

Issues or Crisis Management – Championing Sustainable Fishing

Brief and objectives

While fishermen used to be seen as heroes of the sea, risking their lives to put food on our plates and bringing commerce to their communities, in recent years they have been painted as environmentally-unfriendly ‘trawler barons’ without a care for the future sustainability of marine habitats or wildlife.

The Times and The Sunday Times were the most outspoken sections of the media, presenting a catastrophe narrative of fish stocks reaching its zenith in September 2012 when the Sunday edition ran the headline [‘Only 100 cod left in the North Sea’](#). In February 2013 Acceleris was appointed by The National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations (NFFO) – the industry’s representative body – to redress the balance.

The agreed objectives were to:

- Increase coverage of the NFFO by 200%
- Increase mainstream coverage and achieve a minimum 50-50 split against trade coverage
- Achieve 75% positive NFFO mentions
- Increase visitors to the NFFO website by 20%
- Create an influential Twitter following
- Make the NFFO the ‘go-to’ body for authoritative comment on all things fishing.

Strategy and tactics (including innovation and creativity)

In order to promote a positive image of the federation, we decided to put fishermen at the heart of our strategy and literally be the voice of the industry – countering the activity of some highly proactive and negative NGOs.

This would be achieved through:

- A proactive press office function utilising a network of regional spokespeople – all fishermen – who had different niches and were used to give local context to the national debate
- A series of proactive news stories highlighting positive aspects of the industry
- One-to-one meetings between the NFFO Chief Executive and key journalists to relay a positive narrative of the industry and address specific misconceptions
- A multi-media approach including video, photography and online social media engagement to fuel positive debate online where the federation’s voice was absent

- Larger, consumer-focused creatives to engage the general public, reach new audiences and achieve mainstream news exposure.

Implementation (including where, when and for how long)

Mainstream consumer initiatives

‘**Tweets from the Deep**’ was a social media campaign that saw a small boat fisherman take to Twitter for a one-day tweetathon. It successfully introduced the federation to a new audience – **grew Twitter following by 100% and increased website traffic by 88%** - and achieved mainstream news exposure including interviews on BBC Radio 5 live and BBC Radio 2’s Simon Mayo Drivetime programme. It also promoted transparency in how the industry works.

‘**Let Them Eat Hake**’ was a creative campaign that promoted hake as the UK’s most sustainable fish. Teaming up with chef Mitch Tonks, the initiative engaged food writers and members of the public, achieving almost **10 million OTS** with coverage including The Sunday Telegraph’s Stella Magazine and endorsements from the BBC’s Food Programme and retailers including Selfridges.

Leading the debate

As part of our proactive news monitoring and direct response, we highlighted a number of topical areas for comment by the NFFO – and tackling inaccurate and misleading articles. One example was challenging chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall on the impact of the discard ban, which resulted in a positive, **full page article in The Times** and 10 minute **live Newsnight debate** between the chef and NFFO Chief Executive Barrie Deas.

Use of Twitter

Through using the federation’s position at the heart of national/EU debate, the NFFO’s Twitter feed quickly became a trustworthy source of industry news. This has been key to forging relationships with influencers, with followers of note including Deputy Editor at the Metro, Joel Taylor, Scottish MEP Struan Stevenson and acclaimed Hollywood actor Timothy Spall.

Demonstrate the types and variety of media utilised

Thanks to a strong network of spokespeople we are able to regionalise all news stories securing strong levels of regional print, web and broadcast coverage. Through identifying national-interest stories, we also had a strong hit rate with national media, and in the last 12 months have secured positive **coverage in EVERY national broadsheet**, as well as national broadcast opportunities including:

- BBC Breakfast

- BBC Radio 2
- BBC Radio 4
- BBC Radio 5 live
- Newsnight.

Research, planning, measurement and evaluation (outcomes and outputs)

Our first tasks were to carry out a media audit, stakeholder mapping and SWOT and PESTLE analyses to find out who was writing about the industry, gauge the NFFO's media presence and identify influences and influencers.

Key outputs:

- **642 press cuttings** – equates to 1.75 pieces of coverage every single day
- Estimated **reach of more than 197 million** (15 times higher than audited reach of Defra's own campaign when analysed over the same period).

Against the agreed objectives we achieved:

- A **3,300 % increase in coverage**
- **60% of coverage in mainstream press**, with trade making up just 40%
- **99% positive** and neutral sentiments in all coverage, with 76% wholly positive in sentiment
- **28% increase in NFFO website sessions.**

Demonstration of Twitter's influence:

- More than **950 mentions** and **450 retweets** – a sign of strong engagement with the federation and the issues it raises
- Potential **reach of almost 2.2 million**
- Third **largest source of traffic** to NFFO website – accounting for more than 11% of all traffic.

Key outcomes:

- Now regularly approached for NFFO comment on all things fishing
- NFFO chief executive was invited to join the BBC's Rural Affairs Committee
- Once the industry's staunchest critic, The Times has run three NFFO-led stories in the last four months alone, demonstrating **a change in the tide of opinion**
- NFFO membership **fee income increased by 8%**
- Acceleris invited to speak about campaign at Humber Seafood Summit alongside major retailers, Government officials and industry representatives from across Europe

- NFFO and **Acceleris** asked to support **European trade body** Europeche on ongoing reputation and management issues.

Quote from article on hake initiative in the Sunday Telegraph's Stella magazine:

"Press releases don't linger long in my inbox ... but I do pay a lot of attention to news about fish and what is sustainable ... [The NFFO campaign] has carefully evaluated the situation and established that stock levels are indeed healthy so hake is now definitely on the menu." **Diana Henry, Columnist**

Following the client's appearance on Newsnight, they received many emails and notes of congratulations from members and colleagues across Europe:

"I'd like to see our catching sector so well put forward in many more countries as it was yesterday evening in England." **Geert Meun, Executive Secretary of Dutch Fishing Federation**

Budget and cost effectiveness

Five agency days per month, incorporating Director, Manager, Exec and online consultants at £4,250 per month.

The campaign delivered **3,865 OTS for every pound spent.**

"Our partnership has been very effective not only in defending our Federation from direct criticism but in turning the tide of hostile commentary about the fishing industry as a whole. We have been very impressed by their commitment, professionalism, contacts and insights." **Barrie Deas, Chief Executive of the NFFO**