

AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN **PUBLIC RELATIONS** **2021**



Best Consumer Public Relations Campaign

Over €50,000



Embrace a Giant Spirit, Tourism NI's new brand, is brought to life through a collection of unique experiences. You can awaken your own giant spirit – through Northern Ireland's culture, landscapes, legends, cities, coast and food.

Campaign

Northern Ireland: Embrace a Giant Spirit

Description of Campaign

Despite travel limitations, this programme of PR and digital activity drove awareness of Embrace a Giant Spirit. It demonstrated the story behind the brand, the spirit of the people and the unique experiences on offer; ensuring NI was firmly on the map for the year of the staycation and beyond.



Public Relations Consultant

Jago Communications



Client

Tourism Northern Ireland

Background to the Campaign

March of 2020 began well, with Tourism NI awarded 'Destination Brand of the Decade' at the Travel Marketing Awards in London. But the COVID headlines had started.

Our aim from March 2020 was to look ahead to the next decade by launching and increasing visibility of Tourism NI's **new** brand across Ireland: *Embrace a Giant Spirit*. More people had travelled to NI the previous year (particularly from the Republic of Ireland/ROI market with a 23% increase) but we had to build on this momentum to reach targets (double the value of tourism to NI economy over next 10 years).

We had extensive plans to tell the story behind the brand, reflecting our history, culture and people, our Giant Spirit and unique NI experience. Consumer research highlighted that NI is perceived as uniquely warm, engaging and big-hearted. We needed to bring that Giant Spirit to life.

Our original plans included activities from events to activations, stunts, media trips, broadcast tours and more but then

the pandemic really took hold. We quickly undertook an extensive PR/digital communications audit and developed our plan for the year ahead.

Our timeframes had to be agile, aligning with Government guidelines within two different markets (ROI and NI), but we had to be proactive and prepared. We scenario planned and developed a phased approach:

Phase 1: Rapid Response

- Maintaining proactive and informed PR and communications.
- Integrated across all channels, pivoting towards appropriate content for different audiences.
- Keeping channels open, highly measured, agile. A warm, proud, together, optimistic, responsible, personable tone of voice reflecting the Giant Spirit.
- **Instill confidence.**

Phase 2: Re-building Momentum

- As COVID numbers decrease, forward-thinking recommence for short-breaks.
- Pivoting towards content that helps people to plan and book for when we can travel again.
- Reflecting industry re-opening/welcoming visitors.
- **Intercept and Inspire.**

Phase 3: The Giant Welcome

- Recognising that international planning may take longer to recover, opportunity here to strongly push and capitalize on the 'staycation' experience in NI for both domestic and ROI target segments.
- **Inspire and drive bookings.**

In addition, we monitored the Brexit situation, armed with communications that travel to NI would not be hindered.

Statement of Objectives

Overarching PR and Influencer Objectives:

- Increase visibility amongst NI and ROI target consumer audiences of the Embrace a Giant Spirit brand, in particular the story behind the brand, the people/hospitality heroes.
- Improve knowledge of the unique NI experiences, in line with new brand (only a 2-hour drive from Dublin for ROI audience).
- Demonstrate return and resilience of tourism in NI when it was safe to travel.
- Highlight safety and We're Good to Go (industry standard charter), critical that we emphasise understanding and commitment to the safety of consumers first and foremost.
- Ensure quality and quantity (minimum 480 pieces) of media coverage, PR impact score of 65 (a dedicated Tourism NI measurement we developed based on AMEC Framework).
- With a limited influencer budget, drive domestic market and ROI market to book an overnight staycation in Northern Ireland with creative influencer content.
- Ultimately, drive staycations in Northern Ireland from ROI and NI market.

Secondary objective, by meeting the above objectives this will instill confidence in the industry that Tourism NI is driving key tourism messages.

Programme Planning and Strategy

Research & Planning

We undertook intense PR planning to identify tactics we could creatively and safely deploy. We interrogated the Embrace a Giant Spirit research and key motivators for travel amongst target audiences.

We identified key interests amongst our ROI segments (Open to Ideas, Active Maximisers and Open-Minded Explorers) and new NI segments (Social Instagramers, Aspiring Families, Natural Quality Seekers). In addition, we regularly tapped into Consumer Barometer Research to understand the appetite for travel in both markets and the type of

travelling they were seeking (e.g. priority of safety, more self-catering options, open outdoor spaces). It also found that the younger demographic was more likely to travel first. We adapted and dialled up particularly key messages and focused on different segments based on research and industry requirements.

Our approach included continuous monitoring: listening, researching and adapting, ensuring we aligned with consumer sentiment and Government guidelines.

The Idea

Telling the story behind Embrace a Giant Spirit was still core to our 2020/21 strategy. Showcasing the people's Giant Spirit would work across each Phase (even when travel wasn't permitted), with the experiences more upweighted within for Phase 2 and 3.

The 2020/21 strategy incorporated a creative content plan for each market. A range of tactics included:

• Immediate Media Outreach

- > Careful outreach to key media and influencers to say we were 'still here', offering responsible/appropriate content for their channels. Gathering key insight directly from media on how they were adapting, with feedback highlighting they required content asap due to more limited media resources and less regular content from other sources.
- > In addition, discussing content creation and development for phase 2 and 3.
- > Proactive engagement with long-lead titles, recognising editions are still being planned.

• Content Development for PR/digital channels

- > Created a working group to develop weekly content including new 'at home' content.
- > Outreach to industry to instill confidence and offer ideas for proactive communications.
- > An integrated creative content/PR calendar was developed with tactics such as broadcast pitches, listicles, micro-media releases, video content, Facebook Lives, profiles and interviews. Phase 1 widespread coverage, from snapshot of themes and coverage examples below:
 - Star Gazing Tips from Tyrone's Dark Sky Park: RTÉ, Irish Independent, UTV Live interviews.
 - Recipes/videos from NI chefs: Double page Business Post, The Journal.
 - Gardening advice from National Trust/Hillsborough Castle: Double page in Sunday Life, The Gloss.
 - Ultimate NI playlist created on Spotify & book lists: Hot Press, The Sunday Times.
 - Family activities at home from NI such as Armagh Planetarium: HerFamily.ie, Irish Times, Daily Star, Ireland AM.
- > Staycation Nation: We prepared NI staycation inspiration content when the time was right. From 10 self-catering options for families to glamping for couples, consistent creative content distributed to media regularly during Phase 2/3, with safety message interwoven.

• New media trip approach

- > Expanded FAM trip programmes in both NI and ROI, tried and tested tactic but with creative additions. Longer trips to drive staycation message. More integration to share on social channels.

• Embrace A Kindred Spirit

- > When it was safe to travel, 'Embrace a Kindred Spirit' invited those with a big-hearted spirit in ROI to embrace ours in NI.
- > Dedicated trips and campaigns with two key ROI figures, firstly media personality Darragh McCullough. Secondly, while Dáithí Ó Sé wasn't heading to Kerry as usual this August, we invited him for a family trip to Belfast.
- > We maximized the trips through video content, photography, print and broadcast interviews, profile pieces and media release, all linking to the Embrace a Giant Spirit key messages.

• People Storytelling

- > A Storytelling calendar, profiling industry & the unique experiences they offer. Pitching around creative themes.
- > Identified stories that exemplified Embrace a Giant Spirit and pitched to media across broadcast, feature print and online. Weaving in measures they were taking to ensure the safety of consumers.
- > Very successful stream of content, from Sisters Elaine & Martina from St Patrick's walking trails on RTÉ Radio 1 on Christmas Day to Bushcraft expert Rob Hill on primetime UTV TV, and mindfulness guru and tourguide Ann Ward due on Ireland AM.

- **Embrace a Giant Spirit Virtual Masterclasses**

- > Live stream workshops profiling the people and their experiences, programme of free online Discover NI Facebook workshops where people can really get a sense of the warmth of our people.
- > Maximised through social and PR.

- **Virtual Embrace a Giant Spirit Media & Influencer Event**

- > Cancelling our March media events, we needed to creatively adapt.
- > A virtual/hybrid event for media/influencers across Ireland, inspiring them around the Embrace a Giant Spirit brand.
- > This needed Giant Entertainment, it needed to wow. There were many virtual media events now, we needed to stand-out.
- > Presented by Holly Hamilton and Connor Philips, we coordinated guest appearances from Derry Girls stars, Paddy Kieltly, musical performances from Rachel Tucker/Ryan McMullan/ROE/Neil Martin, poetry from Ian McElhinney, as well as a luxury hamper delivered to all to enjoy the finest NI food and drink while they enjoyed the event. There was an interview from renowned artist Colin Davidson (masterfully created Embrace a Giant Spirit logo), a social competition for one guest to win one of his beautiful landscape paintings of Belfast.
- > As well as Giant Entertainment, a relaxed Q&A with Naomi Waite, Marketing Director.

- **Strong Broadcast Focus**

- > As well as broadcast focus of all our core content campaigns, we set out to drive a dedicated broadcast push.
- > Targeted key BBC, RTÉ, Virgin and UTV commissioning editors/producers with pitch ideas. We strongly engaged with producers/production houses from Phase 1.
- > We secured a mini-series on UTV, as well as a half hour RTÉ Nationwide programme on Northern Ireland in August 2020 and a two-part Giant Welcome series on Virgin Media.
- > We have also secured a Channel 4 network programme due to air in Summer 2021, working in partnership with Waddell Media.

- **Influencer Programme**

- > With a limited budget, delivered a highly successful influencer programme.
- > During Phase 2, built relationships and worked with a number of influencers that had already visited NI previously. They reshared previous content and ensured NI was front of mind of the staycation summer, reshared on Discover NI.
- > Crafted an email to domestic influencers to share #EmbraceaGiantSpirit on their adventures, get behind our industry and support local. Building brand awareness.
- > Working with 1 digital micro-influencer in ROI market and 1 digital micro-influencer in NI market, aligned to Social Instagrammers/Active Maximisers audiences. This included trips, creative content development, interactivity and competitions.
- > Mid-way through, the Government launched Eat Out to Help Out scheme. We adapted and ensured we increased awareness of this.
- > Partnering with VisitBritain/London & Partners/Visit Scotland, we hosted influencers from across the UK as part of an 'influencer swap'. We really maximized the partnerships to utilise the content/repurpose on owned channels it to reach our target audiences online.

- **Humans of NI**

- > As we re-entered lockdown in Winter 2020, a focus organic digital campaign to really celebrate our industry, the Giant Spirit.
- > 10-part series of personal people profiles for Facebook and Instagram, accompanied by beautiful photography, similar to 'Human of New York' social concept.
- > Also, Valentine's Day content with couples of NI hospitality.
- > Instilled confidence in our industry, told their unique, fascinating stories, whilst raising awareness of the true nature of Embrace a Giant Spirit.
- > Widespread authentic engagement online.
- > Maximised through exclusive print series with News Letter newspaper.

- **Soothing Stories from NI**

- > Embargoed for 9th March 2021, development of four-part audio-series of enchanting Soothing Stories from Northern Ireland, bringing listeners on a journey through NI.
- > Actors Conleth Hill and Bronagh Waugh lending voices to bring the local stories to life.
- > Watch this space for the launch! Hosted on Discover NI Spotify, integrated across PR, digital and partners.

Measurement

Despite **travel to NI from ROI only being permitted 12 weeks from March 2020 to now**, as well as extremely limited travel domestically, we achieved:

- Over 590 coverage (NI), combined reach of 47m (5% broadcast), with 97% including key messages (from Embrace a Giant Spirit and safety measures). An average impact score of 83.
- Over 280 pieces (ROI), a combined reach of 165m (18% broadcast which is an increase on the previous year), with almost 40% including the Discover NI URL and 99% including key Embrace a Giant Spirit, 2-hour drive and safety messages. Average PR impact score of 85.
- Ranged from profiling the resilient industry, to showcasing unique experiences and activities on offer in NI.

Stats to illustrate digital:

- Influencer activity led to over 300 posts, 1.9m impressions, 45k engagement.
- Humans of NI generated 330k impressions and 4.8k engagements.
- 44+ #embraceagiantspirit posts following virtual event.

Event:

- 95% of respondents said YES to being inspired about Embrace a Giant Spirit.
- 23k views of events videos.
- 100% of attendees said would attend similar event.
- “The best virtual event I have attended this year”. The Travel Expert.
- “Really inspired me to look closer to home and share that with my print and radio audiences” Kerry McLean, BBC/Irish News.
- “It made me want to visit NI asap” Rory Cashin, **Lovin.ie**
- “Best virtual event of this whole year, because of the content, the live hosts/live aspect, the hamper, the chat box with other attendees/being able to attend it 'live' with others.” Yvonne Gordon, Travel Writer.
- “It showcased NI in a wonderful light” The GastroGays.
- “It was impossible to not feel excited about the talent in NI and the Embrace a Giant Spirit brand.” Kelli Burch, NI Freelance.

IMPACT

- Although local NISRA official statistics not available yet, stats showed that visitor numbers from ROI soared 200% in August 2020, compared to the previous year. Overall Tourism NI noted a “significant growth in cross-border visitors” in summer 2020.
- Reviews from ROI increased 51% in 2020 compared to the previous year.
- Cross-border business provided 60% bookings in some attractions such as the Titanic Centre Belfast when it reopened.

PARAGON



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