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Best Use of Media Relations

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Campaign

A walk in the park: Launching Ireland's first community currency

Description of Campaign

Dublin 8 is home to Ireland's first community currency project, Civic Dollars, which seeks to encourage use of public parks while giving back to local businesses and community groups. This campaign aimed to draw attention to the project, drive user participation and raise awareness among local businesses and organisations.

Public Relations Consultant

Murray

Client

The Digital Hub/Smart D8

Background to the Campaign

Smart D8 is an ambitious, collaborative initiative with the purpose of investigating how new and innovative approaches can be used to improve citizens' health and wellbeing in Dublin 8. Smart D8, part of Smart Dublin, brings together local authorities, academia, healthcare, local community and industry in a partnership model to address real world issues. It is led by The Digital Hub, Smart Dublin, Dublin City Council and St. James's Hospital, and backed up by a range of partners across the healthcare, research and enterprise sectors.

Launched in March 2021, Smart D8 introduced its largest pilot project to date in November 2021 called Civic Dollars. Civic Dollars encourages use of public parks and aims to drive better health outcomes for the community through innovative and non-invasive use of technology. It is based on the community currency model, and rewards users and participants spend time in Dublin 8's parks. Civic Dollars takes this one step further, by allowing the earned 'Civic Dollars' to not just be redeemed in local businesses but also gifted to local community groups to exchange for important services like marketing, IT or legal support – functions sometimes financially out of reach for small, grass roots community organisations.

Civic Dollars works through a smartphone app to geolocate users' entry, activity and exit in selected parks in Dublin 8, meaning that engagement and action were central to the campaign's success.

A key strength for Civic Dollars is the creation of positive feedback loops in a community, whereby local residents feel empowered to improve their health and wellbeing in public parks, local business and community groups can financially gain, and local authorities can action park usage statistics for the future benefit of communities. An early identified challenge was explaining the concept of community currency, which is relatively new to Irish communities, while also driving engagement with Civic Dollars and use of the chosen parks in the Dublin 8 area.

Murray was tasked by our client, The Digital Hub, to action a short, concise media relations campaign for the launch of Civic Dollars to drive awareness and adoption.

Statement of Objectives

Press statements were issued to targeted journalists following:

1. Reach a wide audience to highlight the work of Smart D8, but with specific geographical focus on the Dublin 8 region.
2. Drive signups to the Civic Dollars platform which would increase park usage, generate Civic Dollars and facilitate gifting to local community groups.

Linked to these was the overarching aim to display a proof of concept for a community currency to work in Dublin, to serve as a benchmark for future projects. Data from a similar launch in Belfast would prove key in assessing how a bespoke media relations campaign would support and enhance this.

Programme Planning and Strategy

Working to tight timelines with multiple stakeholders across Smart Dublin, Smart D8, The Digital Hub and the Civic Dollars team, it was essential to have a concise approach to the campaign. Murray focused on 3 keys areas to drive maximum results for the launch:

1. Developing the news hook
2. Defining the audience
3. Effectively engaging with media

It is rare that a public relations campaign goes exactly to plan. In operating as both strategic advisor and actioning the media relations element of the launch our key media targets were delivered and surpassed, including the front page of the Irish and several top tier broadcast hits – giving a hyper-local call to action a national profile. Our campaign led to impressive outputs, outcomes and impact for the client.

Measurement

With a project focused on a specific call to action, the outputs, outcomes and impact of Civic Dollars were central to measuring and evaluating the launch.

Expectations across all metrics were met and far exceeded.

• **User signup:** 67% of our stated objective for user sign ups was met in the first week after the launch, with 100% being met 2 weeks ahead of schedule.

• **Community donations:** An important output of the launch campaign has been the level of gifting carried out by Civic Dollars users Dublin 8. 42% of Civic Dollars earned were donated to local community groups.

• **Community feedback:** As part of the future impact of Civic Dollars, users have actively made reports on park improvements to Dublin City Council through the Civic Dollars app. This is evidence of a positive feedback loop in action between citizens and government.

- **Media coverage:** The strength of the media coverage was a key outcome in ensuring as many people as possible were informed of the call to action. We secured all of our key targets including the Irish Times, Morning Ireland, RTE's Six One News, Newstalk Breakfast and local Dublin media. Coverage secured in the first 24 hours of the launch reached over 5.7m people

- **Digital engagement:** Digital channels also saw unprecedented attention, with a ten-fold spike in visits to the Civic Dollars website, peak popularity of 100 according to Google Trends and over 38,000 impressions on the launch posts across Twitter and Facebook – a key social media channel for community action.

Our launch campaign delivered on outcomes, outputs and impact which surpassed expectations.

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