



# THE SUNDAY INDEPENDENT

*Sustaining a publishing success through advertising*

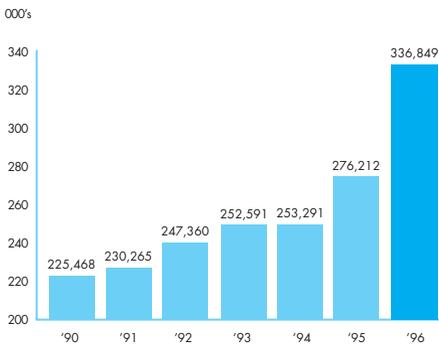
## ■ INTRODUCTION

Not too long ago, just to stabilise sales in a market as competitive and mature as Sunday newspapers would have been regarded as highly laudable. To increase them substantially would have been considered impossible. But the Sunday Independent, with no small help from advertising, has done just that, against a backdrop of heavy investment by UK publishers and contracting sales for Irish titles generally.

## ■ MARKETING BACKGROUND

By any standards the Sunday Independent's turnaround between 1990 and 1994 had been phenomenal. Under the editorial direction of Aengus Fanning the paper increased sales by almost 28,000 copies per week and added 160,000 new adult readers.

Figure 1  
SUNDAY INDEPENDENT –  
SALES TRENDS 1990-1996



Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations Jan - Jun

The newspaper had largely thrived on foot of a potent 'editorial cocktail' of news, features, trenchant opinion, entertainment and humour, spanning the gap between traditional Sundays and quality magazines.

Although the Sunday Independent occupied the 'middle ground' (in age and

class terms) and was enjoying overall sector leadership, the Independent's new marketing team and advertising agency, Irish International, faced 1995 with a number of challenges. The heavily-resourced and multi-sectioned Sunday Times continued to make strong inroads into the upper-end of the Sunday market and the niche Business Post was also growing steadily. Elsewhere, a revamped Sunday World, under new management, was also beginning to recapture some of its lost glories in the C1C2 sector. Added to this, the rising cost of newsprint had pushed the Sunday Independent's cover price towards the psychological barrier of £1, late in 1994.

The key objective then was to continue the paper's sales and readership growth, particularly amongst core AB readers.

## ■ MARKETING STRATEGY

An examination of the newspaper was undertaken across the areas of Product, Presentation and Promotion.

Qualitative research amongst regular and lapsed readers highlighted the position that Sunday newspapers in general, occupied within people's weekly 'media diet'. On the positive side a Sunday paper was seen as:

- More of a 'must have' than a daily.
- Requiring a different mind-set (i.e. to switch off, lose yourself, be entertained, unwind).
- Offering greater choice and flexibility (i.e. pick up and put it down, not tied to a time and a place).
- Providing more depth and detail.

On the negative side a Sunday newspaper was seen as placing greater demands on personal time, requiring greater concentration and involvement.

For a Sunday newspaper to be successful it was seen as needing to strike

*Premium Award  
&  
Category 2  
Gold Award*

*Irish International  
Ltd*

*Peter McPartlin  
Catherine Donnelly  
Mal Stevenson*



a delicate balance between being informative and entertaining.

Figure 2  
EMOTIONAL DEMANDS ON A SUNDAY  
NEWSPAPER

HIGH INFORMATION	V	HIGH ENTERTAINMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Got the topline news all week, need to understand it</li><li>• Reflective mood</li><li>• More time to give it/concentrate</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Busy week media-wise</li><li>• Depressing 'news' week</li><li>• In an 'away-from-it-all' mood</li><li>• Less interested in politics/business news aspects</li></ul>

In positioning terms the Sunday Independent was seen as getting closer to this mark than any other Irish newspaper. Historically, it had managed to achieve a balance in both tone and content by using the two sections of the paper to meet the demands for news and entertainment.

In spite of frequent and hostile criticism from competitors, core readers continued to give largely positive feedback to the often provocative content of the Sunday Independent.

*"It's more opinionated than a daily, it's more than just straightforward reporting. Dunphy or Conor Cruise O'Brien will pick out some story, so if you agree with them after reading it, you're more strong in your feeling towards it. But if you totally oppose them, it gets your feelings going more."*

This, together with judicious use of full colour, enabled the paper to compensate in presentational terms for the limitations posed by its print technology.

The emphasis was to be on promotion and particularly the advertising of the product. Up to then, advertising, in the main, for Sunday newspapers (including the Independent) tended to follow a trusted but tired formula of feature / writer lists broadcast each Saturday on radio.

## ■ KEY ADVERTISING OBJECTIVE

Irish International were briefed to provide a solution that would break the traditional mould and position the Sunday Independent as the most complete and lively Sunday paper – an integral part of Irish Sunday life. Ideally the solution would also reflect the newspaper's reputation for informative, provocative and entertaining writers.

The advertising was aimed at recruiting and reinforcing loyalty amongst urban-based AB's – people who above all would regard themselves as open-minded, modern and enjoying life, but who were potential 'switchers' to the Sunday Times and Business Post.

## ■ CREATIVE/MEDIA EXECUTION

The first 'A Day In The Life' commercial was aired (RTE TV, UTV and Channel 4) in February 1995, featuring words and images designed to capture the essence of the newspaper and set to music by the composer Carl Orff. A series of short but intense two-week TV bursts ran across the period February to May 1995, backed with a superlite poster campaign at launch.

In mid-May the second phase of the campaign began with a TV commercial featuring a range of the newspaper's journalists. This was supported by a series of radio and in-paper press ads with key writers expressing their motivations and approach to writing for the Sunday Independent. These were designed to distinguish the title from the raft of newspaper 'menu ads' on the medium.

## ■ RESULTS

Even before the closure of the Sunday Press in late May 1995, there were strong indications that the Sunday Independent's new advertising strategy was paying dividends. Quantitative assessment by Business & Market Research (BMR) showed strong awareness and positive liking, particularly by ABs, of the advertising.

The BMR interviewing was conducted



by telephone amongst two matched samples of 300 ABC1 adults aged 18+ in Dublin city and county. The pre-campaign survey was conducted between February 16th and 17th 1995 and the post-campaign measure between May 5th and 9th. measure between May 5th and 9th.

Figure 3  
RECALL OF SUNDAY NEWSPAPERS  
ADVERTISING  
Unprompted

	All		AB Adults	
	Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %
Sunday Independent	20	26	20	32
Sunday Tribune	14	7	14	8
Sunday Press	8	5	8	5
Sunday World	8	9	10	8
Sunday Bus. Post	7	7	8	10
Other Sundays	8	8	10	9

Spontaneous recall for the Sunday Independent advertising was significantly higher than for any Sunday newspaper. When the first post-campaign measure was undertaken in early May, unprompted recall had risen amongst the adult sample overall from 20% to 26%. More importantly, the unprompted figure had risen from one in five to one in three AB adults.

Figure 4  
RATING OF SUNDAY INDEPENDENT  
ADVERTISING  
Base: All those aware of Sunday Independent advertising.

	All		AB Adults	
	Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %
Like It	38	61	40	64
Disliked It	19	10	17	7
No Opinion	43	29	42	29

There were also significant increases in the positive rating of the advertising between the two surveys, with AB's again providing the most favourable response.

The litmus test for the new advertising though, was whether it would increase the propensity of AB's to purchase the Sunday Independent. Here the research showed that the newspaper succeeded in increasing its lead over its main competitors as the title people said they would consider buying nowadays. (Figure 5)

Figure 5  
SUNDAY NEWSPAPERS  
CONSIDER BUYING NOWADAYS  
Mentioned At All

	All		AB Adults	
	Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %
Sunday Independent	51	53	49	55
Sunday Tribune	31	27	41	36
Sunday Press	18	22	15	23
Sunday Times	17	16	19	21
Sunday Bus. Post	15	16	19	26
Sunday World	8	13	7	8
Other Sundays	12	18	7	18

In the February to May 1995 period average sales grew year-on-year by over 13,000 copies per week (+5%), even with the price increase to £1 and before the demise of the Press.

No other marketing initiatives / tactics were undertaken by the Independent at this time. What's more, the new advertising also succeeded in helping to reverse a seasonal downturn in sales, which the paper previously experienced in these months.

*"It's more opinionated than a daily, it's more than just straight-forward reporting. Dunphy or Conor Cruise O'Brien will pick out some story, so if you agree with them after reading it, you're more strong in your feeling towards it. But if you totally oppose them, it gets your feelings going more."*

*“Satisfying the customer should be the basic objective of newspaper publishing.*

*A successful mainstream newspaper should strive to have all the ingredients, the variety and compulsiveness of a lively TV schedule.*

*It should, as someone recently said of the Sunday Independent, ‘crackle with energy.’”*

*Aengus Fanning, Editor*

Figure 6  
SUNDAY INDEPENDENT – SALES TRENDS  
February - May Period

	Per Issue	Year on Year	Copies Gained/ Lost
1993	255,421	-1%	-2,580
1994	252,636	-1%	-2,785
1995	265,876	+5%	+13,240

Source: A.B.C.

In effect, the advertising resulted in bringing about a net sales increase of +6% (or 16,000 extra copies per week) across 16 weeks. This amounted to an additional £256,000 worth of cover-price revenue alone for the newspaper against a net advertising investment of £188,500. (The Sunday Independent’s total cover price revenue in the February to May 1995 period was an estimated £4.27m, which meant its overall advertising to sales ratio was 1 : 22 – well below normal levels for newspapers.)

The demise of the Sunday Press at the end of May 1995 resulted in massive sales gains for all Sunday newspapers, but in particular the Sunday Independent.

While the paper itself was perhaps best placed to capture most of the Sunday Press transfers, it could be argued that its advertising also strongly positioned it as the most appropriate choice for these disenfranchised buyers.

Having said that, the case for advertising’s contribution must, in our view, be based on fact / logic and not wishful thinking.

Through a process of conservative extrapolation and analysis of available sales data, the agency estimates that in the 17 months between February 1995 to June 1996 the newspaper’s net investment in this new campaign of £397,000 had resulted in additional cover price revenue of at least £612,000 – a 54% return.

In addition, there was strong corroborating evidence from the JNRR

surveys that the Sunday Independent was recruiting and reinforcing readership in the primary target group of AB adults.

Figure 7  
SUNDAY INDEPENDENT –  
AB ADULT READERSHIP

JNRR Date	Total AB Readership	Solus AB Readership
Jul ‘93 - Jun ‘94	153,000	72,000
Jan ‘94 - Dec ‘94	158,000	72,000
Jul ‘94 - Jun ‘95	163,000	72,000
Nov ‘94 - Oct ‘95	168,000	91,000

Source: Lansdowne / JNRR

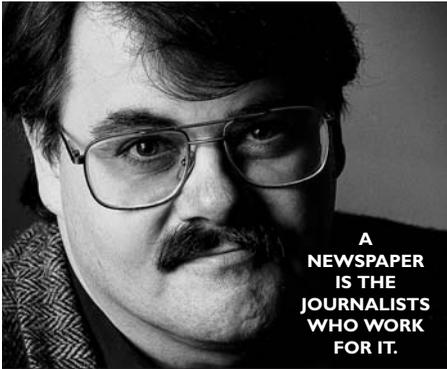
Finally, another by-product of the campaign’s effect in boosting sales and readership would have been its unquantifiable contribution to advertising revenues for the newspaper in the medium term.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS

It would be erroneous to suggest that the advertising was solely responsible for this lift in the Sunday Independent’s fortunes. After all, the very reason why people are attracted to their individual newspaper is in no small measure due to the editor, his journalists and their writing.

As editor Aengus Fanning has said: “Satisfying the customer should be the basic objective of newspaper publishing. A successful mainstream newspaper should strive to have all the ingredients, the variety and compulsiveness of a lively TV schedule. It should, as someone recently said of the Sunday Independent, ‘crackle with energy.’”

He’s right, of course, but what advertising has done and continues to do for the Sunday Independent, is communicate that energy in a compelling way.



**A  
NEWSPAPER  
IS THE  
JOURNALISTS  
WHO WORK  
FOR IT.**

**“**When Sean Duignan was offered the job as Albert Reynolds’ press secretary his friends told him to give it a lash. He did. And as the Reynolds/Spring government stumbled from the passports scandal to the ceasefire triumph and on to the Harry Whelehan disaster Duignan was there, at the heart of the action. He kept a diary, and the dramatic events of the day were filtered through his observant eye and his sense of humour. He’s out now and he’s telling us what the spin doctor saw. **”**

Read Gene Kerrigan this Sunday.  
Only in The Sunday Independent.

**Sunday Independent**  
A DAY IN THE LIFE

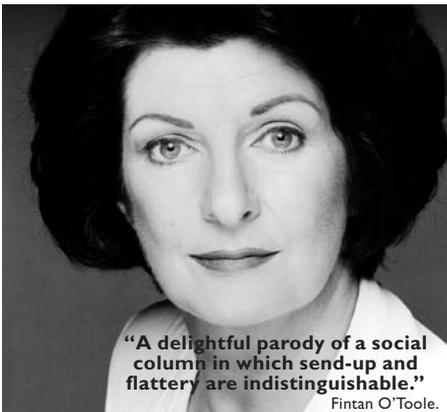


**A NEWSPAPER  
IS THE  
JOURNALISTS  
WHO WORK  
FOR IT.**

**“**I’m absolutely convinced from my work that the justice system in this country favours the criminal. That’s why they get away with it.  
I can say ‘look, this is going to take me two weeks, three weeks, four weeks,’ and I’m given that time. I sometimes seriously consider - ‘is this worth it’ - but I think it would be worse for me if I, or any journalist, was to be intimidated. So I won’t give it up and I can understand why I am doing it. It’s because it has to be done. **”**

Read Veronica GuerIn this Sunday.  
Only in The Sunday Independent.

**Sunday Independent**  
A DAY IN THE LIFE



**“A delightful parody of a social column in which send-up and flattery are indistinguishable.”**

Fintan O’Toole.

Terry Keane is as admired by her peers as she is loved by her fans. Even those who claim to hate the Keane Edge, read it. As Fintan O’Toole goes on to say in his book, Black Hole, Green Card, “not being in the social columns is a much more comforting state for the truly powerful than being in them.” Fortunately for us, Terry Keane ensures that they never get too comfortable.

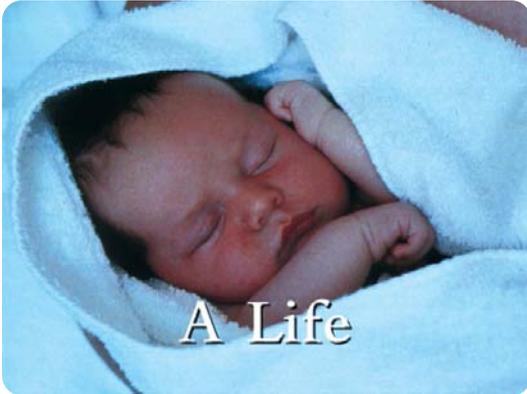
Her writing is dashing and individual. Her column deflates overblown egos, exposes hypocrisy, pokes fun at the pompous and does it with a wit as sharp as a scalpel.

Read The Keane Edge.  
Only in The Sunday Independent.

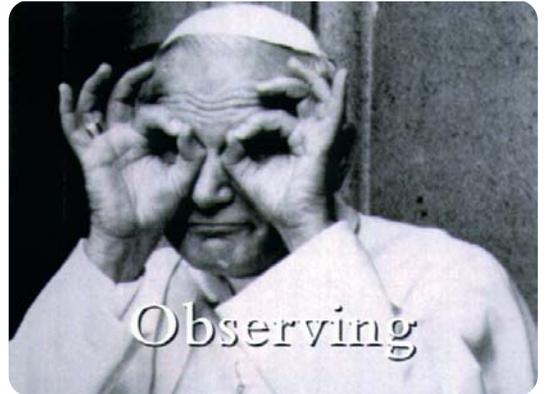
**Sunday Independent**  
A DAY IN THE LIFE

*“Sunday Independent - a day in the life”*

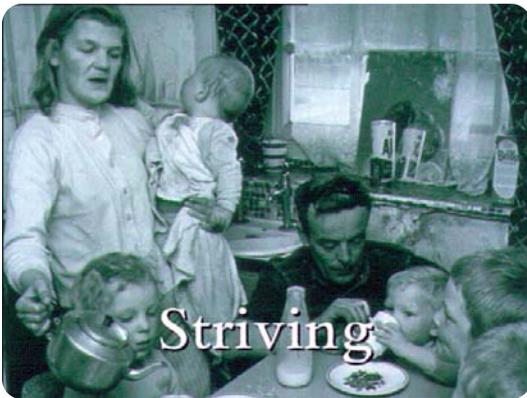
*Series of three mono press adverts used in other Independent Group titles to cross-promote the newspaper.*



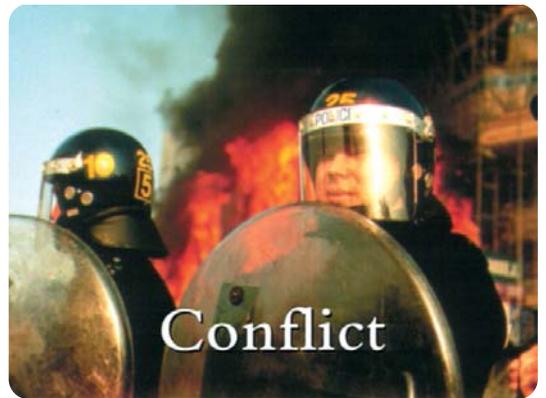
A Life



Observing

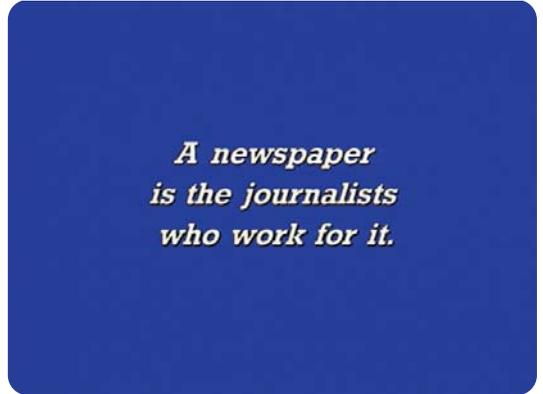
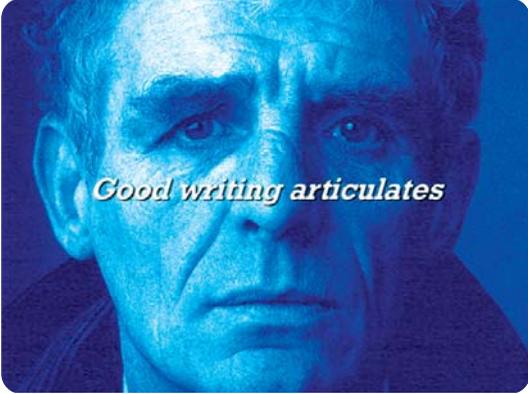


Striving



Conflict

*'Day in the life' TV commercial*



*'Journalists' TV commercial*