

The logo consists of the lowercase letters 'ohc' in a rounded, sans-serif font. The 'o' is a lighter shade of brown, while the 'h' and 'c' are a darker shade of brown.

O'Herlihy Communications

Rally Ireland

PRCA Award for Excellence – Entry 2009

A. The Brief

Rally Ireland 2007 was one of Ireland's most successful international sporting events. It attracted nearly 250,000 spectators and €11million worth of coverage across print, broadcast and online media. It also resulted in Ireland being awarded another round of the World Rally Championship in 2009.

Following such a successful event in 2007 the challenge in 2009 was to match this level of success and attempt to exceed it. There was an air of negativity surrounding the event before O'Herlihy Communications (OHC) were appointed to Rally Ireland in October 2008. This came following the resignation of two main figures that had initially brought the event to the country with many feeling Rally Ireland 2009 could not succeed without them and certainly not exceed the heights of 2007.

OHC were hired with only four months left until the event and we were briefed to maximise all areas of publicity and media relations before, during and after the event. We were also briefed to counteract the negativity and uncertainty surrounding Rally Ireland 2009 which was threatening to undermine Ireland's biggest sports event.

With such a short lead in for an event of this size we immediately set out a comprehensive PR campaign that would aim to achieve all the objectives agreed by Rally Ireland.

B. Statement of Objectives

- Promote Rally Ireland's key messages – Free, world class event on your door step, Ireland's largest sporting event in 2009 and the first time that the first round of the WRC has been held outside of Monte Carlo in over 30 years.
- Combat negativity surrounding departure of two key figures from Rally Ireland.
- Highlight the benefit of such an event to the country during tough economic times.
- Achieve significant local, national and international coverage for Rally Ireland 2009.
- Promote the North and South partnership which enabled this event to happen.
- Promote Ireland as a tourist destination through the event on behalf of the governments in the North and South of Ireland
- Broaden rallying from the minority columns in the sports pages and bring it to the wider sports audience and beyond, to include news, tourism, business and lifestyle media.

C. Programme Planning and Strategy

A detailed timeline of action was put into place with four months to go until the event that would achieve all the key objectives and raise the profile of the event through different areas of the media. This strategy used several PR tools to communicate the key messages and to reach the wider audience untouched by Rally Ireland 2007. To illustrate the depth of the communications strategy we have outlined below some of the key areas used to exploit all PR opportunities that lay within Rally Ireland 2009.

PR Tools -

Interactive Media Briefings

Once appointed OHC set immediately to put together a full round of media briefings to cover print and broadcast media at a local level both north and south of the border. These briefings gave OHC and Rally Ireland the opportunity to meet face to face with the key opinion makers and editors to reassure them that Rally Ireland 2009 was in the perfect position to bring another world class event to the country.

It helped eliminate any negativity surrounding the event and opened clear lines of communication between Rally Ireland and the media to ensure that some of the negative and inaccurate stories that had been seen in the media would not appear again in the months leading into the event. The briefings were a huge success and showed a genuine effort by Rally Ireland to ensure all media were aware of how big this event was and gave us the opportunity to develop stories and unique features for each media outlet.

For those within the media who were untouched by Rally Ireland 2007 it gave us a chance to brief them fully on the benefit of the event to the country on all levels including sport, tourism and economic. We were able to give them the key messages such as Ireland being chosen to host the first round ahead of Monte Carlo for the first time in 30 years, a message that was carried regularly by all media along with the economic benefit to the country.

Bring the World Rally Championship experience to the media

While telling people what this event will be like works to some extent but to be able to physically show the media what Rally Ireland is all about was a key tool in our PR campaign. We gave media the World Rally experience. We brought a select group of journalists to Rally GB in Wales with key Rally Ireland personnel to see a round of the World Rally Championship up close.

They got to experience to see and meet the drivers, to watch them in action, to see behind the scenes in the Service Park with the mechanics and on top of this we arranged a Co-Drive with two World Rally drivers. This gave the journalists the opportunity to sit in the passenger seat and experience exactly what it is like to travel at 200kph on challenging forest roads in the heat of World Rally battle. Those who had experienced this before were suitably impressed; those who hadn't were shaken but exhilarated and now fully converted to Rally Ireland.

For those who couldn't travel to Wales we set up a series of co-drives in Sligo ahead of Rally Ireland to help spread the World Rally experience with a range of sports and news journalists. The World Rally experience helped convert a huge section of the Irish media to Rally Ireland and finally see what this event was all about. It also yielded a range of features and indepth news pieces in print and on radio to show exactly what it is like to experience a WRC car in its pomp.

The stars of the future - Rally Ireland Karting Day

With so many World Rally drivers and Formula One drivers learning their trade at an early age at Karting OHC established a Rally Ireland Karting Day in Kilkenny for children north and south of the border. This gave children the chance to feel like celebrities for the day and meet some of Ireland's top rally drivers to guide them in their carting. The day was covered by local media, RTE News and News2Day on RTE 2 helping to reach different audiences and show that Rally Ireland is for the whole family.

Employ a targeted story pipeline

From the outset OHC put together a story pipeline. This was an extensive list of stories and features that could be rolled out in the months leading up to the event. The list contained over 100 different stories for local and national media to be released at key times to ensure Rally Ireland had a constant presence in the Irish media.

These stories included:

- Ken Treacy, the Lotto millionaire who used his money to compete and was the first entrant in Rally Ireland 2009
- Donnacha Hayes a retired engineer from Cork who had travelled to the Antarctic before becoming a radio controller for Rally Ireland.
- Features included the A-Z of Rally Ireland detailing from A-Z all you need to know about the event

- Rally Ireland by numbers, some interesting facts of the numbers involved in making Rally Ireland 2009 happen.
- Rally Lingo – a tongue in cheek, self deprecating piece, that poked fun at the lingo used by rally fans

These along with a continuous flow of event information on entrants and updates on the routes, weather and all aspects of Rally Ireland ensured that the event was regularly spread across all areas of the media with a story to suit all tastes.

Make noise! - Rally Ireland - The Launches

To target media north and south of the border Rally Ireland was launched in Sligo and the venue of the Ceremonial Start, Enniskillen Castle in Fermanagh. The Sligo launch gave those in attendance a flavour of what Rally Ireland was all about with some of the most enduring images of the pre-Rally Ireland publicity as Shaun Gallagher raced along Strandhill Beach in Sligo on a stormy day in October. The launch achieved blanket coverage across print, TV and radio.

The Enniskillen Launch was held at Enniskillen Castle and portrayed the beautiful imagery of County Fermanagh and also ensured the Northern Ireland media could directly access key figures of Rally Ireland for interview leading into the event. Again the launch in Enniskillen was a huge success securing blanket coverage with TV, broadcast and print media in NI and also gained significant coverage in the Republic.

It doesn't happen by accident! -Profiling the people behind the sport

In the lead in to the event we profiled some of those involved in different aspects of Rally Ireland. John Naylor, Event Director of Rally Ireland was established as the key spokesperson for the event. He was profiled in a range of print media pieces including the Sunday Business Post, Sunday Independent, Irish Daily Star and Irish Independent. We also profiled some of the drivers involved including WRC driver Shaun Gallagher who featured in the Sunday Independent, Irish Daily Star and Belfast Telegraph. We also profiled some of those involved behind the scenes including Chief Medical Officer David McManus who was featured in his role in the Newsletter and Irish Medical Times.

It's not just for men! The Toni Factor

With Rally Ireland's key demographic being 16-34 males OHC set about changing that by bringing a female to the fore of the Rally Ireland publicity. This female was 20-year-old Toni Kelly from Donegal, the events only female competitor. OHC put a full plan together around Toni and executed this to secure publicity for her involvement with Rally Ireland in Life (Sunday Independent), Weekend Magazine (Irish Times), Irish Sun feature, appearance on the Seoige show, interviews on Newstalk, Today FM and local radio stations across the country. Toni became the first female of Irish motorsport and this led to an increased interest from a female audience in how she performed and the media duly obliged by following her every step of the way as she won her class and finished 21st in Rally Ireland.

Public Information Campaign

A key element of making Rally Ireland work was a strategic public information campaign through extensive local media coverage. OHC briefed each key local media outlet to ensure that essential public information was carried verbatim across all mediums. This included road closure information, safety information and Rally Ireland Helpline information. The public information ensured that every community that was involved with Rally Ireland would know what was happening in their area and when it was happening. This helped to keep the lines of communication open between Rally Ireland and the local communities.

Rally at the Mall – Charlestown Shopping Centre

OHC established a partnership with Charlestown Shopping Centre to help promote the event with two weeks to go. With the event taking place in the North West of Ireland a strategic partnership with a well known Shopping Centre in Dublin would help give Rally Ireland fans on the Eastern seaboard a chance to experience the WRC fever.

The weekend attracted huge crowds and celebrities such as Shane Lynch and Nicola McLean helped reach a different type of rally fan. It also gave people a chance to enjoy a real rally experience with a WRC simulator on show during the weekend and several competitions and promotions running through the weekend. This led to extensive coverage within the tabloid, broadcast and local media. Pictures were carried from the launch and the weekend itself across all the tabloid media along with details of the event and Rally Ireland itself.

The strength of volunteerism is alive and well - Local Campaign

Rally Ireland 2009 could not have happened without nearly 4,000 volunteers who gave their time and effort to ensure the event took place. The feeling from 2007 was that these people were not given the proper recognition that they deserved within the media. OHC set about changing this opinion to show who the true champions of Rally Ireland were.

OHC put together profiles of all key personnel behind Rally Ireland. Once the profiles were in place we briefed the key media in the areas where these volunteers were from and placed features in the local media on the people who were making Rally Ireland a reality. This gave people a chance to see their own neighbours making a difference within one of Ireland's biggest ever sports events.

Through this campaign we achieved significant coverage for over 40 key individuals from all over Ireland who were involved in Rally Ireland and these key individuals were able to promote their teams within the local print and broadcast media with interviews secured. Subsequently those who deserved praise for their huge effort throughout the event were acknowledged within their own communities.

Strategic releasing of competitor testing news

Two weeks before Rally Ireland the WRC's top two teams, Citroen and Ford, held secret testing in Monaghan ahead of Rally Ireland. OHC worked closely with the teams to secure interviews for select journalists who were given special access to these world class sports stars just days away from their debut race in the WRC 2009.

Giving these interviews ensured excellent pre-event coverage and brought the key message home to the Irish public showing how big an event this is when World Rally teams are able to close parts of Ireland's road network under complete anonymity to prepare for Rally Ireland. This also carried huge favour with those journalists who were given the privilege of talking to these drivers and again this helped to show them that Rally Ireland 2009 would exceed its predecessor.

Finding the news value -Team Liaison

From liaising closely with the teams in the World Rally Championship we were able to develop stories and angles that were of benefit to the Irish media and that could bring Rally Ireland to new audiences. This included a feature on Eoin Cleary, one of only two Irish people working in the WRC. Cleary, who is a mechanic from Waterford, is part of the BP Ford World Rally Team and was able to tell his unique story from travelling around the world with the WRC through a comprehensive profile interview with the Irish Times, along with an interview on RTE Radio.

Working closely with the teams we put together features on their cars that were used across a range of media in the run up to the event. This includes the difference between an everyday car and a WRC car that featured in the Sunday Times and the dynamics of a WRC car steering wheel which featured in the Irish Daily Star.

Press Office

On top of the PR tools used above OHC also, built and ran a full Rally Ireland Media Centre in Sligo IT for the duration of the event. This involved accrediting 260 print, broadcast and online journalists from Ireland and all over the world. Running the Press Office involved hands on management of the 260 media on site with regular bulletins, organising press conferences, updates, and crisis management. OHC successfully managed the Media Centre during the event creating news angles from within the event for the journalists in attendance and supplying them with key information as it happened from the Rally.

Photographer Briefings

OHC retained four photographers to cover Rally Ireland and provide rights free images to all media. OHC briefed all photographers individually to capture the spirit of Rally Ireland – the event, the spectators and the beautiful island of Ireland. The success of these photographers was shown in the coverage received for the event with all editorial supported by spectacular pictures from the event.

D. The Measurement Stage

The PR campaign for Rally Ireland 2009 was measured in the quality and quantity of coverage attained. This ensured that the coverage received was relevant to the targeted audiences and that the messages delivered in the coverage were in line with what was set out at the beginning of the campaign.

The media coverage for Rally Ireland 2009 was measured at €15.2million with this covering local and national media. While the quantity exceeded the coverage in 2007 the quality was varied enough to show that Rally Ireland 2009 had successfully reached a wider audience than its predecessor. Examples of this includes features in Lifestyle magazines such as Life (Sunday Independent), Health and Living (Irish Independent), Chic (Irish Daily Star) and Weekend Magazine (Irish Times).

The coverage included over 500 national print pieces and over 750 local print pieces. Rally Ireland also amassed nearly 13 hours of TV coverage nationally and internationally along with 8 hours of National radio coverage and nearly 100 hours of coverage from local radio stations across the region.

Key Messages communicated by the Irish media post event -

Vincent Hogan, Irish Independent – *“this was the greatest free show in Irish sport”*

Irish Daily Star – *“Rally’s a Roaring Success”*

John Kenny, RTE Sport – *“Rally Ireland produced an event the whole country can be proud of.”*

Andrew Murphy, Evening Herald – *“Rally Ireland deserves all the praise heaped on them for the smooth running of a great event”*

Justin Hynes, Irish Times – *“Rally Ireland Success!”*

Rally Ireland’s key objective had been achieved; it had matched and exceeded its predecessor. The event was able to show it was not a once off and that Ireland is capable of hosting a round of the WRC on regular basis. Attendance figures for 2009 had also exceeded 2007 with over 270,000 turning out over the weekend to make it one of the most memorable occasions in Irish sport, one that anyone who experienced will ever forget.

E. Budget

The budget for the Public Relations campaign for Rally Ireland 2009 was €32,000 - €64,000

F. Supporting Materials

The appendices include sample press releases and coverage from the event.