

CIPR Pride Awards

Thames Water entry: Corporate Responsibility

Company	Thames Water (in-house PR team)
Region	Thames & Chiltern
Campaign	Green December (Poo to Hoo)
Award category	Corporate Responsibility
Cost	Zero

1. Strategy

Each year we publish our Corporate Responsibility Report. It might be news to us, but it isn't necessarily news to anyone else. However, last year we decided to change our approach and get creative. Instead of putting out a bland press notice – ignored by media - saying we'd published the report, we decided to run a month-long campaign, Green December, consisting of two stories highlighting our environmentally and economically responsible behaviour against the backdrop of the Copenhagen climate summit. Our strategy was based on good old-fashioned, journalistic principles – digging out newsy stories from an otherwise dull subject area and putting them into pithy copy for journalists to devour. The aims of getting coverage were, firstly, to enhance Thames Water's reputation and, secondly, to drive more viewers to our online CR Report.

2. Implementation – Green December: from Poo to Hoo

a) In early December we issued our “poo power” press release, documenting our use of sewage to generate electricity, saving Thames Water £15m in more carbon-intensive Grid energy in 2008/09.

b) In the week before Christmas we gave our Hoo Island release exclusively to the Daily Telegraph then to other media. The story told how spoil from our work to replace London's Victorian water pipes being shipped to Hoo Island off the coast of Kent to create a haven for wild birds. This saves Thames Water £4m a year in landfill tax and helps cut the firm's carbon emissions.

3. Creativity – what makes the campaign stand out?

Thames Water has generated power from poo for more than 50 years. The two methods used are “anaerobic digestion” and “thermal destruction with heat recovery”. These multi-syllabic mouthfuls don't go down well with the media. That's why we got creative and coined the phrase “poo power”. We also referred to sewage sludge, the dried-out solid in sewage, as “poo cake”. By using “down the pub” language we took a previously obscure topic and turned it into a fun, eye-catching story accessible to the man and woman on the street. Rather than talking simply about generating renewable electricity, we explained how much we'd saved in the past year in grid energy bills - £15m in this case. And guess what? Media “got it”.

The Hoo Island story needed to be told in as simple a way as possible. We emphasised the cash saving from avoided landfill tax as economically responsible – not wasting customers' money on an avoidable expense – and environmentally

responsible – using waste to enhance a bird sanctuary. Hoo, we decided, would not have the same broad-based appeal as poo power, so we gave it exclusively to the Telegraph, who ran it first. We then put it round other media.

4. Evaluation and measurement

- Total circulation hit: **at least 96 million**
- 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.

1. Poo power coverage

The total circulation hit 61 million (excludes regional readerships, so the real total is far higher) and the sentiment was almost all positive, carrying all our key messages on us being environmentally and economically responsible.

National print and online:

- Press Association news wire – said Thames Water was celebrating a new kind of “bottom line” - ensured coverage the length and breadth of the UK in the regional press.
- Daily Express (700,000 circulation) and The Sun (3 million), under the headline “Poo-wer supplies.”
- “‘Poo power’ saves water firm £15m” – Evening Standard (600,000), standard.co.uk (2.5 unique monthly users), Daily Mirror (1.3 million), mirror.co.uk (10.2 million monthly unique users) Channel 4 News online (no data available)
- “‘Poo power’ cuts electricity bill” – BBC News online (14 million monthly unique users)
- “‘Poo power’ saves Thames Water £15m and cuts greenhouse emissions” – Metro (750,000) and metro.co.uk (3 million)
- “‘Poo Power’ Leaves Water Firm Feeling Flush” – Sky News online (12 million monthly unique users), Yahoo! UK (5.5 million) and MSN.com (1.5 million).

Broadcast: BBC Radio Five Live (6.5 million listeners), LBC Radio (700,000), BBC Radio Berkshire and Oxfordshire and a host of local commercial radio stations....not to mention

International:

New York Times and in papers in places like Namibia and Malaysia.

2. Hoo Island coverage

Telegraph (750,000 circulation) and telegraph.co.uk (30 million monthly unique users), who published on Boxing Day: “Mountain of leftover soil from London roadworks creating new bird island at sea”.

GMTV (4.5 million viewers) followed the Telegraph’s lead, running the story on its national programme. ITV London and ITV Meridian South did too, interviewing Thames waste manager Alan Young at a mains replacement site before visiting Hoo to see where our spoil is shipped. BBC South East TV is also set to cover this when the snow melts.

Based only on national broadcast and print coverage, the total circulation hit was 35 million.

5. Cost-effectiveness

Widespread positive coverage on **zero budget**.

6. Final results against objectives

We aimed to get widespread positive coverage carrying messages about Thames Water being environmentally and economically responsible. This was achieved (see section above).

The secondary aim was to drive more viewers to our online CR Report. Viewers went up 400% on the previous year, from 1,000 to 4,000.
