



Category: Low Budget Campaign

Company: Loughborough University

Entry title: #LboroFamily's Golden Ticket

Brief and objectives:

Clearing and results day is one of the busiest times of year for universities and is a 'last chance' to hit student recruitment targets. In an increasingly competitive environment, ever larger sums are being spent on advertising campaigns at this crunch point in the cycle.

Our top-line brief was simple – hit targets without compromising on quality.

SMART objectives included:

1. Delivering 97 additional students in difficult to fill subject areas at AAB plus grades within 48 hours
2. Positioning Loughborough as a first choice institution with both potential students and their influencers
3. Engaging with new students rapidly and effectively to mitigate the potential for students to “transfer out” to a different institution via the adjustment process.

Rationale behind campaign, including research and planning:

Our rationale had a strong focus on emotive appeal and share-ability as ways to create stand-out. The team identified what had previously worked well including selfie frames, PR and online content but sought new twists to keep Loughborough front of mind and ahead of competitors.

Market research included our own campaign reports, market tracking data and UCAS statistics, competitor research (including a comprehensive look at competitors' previous and emerging campaigns, themes and tactics) and environmental scanning from the youth market and more broadly. We explored channels and opportunities available within a very tight budgetary envelope and looked at our longer term strategy and brand positioning to identify solutions that would provide us with cut-through and longevity for future recruitment initiatives.

Data on the kinds of information people were looking for and metrics on what had previously proved popular helped us to shape content development whilst PR planning identified angles and opportunities months ahead and allowed us to find, develop and pitch stories ahead of our competitors with a range of key media.

Working through the 42 influencing factors on decision making behaviour, we mapped touch points and content geared to ensuring Loughborough's selling points would be obvious through the campaign with a particular focus on our strong community feel. We explored the notion of family with various focus groups and felt this idea would resonate with our broader

stakeholders and allow us to benefit from traction to support our overall positioning and strong focus on sector-leading student experience.

Our planning led us to identify opportunities to personalise our message in a way that would be unique within the sector. In line with our brand and the idea of Inspiring Winners, we developed a personalised Golden Ticket invitation that welcomed new members of the Loughborough family. The creative was designed to resonate with our branding and the idea of family whilst a Golden Ticket is something that both looks and feels special – crucially, it also lent itself to being visual and very shareable.

Strategy and tactics, including creativity and innovation:

The strategy hinged on driving traffic to a dynamic website and encouraging calls direct to our call centre. The golden ticket selfie cut-through on social helped us own the space whilst our PR and digital content fuelled excitement and created huge online buzz and amplification.

Implementation of tactics:

Based on detailed market research and trend analysis, cutting-edge elements included personalised Golden Tickets – so popular we had scores of requests from current students, staff and alumni for ‘theirs’ – and a pace-setting content strategy linked to video, web, imagery, social media, audio and PR opportunities, supported by a comprehensive bespoke website with real-time updates.

Snapchat filters; Boomerangs and content pieces including observations on the Clearing environment helped Loughborough stand out and picked up on non-HE best practice. A feature piece in the ACPME magazines spot-lighted Loughborough’s ‘Gold Standard’ to creative teams across UK HE and the campaign has been showcased at several conferences.

In addition to scheduled PR work, including a double-page case study (with video) in The Guardian, TV and radio interviews and local and national success stories, the campaign’s imaginative approach resonated with both students and the media. Independent coverage in online Student publications compared our approach favourably to competitors whilst the Metro and the Mail both featured our campaign as sector-leading. HE professionals and pundits were similarly impressed.

Measurement and evaluation:

Delivering the most talked about clearing campaign in UK HE, smashing targets, raising profile and generating additional income of £4.6m for a total outlay of just £2,300, Loughborough’s Golden Ticket also launched a unique strategic engagement campaign spanning a wide-range of stakeholders under the hashtag #LboroFamily. The halo effect has seen a stand-out boost in applications for 2017 despite a declining overall market.

Loughborough’s campaign was created and delivered entirely in-house without agency support. It exemplified collaborative working with direct engagement from the senior team including the VC, CFO, COO and both academic and professional services staff, students, Students’ Union and alumni. It was supported by our local MP, police, and businesses.

The campaign delivered targets linked to our ‘Building Excellence’ strategy, specifically relating to high quality students and without compromising tariff points - 111 UK/EU students and 34 international students came via Clearing - 48 over target. Using #LboroFamily galvanised advocacy, has built pride and generated word of mouth as we have developed it

across campaigns. In reputation raising terms, Loughborough achieved a Net Promoter score of 45 (50 is defined as excellent) whilst brand tracking saw a 12% hike in 6 months in those ranking Loughborough as good/excellent in the 18-24 age group with major increases across all age groups and 8% increases amongst 55-64 and 65+ age groups –strategically important as part of ongoing alumni/philanthropic cultivation.

We gained 902 new Facebook followers with a total reach of 1.26m, connected 243 followers with our Freshers' page (total reach 24.6k), enjoyed 43,800 views on Snapchat, saw 3,000+ video views and delivered 828.2k impressions on Twitter with 2.9k link clicks, 1.2k retweets, 1.8k likes, 143 replies and an additional 427 followers plus increased time spent on the website versus 2015. August saw a number one position on Edurank, ten points clear of the University of Oxford, as a result of social media dominance.

Budget and cost effectiveness:

Total budget was £2,300 (print) not including staff time (which we do not recharge) and generated income of £4.6m, an ROI of 1999:1.