

The Big Drink Debate

Strategy

At the time of planning the Big Drink Debate campaign (summer 2008), the West Midlands region had the third highest alcohol related death rate (17.1 per 100,000 men and 8.1 per 100,000 women) of all English regions. It was estimated that 16% of all people in the West Midlands were binge drinkers.

The Big Drink Debate was developed to raise awareness and stimulate debate of the issues and to gain feedback from members of the local public on alcohol-related issues.

The aims for the integrated campaign were to:

1. Inform and influence a West Midlands wide multi-agency alcohol strategy.
2. Raise awareness of alcohol and the harms caused by excessive consumption.
3. Longer-term, to reduce the number of alcohol related hospital admissions.

The advertising element, which started six days after the PR strand, included web advertising, radio advertising and a small number of A3-sized poster sites. A small number of leaflets and a website were also developed, which utilised a new brand identity for the campaign. This identity was a 'crime scene' of an alcoholic glass. (See enclosed). All of this activity was delivered by a separate advertising agency and through a separate budget.

The PR Strategy for the Big Drink Debate was to:

- establish a media presence;
- maintain a presence in the media for the debate and;
- encourage more people to take part in the debate.

The PR objectives were to:

1. Use the media to create the highest possible profile across the West Midlands for the Big Drink Debate.
2. Encourage as many people as possible to engage with the campaign through PR– either by completing the questionnaire, or contributing to the debate in other ways.
3. Influence broader discussion by the people of the West Midlands of alcohol related issues.

Planning

The campaign used PR to drive local people to www.bigdrinkdebate.co.uk . To maintain coverage in the media COI also planned to issue interim results on local areas.

Implementation

There were two campaign launch events (Birmingham and the Merry Hill Shopping Centre); to which all local mainstream media were invited. TV coverage was secured on ITV Central, with other interviews being broadcast on the majority of local commercial and BBC radio stations.

In the following weeks, the roadshow, using the same 'crime scene' graphics toured the region generating publicity in the local press as it went. Leaflets were distributed and volunteers from the NHS carried out the survey with members of public using hand-held PDAs.

COI secured regular slots on community radio stations, (including New Style Radio and Aston FM) with activity ranging from simple interviews to one-hour phone-ins. The Big Drink Debate became a regular slot on a medical show on Unity FM, aimed at the Asian population in Birmingham.

The call to action, www.bigdrinkdebate.co.uk was included in all press notices and used in interviews, with the aim of driving traffic to the website. Interim results of the survey from local areas of the West Midlands were released midway through the campaign, breaking down the results into the individual areas. This generated sizeable coverage and led to an increase in website visitors.

Localised 'final call' releases were distributed, again generating coverage and leading to spikes in traffic to the website. The final results were also distributed at the end of the campaign.

Creativity

The crime scene imagery used in the campaign was intentionally provocative, indicating that alcohol use can be life threatening.

The white chalk outline of beer and wine glasses used on the poster and leaflet campaign was replicated at the roadshows. This generated interest from passers by, who were then quizzed by people on the stand about their drinking habits, with the data feeding into the results obtained on the website. (See enclosed examples).

Evaluation and measurement

- www.bigdrinkdebate.co.uk had more than 2,500 visitors in the first 6 days of the campaign.
- There were 9,500+ unique users, with 59 % going directly to the website, proving excellent awareness of the campaign and the URL.
- There were 7,299 completed surveys.
- Of those 6,364 (87%) came from the website with 935 (13%) originated from the roadshows.
- Seven media outlets attended the launch, which included TV, radio and print titles.
- Identified coverage throughout the campaign included:
 - 34 print media articles
 - 30+ web articles
 - 25 pieces of radio coverage (including 14 interviews)
 - 2 pieces of television coverage.

Cost-effectiveness

The total PR budget for the campaign was £25,000. To minimize costs volunteers from the Department of Health were used at the roadshow to capture the data and

answer any questions people may have about alcohol abuse and the effects of drinking.

The creativity of the roadshows also attracted members of the media. With the local press there taking their own pictures, it meant the client was not only practically guaranteed coverage, but also didn't have to spend extra money paying for their own photographer.

It was vital to set up the website and for it to be easy to use and understand. The website attracted nearly seven times as many responses as the face-to-face questionnaires, which proves its effectiveness.

Final results against objectives

In terms of the overall aims, the results of campaign are currently being utilised to help inform the regional alcohol strategies for a range of partners. The results uncovered a range of opinions from across the West Midlands which the Department of Health and its partners were previously unaware of.

The campaign also raised awareness of the issues caused by excessive consumption of alcohol. This was highlighted in phone-ins and in interviews. The longer term aim of the campaign is still to be measured.

All PR objectives were achieved.

1. The amount of coverage, highlighted above, in a range of local media and platforms demonstrates how the profile of the campaign was raised and maintained.
2. 7,299 surveys were completed, the website had 9,500+ unique users and local residents engaged with the campaign at the roadshows.
3. There was also broader discussion of the campaign through radio phone-ins, the blog on the website and through commentary pieces by journalists.

The client said:

“The campaign was driven by the PR. Our intention from the outset was to get people talking about an issue that is often dismissed too easily. We wanted to engage public and the media in a debate about alcohol-related issues and provoke responses, both positive and negative from across the region. This was achieved for the duration of the 12-week campaign.”

Nigel Smith, Senior Public Health and Communications Manager.