



Category: Low Budget Campaign

Company: Tricker PR

Entry title: Coats Of Many Colours Counteract Black Dog Syndrome

Brief and objectives:

The Scottish Women's Institutes (SWI), a charity, with falling membership and limited budget, celebrates its centenary in 2017.

To mark the centenary, the SWI planned a series of garden parties and tree plantings, but also wanted to be seen as Scotland's leading organisation for the preservation and passing on of craft skills - as well as a place for fun and friendship.

Tricker PR was tasked with finding a high-profile stunt which would:

1. Highlight SWI knitting experts to audience of Scottish women
2. Demonstrate that by joining the SWI women could learn this skill and others
3. Highlight centenary year with a story about more than tea parties and plantings
4. Have ability to be replicated across Scotland – the SWI has almost 800 Institutes across Scotland
5. Result in digital coverage where 40% had links to SWI website or Facebook
6. Raise a smile – reinforcing 'fun and friendship' qualities of membership
7. Remain within budget - £1,750

Rationale behind campaign, including research and planning:

As budget was tighter than a war time ration, we needed an idea which was simple to execute which could gain regional coverage across the Scotland.

We worked our tails off in a team brainstorming session, showing dogged determination to find other organisations with bases across Scotland to work with – where we might find synergy with SWI craft skills. The Scottish SPCA rehoming centres were tabled. Even the most hardened news hound loves a cute animal story, right? Especially at the end of a week?

Our ideas were nothing to be sniffed at, but still very ruff round the edges – how did we get a campaign about rescue animals and knitting grannies pup and running? For a moment, we worried that perhaps we were barking up the wrong tree.

Cue 'fur'ther dogmatic research to discover "Black Dog Syndrome" - where dark-coated dogs are overlooked by potential new owners in favour of lighter-coloured dogs.

Dark animals don't photograph well; it's difficult to distinguish their features. White or grey hairs show up against their coats making them look older. Their teeth look comparatively whiter, thus appearing more threatening than those with lighter coats.

Superstition has given black dogs a bad image too. They often appear as evil forces representing death. Writers Sir Walter Scott and Arthur Conan Doyle played up these superstitions using spectral hounds. More recently, Hagrid's dog Fang in Harry Potter – a docile, loving creature - was a big, black hound.

The 'pawsome coats of many colours' campaign was born...

SWI members would knit multicoloured dog jackets for SSPCA dark dogs to make them more attractive to potential re-homers. Scotland's top craftswomen making stripy dog coats in aid of homeless pets desperately seeking loving new homes – to boost their appeal.

Strategy and tactics, including creativity and innovation:

The mechanics - as befitting objectives and budget - were simple: one press release and one set of images of SWI members knitting jackets and SSPCA dogs modelling them.

Skills would be demonstrated, not least by the intricate pattern required to knit dog jackets to size – it's a skill not to be sniffed at - and it would raise a smile.

Implementation of tactics:

We brainstormed in January, scheduled campaign for mid-February, following Valentine's Day to avoid cross-over with Valentines stories and to capitalise on the period when Institutes are open (closed June to September.)

SWI knitting experts were approached around each SSPCA rehoming centre asking them to knit jackets for local black dogs. They all thought we were barking mad when we asked them to 'come to the bark side' with us – and some did wonder 'howl we pull this off?' But we hounded them into knit-one-purl-one action and had an army of knitters across Scotland.

The shaggy dog story – or press release as we prefer – was drafted. Springer Barney and lurcher-cross Archie were recruited as models for our 'pup'arazzi. Barney lost all dignity chasing SWI branded balls of wool around as if he's been given a new leash of life ... star of the show.

There was no budget for video, however, on 'ruff'lection, we ought to have taken some video on phones at the photoshoot, as this was requested later by several outlets. A quick return trip to the centre the day the release was issued provided the BBC and others with a 40 second clip.

We also didn't anticipate the flood of enquiries from across the world via SWI social media for copies of dog jacket patterns...

Measurement and evaluation:

The shaggy dog story that turned into a bit of a yarn had immediate results. Digital coverage was measured using external tool Coverage Book; which gave independent evaluation.

- 1.27 billion online readers
- 2.53 million estimated views
- 6.65K social shares
- 92 pieces of digital coverage
- 58.6% included a web link (Objective 5)
- 83.6% mentioned centenary (Objective 3)

- Facebook reach rose from 1,376 a week before campaign to 49,673 with a page following of 4,244
- Klout score rose to a high of 63.86
- Web sessions rose by 33% during campaign

The story featured in national dailies and multiple regional titles (objective 4) including:

- The Times
- Daily Telegraph
- Daily Express
- Daily Star
- The Sun
- Daily Record
- The Herald
- The Scotsman

National and regional broadcast coverage (objective 4) included:

- Sky News
- BBC Alba
- BBC Reporting Scotland
- STV News
- BBC Scotland video – 45.5k views
- BBC Radio 4 – You and Yours

Each piece referred to SWI knitting expertise (Objective 1), highlighting skills within the SWI (Objective 2)

The response from the public – across the globe – was mind boggling and demonstrates Objective 7:

- Reader comment The National “Thank you The National, an item to put a smile on our face.” - Neil Armstrong
- “Such a cool project” – Andrew Huspani – This Dog’s Life, USA
- “That’s hilarious and also awesome” – Hazel Lawson, chief reporter, The Northern Scot
- SWI Facebook feedback “I saw this on the telly last night, really cute” – Emma Fraser

Budget and cost effectiveness:

The actual budget was £1,735 including photography. The project remained within budget achieving objective 7.

Between February and April 2017, the SWI attracted 300 new members – although this cannot be wholly attributable to the campaign, it will have impacted on this.