



**Category:** Best Event

**Company:** Cool Blue Brand Communications

**Entry title:** Opening Newcastle's City Pool to the city

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**Brief and objectives:**

Cool Blue has delivered integrated PR for the redevelopment of Newcastle City Pool and Turkish Baths since 2015.

The historic building closed in 2013 and Fusion Lifestyle, a registered charity, will reopen the baths after a £5m refurbishment, having secured planning permission and listed building consent for its proposals.

With over a year to go until the venue reopened, we needed to retain public and community interest in the development and involve the local community.

Objectives

- Maintain interest in the development
- Maintain and increase public support for the development
- Engage with key stakeholders (e.g. City Council, members of the public, Reopen group)

**Rationale behind event, including research and planning:**

Following a successful and popular civic exhibition and consultation in spring 2016, we understood the power of events for showcasing this historic Grade-II listed building.

Our planning showed few milestones and opportunities to maintain interest until the reopening in 2018, so we needed to use the assets and advocates available in order to create an engaging event.

Key messages

- Fusion Lifestyle is a trusted organisation for developing the City Pool
- The facilities will be affordable and inclusive for the community
- The building is a historic gem in the North East which should be restored

Audiences

- Community stakeholders - students, city workers, residents, regular visitors, community interest groups
- Decision makers - councillors, MPs
- Influencers - council officers, Reopen Group

- Corporate stakeholders - local businesses/ tourist board

### **Strategy and tactics, including creativity and innovation:**

We identified that the most effective way to maintain interest in the City Pool redevelopment was to open it up to the public for one last time before the 12-month construction project.

This would use Fusion Lifestyle's one and only asset – the historic building itself – and leverage the support of a range of advocates including councillors, regional media and the local community. It would also meet the client's brief of producing a low-cost campaign.

The strategy that emerged was a series of public tours of the building, guided by the developers themselves and supported by the influential Reopen Newcastle Turkish Baths campaign group.

Open to anyone with an interest in the refurbishment, this would be the first time in over three years that members of the public could explore beyond the foyer and the last before construction started – a welcoming gesture from the developers.

We also wanted to invite key influencers in the region, including regional media, historic societies, councillors and the Lord Mayor.

### **Implementation of tactics, including details of design, production and support teams employed:**

There were lots of practicalities to work out with the client, including planning the logistics of multiple guided tours that were subject to health and safety regulations, booking mechanisms, media and VIP invitations, safety assessments, catering, branded materials and tour itineraries.

In the run-up to the tours, we produced City Pool branded hard-hats, high-vis jackets and water bottles, as well as designing a six-metre display stand showing how the pool would look.

In April, we announced the public tours to the region's media and through our social media channels and email database. We initially released 10 tours over two days, with each tour allowing 12 people. The response was beyond our expectations: tickets were all reserved within 24 hours and, after consultation with Fusion Lifestyle, we released more times and tickets – double the number in the original plan.

We arranged separate media and VIP tours, securing attendance from the Lord Mayor, soap star Charlie Hardwick, BBC Newcastle, Made In Tyne & Wear and The Journal.

Attendees had many heart-warming stories about their memories of the pools – with some remembering learning to swim there in the 1950s – and we shared memories through social media to engage with members of the community who couldn't make it in person.

We also engaged with groups within the community who had unique insights into the building. For example, through partnering with the North of England Civic Trust and the Newcastle & Northumberland Society we sourced historic stories photographs of the venue – including an 1897 Sunderland bank robbery linked to the Turkish Baths! – which in turn secured considerable media coverage.

Similarly, we tracked down long-serving former Newcastle swimming club coach, Ian Oliver, who shared his experiences of coaching Olympians and local swimmers alike – content which gathered real interest on social media and in The Journal.

**Measurement and evaluation:**

The tours saw 150 attendees over two days including:

- 135 members of the public
- Ten VIPs
- Six media

The client's target regional and national media all either attended the tours or covered the story, meaning excellent features on BBC Breakfast, BBC Newcastle, The Journal, The Chronicle, The Northern Echo, BBC.com and ITV.com.

On social media, the tours produced a sharp increase in Facebook followers from 500 to 1,300. Our posts during and after the tours also saw very high engagement, with single organic posts gaining up to 55,000 people reached, 400 reactions, 110 shares and 20 comments.

**Budget and cost effectiveness:**

The three month campaign around the event was budgeted at £3,000 a month plus VAT. The total budget from March to May 2017 was £9,000.

Fusion Lifestyle is delighted with the activity and value for money.

Anthony Cawley, Director of Operations, who delivered the tours, said: "I'm massively thankful for what Cool Blue has delivered. The event went really well and I found it fascinating listening to all the memories from the visitors. It's great to be involved in a project where everyone wants it to happen and be a success, as it's just genuinely loved in the city."

Tim Mills, Director of Business Development at Fusion Lifestyle, said: "We've been delighted with the work of Cool Blue Brand Communications. They've achieved significant coverage and helped us gain feedback from a wide cross-section of stakeholder groups. Together we are delivering a lasting legacy project for the North East."