

CASE STUDY: Multiple Sclerosis Ireland

“We Were Blown Away with The Results”

July 2020

All charities worldwide are suffering massive loss of income during this Coronavirus pandemic. And no less so than in Ireland, where a strongly religious population are used to giving generously, though in Lockdown, how does that money flow through?

After pondering the problem, Sally Spearman, the fundraising manager at MS Ireland approached Rentaballoonrace.com in April about running a bespoke virtual race, launching from their offices in Dublin, sometime in early June.

A target of selling 9000 balloons was set, one to represent each person living with MS in Ireland. The campaign’s objective was to raise awareness and funds for World MS Day which is the 30th May each year. Covid-19 meant 2020 would be very different from usual.

With no experience of a virtual race, Sally sat down with her digital manager, Tom, to devise an online marketing plan. A budget of €3000 was agreed and thoughts as to which Social Media (SM) channels discussed. Facebook and Instagram were chosen for primary advertising, with Humans of Dublin, a quirky but highly popular photographic blog coming in behind.

The Comms team worked hard to garner some fantastic PR for the campaign. Digital-wise, adverts were placed on both Facebook and



Instagram on a trial and error basis to see which visuals and text performed the best.

In addition, Sally and her colleagues approached the top 1000 influencers in Ireland on a pro-bono basis to see if any would bite. They received an approximate 1 in 50 response, and were impressed by 2 Liverpool folk singers Jake and Nathan Carter, both very big in Irish music culture. Indeed, Jake was good enough to produce a video which was uploaded onto his SM accounts.

They also approached Irish talent agencies with limited success and sent out three editions of their e-zine over the campaign period.

Finally, on the digital front, Sally, Tom and their part-time colleagues created a WhatsApp message which was spiralled out to members of their own groups, plus groups belonging to multiple ownership members.

For conventional marketing strategies included working with their charity partners, The Irish Times and Leinster Rugby Club. The Irish Times offered free print and digital advertising whilst Leinster gave a signed rugby shirt and a massive SM shout out from their vociferous supporters’ club.

In total, Sally and the Comms team managed:

- Articles in 5 national and regional papers: The Irish Daily Mail, The Dublin Gazette, Irish Daily Mirror, The Irish Independent and the Cork Echo
- Articles in 10 different online media outlets
- 7 interviews on national and local radio
- 2 TV interviews

Other promotional work evolved around selling balloons and activation codes to suppliers and known corporate sympathisers.

Sally was effusive about the Rentaballoonrace team in saying, “The guys couldn't have been more helpful, especially when it came to the many changes I made along the way. We didn't have a long lead-in time and the team really made me feel like they were prioritising MS Ireland in helping us get over the line. The same sentiments were echoed about Mike and the team by several UK charities that I contacted in the research phase of this campaign.”

Asked by Mike about what promotional strategies worked and what didn't, Sally was absolutely sure that more initial effort should have gone into working with suppliers and corporate sponsors. And she

is right, as these organisations are the 'low hanging fruit' of the sales and marketing mix for any charity.

After all the analysis, the response MS Ireland had to their fundraiser was phenomenal – netting just over €40,000 after budget and other expenses. “We knew we had to do something a little different, and virtual balloon racing ticked so many boxes - it's inclusive, eco-friendly, educational and fun.”
Said Sally

ENDS

For more information, pictures, case studies and resources

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Multiple Sclerosis Ireland

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