

Business Objectives

These are Thames Water's long-term business priorities, which the press team supports:

- Provide a high-quality, reliable service for our 14m customers.
- Act sustainably, doing the right thing for people, the business and the environment.
- London On Tap, our campaign promoting the quality of our tap water, and Bin it – don't block it, to combat "sewer abuse".

In 2009, we had this additional priority:

- Getting the best outcome for customers and the company at Ofwat's five-year industry Price Review by reaching key influencers through the media.

A recent example of an outstanding campaign is: Price Review (2008-2010)

Thames Water submitted its draft five-year business plan to regulator, Ofwat, in April 2009, proposing to increase bills to fund essential upgrades. Raising bills in a recession, no matter how valid the grounds, is a tough ask to publicise. Our aim was to achieve balanced coverage and ensure all decision-makers understood our case.

We briefed Sunday Times, FT, Trade, Utility Week and other media likely to reach people who could inform the debate. We took the bold step of using the guaranteed air-time of our financial results announcement in June as a platform to push Price Review messages.

A low-key approach was then adopted for Ofwat's final pricing decision in November.

Results:

- 107 articles, 80% neutral coverage with a 34% share of voice
- 72% contained one or more of our key messages – eg, the need to repair "our crumbling Victorian network,"
- By November media knew our position: "You only have to look at a picture of a Victorian pipe to wonder whether you wouldn't rather pay a bit extra" - *Daily Telegraph's* Rowena Mason, reheating a key message.
- Thames Water was one of two companies allowed to increase bills in Ofwat's Final Determination in November.

Outstanding achievements and results

London On Tap (2008-current) is our campaign with the Mayor of London to promote tap water at London's restaurants, cafes and bars, reminding people they have a choice. To make tap water 'cool' we teamed up with the Evening Standard and Aldo Zilli (at no cost) to win high-profile supporters. We ran a competition to design a water carafe for London's bars and eateries to serve tap water in. The winner was announced by Boris Johnson. With no marketing budget to sell the winning design, we relied solely on PR and event opportunities.

Results (2008-09)

- 118 articles 68% positive, 28% balanced
- 92 articles contained our key messages
- 3,000 London establishments pledged to offer tap water without prejudice
- Government departments criticised for spending public money on bottled water
- Bottled water sales fell for the first time ever
- Media launch for the carafe generated 1,500 sales
- Prompted two items of research by Which? And WaterAid into people's preference – showing tap came top
- Business in the Community (BitC) National Example of Excellence 2009 – beating M&S, Cadbury's and the Co-operative Group
- Marketing Initiative of the Year – Utility Industry Achievement Awards, 2008.
- We now advise other European cities on how to implement similar campaigns.

Bin it – don't block it (2009-present)

We launched a campaign to highlight the consequences of customers putting anything other than human waste or loo roll down drains. We collected data via the website to provide the 'news hook', held a photocall in London's sewers, teamed up with ITV1's primetime show Grimefighters and used a handycam to film the sewer "flushers" singing 'This Christmas Think of Sewermen'.

Results:

- Over 100 pieces of coverage by target media (**BBC Newsround, Online, The Sun, Daily Mail, Independent, Metro, Five Live and BBC 1**)
- Key messages used 227 times in press and online articles.
- ITV1 London re-filmed the Singing Sewermen in action who also appeared live on the BBC Breakfast sofa with Bill Turnbull
- 9,000 hits on the campaign website
- Singing sewermen film had 150,000 hits on BBC News Online, 4,200 hits on YouTube and 400 on Flickr.
- Grimefighters appearances reached five million viewers per episode

Hydrachill (2009)

In October 2009 the tap-v-bottled debate kicked off, so we seized the chance to unveil our plans to introduce **Hydrachill** water machines in London. We tipped off the *Sunday Times* and *Observer* - too good a tale to simply "press release". This achieved eight positive pieces (**Observer, Sunday Times, Daily Mail, Evening Standard, BBC London, ITV London, BBC Radio 4, Smooth Radio**).

Green December (2009)

We publicised our Corporate Responsibility report with our Green December campaign, using two stories from the report highlighting our green credentials against the backdrop of the Copenhagen climate summit.

- Poo Power – how Thames Water generated £15m a year of electricity from our 13m customers' waste.
- Hoo Island - how spoil generated from our Victorian mains replacement programme in London is shipped to a haven for wild birds off Kent, cutting our carbon footprint by avoiding thousands of lorry journeys to landfill sites as well as millions of pounds in landfill tax.

Results

- 35 positive news items (*Sun, Express, Telegraph, ITV London, ITV Meridian, GMTV, Mirror, London Evening Standard, Sky News online, BBC News online, CBBC Newsround, BBC Radio Five Live*) driving positive environmental messages.
- Positive social media response reaching 28,000 followers on Twitter
- Viewing figures of our CR report increased four-fold compared to the year before.

Implementing social media (2009-present)

We used Twitter to engage customers, particularly if services were interrupted. We proactively look for customers reporting problems and respond to them, giving links to website updates.

Results:

- Negative customers into positive (including Dean Piper, Entertainment Editor of the Sunday Mirror who said he would 'spread the word' about our work)
- Pop star Lily Allen, who finally thanked us for helping her after first wrongly tweeting to her 2m followers that we had cut off her water.
- Sold social media to senior management, resulting in an expanding Thames Water's digital offering
- Dedicated @thameswaterjobs set up to help HR saved advertising costs.

Why the team is special and what makes us stand out

Getting positive media coverage for a water firm is tough. Many people expect water to be free because it falls from the sky, get frustrated by our road works and stories about sewage often struggle to pass the "cornflakes test" (would you want to hear about it over breakfast?). We are always up against it, particularly when our team was cut from four to three at the start of 2009. Our budget is zero and despite being the largest water company, we have the smallest press team and some of the biggest challenges – capital, national media, MPs.

We achieved this by moving our 24/7 communications from being reactive/operationally-led to being proactive, controlled and planned to meet business demands.

We are committed, passionate and work as a team. Our job isn't glamorous – we have to regularly go down the sewers, visit works, and turn technical engineering language into 'pub speak', all while remembering our top priority - customers.

This is especially true in crisis situations. When half of London has no water, we play a key role in telling customers what's happening. This can mean doing live broadcast interviews or briefing directors/CEO at any time of day, not to mention tweeting.

Our work on social media is industry-leading. The press team often advise regulators and fellow water companies on best practice.

We get results. And In June of this year this was recognised when we were named "most entrepreneurial in-house PR team" by PR Week.