

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



Best Use of Sponsorship

Over €50,000



The Vhi Virtual Women's Mini Marathon took place last year in cities, towns and villages across Ireland. 22,500 women participated the 10km that saw over €1m across Ireland. To mark the special virtual version of the event, Vhi commissioned a statue of a female runner, 'Cara', that symbolised all the women who participated in the event. Registration for the 2021 Vhi Virtual Women's Mini Marathon is now open at www.vhiwomensminimarathon.ie

Campaign

Vhi's sponsorship of the Vhi Virtual Women's Mini Marathon

Description of Campaign

Vhi exists to help customers live longer, stronger, and healthier lives. Due to COVID-19, the Vhi Women's Mini Marathon was cancelled. Vhi pivoted to a virtual event, providing a platform for participants to get active, push boundaries and allow Vhi to reward customers' proactive approach to wellbeing during unprecedented times.



Public Relations Consultant

Teneo



Client

Vhi

Background to the Campaign

Vhi is Ireland's leading health insurer whose mission is to actively help their customers live long and healthier lives by making healthcare and wellness more accessible. As a national and market leading brand, awareness is not an issue for Vhi.

The objective was to make Vhi more relevant to their core target audience. We identified sponsorship as a vehicle to help achieve this business goal.

Extensive research identified running – specifically 10km events – as the perfect sponsorship area to engage our core target audience.

The Women's Mini Marathon (WMM) is an annual 10km event. In 2014, Vhi entered a 5-year partnership with the WMM. Since its inception more than 1 million women have participated. 30,000 women participate annually by walking, running or jogging and it's the largest all-female event of its kind in the world. The WMM had been delivering

on Vhi's sponsorship and business objectives, thus a 2-year sponsorship renewal was agreed in 2019.

For the 2020 campaign, we set out to reward customers for taking positive action, positioning Vhi as a leader in participative running and driving affinity and relevance with women aged <45.

Our 2020 event was launched before COVID-19 reached Ireland. Once the severity of the situation became clear, the physical event was cancelled.

Vhi and WMM worked together to reimagine the event to the **Vhi Virtual Women's Mini Marathon**. This virtual version of the 10km event, ran between 1st – 10th October. With campaign title of "10km your way", we established 10,000 participants would be a measurement of success.

Statement of Objectives

Vhi Virtual Women's Mini Marathon objectives:

1. Increase Vhi's brand relevance with its target audience.
2. Actively help our customers and communities live longer, stronger, healthier lives by making health and wellness more accessible.
3. Reward Vhi customers for taking positive action by signing up.
4. Drive our goal of 10,000 participants to sign up.
5. Engage our target audience through:
 - a. Use of brand ambassadors to achieve a goal of 1 million total reach from social posts.
 - b. A targeted PR campaign.
 - c. A targeted AD campaign.
6. Engage Vhi employees in our sponsorship through training programmes & encouraging the team to sign-up.
7. Provide an opportunity for participants to raise much needed funds for charities when fundraising opportunities had been severely impacted.

Programme Planning and Strategy

Audience Profile

Vhi's primary target audience for this campaign is women aged 25 – 35, they're constantly connected with an always on approach and are focused on building their careers. Most importantly, they are unlikely to have engaged with a health insurer and they don't see the Vhi WMM as an event for them.

Our secondary audience is women aged 35+, juggling work and family priorities. They are also health conscious but are more likely to have experienced a major health event i.e. illness or pregnancy.

Approach

With our audience clearly defined, our approach at the beginning of 2020 was to engage with them through social, PR and content partnerships. Our strategy involved working with a carefully selected group of young women who would help us tell our brand story as well as their own stories.

We created the Vhi Run Squad which was comprised of a group of 5 digital influencers who would train and participate in the event. The selection process was critical, as we wanted to work with women who were suitable and relevant to the target audience but also represented each different type of participant, from beginner to expert, and would tell their own story in their own way.

Phase 1 – Launch of Physical Event

With our Vhi Run Squad, we launched the physical Vhi Women's Mini Marathon in March 2020, delivering 34 pieces of targeted media coverage landing key messages about the event and Vhi's role.

Unbeknownst to us, Covid was about to halt plans for a physical event, however the rigorous ambassador selection process provided crucial, as it ultimately aligned credible and relatable personalities to a new and uncharted virtual event.

Phase 2 - Arrival of Covid 19

As an event which would see 30,000 participants was clearly no longer feasible, it was back to the drawing board. The aim was to create a solution which would provide a relevant virtual event platform for participants to get active, push boundaries and allow Vhi to reward a proactive approach to wellness during a difficult time period for our customers.

The preferred solution was to host a virtual event, with participants being able to complete the 10km 'their way' over the course of 10 days during the autumn.

In partnership with the WMM we developed an activation strategy for a virtual event that would add value and meet the revised objectives.

Phase 3 - Implementation of Strategy

To fully maximise the virtual version of this event, we utilised a comprehensive marketing strategy, encompassing social, digital, PR, advertising, internal comms and activations to ensure that our new objectives were delivered.

The virtual nature of the event made it more accessible than ever before.

Return of the Vhi Run Squad

Our decision to work with digital influencers perfectly aligned with the objectives for a virtual version of the event. It was through digital and social that we remained connected whilst having to be physically apart in 2020.

The Vhi Run Squad returned for the virtual event, posting weekly updates on their channels throughout September, promoting key brand messaging, encouraging registration and ensuring there was a steady stream of engaging content.

A heavyweight social content campaign resulted in the highest ever digital results for the partnership. Through the ambassadors, we focused on key moments of the campaign, from registration opening to the delivery of participant race packs.

PR Launch

With a new virtual version of a recognisable event, we needed a big bang PR launch that would generate significant media coverage and appeal to our target demographic.

Taking Covid 19 restrictions into account, we captured bespoke creative photography with our Dublin based ambassadors and through targeted media pitching, we garnered 44 separate pieces of coverage promoting the virtual version of the event.

Creation of 'Cara' Statue

To mark the start of the Vhi Virtual Women's Mini Marathon, we commissioned and erected a statue of a female runner that was placed on display outside the Mansion House in Dublin City Centre, where it remained for the duration of the 10 day event. 'Cara', meaning 'friend' as Gaeilge, was made from sustainably sourced wood and was a symbol of the women taking part in the event.

We increased the PR interest in Cara by organising the Lord Mayor of Dublin to participate in the statue launch and photocall, delivering a further 23 pieces of coverage.

Vhi Rewards Programme

Rewarding participants for taking a proactive approach to their personal wellbeing during a pandemic was a key objective. Vhi achieved this in a straightforward and simple way – through the Vhi WMM Member Rewards. Every Vhi customer who paid their €10 registration fee, could claim it back via the Vhi app. This move positioned Vhi as an organisation that helps and rewards customers who proactively aim to live longer, stronger, healthier lives.

Measurement

Goal: 10,000 participants

Achieved: 22,428 participants – 124% higher than targeted

Goal: Assist charities with raising approx. €500,000

Achieved: €1,000,000 raised for charity when fundraising was severely impacted

Goal: Help customers live longer & healthier lives by making health & wellness more accessible. Reward Vhi customers for taking positive action.

Achieved: Over 1K curated links for event registration directly to the ambassadors. 1,300 Vhi customers (6% of entrants) were rewarded with free entry

Goal: Engage Vhi employees in the sponsorship through training programmes & encouraging the team to sign-up

Achieved: 110 members of staff participated - 7.3% of the entire workforce. 70 participated in the training programmes

Goal: Increase Vhi's brand relevance with its target audience – females aged 25-45.

Achieved: We reached new audiences, with 36% of participants taking part for the first time. Over 90% indicated they would return for a virtual event in 2021

The use of PR to support our sponsorship of the Vhi Virtual WMM had meaningful results for our brand. Media coverage across all channels – press, broadcast, online and social – at a local and national level. The strategy allowed us to continually secure coverage throughout 2020 as we moved from a physical to a virtual event. Our eye-catching photography featured in the Irish Times 'Picture of the Day' & the statue launch was featured on Jenny Greene, RTÉ 2FM.

These results demonstrate how a sponsor and rightsholder working together can overcome COVID-19 challenges to create a best-in-class virtual event and experience for participants.

PARAGON



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