

Siriusly Exclusive

Background

Weber Shandwick's brief from Dalmore's new product development (NPD) team was deceptively simple. Can you launch Sirius, the new Dalmore malt whisky expression? There are only 12 bottles produced...and it costs £10,000 per bottle. The real motives were more direct. The team wanted to use Sirius as a 'test' vehicle for future NPD activity, whilst gaining useful global consumer profile for the Dalmore brand. As a final objective, the Sirius was to be distributed to Dalmore's brand partner, World Duty Free (WDF), so profile there would be appreciated.

From the start - and appropriately for such a one-off brief - Weber Shandwick worked closely with the Dalmore team to turn traditional consumer relations on its head. While this rare and precious liquid undeniably merited a global launch pad, to shout from the rooftops the huge capacity for luxury and quality that the Dalmore could sustain, we opted for a more subtle approach.

Premium malt whisky marketing is awash with superlatives and hyperbole as it is – so a traditional approach would hardly set this premium malt apart from the rest, despite its exorbitant price tag.

Rather we regarded this as, first and foremost, a business story. The only people who could afford to pay £10,000 for a bottle of whisky were seriously rich investors. This opened up an avenue for us to highlight Sirius as the vanguard for whisky investment. And if this story was covered by the financial press, then it would be read by business high-rollers and high-net worth individuals who were, in fact, the target consumer audience for Dalmore – as well as being useful advocates for WDF. This would be a consumer campaign focused on a business audience.

Implementation

Weber Shandwick started this process by exclusively briefing Andrew Bolger, the Scottish stringer for the FT. Pushing messages of investment in high-end luxury products, we managed to secure a lead article which kick-started world-wide media interest. We issued a simple, business related press release, devoid of superlatives, to fuel the story and set to work on targeting a number of key influencers within the financial media including the Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg and CNBC.

While the business story was gathering momentum, we paid some regard to more traditional consumer marketing methodologies. The obligatory dark and mysterious female model was drafted in to add some exotic pictorial drama to the story. And influential whisky bloggers were sent the world's most expensive whisky sample to stimulate interest across the internet.

Within one week, all 12 bottles of Sirius had been sold to global investors. This sales success formed the next wave of simple media releases, providing us with a second wave of driving media interest and activity. The campaign reached its climax with a 20-minute CNBC interview with Whyte & Mackay CEO John Beard, further reinforcing the Dalmore's business credentials.

Evaluation and Measurement

Results were impressive. 12 bottles were sold within a week. 120 separate items of coverage mixing heavyweight business titles with international luxury and travel websites. Universal praise from whisky experts (our 10 bloggers). Internal appraisal by the client team now which uses aspects of our campaign as a benchmark for all future NPD product launches.

This was a risky campaign to deliver. Had the campaign gone wrong, then we would have been accused of taking the consumer excitement, colour and buzz out of the story. But the business media love consumer stories if they are aimed directly at them, and we managed to secure a huge variety and range of coverage.

The NPD team was happy because the process was simple, good value and placed them in a good light. And all the bottles sold out within a week, resulting in a tidy profit margin. WDF were mentioned in the FT which was appreciated. And the Whyte & Mackay CEO was interviewed by CNBC about future NPD plans, resulting in useful corporate profile.

£10,000 is an awfully large amount of money to spend on a bottle of whisky. But when the rewards include global exposure and brand credibility, it actually seems value for money.