

How WWF used PR and experiential activity to activate Earth Hour

Dec 5, 2011



Background

Every year on March 26, WWF (formerly World Wildlife Fund) stages Earth Hour, a global event where landmark buildings across the world are plunged into darkness for one hour to highlight climate change. In 2011, WWF UK's in-house PR team wanted to make Earth Hour bigger and better than ever before in the UK – driving support for WWF amongst businesses, schools, MPs and the general public.

Objectives

- To drive mass awareness of WWF's Earth Hour in the UK
- To bring conservation and sustainability issues to life
- To encourage active involvement from supporters in local events
- To communicate what can be achieved by working together

Strategy

Iconic local landmarks were approached directly to switch off their lights for Earth Hour, creating a flow of pre-event news stories. MPs were encouraged to support the campaign, taking part in photocalls and video messages. Schools were mailed educational packs on climate change, and local businesses encouraged to organise energy-efficient events in

support of Earth Hour.

Media outreach began six months early, with celebrity-backed feature approaches to long-lead consumer press, and hard-hitting opinion pieces for nationals. A media partnership was negotiated with The News of the World to run through March, and broadcast media alerted to numerous events on the night. Personal video messages of support from David Cameron, Nick Clegg, Ed Miliband and Boris Johnson were also secured.

Press templates for participating schools, businesses and individuals were made available on a special microsite. This also featured a live, interactive regional map showing which counties in the UK were getting most behind the campaign. A dedicated page on Facebook acted as the UK hub for news, photos and video content before, during and after Earth Hour.

Keen to create a signature stunt to mark Earth Hour itself, WWF UK brought in creative agency Knifedge, who created the UK's largest human-powered projection on the side of The Royal Albert Hall during the big switch off. 200 supporters, journalists, MPs and corporates – led by TV presenter Kirsty Gallagher - took turns to ride 60 gyro bikes, powering a 60-minute animated film of 30 endangered species. The stunt was filmed and seeded on Earth Hour's Facebook and YouTube channels.

Measurement & evaluation

There were 1,600 pieces of coverage generated, reaching 48% of the population (Metrica 2011). National highlights included BBC, ITV, Sky, News of the World, The Sun and The Sunday Times. Over 150 landmark buildings switched off including Buckingham Palace, the Houses of Parliament, Big Ben, the Millennium Stadium and even the iconic lights at Piccadilly Circus.

Results

WWF UK saw a 99% growth in Facebook likes to 45,000. Earth Hour trended on Twitter for several days, and post-event research found that 35% of the UK population had heard of Earth Hour (nfp Synergy 2011). Across the UK, thousands of people took their support beyond the hour by committing to an ongoing action, big or small, for the future of the planet.