

PRIDE AWARDS 2017

Category: Corporate and Business Communications Campaign

Company: Southern Water

Entry title: The Unflushables

Brief and objectives:

'The Unflushables' campaign was created to increase awareness of the issue of internal flooding - when raw sewage backs up in pipes due to a blockage and floods people's homes through their toilets, showers and baths – and the simple steps customers can take to prevent it.

Last year we cleared 23,000 blockages and removed 7,000 tonnes of unflushable items. This not only costs £10million pounds a year but can have significant environmental damage and cause misery to customers. In many cases, homes and possessions are destroyed including irreplaceable things like family photos and heirlooms.

Research shows some customers are cynical about water companies asking them to take more care with what they put down sinks and toilets, feeling it's a 'problem' that we are paid to deal with. That's why we approached the independent consumer watchdog, the Consumer Council for Water (CCWater) as we felt it gave more credibility and clearly demonstrated this campaign had our customers' best interests at its heart.

Our campaign aimed to:

- decrease the number of customers experiencing internal flooding by increasing awareness of how to stop blockages
- increase customer engagement and reach across social media via video views, shares and re-tweets
- drive traffic to our website, in particular the campaign pages build relationships with key partners.

Rationale behind campaign, including research and planning:

We needed to spread the message that two-thirds of internal floods are preventable.

Through research conducted by Relish, we discovered customers' attitudes and disposal behaviours, the motivations and rationale for incorrect disposal, and how they prefer to be communicated with in order to influence and encourage positive behaviour change.

The research clearly showed that customers responded most strongly to the personal impact it could have on their home, and we felt our campaign would most effectively target 'lazy convenience seekers' and 'habitual conformists', also capturing 'converted advocates' and 'habitual do-gooders'.

Armed with this information we devised a new campaign to highlight the impact of internal sewage flooding along with simple steps to change behaviour amongst these groups. The campaign needed to be underpinned by expertise and have a strong visual identity, so we worked with colleagues across a number of teams.

We knew a multi-channel campaign would increase awareness and that having an independent voice involved in the form of CCWater would show we're not the only ones working to combat the issue.

Strategy and tactics, including creativity and innovation:

Previous research revealed customers liked appropriately placed humour. Crucially they wanted to feel at the heart of it, and not lectured to. So we came up with the idea of a film about internal flooding told from the viewpoint of items ruined by sewage, with a central narrator tying it together.

We then chose items from our case files and selected an armchair (the loss of irreplaceable family heirlooms), a washing machine (machine the practical concerns when sewage floods your home) and a child's toy (the human impact). This allowed us to communicate with people driven by different motivations. A toilet as the narrator added a gentle touch of humour.

We wanted a stop-motion animation film, as we felt it would appeal to a range of age groups, with older viewers reminded of Aardman Animations and younger ones relating it to Laika Studios.

We also wanted this film to continue our theme of using colleagues in our films, so we cast the voices for our 'characters' from people who work closely with the issue. Then we approached The Progress Film Co, who we had previously collaborated with.

The full suite of films is available on our Vimeo page: <https://vimeo.com/203984913>.

We worked with our in-house design team to create design versions of our characters for use on social media and updated our existing infographics and assets with the new 'Unflushables' logo.

In addition, our research identified an issue with parents flushing wipes and nappies, so we linked up with Mumsnet, asking users to post questions they might have about 'The Unflushables'.

Mumsnet picked 20 for our expert to answer and, as Sharon was also one of the stars of The Unflushables campaign (the voice of the washing machine!), it tied everything together.

The response was excellent, with Mumsnet commenting that it had "far exceeded our expectations", nearly tripling average page views and achieving more than fifteen times our target number of questions.

Implementation of tactics:

Before the launch, we trailed the campaign on social media using 'behind the scenes' photos.

On launch day, we issued a national press release quoting figures for England and Wales, regional press releases with county-specific figures, and releases to our casts' local papers, each of which carried quotes from us and CCWater.

We created a joint social media bank with CCWater and took turns to tweet & re-tweet, helping to spread the message that this was a joint campaign.

We launched the film on our social media channels and, in the coming days, used quotes from the film along with clips, the social media cut-downs for each character and the hints and tips assets.

We have also used the images to update giveaways such tote bags given out by the FOG and Unflushables team at community days, events and Freshers' Fairs, which have the Unflushables logo on one side and simple tips on the other.

Measurement and evaluation:

We set four main KPIs to stretch us in terms of engagement and interactions:

1. increase engagements (likes, shares and re-tweets) with campaign assets from an average of 1,000
2. achieve 5,000 video views
3. achieve 500 click-throughs to our campaign page
4. partner with at least one key stakeholder on the campaign and achieve likes, shares and re-tweets with at least 5 other stakeholders

We completed all but number three inside the first week. After the campaign's launch in February, a survey relating to some of our customer promises in April revealed that awareness of what should and shouldn't be put down the sink/toilet rose by a full 5% on the previous year's result.

In total, for the two months of the campaign (February to April), The Unflushables achieved a total of 13,837 video views across our social media platforms – nearly three times our KPI. We achieved a total reach of 92,140 and 2,311 likes, shares, re-tweets. We also achieved 1,706 click-throughs from our social media channels, which again tripled our target.

In addition to partnering with CCWater, we achieved around 100 likes, shares and re-tweets with stakeholders including councils, environmental groups, Citizens Advice Bureau, regional and trade media, and other water companies.

Budget and cost effectiveness:

The budget was £12,000, jointly funded by the media team and the FOG and Unflushables team, making this an incredibly cost effective campaign given that we spend around £10 million p/a on this issue.