

Excellence Awards - 2021 Entry
85 Tottenham Court Road
London. W1T 4TQ
020 7631 6900

Entry ID: 9234

Third Party Authorization

Are you entering on behalf of, or in association with, any third party?: No

Basic Information

Category: 16. Education Campaign

Entry Information

Entrant company name: University of Oxford

Entry title:

Oxford University's COVID-19 Research

Entry

Brief, objectives and budget:

In January 2020, Oxford's researchers were already meeting to discuss approaches to the emerging novel coronavirus. By the time the virus was sequenced, a vaccine team was ready for action. As the pandemic spread, hundreds of researchers across more than 50 departments were contributing to a lifesaving vaccine and new treatments, engineering ventilators and tests, investigating the mental and social impact of lockdowns, tracking government responses and working directly with international bodies. Oxford's research was world-leading, and this campaign's role was to ensure it had the right impact.

This work moved quickly, and the University's Public Affairs team pivoted immediately to produce a global COVID-19 campaign strategy. We focused on telling a powerful story about Oxford's research excellence and its practical application to help address COVID-19's global challenges. The campaign aimed to:

*Ensure audiences saw Oxford as more relevant than ever as it brought together the best people to deliver solutions

*Position Oxford as a global centre of expertise in combatting infectious disease, particularly COVID-19, and to make it a 'go-to' source of information for media and policymakers – and to cement perceptions of Oxford as a leader in global health research and innovation

*Contribute to significant fundraising goals for specific COVID-19 research needs and student/staff hardship funds

*Keep our community informed on the latest impacts of the pandemic on operational activity, developing a sense of pride among internal stakeholders and retaining student offer-holders

There was no designated budget, although approximately £9,000 was spent to cover media training, photography and social advertising.

The idea, research and planning:

Although the interested public was always one audience, our focus was on policymakers, national and global organisations, donors/funders and media, with a secondary focus on internal staff and student stakeholders. We strategically targeted key markets, including the UK and USA. Previous insights indicated that these audiences did not necessarily see Oxford leading in the sciences over peers, and we knew that this was an opportunity to demonstrate excellence in Oxford's research breadth and global partnerships.

Strategy, creativity and innovation:

The campaign ran from early 2020 to 2021. By the time the WHO declared a pandemic, the team was deploying one major news story a day. With all content produced in house and nearly all reach earned or owned, our work needed careful prioritisation. Our strategy was defined by four key strands of work supporting the Oxford's organisational goals:

*A people-focused approach to scientific storytelling

*A research narrative tailored to priority audiences, supported by bespoke packages to encourage fundraising

*Timely and clear information on Oxford's COVID-19 research and public health messaging, including specific work to combat disinformation and disseminate messaging via partners

*Guidance for Oxford's student, prospective student, staff and regional communities

Delivery/implementation of tactics:

These overarching strategic areas were supported by tactical creative work:

*Relationship building with global partners in media, public health and academia, using foundations built through team members' CIPR CPD activities

*Giving access to embedded documentary crews to tell key stories such as vaccine research and disseminate public health messages

*Ensuring key government and policy stakeholders had the opportunity to hear from researchers and providing content and expertise for national and international health/vaccination campaigns

*An engaging campaign hub website tailored to priority audiences, with a subsite covering vaccine development and researcher profiles

*Social media storytelling around key moments, as well as intense social media engagement around vaccine milestones when public interest was high

*Bespoke content creation for donor/funder collateral, including high-level donors and public appeals

*Digital series to offer context and depth, including live lecture/Q&A series covering Oxford's COVID-19 research, and a podcast series on the history of pandemics

*An internal COVID-19 information website supplemented by weekly internal bulletins and social media, including research story highlights and insights from lead researchers

*Comprehensive crisis communications executed when operational issues arose using lessons learned from CIPR CPD activities, including fake news and clinical trial pauses

Measurement, evaluation and impact:

The scope and scale of the campaign have been unlike anything in the University's history. Over 2020, the campaign generated:

- *131 COVID-19 press releases, including working with UK Science Media Center on 318 expert comments & 45 press briefings
- *Over 500,000+ media mentions, including 18 newspaper front pages in one day
- *Potential global media audience of 1.1 trillion
- *7.2 million pageviews of COVID-19 websites
- *Social media reach of 78.7 million, engagement of 2.7 million and video views of 10.2 million
- *14 occasions on which Oxford academics gave evidence to parliamentary committees
- *Livestream reach of 4 million
- *Podcast listens of over 30,000

Throughout the campaign, effective storytelling helped Oxford's researchers become household names, with profiles or coverage on platforms from Bloomberg to HBO and researchers leading national press conferences – UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson called them 'the scientific cavalry'. This work contributed to perception shift around Oxford research, establishing the University as a leader in science and medicine among our target audience. The University's share of voice vs competitors averaged 95% throughout the campaign; media coverage was 10x the average as a result of proactive and reactive management.

Oxford became the 'go-to' institution for stakeholders; our work was mentioned in the prime minister's COVID-19 press conferences 7 times, and 47 times by Boris Johnson and Matt Hancock on social media; we received visits by the Duke of Cambridge, the Prime Minister and other leaders. Real-world impact ranged from global to local, from the University shaping decision making around the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine rollout, to Oxford's research influencing UK decisions around mask wearing.

In addition to generating positive perceptions of Oxford and its work, the communications campaign supported hugely successful fundraising, with over £187 million raised for crucial projects and three times the average annual gifts, as well as increasing Oxford's profile among major donors – leading to new long-term conversations around future needs in global health research.

Internally, the campaign brought together more than 150 of our senior academics, supported by hundreds of researchers – from the history of medicine to drug development. Academics' research trials and results have been implemented locally, and academics' expertise shaped the University's operational choices, leading to positive retention among student offer-holders, record engagement with internal communications and evidence-based business choices.

Supporting Information

Additional supporting information (images, artwork, clippings and other media):

Provided

Campaign image (if entering individual/team awards, upload headshot/team photo here):

Provided

Company logo:

Provided

Please write a 30 word entry summary in the third person:

Oxford University pivoted quickly to reach key audiences with its COVID-19 research, positioning itself as a global leader in vaccine and disease research, reaching new fundraising records and engaging stakeholders.
