ideal choice as the face and voice of our campaign. He, like our target audience, was as unlikely to know anything about water safety making him an authentic, credible ambassador. The antithesis of a corporate figure, we were confident his involvement would cut through on social.

We approached Darren to collaborate on an original social media sketch and to voice our radio advert. We worked



together to devise a sketch that was true to Darren's style, full of Dublin wit and banter, urging people to 'Always Think Water Safety' no matter the activity. We decided to film the sketch on location in Dublin Port, placing the message in context using real port crews.

## **Oh Ship! Always Think Water Safety**

We developed a strapline for the campaign to entice the curiosity of our audience. Using a play on words we created "Oh Ship! Always Think Water Safety" to tie together all elements of the campaign with a playful tone.

The strapline featured in our week-long radio advertisement, with Gibneys developing the script for Darren to voiceover. Our strategy placed the advertisement on radio channels with the strongest reach among the target demographic – national radio stations Today FM and Radio Nova, which over-index on male listeners, as well as Dublin and East coast stations 98FM, FM104, and East Coast Radio.

Working with the Harbour Master, we developed a starter guide to basic safety etiquette on the water, featuring a map showing the port's shipping lanes and the number to call for VTS.

To add gravitas to the campaign we approached Water Safety Ireland to support our message, and the organisation's Chief Executive provided a quote for our launch press release and undertook to share our campaign materials with their network, broadening our reach.

To round out the campaign we developed a suite of materials to integrate with Darren's social media sketch, developing content for digital display adverts to accompany the launch, appearing on websites most frequented by the target audience for click-through to Dublin Port's website which hosted more detailed water safety information.

## **Launching 'Oh Ship'!**

For the launch, it was agreed with Darren Conway that the video sketch would first be posted to his social media accounts before being shared across Dublin Port's digital channels and only then pushed out to all media and stakeholders. This allowed the content to grow organically across Darren's fanbase first (57,700+ Twitter and 97,800+ Instagram followers), keeping the campaign authentic for the target audience.

To bring the message to life outdoors and give the port's digital message a physical presence, we commissioned a large mural to be painted on the wall approaching the Poolbeg Lighthouse at the end of the Great South Wall walk, which attracts 500 walkers each day. The mural depicted the campaign strapline "Oh Ship! Always Think Water Safety" in giant blue letters visible to both walkers and leisure users from the water. Our choice of location, a popular backdrop for Instagrammers, increased the likelihood of the mural featuring on digital in the social media feeds of our target audience, making the physical digital again.

A press release was developed highlighting the campaign, with a focus on simple, effective safety message and tips from the starter guide, which we released together with a link to the video sketch, as well as a map of the shipping channel and VTS number to call.

Our story was picked up by national and local news media and led to an in-depth interview for the port's Harbour Master on Tom MacSweeney's popular Maritime Ireland Radio Show podcast. While Darren Conway was the face and voice of the campaign on social, we drew on Captain Michael McKenna, as Harbour Master, to address the port's maritime community about their vital role in helping Dublin Port assist novices on the water.

Our digital advertisements were also reproduced as billboards and displayed around port, while 500 posters and 2,000 starter safety guides were dropped to every yacht club, water sports rental and retail outlet in the surrounding area, with digital versions also available for download.

The evergreen nature of the digital content developed enabled Dublin Port to run the campaign for the remainder of summer, with activity easily boosted around weekends, bank holidays and good weather.

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## **Measurement**

The launch hit all objectives;

## **Social Media Response**

The response to the campaign launch was overwhelming, with Darren Conway reporting it as the most successful sponsored sketch and best performing collaboration he had done at the time of commission. Given Darren's loyal fanbase of young men in Dublin, we know the campaign resonated with the target audience.

It also struck a chord with political figures keen to be associated with this emerging voter base. The quirky nature of the sketch attracted retweets and quoted tweets from Sinn Féin's Mary-Lou McDonald, Gerry Adams, Declan Kearney, and Chris Andrews, as well as media personalities including Pantibloss and Keith Walsh. This exceeded our target of retweets by verified accounts by 40%.

Social chatter pointed to a refreshing and novel approach by Dublin Port to an important issue. One Twitter user tagged Dublin Port Company with their feedback to remark on "very smart advertising to hit a different crowd, not your standard ad that people won't pay attention to. Love this well done everyone involved."

Analytics from Darren Conway showed the sketch attracted over 600,000 combined impressions, exceeding our target by 100,000. There was strong evidence of followers tagging peers, fuelling the message organically among the target audience.

## **Increase Awareness of VTS Channel 12 and Decrease in Incidents**

The Port's radio operators noticed a significant increase in the use of the VTS Channel 12 following the launch of the campaign, while the Harbour Master noted a decrease in the volume of call-outs for assistance for the remainder of the summer.

## **Acknowledgement and Praise from Industry Experts and Stakeholders**

The launch and subsequent response prompted the campaign style to be praised by other port authorities in Ireland and in the UK, with Dublin Port's Harbour Master contacted by counterparts in Rosslare, Cork, Galway, and Dunmore East, as well as Holyhead. Shipping companies and local yacht clubs also contacted the Port to acknowledge the campaign's effective message, with the mural at the Poolbeg Lighthouse seen by over 21,000 Dubliners in the campaign period.

The campaign proved so successful that a continuation is planned for Summer 2022.

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