



AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN **PUBLIC RELATIONS 2023**



Best Long-Term Campaign



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DRURY.

Public Relations Consultant

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Client

John Sisk & Son

Campaign

In 2019, John Sisk & Son (Sisk) demonstrated its intent to help combat the climate emergency with the creation of its 2030 Sustainability Roadmap titled: Building today, Caring for tomorrow.

The Sisk comms team believed that effective PR could strategically position Sisk as a sustainable leader in the Irish construction sector.

Description of Campaign

The construction sector is traditionally stereotyped as a dirty environment and with good reason. The industry and built environment is responsible for 37 percent of all harmful emissions in Ireland and concrete is the second most used substance in the world after water.

Our sustainability strategy has been driven morally from within the business and the demand of our clients for more sustainable buildings with the least amount of embodied carbon. Sustainability is a hot topic in the construction sector with some customers requesting sustainable credentials which can make up 10-20 percent of scoring in tendering for new projects.

In 2020, John Sisk & Son (Sisk) demonstrated its intent to help combat the climate emergency with the creation of its 2030 Sustainability Roadmap 2030 titled: Building today, Caring for tomorrow.

This roadmap set out 21 targets over a ten-year period that outline direct support for the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including how Sisk is going to reach its ambition of carbon neutrality by 2030.

The main challenges the Sisk in-house communications team faced was that the business wanted to avoid the appearance of 'greenwashing'. This was compounded by Sisk being a family business traditionally hesitant towards risk. For Sisk to take a leading position on sustainability from a communications perspective, we had to first do a lot of work with internal stakeholders. In particular, we had to build a rapport and trust with the Sisk sustainability team to demonstrate that PR could add value to the business in its goal to be a sustainable leader.

The communications function saw this as an opportunity to gain an advantage among our competitors and to enhance our corporate reputation. We believed that effective PR could strategically position Sisk as a sustainable leader in the Irish construction sector. Part of the PR challenge was to influence our own staff into behavioural changes and influencing our supply chain partners to come on this sustainable journey with Sisk. We also had to demonstrate that we are a serious advocate of sustainability and that this was not a greenwashing exercise.

Background to the Campaign

Our PR strategy was augmented by five key themes of the Sisk sustainability Roadmap:

- Tackling climate change and air pollution
- Caring for the environment
- Enhancing communities
- Leading on responsible business practices
- Embracing innovation and digital technology

Audience definitions

Our target audience was male and female construction professionals, supply chain partners, new and existing clients, key stakeholders and government officials.

Having identified the target audience, we then devised a strategy to target specific outlets.

To reach construction professionals and supply chain partners, we targeted construction trade press, because its audience is heavily skewed towards those working in the sector.

To reach new and existing clients, key stakeholders and government officials we targeted The Irish Times because the audience profile is 57 percent ABC1 and the 36 percent of its readership is based in the Dublin area, where many of our new and existing projects are located.

Statement of Objectives

Business objectives

1. We will achieve carbon neutral status in 2021 by offsetting the emissions from our operations through internationally accredited carbon reduction schemes.
2. By 2024, 50% of the vehicles in our fleet will be electric.
3. We will plant 1.7 million trees as native woodland in Ireland, the UK and wider Europe by 2029.
4. Switch from diesel to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) on all of its Irish construction sites.
5. We will establish sustainable partnerships supporting the successful restoration of peat bogs.

PR campaign objectives

1. Our goal was to position Sisk as the leader in sustainability among Tier one Irish construction companies.
2. Influence behavioral change among our staff to transfer from traditional diesel company cars and switching to Electric Vehicles (EV's) to achieve the company target of having 50% of our fleet to EV's by 2024.
3. Increase staff volunteering by participating in sustainability-related Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities to help Sisk achieve milestones on its 2030 Roadmap.
4. Influence our supply-chain partners to engage with Sisk on sustainable practices to help achieve our goals set out in the Roadmap.

Programme Planning and Strategy

Execution: Phase Two (2021-2022)

The business hired Sinéad Hickey as its Head of Sustainability in February 2021. Sinéad's appointment gave us an opportunity to land stories in The Examiner and construction trade magazines.

The Sisk – Sustainability Roadmap was set to be launched in April 2021 with over 400 key stakeholders invited to a launch event. We co-ordinated the event and produced four pieces of video content and sourced sustainability influencers to act as MC and a guest speaker.

We planned a face-to-face event, but due to Covid-19 we moved this online. The comms team secured Ella McSweeney, a sustainability journalist to act as MC and Dr Tara Shine, environmental scientist to be a guest speaker. As a result of this event, Dr Tara Shine is now Chairperson of the Sisk, External Sustainability Advisory Council.

Prior to the Sisk Sustainability Roadmap being launched the PR team knew that we had to build relationships internally with key Sisk stakeholders, including C-Suite executives.

We decided to host story mining sessions with key internal stakeholders to try and identify newsworthy stories. This enabled us to create a content calendar and develop stories for our internal and external audiences.

Execution: Earned and paid media strategy

Traditional media targeting included leveraging our existing relationships with Irish construction trade press, building new relationships with UK trade press, Irish national media and Irish national media sustainability supplements.

We also leveraged national advertorial sustainability supplements as part of our PR strategy. The rationale for this was that we wanted to position Sisk amongst other large corporates that typically engage with such features. It enabled us to position Sisk as a leader within the construction industry as we appeared alongside major organisations in industries more traditionally associated with sustainability. It also served a purpose in enabling us to reach our target audiences such as our clients and key decision makers in the Irish political landscape.

By leveraging Irish and UK construction trade press this allowed us to hit key audiences including supply chain partners, construction professionals, government departments, plus existing and potentially new clients.

We wanted to build lasting relationships with national journalists and adopted a 'quality over quantity' approach to generating national media coverage. Our PR agency, Drury, made recommendations of national journalists in the sustainability space and we set about strategically targeting specific journalists with exclusive stories.

As a direct consequence, we have built key relationships with journalists such as Neil Briscoe, motor journalist, John Cassidy, video journalist and Tim O'Brien, news reporter all in The Irish Times. Sisk has featured in the Irish Times on multiple occasions, with EV-related stories being covered. These include, for example Sisk's purchase of Ireland's first electric JCB. This particular story was placed prominently in The Irish Times business section and also featured on its front page. Sisk was also subsequently invited to participate in an Irish Times.com video story, alongside other high profile Irish companies investing in EVs. We also landed a story in The Irish Times as the first construction company in Ireland to replace diesel products and to mandate Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) in all of our Irish construction projects.

As the business began to hit more sustainability milestones it enabled us to get more confident to pitch bigger stories. One particular sub-campaign we managed from Dublin during Covid-19 was the completion of one of our major projects

in London. The project completion coincided with the UEFA European football championships taking place beside our project at Wembley Stadium.

Tactically, we decided to use this major sporting event as a news hook to relay stories back to Irish audiences on our investment in apprenticeships and our use of digital technology. We successfully landed a piece on the RTÉ Six One News. We also trialled a first LinkedIn video ad campaign to target specific content at UK organisations that the business was trying to win work with.

Furthermore, we built a solid relationship with our client comms team and the then RTÉ London correspondent, Sean Whelan. We also landed a piece with a more technical set piece in the Business Post about digital construction. Again, this story hinged on investment figures in technology being disclosed.

Execution: Online media tactics

We agreed from the outset that we would leverage our internal communications channels (Intranet site called iSite and Yammer) and our external social media channels (Twitter and LinkedIn) to create engaging content, including high level video production to amplify our corporate storytelling. Our LinkedIn audience has grown from 54,000 in 2020 to 80,000 followers by the end of 2022.

On our intranet channel, iSite, we profiled staff members that had switched to EVs to influence others to make the switch. We also have a dedicated channel on Yammer for staff to speak about sustainability.

We developed a new Sisk corporate website that was launched in 2021 and created a new prominent Sustainability webpage. This allowed us to showcase our sustainability roadmap and to highlight our latest key sustainability stories. In 2021, we created our own podcast called: 'Inside Sisk'. We commissioned podcast hosting company, Audiobrand to produce our podcast first six-part series and they also completed a second six-part podcast series in 2022. The podcast has had nearly 6,000 downloads since its inception.

Each Christmas Sisk apprentice carpenters create over 500 wooden toys for children's charities at our Dublin joinery and training centre. The communications challenge we faced was telling the same story year after year. In 2021 we decided to capture the toy making process by use of a First Person Drone (FPV) drone video. This amassed over 69,000 impressions on LinkedIn with commentary from key stakeholders including, Sean Whelan, RTÉ, demonstrating the relationship we had built with him.

Building on the toy story in 2022, we took a digital only approach landing key messages that our training centre team used recycled Covid-19 site signage to produce our Christmas toys, with 70 percent of the toys made from recycled timber.

Measurement

Sisk is the most talked about construction company in Ireland, in connection with sustainability. Over the past four years, Sisk have had more than double the amount online mentions in connection with sustainability (620) than its top four Irish competitors combined (274). We have become the clear leader in the space.

Our online coverage of sustainability has almost doubled since 2019 (104 items) compared with 2022 (201 items). IrishTimes.com was the most popular source, with the Irish Examiner, third and Irish Independent fifth. A few other construction industry sources make up the Top 5, showing a split between key nationals and trade publications.

Our 'Inside Sisk' podcast has had nearly 6,000 downloads since its launch in 2021. In 2022 our intranet site, iSite had 39 Sustainability related stories compared with just seven in 2019.

The business has implemented a robust approach to sustainability and has hit key milestones in its targets insofar including, becoming carbon neutral in 2021, rewetting of 50 acres of bog and mandating HVO across its Irish construction sites.

Sisk has now converted over 120 staff members from traditional diesel cars to EVs since 2019. We are on track to hit our Roadmap target of having 50 percent of staff switched to EVs by 2024, however we face external challenges including

shortage of new cars and the rise of Benefit in Kind (BIK) up from zero percent to 23 percent in 2023. To counteract the introduction of BIK for EVs, the business has developed an innovative 'EV to Work Scheme', providing financial incentives for employees to choose an EV.

Staff numbers volunteering has increased significantly. With events over the past three years including, tree planting, bog restoration and the refurbishment of a primary school.

- Tree planting events – 15 staff members along with
- Bog restoration – 40 people
- School refurbishment – 59 staff members including supply chain partners

Our external Sustainability Council established in 2021 features some key influencers including, key clients and supply chain partners.

This demonstrates Sisk's leadership and credibility in its efforts to tackle the climate emergency.

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