

**Region: North East**

**Category: 5 - Community relations**

**Title: Dx2 – Darlington Experiment 2.0**

**Entrant: Cool Blue Brand Communications:**

**Client: Darlington Partnership**

### **Background**

Dx2 was born out of an idea to raise the profile of Darlington via social networking websites.

Civic leaders were disappointed to find in web searches of 'Darlington' Google's first page of entries were all showing anti-social activities and there was a general view that Darlington, and its people, deserved a more positive online reputation.

### **Objectives**

- Involve the citizens of Darlington in promoting the town via social media activities
- Achieve positive regional and national offline traditional media coverage of
- Boost Darlington's positive presence on web search engines
- Get businesses, agencies, local groups and individuals involved in a shared sense of community

### **Project name**

Darlington is known as the birth place of the railways and original Darlington Experiment was the development of George Stephenson's Rocket. So we captured the idea of a Darlington Experiment for the modern age, focused on Web 2.0 – or social media platforms.

### **Strategy**

Key to the success of the campaign was providing the people of Darlington with a voice of their own and freedom to express themselves via the power of social media.

We developed a campaign that would drive participation in the project, getting citizens of the town to be creative about their town and the things they loved about it and ultimately change the online image of Darlington.

Cool Blue devised a highly creative website/portal through which all activity would be aggregated and showcased. It had to be highly engaging, easy to use to encourage wide participation from people of all types, ages and interests.

We also needed to find ways of creating widespread awareness and participation, to achieve this we needed a range of events and activities to spur people into action.

### **Implementation and Creativity**

#### **Dx2 Branding**

We developed a distinctive graphic identity for the project which was used to badge/unify each piece of activity. The identity was visible during all events and on all items of promotional material.

#### **Media partnership**

A media partnership was created with the regional newspaper The Northern Echo, based in the town. The editor was also keen to change the online image of the town and was extremely supportive in creating collaborations between the DX2 project and the newspaper's own digital media. The partnership also helped to secure ongoing coverage in the printed version of the newspaper, creating great local visibility for the project.

#### **Website**

The project revolved around a bespoke social media website, The TubeTrain which acted as a 'hub' for all of the activity/conversation throughout the duration of the project. The website was advanced in its programming and use of 'latest' technologies which were deployed to create a highly engaging and user-friendly site.

#### **Twitterer**

We came up with the idea of creating the town's very own 'Twitter in Residence' a world first - to engage people with the human face of social media.

#### **Briefings for business and education**

A series of briefings was made to businesses in the town via established business networks such as the Chamber of Commerce and Darlington Town Centre company; volunteer groups from the town's two secondary schools, plus students and teaching staff at Darlington College.

### **Community Leaflets / Fliers**

We also designed and distributed a range of friendly 'How To' materials to encourage participation showing step by step how easy it is to post comments, photographs and video to the website. The hand-drawn illustrative design was used to create warmth and engagement around materials that could be seen as a bit intimidating to some. These were distributed to libraries, leisure centres, council offices, shops and businesses around the town and as part of the Dx2 Experiment Market event.

### **Events**

A short series of events was created. Key amongst these was the Dx2 Experiment market which was held in the town centre Saturday market.

Over 2000 people attended the Dx2 Experiment market with made scientists carrying out fun experiments and a team of 'Lab Rats' – the fun name given to secondary school student volunteers resplendent in their very own Dx2 branded lab coats - who demonstrated how easy it was to be part of DX2.

### **Evaluation and Measurement**

The project had a pre-determined 12 week lifespan. As a result the following evaluation results are exceptional:

- The Dx2 website has the highest page rank of any of the Darlington destination sites (compared to [www.visitdarlington.com](http://www.visitdarlington.com) and [www.discoverdarlington.co.uk](http://www.discoverdarlington.co.uk) – civically owned/managed and long established websites)
- Over 18,500 hits on the website
- Visitors to the site from over 50 different countries
- 359 followers for The Darlo Bard
- A significant increase in searches for 'Darlington' on Google during and after the campaign
- An astonishing 400,000,000 + opportunities to see.
- £400,000 worth of coverage was generated in UK-based regional and national print media. However, the real value of the vast amount of global web coverage generated does not allow us to definitively evaluate the impacts in direct financial equivalent terms - this would lead to exponentially higher figures.

## **Results against Objectives**

- **Positively promote Darlington to a national (and regional) audience**  
Through Dx2, Darlington has received wide regional, national and international coverage as a town embracing social media in a unique way, transforming the town's online image.
- **Create a distinctive identity for Darlington**  
Dx2 has revealed Darlington to be a thriving town full of talented creative individuals. The brand has been embraced by the residents of the town, and many on Twitter now use the #dx2 hashtag as a universal Darlington hashtag.
- **Achieve positive national media coverage**  
The media coverage for the campaign was overwhelmingly positive, with Dx2 cited as a great example of a destination campaign  
<http://davidhiggerson.wordpress.com/2009/11/13/the-darlington-experiment-2-0-a-case-study-for-newspaper-pride-campaigns/>
- **Devise creative ideas to raise Darlington's profile**  
The ideas we finally delivered were only a small portion of the great ideas we originally had, but due to budget and time constraints we were forced to choose just two to highlight. Experiment Market had over 2,000 attendees, and the Twitterer in Residence event raised the profile of Darlington globally.
- **Boost Darlington's presence on search engines and raise its on-line profile**  
Independent analysis of Google search terms has shown that searches for Darlington increased during and after the campaign along with the amount of highly positive media generated by the project shows how successfully Darlington's online profile was raised.
- **Get businesses, agencies, local groups and individuals on board and signed up to a shared sense of community**  
We encouraged participation from all sectors of society and information posted to DX2 demonstrates how successfully buy-in was created.

**Testimonial – Cassandra Ferguson, Head of Communications,  
Darlington Borough Council**

“Dx2 has transformed the way in which we are thinking about public-facing campaigns. The innovative and highly successful use of digital platforms has been positively evidenced in this campaign, providing us with some extremely cost effective routes to mass communication.”

**Budget**

Budget category B) £11-£50k