

## Basic Information

*Region (Check Region):*

Northern Ireland

*Category:*

22. Best COVID response

## Entry Information

*Entrant company name:*

MW Advocate & JComms

*Entry title:*

#FightBack

## Entry

*Brief, objectives and budget:*

In March 2020, senior figures of two leading Belfast based PR agencies, JComms (Joris Minne) and MWAdvocate (Brendan Mulgrew), recognising the gravity of the pandemic, approached the Department of Health with a plan to promote key public health messages.

Early evidence available to the Department showed young people were not engaged in the vital Covid messages and were not adhering to the health guidelines and advice. We proposed a multimedia campaign, with an emphasis on social media and well known sports figures, celebrities and others with a strong online presence, to promote the key messages:

Stay Home  
Wear a Mask  
Wash your hands

Our objective was to drive engagement and interaction with young people as a means of increasing adherence to the guidelines and a realisation of the seriousness of the emerging situation.

The Department of Health agreed with the need for this campaign which was initially undertaken at no cost. As the scale of the project became clear, a fee was agreed and over the course of the pandemic in 2020/21 the budget was £22,000 in total.

On this occasion two agencies, normally competitors, pooled their network of contacts, their in-house design and social media skills and very quickly established a campaign and a tagline - Join the #FightBack.

### *The idea, research and planning:*

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We produced a campaign of targeted messaging throughout the pandemic. We understood that the majority of our target audience - younger people - were not consuming news and updates on the pandemic via traditional television and broadcast outlets, so our focus remained online.

Problematic areas identified included the student population, school leavers and certain members of the public who believed the pandemic would never affect them and refused to support public health guidance.

We established profiles for #Fightback on Twitter (primary), Facebook and later TikTok, and grew the following of each account organically and using our network of contacts to secure support of key influencers to produce online content we could share.

Planning meetings took place bi-weekly, with collaboration between both agency teams. We marked significant dates and milestones (e.g. Mother's/Father's Day, Christmas, St Patrick's Day, Death toll milestones) to produce a content calendar that targeted key timeframes when staying at home would be a challenge for young people.

Communication with the Department was ongoing to ensure our messages were consistent, appropriate and up-to-date, and reflected the analytics and data they were able to share with us in relation to concerns and problem areas.

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### *Strategy, creativity and innovation:*

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Our strategy was to target and stay engaged with our audiences and consistently reinforce the public health messages which applied throughout the campaign. Our designers and creative teams came up with original, funny, emotional and sometimes controversial material, by following current affairs, news and trends.

We used humour, incorporating NI slang, pop culture and politics, to engage. We knew that comedy works in NI so kept as much of our content as lighthearted, with more serious announcements and pleas woven throughout.

Music is another firm favourite in NI, so we worked with singer songwriter Emer Maguire to produce a Fightback theme tune which we shared across our channels and secured airtime on commercial radio. The song has to date been watched over 40,000 times.

Our use of humour, music and even cheekiness cut through the rigid language distributed through official channels. The irreverent and emotional tone of Fightback allowed us to share informative guidelines and messages to the public in a way that the Department of Health could not.

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### *Delivery/implementation of tactics:*

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We kept the Fightback channels fresh, appealing and interactive by constantly reviewing our output and bringing in new voices when needed.

To gauge public opinion and sentiment, which we often fed back to the Department, we initiated conversations and shared polls which attracted more than 10,000 votes and provided us with content to share stories and figures.

Topics included activities to people get through lockdown; a 'dick of the day' series where we lampooned well known figures who questioned the Covid guidelines and estimations on the uptake of the vaccine.

As the aim of the campaign was to bring public health guidelines to the attention of young people and to secure their buy in to the behaviours required to deal with Covid, messaging had to be realistic and meaningful to them. The use of influencers was crucial to this work. Those who took part included GAA stars, Ulster Rugby and NI football teams, Jonathan Rea, comedians Paddy Raff, Tim McGarry, Ian McElhinney in his Derry Girls guise, and local TikTok sensation, Olivia Neill.

Initial reaction was very strong and video content was shared hundreds of thousands of times. As the campaign rolled out we also used mainstream media and secured widespread coverage in broadcast and print media.

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#### *Measurement, evaluation and impact:*

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Between March 2020 - March 2021, we had recorded more than 2 million Twitter impressions.

Social media highlights included:

Grandpa Joe, Derry Girls - 126K impressions / 43,000 views  
Tim McGarry, 1 year of lockdown/Themuns - 250,000 views  
Olivia Neill YouTube video mention - 939,579 views  
Emer Maguire songs - 15,000 views

96% of TikTok viewership was from within Northern Ireland.

Another significant outcome of the campaign was the use of "Fight Back" in daily discourse among political leaders, the Chief Medical Officer and media, becoming a regular feature in Ministerial speeches and appearing on profiles of many leading journalists online.

While our social media measurements are impressive, it is the figures relating to social impact and the numbers of lives that may have been affected as a result of the campaign that are vital. That's difficult to put a figure on, but whether it's one or one hundred - we know it's enough.

As our campaign wound down in March 2021, hopefully for the final time, the Department of Health signed off a thank you email by saying:

"I wanted to say thank you for all the work, expertise and commitment. I have no doubt that the messaging pushed by Fightback has helped saved lives in the past 12 months.

That's quite a thing to be able to say."

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## **Supporting Information**

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

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Provided

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