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**PUBLIC
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2023**



Best Communications Campaign by a Not-for-Profit or Non-Governmental Organisation



TV host Mairead Ronan is challenging schools and students across Ireland to become battery recycling champions as part of a nationwide initiative, which will also help raise funds for children's hospice, LauraLynn. Mairead is joined by schoolgirls Cara, nine, and Elsie Jones, eight, whose sister Molly avails of LauraLynn's services. Picture: Conor McCabe Photography

Campaign

WEEE Ireland Schools Battery Recycling Programme

Description of Campaign

Partnering with MediaConsult, WEEE Ireland, the country's largest e-waste and battery recycling scheme, aimed to revive the Schools Battery Recycling Programme, halted during the pandemic. The strategy led to exceptional engagement, surpassing pre-Covid figures, with a 74% increase in school participation and a 13% increase in recycled batteries.

MediaConsult

Public Relations Consultant

MediaConsult



Client

WEEE Ireland

Background to the Campaign

WEEE Ireland's Schools Battery Recycling Programme has been running for 11 years and encourages teachers, students and their families across Ireland to become battery recycling champions.

Improperly disposing of batteries, such as throwing them in waste bins, is not only detrimental to the environment, but also results in a significant loss of precious metals and resources.

It is essential to inform individuals on the importance of responsible battery disposal and encourage them to participate in recycling programmes.

By doing so, we minimise the negative impact of batteries on the environment and preserve the Earth's natural resources for future generations.

The programme challenges schools to use WEEE Ireland's free online educational resources to teach students

about the significance of battery recycling and its environmental impact if they are improperly dumped.

A competition further motivates students to take tangible action by collecting used batteries from their homes, allowing schools to be in with a chance to win one of six €2,000 sports vouchers (three for junior cycle and three for senior cycle).

During the pandemic and the imposition of rolling lockdowns and travel restrictions, junior and senior schools were forced to close temporarily.

This led to a major reduction in the Schools Battery Recycling Programme's activity levels, including a cessation of the competition.

To successfully revive the programme in September 2022 with the aim of matching pre-pandemic participation levels, WEEE Ireland worked hand-in-hand with MediaConsult to create a robust national and regional communications campaign to reignite interest among primary schools and make the programme more appealing to that generation.

In addition, the programme's reach was enhanced by strengthening the messaging to encourage more secondary schools to participate.

It was essential to create engaging and informative content that resonated with the target demographic and encouraged participation.

This included using multimedia formats such as videos and compelling visual content easy to share on social media platforms.

By utilising a comprehensive media strategy that included both traditional and digital channels, WEEE Ireland aimed to maximise the campaign's visibility and generate interest and excitement around the programme's return.

Statement of Objectives

The key objective of the campaign was to re-ignite interest in the WEEE Ireland Schools Battery Recycling Programme and for participation levels to match or exceed pre-pandemic levels.

This was further broken down into specific short, medium and long term objectives and goals.

Short Term: September – November 2022

- Generate interest and excitement around the relaunch of the Schools Battery Recycling Programme and competition in primary and secondary schools across Ireland
- Tailor PR messaging to attract media interest in targeted regions, focusing only on those counties in which WEEE operates its battery recycling scheme
- Encourage increased secondary school participation in the programme
- Publicise the competition launch, mechanism and prizes, in addition to its charity partnership with LauraLynn
- Bring the environmental and resource recovery elements of the programme to the fore, while maintaining the success of the long-term charity partnership
- Engage additional stakeholders to help create groundswell and support battery recycling in the community, including Environmental Awareness Officers and battery retailers.

Medium Term: November 2022 – February 2023

- Increase the number of battery box collections to match or exceed pre-pandemic levels
- Increase the number of batteries recycled through the programme to match or exceed pre-pandemic levels
- Regularly communicate with as many schools and students as possible through a range of channels, to keep them engaged in, and excited about, the programme.

Long Term

- Create ongoing awareness about the importance of battery recycling and resource recovery with the ultimate aim of making Ireland a leader in sustainable battery waste management.

Programme Planning and Strategy

WEEE Ireland and its PR partner, MediaConsult, successfully resurrected the Schools Battery Recycling Programme through a seven-month targeted and determined multi-media campaign.

As primary and second-level schools returned to classrooms following the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, the challenges were obvious.

Key to rejuvenating this vital initiative, which has at its heart a charity partnership with children's hospice LauraLynn, was bolstering the level of direct engagement between schools and WEEE Ireland, underlining and communicating the benefits of battery recycling and encouraging entry into the competition.

Crucially, it aimed to give students and teachers a sense of ownership in spreading the recycling message.

This core aim of restoring the programme to the success of pre-pandemic levels, from its launch in September 2022, was met – and surpassed.

This was all the more encouraging given that WEEE Ireland had embarked on a full makeover of the campaign, bringing it fully back under its own brand.

This involved building a new battery recycling microsite catering to consumer battery recycling at home, work and in the community.

The schools competition was housed within this, with its own page and resources links; all updated to the new look.

Despite this transformation of the initiative, it appeared to be universally adopted – both by schools which had previously taken part and new entrants.

An intrinsic part of this campaign focused on the need for all of us to embrace the circular economy, re-using materials – in this case batteries – containing precious metals which can be re-used in manufacturing.

Fuelled by encouragement from WEEE Ireland and the MediaConsult communications strategy, schools in the areas in which WEEE operates (around 75% of the country), effectively became couriers for the campaign, relentlessly driving awareness online and physically, in their own homes and communities.

While Covid-19 had propelled them into a world of online education, it also introduced them to the power and influence of social media.

This migration from classroom to online learning was immediately recognised by WEEE Ireland and MediaConsult and became the springboard to harness the energy of students and schools in spreading the competition's message.

The level of engagement on social media from primary and secondary schools reached new heights, particularly on Facebook and Instagram - the image-sharing platform, which allowed schools to highlight and update their battery collecting performance on a daily basis.

Schools were routinely invited to let WEEE Ireland know how many batteries they had recycled by tagging the organisation on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn, giving the schools a chance to be spotlighted in WEEE's newsletters.

These news updates, for primary and secondary schools, helped to drive the message home, landing in the email inboxes of 2,852 schools nationwide, underlining the importance of battery recycling and increasing the level of engagement between schools and the client.

The launch newsletter was followed up with a new series of newsletters.

Actively participating schools were selected from their communication directly to WEEE Ireland and on social media in a 'School Spotlight' style questionnaire to ask schools how they were recycling, tips, what they were learning, and what had motivated them to take their own unique individual approach.

The campaign motto was seen by schools as simple and effective: Recycle for Good – the Power is in Your Hands.

The ask of schools was also straight-forward – fill 10 full 5kg battery boxes to be eligible for entry to the competition.

The celebrity ambassador for the campaign was Mairéad Ronan, the well-known broadcaster, host of RTE's Ireland's Fittest Family and LauraLynn Children's Hospice Ambassador.

A launch video was shot (<https://youtu.be/yKGqnLmxoxE>), featuring the campaign charity partner, ambassador and WEEE Ireland, which was edited into smaller clips offering fresh content that could be regularly shared across social media.

Traditional media was also employed in the form of a national press release highlighting the programme and competition.

Imagery on the launch day featured a touching connection between siblings Elsie and Cara Jones, whose sister Molly attends LauraLynn's services.

Existing data gave WEEE Ireland and MediaConsult the opportunity to roll the messaging out to regional newsdesks, making the campaign a relevant news story in those counties in which WEEE Ireland operates its battery recycling scheme.

A few months into the campaign, RTE's children's news programme, News2Day, recorded a television package on the Schools Battery Recycling programme from St Anne's Primary School in Dublin's Shankill, where Elsie and Cara are pupils.

The segment can be viewed at the link below:

<https://www.rte.ie/kids/news2day/2023/0131/1352994-news2day-31-january-2023/>

But the engagement did not stop at school level: our campaign also enlisted the support of county councils' Environmental Awareness Officers and asked battery retailers, supermarkets and newsagents to come on board.

This had the domino-effect of councils' communications departments resharing posts and posting their own messaging about the campaign on social media.

In this way, the campaign was transmitted seamlessly through the wider community, persuading everyone to collect unused or end-of-life batteries to harvest the precious metals within.

A rebranded fleet of 'battery trucks', delivering and collecting WEEE's distinctive blue battery boxes to and from schools, took to the highways and byways of Ireland.

One measure of the campaign's success involved the hiring of extra drivers to keep up with the demand from participating schools ahead of the deadline.

WEEE Ireland – which is mandated by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications to carry out battery and e-waste recycling awareness programmes as part of its recycling and extended producer member services - and MediaConsult, will continue this initiative into the future, committed to building on the tremendous successes of this campaign.

Measurement

The communications campaign to relaunch the WEEE Ireland Schools Battery Recycling Programme exceeded all expectations, delivering exceptional engagement levels across primary and second-level schools.

Quantitative

The number of participating primary and secondary schools increased by a staggering 74% while the overall volume of batteries collected for recycling increased by 13% when compared to pre-pandemic figures.

This is the equivalent to 553,900 typical AA batteries collected, versus 489,500 during the same September–February period of the last full year of the campaign (2018-2019).

A 317% increase in the number of secondary schools participating in the programme and competition was recorded during the same period, when compared to pre-pandemic numbers.

Seventy-seven pieces of coverage were generated across print, online and broadcast media, reaching 3.2 million people.

These included 60 regional articles and a range of national print, online and broadcast pieces on RTE, the Irish Independent, Irish Daily Mail, Irish Mirror and the Irish Daily Star.

More than 16,000 email newsletters were sent to over 2,800 schools with clear CTAs to enter the competition and access the educational resources. The average open rate was 42%.

Visits to the programme microsite and online form submissions for the blue battery box deliveries corresponded to PR coverage, aligned with targeted social media video ad campaigns and content.

During the September/October launch period, the page views to the programme's microsite increased by 33% compared to the 2018 launch period.

The campaign videos generated almost 99,000 video views on Facebook and Instagram.

Qualitative

The campaign was highly engaged across all major social media channels with students posting stories on their schools' social media pages, promoting the battery recycling drive and the importance of resource recovery.

The newsletters' 'School Spotlight' interviews highlighted what motivated students to get involved and what they learned from the programme, helping WEEE Ireland gain an insight into ways to improve its messaging for future campaigns.

By tagging Local Authorities in social media stories and sending a direct notification to all Local Authority page admins, the campaign message was further amplified.

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