

CIPR PRIDE AWARDS 2014

Category 18: Best Event

Entry: All Aboard East Coast Trains – A Celebration

Brief and Objectives

East Coast was featured in a ten-part documentary series '*All Aboard: East Coast Trains*', which was broadcast on Sky 1 HD between 11 November 2013 and 14 January 2014. The series took viewers behind the scenes to showcase day-to-day stories provided by front line staff and customers who use the Company's train services. From the outset, a key objective was to place East Coast's people centre stage and ensure they became the stars of the show, as ambassadors for East Coast within and beyond the Company. Throughout the filming, their personalities grew in confidence and stature.

As the series approached its conclusion on screen, East Coast wanted to thank its staff for their enthusiastic support, and to obtain direct feedback from those involved. It was important to recognise the part they played in the success of this TV programme, which attracted over 300,000 viewers per episode, and delivered a massive increase in positive perception of the East Coast brand.

A celebratory event for those who took part and their friends and families was devised as a key element of East Coast's internal communication strategy, to promote employee engagement while making those who supported the filming feel valued, and closing the TV series on an exciting note.

Strategy and Tactics

A volunteering and selection process attracted over 350 applications from members of staff wishing to be part of the series. They represented customer-facing and behind-the-scenes roles on trains, at stations, and in offices and depots.

The selected stars of the show were filmed and supported with bespoke media training and 'star treatment' to prepare them fully for the experience of becoming recognised TV personalities. An East Coast train was repainted in a dedicated livery to promote the series, with images of East Coast staff seen regularly in the programmes, alongside a short quote drawn from their appearances on screen. This added to the 'buzz' among staff as the episodes were transmitted and many took the opportunity to take photos alongside 'their' train for circulation via social media.

Their faces became well-known within the business as their stories were shared via a programme of internal communications activity, including a dedicated microsite featuring video clips from the show and profiles of those taking part, and special editions of East Coast's weekly staff e-newsletter *East Coast News* and its award-winning quarterly employee newspaper *Coastlife*.

Several of those who appeared on screen were also featured in external promotional activity and media interviews to promote the series via national and regional media, supported throughout by the in-house Communications team. This helped to further build their

confidence and enthusiasm as ambassadors for East Coast, while encouraging colleagues to watch the series and support its promotion. East Coast wanted to reward their considerable enthusiasm and commitment with a unique and special event.

Demonstration of innovation and creativity

After careful consideration, the Sage Gateshead was selected as the event venue, for its location – easy to reach by East Coast train to Newcastle – and its status as an iconic and glamorous building. On the chosen night, Thursday 16 January 2014, permission was obtained from air traffic control to illuminate the venue by high-power spotlights, visible from trains crossing the King Edward Bridge over the River Tyne. Inside the venue, guests enjoyed live music, food and drink and as the climax of the evening, an Oscars-themed All Aboard Awards event co-presented by Olympic triple-jump gold medal winner Jonathan Edwards and East Coast Managing Director Karen Boswell.

Awards were presented in 13 categories, with a category winner nominated by staff and another selected by East Coast's customers. Trophies were designed around a 'clapperboard' theme, carried forward onto exclusive badges bearing the message 'All Aboard: East Coast Trains – I Was There'. Everyone who appeared in the series and attended the event also received an Oscars-themed promotional pack including a link to download a photo of themselves on the East Coast 'red carpet' leading into the venue, and a DVD box set of the complete TV series.

The awards recognised the outstanding contribution made by each winner to create a hugely successful and popular series.

Details of design, production, logistics and support teams employed

The event venue was designed with cabaret-style seating for 150 guests, to encourage guests to mix freely and share their experiences of being part of the TV series. East Coast worked with experienced event management company Production Values to design and build staging, oversized Hollywood-style props, lighting and layout for the venue, plus audio-visual content for the awards ceremony.

Research, planning, measurement and evaluation

East Coast's in-house communications team worked closely with producers from independent programme maker Cineflix and from Sky TV, to select entertaining and relevant video extracts from the programme to be shown at the event. The event's branding and presentation was also aligned to comply fully with East Coast and Sky TV brand guidelines, creating a professionally themed environment which helped to build excitement among the employees and their families who attended.

Examples of feedback from invited guests:

"I love working for East Coast – this is the best night of my life" – Darren 'Daz' Harrison, Newcastle station

"What a fantastic end to a brilliant series. Loving just being part of it" – Julie Almgill, York station

“A great celebration of everything that’s good about East Coast. Everyone feels special tonight” – Robin Skinner, East Coast Control Centre, York

Budget and cost effectiveness

Cost £20,000.

A wealth of positive feedback was received following the event, including tweets, emails and letters to East Coast’s employee newspaper *Coastlife*, thanking East Coast for providing a fitting conclusion to the TV series.

The event also successfully built on the award of Top Employer status by the Top Employers’ Institute, plus high participation in East Coast’s annual employee survey, which saw 78% of employees taking part, and 71% of all staff agreeing that “East Coast is a great place to work.”

Within a limited budget, an exciting climax to the series was devised which provided an enduring and memorable finale.

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