



The Alresford Watercress Festival

- Proactive regional media relations
- Hampshire tourism
- Full stakeholder approach
- Local knowledge and expertise



Introduction

2008 marked the 5th year of the Alresford Watercress Festival in central Hampshire, having grown from its humble beginnings to attracting over 10,000 visitors each year, coming to sample its many delights. A one day event, the festival draws together both the local community and food lovers from far and wide in a celebration of one of Britain's greatest culinary delights, watercress. The free festival is a great day out for all the family, with market stalls offering delicious locally produced fare, arts and crafts, street entertainers and activities for children.

Alresford is a small but delightful Georgian market town and the Watercress Festival plays a vital role in putting the town firmly on the tourist map. However, various stakeholders felt that recent festivals had neglected to tell the story of the town's historic connection with watercress and that the local community did not have a strong enough sense of ownership over the festival.

Campaign Objectives

1. To strongly embed the festival in Alresford to guard against the festival moving to another part of the country.
2. To keep residents and businesses informed to ensure the smooth-running of the festival, and widen opportunity for involvement.
3. To revitalise local media interest in the festival and ensure a sense of ownership.
4. To increase visitor numbers to the festival by raising awareness throughout Hampshire and beyond.
5. To enhance and publicly recognise the efforts of third parties, local volunteer groups and individuals who make the festival happen.

Campaign Implementation

Identity

Footprint Communications set about repositioning the festival as a local event, working with a local design company to create a fresh new, revitalised image for the event. We re-named the 'Watercress Festival' the 'Alresford Watercress Festival', immediately identifying local ownership values.



Enlisting a local design agency we produced a brand new logo and graphic work to communicate the values of the festival and provide a consistent and recognisable identity. This was used consistently in all festival communications to all stakeholder groups.

Media Relations

Strong media relations would be necessary alongside a well-planned festival narrative, to maximise positive local media coverage and to extend the local prominence of the festival beyond the day of its occurrence.

For media our mission was entirely local recognising that the majority of festival goers would come from Hampshire and surrounding counties. The contract with the principal sponsors prevented us from using national or televised channels and so we needed to maximise coverage through other avenues. All local print and online media was targeted from lifestyle and 'foody' titles to the local newspapers as well as local radio channels.



We initially met with key press contacts on a one-to-one basis to outline how the festival was moving forward and retained close contact throughout. We provided our media with regular drip feeds and images to keep news around the festival fresh whilst keeping it top of mind. In this way we became a local 'hub' to receive stories from all parties involved in the festival and this facilitated new news for both media and website work. A comprehensive launch press release with full details as well as a post-event retrospective release was issued.

We secured Ocean FM and Wykeham Life Magazine as media partners, both first choices due to their relevance to the festival's target audience. This produced credible endorsement and media coverage whilst developing sections of the festival such as the Eateries Awards.

Finally, we provided print and broadcast media support on the day of the festival (i.e. set up media interviews) and facilitated a down the line live radio interview from the festival with BBC Radio Solent. We also took photographs to create a fresh, up to date bank of images and distributed these to non-attending media on the day, for instant post-event coverage.

Integrated Marketing

We created the festival's first ever content-managed website to enable two-way communication with all stakeholders. Apart from providing cohesion with the festival's revamped image, a new festival website was intended to provide an objective news feed, both for press, visitors and the local community.



Footprint Communications produced a 32-page programme with a good mix of advertising and editorial to aid 'memento' retention. This enabled local businesses to get involved in, and profit from, the festival for the first time via advertising opportunities.

20,000 flyers & 500 posters were produced and distributed widely throughout Hampshire and neighbouring counties via TICs, Libraries, HIVES, and Camping & Caravan sites.

We created a formal sponsorship proposal document to assist the organising committee with securing funding, and we supported sponsors through inclusion in festival news stories and via branding on festival marketing materials such as the programme, posters and flyers.

Apart from encouraging festival participants (ie stall holders and entertainers) to market the day, we worked closely with organisations such as Winchester City Council tourism department and local food ambassadors Hampshire Fare.

Note: due to budget constraints, no paid-for advertising supported this campaign.

Campaign Results

- Editorial coverage reached over 3.4m people through local media channels alone. This is equivalent to more than 2.7 hits per capita throughout Hampshire.
- Coverage incorporated radio, newspaper, magazine and online channels
- Time span of press exposure was 5 months, with coverage from February to June – a fantastic feat given that this is a one day event.
- Response mechanisms clearly communicated in most press stories – encouraging 2 way communication
- Clear development of festival narrative in timeline of PR, making the community feel a part of the success story
- Marketing materials provided a fresh and consistent festival identity, on and offline
- 3,778 website visitors, with over 85% of visits in the month of and the preceding month to the festival
- Programme attracted 35 advertisers (excl. sponsors)
- Fantastic festival attendance and reception from local media
- Large reach and tangible results will aid the development of future sponsorship opportunities
- Cost per hit £0.003
- Footprint Communications won the Gold Category at the CIPR Wessex PRide Awards for Community Relations for this campaign.

“Never before has the festival’s PR celebrated Alresford and its local communities, business and groups in such a cohesive and significant way. From the festival programme to the local news coverage, there was a real sense of the occasion being special and giving the local community something to shout about. Without Footprint’s expertise, the festival simply wouldn’t have been such a success.”

Clive Burgess, Organising Committee