

# Seriously Scary Fun:

## Launch of the Castle Dungeon at Warwick Castle

### Background

WPR was appointed by Warwick Castle in late 2008 after a complete review of the product offering by Castle owners, The Merlin Group. £800,000 was spent on a new attraction "The Castle Dungeon" - and PR was deemed key to its success.

### PR Objectives

- Devise creative PR ideas to ensure The Castle Dungeon appealed to all important "thrill seeking families"
  - Dedicate particular attention to core market - teenage boys
- Re-engage with local market and increase visitor levels from within 60 minute drive time
- Strike balance between The Dungeon's desire to "shock" as a brand - with need to keep Castle neighbours onside

### Targets

- Help Warwick Castle achieve Dungeon specific visitor numbers set by The Merlin Group.
- Provide 50 media hits over ten week period, delivering 4x ROI - based on AVEs and pre-agreed budget
- Entice 20 press to visit and publish reviews of new attraction
- Secure 100 guests for VIP launch night

## Topline Achievements

### Footfall

Timescale	Performance Against Visitor Targets
Week One	<b>+73%</b>
Easter Weekend	<b>+32%</b>
By Whitsun	<b>+73%</b>

### Media

During launch period we secured:-

- 125 hits in total (more than double target)
- 34 positive press reviews (against target of 20)
- 9x return on investment (more than double target)

### Planning

- After reviewing the target audience, brand awareness and values - The Castle vs the competition - our strategic recommendation was to bring, "scary fun" into everything we did
- We reviewed the media and recommended skewing the budget to favour quality titles within a sensible drive time, which previous experience showed CLEARLY had the greatest impact on footfall.

- We also placed particular emphasis on finding a suitable medium to target students / male adolescents and proposed an experiential approach - using social media, broadcast and street theatre.
- To appease The Castle's immediate neighbours, we recommended a human interest campaign to operate in tandem with the "scary fun" initiative, issuing stories to local titles only and having positive reinvestment angles - not sale messages.

## Implementation and Results

- Immediately, a hard working media relations campaign was implemented. Countdown stories included scared builders refusing to go to work and all releases were issued on blood splattered paper / emails - bringing an element of "scary fun" to what could have been mundane. Journalists were sent dungeon keys with the tag, "Unlock the secrets of The Castle Dungeons if you dare" and an invitation to visit. **60 press visited in just three weeks. The Sun, The Mirror and Daily Star all ran with the Scared Builders story and pick up of tailored "What's On " releases was exceptionally high across the core drive time, ensuring over 125 media hits - 80% in the footfall-generating regional and local titles as per the strategic recommendations / targets.**
- The VIP launch was a key opportunity to build relations with press, bloggers, stakeholders and VIPs. Guests were sent blood splattered scroll invites in the style of a court summons. On the evening, guests were greeted by plague victims, given individual name badges - e.g. "Elliot Wailing Webb" - before being shackled to fellow VIPs and led down to The Dungeon for their preview experience. **Of the target 100 guests, we hit 120, including 50 media. Feedback was 100% positive and all guests who were known "Tweeters" recounted their experiences on Twitter. All target bloggers wrote about the event the following day. All radio presenters also mentioned the event on their next live shows with a five minute plug on BRMB Breakfast. BBC Midlands Today and ITV Central both broadcast live**

and at length from The Castle Dungeon for the lunchtime and evening news - the first time this has happened in The Castle's history.

- To target the male, youth market, we created a viral film designed to scare and entertain, spreading the word via Kerrang's newsletter, our own database and Warwick Castle's contact list. **30,000 people have viewed the viral so far, with an average of 300 new hits per day. 13- 17 year olds make up 30% of the "viewing demographic", with their parents (35 - 54) accounting for over 50% of viewers - proving this struck a chord with thrill seeking families. 61% of viewers were also male.**
- We joined forces with Kerrang Radio to promote the edgier Dungeon messages to the male under 30s market. Listeners were invited to be buried alive in the Castle grounds to compete for the chance to win £1000. **The "Grave Mistake" campaign went beyond just a paid for promo, entering the editorial arena and becoming the station's headline news (the winner spent five days and nights buried alive). As a result, we had a 50% over delivery on audience reach - 737,918 in total.**
- Finally, we took to the streets of Leamington, Solihull and Birmingham using 'escaped' plague victims to directly interact with teens. **Younger shoppers positively interacted with the actors in large numbers, filming the event on their mobiles and requesting further information. Over 3000 flyers were handed out to target market teens over the course of the day.**
- Locally, our hearts and minds strategy was a great success. **Only one Warwick resident registered a complaint against The Castle in the entire campaign time frame - an all time low, despite this being the most controversial event in The Castle's recent history!**
- Post-launch, we issued a final dungeon 'success' story which led with the number of faintings and vomitings among guests. **The story was picked up by regional and national media including The Times**

and The Daily Mail, inspiring the Mail to pay us a visit and subsequently print a positive, full page review in the paper and online.

## Conclusion

Not only were Dungeon footfall targets smashed, the campaign had wider reaching benefits. Between 1 April and time of writing (3 July) - Castle visitor figures were up 60% on the previous year - while Warwick's tourist information announced visitor numbers to the town were up 23% on 2008.