

Region: Scotland
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Entry Title: “You only have to ask”
Name of Entrant: Real PR
(Client: Scottish Information Commissioner)

“You only have to ask” Five Years of Freedom of Information in Scotland

The Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner (OSIC) appointed Real PR and our design partners, Dynam, to develop and implement a campaign to mark five years of the Freedom of Information Act (2002) Scotland, including design and launch of the Commissioner’s 2010 annual report.

Strategy

A three month campaign was developed and delivered to raise awareness of:

- Freedom of Information (FOI), its impact and why it is relevant to “ordinary people”;
- five years of success;
- the potential of FOI as a tool for change;
- publication of the 2010 annual report.

In order to maintain the momentum of the campaign, our strategy was to employ three phases of focus.

- 1.) Initial activity around the anniversary date of 1st January reminded audiences of the importance of the legislation in terms of democracy and examined achievements to date.
- 2.) Following the launch, activity focused on the changes the legislation has made to real people’s lives and highlighted the untapped potential of FOI for the general public.
- 3.) The final stage of the campaign, culminating in the publication of the annual report, looked to the future and engaged with key audiences on how to make FOI more accessible.

It was anticipated that the introduction and ongoing use of innovative communication techniques, combined with the interest generated throughout the campaign, would motivate people to engage more actively with the Commissioner on an ongoing basis.

Implementation

The legislation became effective on 1st January 2005 and the timing of the five year anniversary presented an opportunity to exploit the press closedown over the Christmas period by briefing media and providing collateral (including regional case studies) prior to the holidays, while holding a news angle back for the launch photocall on 4th January.

A short video interview was created looking at some of the highs and lows of FOI Scotland over the years. As well as being seeded through online channels and the Commissioner's own website the video was placed with the Scotsman and Herald websites to coincide with the launch.

The campaign was trailed in an in-depth interview in the Sunday Times on January 3rd and launched with the release of research showing that voluntary groups were deterred from making FOI requests for fear of damaging their relationship with public bodies.

Prior to the launch, Real PR secured a meeting with the with the head of BBC Scotland news and current affairs and the editors of all BBC Scotland news outlets including: Good Morning Scotland, Reporting Scotland and Newsnight Scotland, which enabled us to supply tailored angles and information for each outlet.

Real PR also took OSIC through a one day introduction to social media, helping them to understand the implications and level of strategy required to utilise social media responsibly and effectively. Due to legal considerations and resource available, it was felt that a fully conversational approach to social media was unmanageable at this time. A strategy to utilise one way channels and proactive monitoring was implemented, with a view to the client re-examining the situation on an ongoing basis.

In the next stage of the campaign, Real PR organised two high level dinners, in Edinburgh and Glasgow, with the editors and political editors of all major media outlets in Scotland. The event was an opportunity for the Commissioner to personally brief them on a range of current issues which fed into future content.

At this stage of the campaign, Real PR also targeted specialist publications with a particular interest in FOI, for example the legal press.

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The Annual Report

Real's design partners Dynam, designed a short and accessible summary version of the report in print and developed a microsite for the full report.

All of the material utilised the theme: “You Only Have to Ask”, which was accompanied by a distinctive motif.

In the final stage of the campaign, Real PR released regionalised data and a national news release to coincide with the report’s launch. Prior to the report going live, Real PR placed an opinion piece in the Sunday Herald with Lord Wallace of Tankerness who was deeply involved defining the act and getting it onto the legislature.

Creativity

Throughout the campaign we strove to take the campaign out of the political pages and look for ways to make it relevant to all readers.

This was driven through the use of case studies to show how the legislation was being used by ordinary people including short videos featuring successful FOI campaigns which were seeded online.

To get people thinking about the potential scope and impact of FOI, we also posed the question: “What would have asked if the legislation had existed throughout history?”

In partnership with the Scotsman and the National Archives of Scotland, the question was asked of a number of public figures including the First Minister. Features appeared throughout the campaign on what people would have asked, culminating in the National Archives attempting to answer the most popular questions.

Evaluation and Measurement

- Over 65 articles were achieved reaching right across Scotland generating 8,000,000 opportunities to see. That is two for every adult of voting age in Scotland.
- Broadcast coverage of the launch included BBC’s Good Morning Scotland, Reporting Scotland and Newsnight Scotland.
- Online video was used by Scotsman.com and Heraldscotland.com as well as through OSIC own channels.
- Coverage was maintained throughout the 12 week campaign with at least one article appearing in press per week
- In order to reach the law community a round table feature was set up with The Journal for the Law Society of Scotland. As well as an in-depth six page feature the event secured the front page of the February issue.
- Journalists were reached through an article by Freelance Environmental Editor and FOI supporter Rob Edwards on allmediascotland.

- The Business press were targeted through an opinion piece in Business 7.

Cost Effectiveness

- The Campaign budget was £17k
- The cost per opportunity to see was equal to 0.002 pence

Final Results against objectives

The campaign raised the profile of Freedom of Information in Scotland. It reached all main stakeholders and navigated difficult political circumstances.

The campaign was sustained right up to the launch of the annual report and beyond.

Over 1000 people have already viewed the microsite for the annual report. In addition, OSIC has started to implement and integrate social media into their marketing and PR activities.