

Case study

Media campaign for the re-launch of HMS Belfast, May 2012

HMS Belfast, part of IWM

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Background

In May 2012, IWM planned a major family-focussed campaign to re-launch HMS Belfast after a six-month closure. The focus of this activity was the Family Weekender, a two-day extravaganza including kids' activities, meeting veterans, simulated gun firings, live music and a barbecue.

We needed to develop a campaign that would make a big impact in the marketplace; creating a buzz around the re-launch, attracting people back on board after the six-month closure and boldly communicating a series of messages about our family offer. In addition, we were also in the middle of our Pavilion building project to house a new shop and café on the shore – hoarding surrounded the old structure, giving us the added challenge of making sure people passing by the ship knew we were open.

But we didn't want the campaign to be a stand-alone burst of activity; it needed to form an integral part of our overall marketing strategy for the year ahead.

Our ongoing challenge is to increase awareness of HMS Belfast as a must-see visitor attraction, communicating to our target audiences that the ship is not just part of the London landscape but has nine decks and a host of interactive experiences to explore as part of a day out in the Pool of London area. With this in mind, the media we used was not solely about driving visits to the Family Weekender but also had to feed into and contribute to our wider objectives for marketing HMS Belfast in 2012/13. In short, the re-launch campaign was a springboard for building the marketing strategy going forward.

Objectives

- Re-launch HMS Belfast with a weekend extravaganza for families supported by a major communications campaign to drive 1,700 visits over the weekend of 26 and 27 May 2012
- Work with a PR agency and utilise our social media channels to generate 'buzz' and word of mouth both online and offline
- Create awareness of HMS Belfast's re-launch ahead of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and peak summer 2012 visitor season
- Deliver a positive series of marketing messages, targeting relevant audiences and accurately expressing the key messages
- Communicate to all local businesses that we have reopened
- Ensure people are aware that we are fully open for business, countering any perception that HMS Belfast is closed due to the redevelopment of the new pavilion and extensive hoarding.

Target audience



Our primary target was families with children aged 8-11. We wanted to continue to target Learning Families – our largest visitor segment to HMS Belfast – who enjoy cultural activities as a family and are looking for an educational trip for the kids, but we wanted our campaign to appeal to families looking for more of a fun and social day out too.

We also wanted to consider how to maximise our marketing to take advantage of the high footfall of overseas visitors in and around the Pool of London area.

Process

We started with some ‘grass-roots’ marketing, aimed at raising awareness and spreading the word across the local area that HMS Belfast is reopening. We managed to use the hoarding surrounding the building work to our advantage, wrapping the boards with graphics and messages from our marketing creative to showcase the ship to people on the shore and reiterate that we are open.

We printed a flyer including a 2-for-1 offer specifically for the Family Weekender and worked with Impact marketing agency to distribute this through 10,000 door drops during the week prior to the event. The Impact distribution campaign also involved visiting 100 venues including hotels, theatres, galleries, pubs and cafes in the London Bridge area to deliver a more bespoke service in raising the profile of HMS Belfast’s family offer. To further our local reach, we ran print ads featuring the 2-for-1 offer in 38 regional newspapers.

Over the weekend itself, we further saturated the area with hand-outs and ad bikes along the South Bank, London and its vicinity. The areas around Borough Market, London Bridge Station, Tower Hill and the South Bank are heavily ‘pedestrianised’ and tough to reach through traditional media channels. Ad bikes allowed us to easily access these high traffic areas, giving us a strong visible presence through our eye-catching creative as well as one-to-one interaction with day trippers and tourists.

We extended the 2-for-1 offer (plus a free burger) to London cabbies and local businesses PricewaterhouseCoopers and Lawrence Graham through their internal communication channels. We also pushed out the 2-for-1 offer through our own eComms as well as promotions with More London, Team London Bridge and visitlondon.com.

We top and tailed the activity specifically promoting the Family Weekender by running our generic marketing creative across a variety of high impact media sites, giving longevity to the campaign beyond the initial buzz and press coverage surrounding the re-launch. During the week prior to the event, we ran a ‘takeover’ on Time Out’s Kids channel online, which

included a range of digital adverts, providing real stand-out with families actively looking for things to do and delivering a high click-through rate. Following the Family Weekender, we went straight into a London Underground campaign to extend our reach across London and keep HMS Belfast in the forefront on people's minds as a 'must-see' family attraction.

In June, we followed all this activity with a wrap of a City Cruises Thames riverboat for five weeks, an entirely new venture for us but a channel we thought could work well for HMS Belfast because of its association with the river and access to people already out and about on and around the Thames.



We were able to fully brand the inside and outside of the boat. On the inside, vinyl panels were placed on walls and ads were posted to the backs of seats, ensuring passengers (with an average dwell time of 25 minutes) were immersed in the campaign. The riverboat's route from Tower Bridge to Westminster covered key tourist hubs – Tower of London, Millennium Bridge, St Paul's, London Eye, Houses of Parliament – which allowed us to reach sightseers (both UK and overseas) and Londoners on the banks and bridges of the Thames – an annual riverbank audience of 80 million people.

Outcomes

- For the period of the campaign – mid-May to mid-July 2012 – we dominated the Pool of London area, creating cut-through in a highly competitive visitor attraction marketplace
- Visitor figures for the Family Weekender exceeded target by 66% (2,829 versus 1,700)
- Visitor figures for the month of June 2012 as a whole were 60% beyond target (22,640 versus 14,124), further illustrating the campaign's success
- We created a 'buzz' around the ship at a time when she was about to feature prominently in the River Pageant of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, raising her profile as a must-see historic site in central London

Key points for effective practice

- Capitalise on word-of-mouth – think about who your local 'ambassadors' could be and invest time in telling them about your offer and incentivising them to spread the word
- Use a multi-channel approach to maximise reach and impact, strategically planning how to mix more adventurous media with traditional channels to reach your target audiences
- Timing is key – don't focus all your resources and budget on one burst of activity but consider how 'waves' of media can complement and follow on from each other to ensure longevity in your campaign before, during and after key times.

Conclusion

As a stand-alone campaign, the re-launch of HMS Belfast exceeded visitor and income targets and created the desired 'buzz' around the Family Weekender and beyond. But it was also a springboard for our marketing going forward, allowing us to hone channels that have proved effective time and time again in targeting our family audience as well as a sightseer market already inhabiting the local area, and plan how promotion-led campaign activity can fit effectively into our overall strategy.

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