



Category: Best Use of Media Relations

Company: Bournemouth University

Entry title: Hurricane Irma: Expert Comment

Brief and objectives:

As an internal PR team, we have put specific emphasis on expert comment in the last few years, from our PRCA Award-winning Expert Directory, to our work with journalists, we try to position our experts in the media to increase their personal, and our institutional reputation.

As anticipation over the size and scale of Hurricane Irma grew, the team decided to put resources into the targeted delivery of an expert in the field, who could provide media comment. As a centre dedicated to training a range of NGO's and government ministers on approaches to handling disasters, the Disaster Management Centre was best placed to comment, given that they had recently finished training Caribbean islands on how to prepare for hurricanes, so were well placed to comment, something we wanted to capitalise on.

In anticipation of this, a short video was shot with expert, Professor Lee Miles, about the work of the centre to use over our social media channels, as well as provide to journalists looking for potential experts.

Objectives

- Create multimedia content to provide to journalists looking for disaster experts
- Provide ongoing support and a central point of contact for media planning
- Provide video, technical, logistic and PR support to Professor Miles
- Provide an in-house technical capability for studio interviews, both TV and radio
- Gain coverage in specialist publications to raise BU's profile within field
- Forge new media contacts as a result of increased coverage
- Raise the profile of the University and Disaster Management Centre

Rationale behind campaign, including research and planning:

Often at the pinnacle of cutting-edge research and education, Bournemouth University is

frequently best placed to provide expert comment and analysis on real world events as they occur.

In the wake of Hurricane Irma in September 2017, our Corporate Communications team were able to use targeted PR to achieve a wealth of media coverage for the University's Disaster Management Centre, an international training facility for governments and NGO's.

BU's Professor Lee Miles appeared across a range of prominent national and international broadcasters, such as ITV's Good Morning Britain, BBC Radio 4, CNN, and the BBC World Service.

A media contacts platform was used to research and contact key specialist publications and journalists, helping raise the profile and reputation of BU within the sector – with a day of pre-scheduled radio interviews across regional BBC stations set up with the BBC's Media Planning department.

Strategy and tactics, including creativity and innovation:

The team liaised closely with Professor Miles and the Disaster Management Centre, as well as monitoring news updates in order to best progress media appearances.

It was decided to have Professor Miles pack a travel bag in advance and clear his diary, so as to facilitate any journalist requests, with Professor Miles travelling to London for a majority of interviews which were coordinated while in the city.

We are beginning to see an increasingly PR-reliant news atmosphere in the UK whereby faster internet speeds, better quality equipment and the need for 24/7 news have provided more media appearance opportunities pitched in by press teams. The challenge in this new environment is being able to provide this content quickly, reliably and efficiently, all of which we were able to do with Hurricane Irma: Expert Comment.

This targeted and reactive PR campaign took a new approach to pitching experts, using in-house content to attract and maintain media interest, but also featured some elements of a traditional media campaign – recognising a newsworthy story and working closely with contacts to secure media coverage.

As Professor Miles had travelled to the affected areas only weeks ahead of the hurricane itself, our expert was in a unique position and able to provide comment from the UK – as most of the island populations affected had lost both power and communications, thus media struggled to find experts in these areas.

Implementation of tactics:

The story was first offered as an exclusive to a trusted national contact before wider expert requests were accommodated. Initial exposure was facilitated in-house over our dedicated ISDN line, with Professor Miles appearing on agenda-setting national broadcast, BBC Radio 4's Today Programme.

After the broadcast, we soon saw a number of requests come in, leading to the adoption of roles for two of the team as dedicated 'Hurricane Irma Press Enquiries' operators. Our in-house video with Professor Miles was released so that media could see their potential guests and use soundbites as necessary.

This approach aimed to secure at least one substantial piece of national press through the exclusive before more widespread media coverage – as well as maintaining a sole diary and point of contact for Lee in order to 'book in' appearances. An ISDN line was booked throughout the period to ensure that we had a local facility to host interviews.

The team arranged for Professor Miles to travel to London for interviews with Good Morning Britain, CNN and TalkRADIO. This then led to a request for Lee to participate in two live interviews for BBC News (one interview occurring 'out-of-hours' on Saturday evening), both facilitated by BU's Multimedia Reporter, who set up a studio using a dedicated lighting setup, backdrop and skype link in a university building.

Measurement and evaluation:

Our expert comment videos are now a standard across university communications, both internally and externally. We are able to target a range of media and businesses, engaging with them across social media, and sharing content directly.

Using our media monitoring service, we were able to correlate media coverage using keywords and phrases like 'Hurricane Irma', 'Bournemouth University' and 'Professor Lee Miles', generating a detailed coverage report.

In total, Professor Miles was broadcast over 36 regional and national radio and TV broadcast media with a combined reach of more than 22 million listeners in the UK and an estimated audience of around 269 million listeners for the BBC World Service.

- Multimedia content

This enabled and enhanced coverage, with more than 1,000 views over BU social media channels, and an estimated audience of around 20,000 viewers tuning in Professor Miles' interview at BU on the BBC news channel.

- Sector-specific Impact

Coverage has helped find wider appeal for the research with Professor Miles due to speak at a major conference in Jordan in summer 2018 with discussions about the usefulness of the research reaching into the Middle East.

This activity – and its tangible results – demonstrate the value of accessible and exciting multimedia content alongside traditional PR techniques to maximise coverage and engage with diverse audiences.

Budget and cost effectiveness:

This was all completed in-house (four team members) and so had no additional associated costs, aside from staff time. 24/7 team availability was ensured over the period to enable media to communicate with Professor Miles and facilitate interviews.