

Fáilte Ireland: Making Dublin click again with tourists

In the Company of Huskies

AGENCY



CLIENT



AWARD

LEISURE, MEDIA & ENTERTAINMENT
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COMPANY PROFILE

In the Company of Huskies is a creative agency with deep digital DNA bred to transform brands and business. We solve brand and business problems with the kind of ideas, innovation and creative thinking that digital makes possible. We do this for some of Ireland and Europe's best-known brands. We were founded 17 years ago and we've confidently navigated our clients through the opportunities every breaking wave of digital disruption has offered. In recent years, the kinds of problems we've always solved have moved centre stage for clients, so we've attracted some of the best ATL talent and combined this with our deep digital DNA to build a team of proven experts to solve them. Our work is varied. It could be a content programme, a big brand idea, a social campaign or a simple line of code. More often than not, it's a combination of disciplines and channels. But in every instance, the result for your business or brand is transformational. We are an agency of thinkers, writers, artists, brainboxes and business heads who believe in the power of change, innovation and creativity to transform the world.



INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

This is not a story about a beer, a bar, or a bank. It's not a story about big corporations or shareholder profit. It's a story about Dublin, and how, when it was most down on its luck, a series of brave communications decisions by Fáilte Ireland and its agencies helped bring it back from the brink.

These decisions were many and varied including:

- ▶ Forgoing the traditional media it had always used and instead turning to digital and social channels.
- ▶ Building new models centred on how a tourism destination might use these channels to build a new brand for itself.
- ▶ A seemingly counterintuitive approach focused not on selling the city itself but rather the passions and interests that happened to take place in the city.
- ▶ A deliberate and progressive 'letting go' of the creation of many of the assets the city used to sell itself, passing them over instead to Dublin's creative class, tourist businesses and tourists themselves.
- ▶ Setting in place the KPIs which would allow all concerned to understand and manage the work being done.

By the end of 2 years, the work proved so effective that Fáilte Ireland has now rolled it out as its preferred approach to promote its other assets, including The Wild Atlantic Way and its new offering Ireland's Ancient East.

It is also work that we feel has learnings for many other businesses looking to understand how they might communicate and build brands in the modern age.

Most importantly though, it has brought Dublin back from the brink of an abyss that followed the financial crash of 2008. In order to understand exactly what was achieved, let's start there.

MARKETING OBJECTIVES

“The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word ‘crisis.’ One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger — but recognize the opportunity.” – John F. Kennedy

In 2008, visitor numbers to Dublin were at their highest ever. And then the financial crisis happened. The effect on Dublin tourism was catastrophic. By 2013, when Fáilte Ireland set out to build a new model for the future, Dublin tourism was down 16% on its peak, translating into a financial hole of €1 billion. And Dublin was still losing 2,000 tourists a day.

It was against this background that, in 2013, Fáilte Ireland set in place ‘People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025’, a new national strategy for tourism.

Dublin would obviously need to play a big part in this. To Fáilte Ireland’s credit, CEO Shaun Quinn, when briefing Huskies, stressed the need to recognise the opportunity that existed in every crisis.

The only problem was that the financial crisis wasn’t the only source of Dublin’s issues. Other factors had changed too. These included:

- ▶ A real perception issue for Dublin.
- ▶ A fundamental worldwide change in how people booked holidays.

Fáilte Ireland set us a task of growing visitor numbers to Dublin by 1m by 2020. Since that figure was set at the end of 2013, we needed an increase of over 140,000 visitors a year, so, by the end of 2015, we needed to be hitting over 280,000+ visitors a year. To make things more straightforward, we agreed an even more ambitious figure with Fáilte Ireland.

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CULTURALLY CURIOUS

Core Motivations:

- Active sightseers
- Broaden their mind
- Explore the landscape
- Culture and history
- Local experiences

Interests:

- Culture
- Literature
- History
- Artisan food
- Local stories

SOCIAL ENERGISERS

Core Motivations:

- Excitement
- New experiences
- Fun
- Holiday somewhere different
- Close to the action

Interests:

- Music
- Nightlife
- Boutique shopping
- City hotspots
- Outdoor adventure

MARKETING OBJECTIVES

BUSINESS OBJECTIVE

Bring 300,000 extra visitors per year to Dublin by end of 2015

We then set about translating this into our Marketing Objectives. To do this, we needed to get a better grip on who we were talking to. Fortunately, Fáilte Ireland came to our assistance. In a brave first, they had recently undertaken a segmentation exercise, based on psychographic data, that gave a new understanding of the visitors to whom Dublin appealed.

These were described as Social Energisers and the Culturally Curious, and their characteristics are described opposite. Our Marketing Objectives would henceforth focus on these segments.

MARKETING OBJECTIVE

Get Social Energisers and the Culturally Curious to reconsider Dublin as a destination of choice for city breaks

ROLE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Drive awareness of Dublin as a contemporary destination of choice for city breaks amongst Social Energisers and the Culturally Curious

Restore Dublin in the consideration set of Social Energisers and the Culturally Curious

This, however, would be heavily influenced by what we found out next.

THE TASK

No sooner had we defined our target than a problem emerged. Research showed Dublin had an image problem - indexing along a number of key attributes which were not necessarily to its benefit. These included:

- ▶ Labouring under a green haze of shamrocks, crosses and leprechauns.
- ▶ Stag party central for many, particularly from European markets.
- ▶ Old, dusty, backward-looking and irrelevant.

(MCCP Proposition Research 12.09.2012 / Red C Segmentation 22.04.2013)

What was clear was that this version of Dublin was unlikely to appeal to the two discerning segments we had identified. This was particularly frustrating in light of what we called The TripAdvisor Factor, which told us that, in fact, these perceptions were actually unfounded.

TripAdvisor has become a benchmark when it comes to travel. What we noticed was that Dublin made it into the Top 10 of World City Destinations of people who had already visited the city on TripAdvisor (Source: MCCP Trenstream TripAdvisor 2012.)

The irony was that Dublin's high ranking on travel sites wasn't translating into it featuring in the Top 10 European City destinations by volume / visitor numbers. (Source: EU Capital City Tourism 2012, Fáilte Ireland Tourism Facts 2013.)

This led us to believe there was nothing wrong with the 'Dublin product' itself. Once people visited, they became strong advocates of the city. What was clear is that there was a gap in how the city was perceived.

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THE TASK

We believed that by re-presenting Dublin to our new targets, we could move the image of the city from a twee / dated / boozy experience to a modern European capital, thriving with unique and appealing experiences and activities.

We set about communicating this to our target. Our research helped us to identify that this would not be a straightforward 'traditional' comms job relying on 'traditional' media.

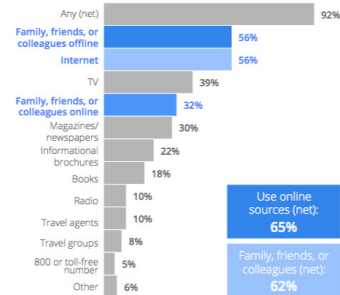
The chart opposite reveals why. It's taken from a 2014 Google Report, 'The 2014 Traveler's Road to Decision', which set out to identify sources of influence on the modern traveller. It shows that the biggest influences on travellers nowadays are not traditional channels or even travel agents but the internet and family and friends.

In many ways, not using large traditional media campaigns was a side issue anyway, since our targets were relatively small and could never have justified large scale ATL campaigns. But even on a smaller level of other options (e.g. guidebooks/travel agents), Fáilte Ireland's own figures showed that they couldn't compare to the influence of the internet and friends and family.

Friends/family and online sources are critical to travel inspiration



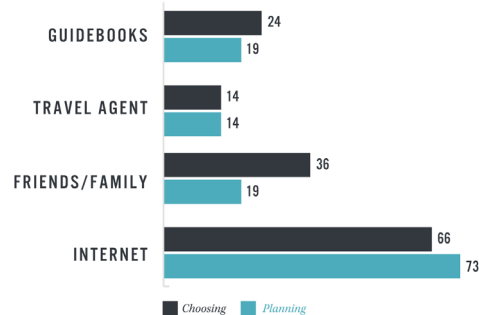
SOURCES OF INSPIRATION (LEISURE TRAVEL)



Base: Personal Quota (n=3500)
Q22 Which of the following sources typically inspire you to start thinking about your personal or leisure trips? (Select ALL that apply)
Source: Google Travel Study, June 2014, Ipsos MediaCT

thinkwithgoogle.com
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2013 SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR CHOOSING/PLANNING A HOLIDAY IN IRELAND (%)



Source: Fáilte Ireland's Post Survey of Holidaymakers 2013

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THE TASK

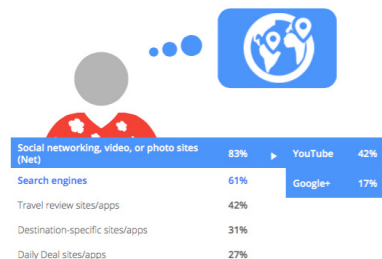
This leads to the inevitable question – how do travellers use the internet when planning holidays. Once more Google's 2014 Report is revelatory – getting granular with its statistics. It stated that 83% of travellers are influenced by social networking, photo or video sites when choosing a destination.

Yet in this new world of online influencers and blogs and social media, Dublin was barely present. As a result, in the area of the single greatest opportunity, Dublin was coming up short. So we set about constructing an International Content Publishing Model to ensure Dublin had presence in the new online world.

We recognised our task was to:

Get Dublin online to ensure it had a presence where it counted, in the top online sources of inspiration for Social Energisers and the Culturally Curious

Search engines and YouTube are **top online sources of inspiration**



Base: Personal quota and use online sources for inspiration (n=2286)
INSPIRE: And, which online sources typically inspire you to start thinking about your personal or leisure trips? (Select ALL that apply.)
Source: Google Travel Study, June 2014, Ipsos MediaCT

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THE STRATEGY

The greatest single opportunity for Dublin to achieve its objectives was online, and we believed a Content Model was the way to achieve this.

Content is a big word and can take many forms. We needed to understand what content would best serve Fáilte Ireland along the new consumer journey, but first we needed to understand what the new consumer journey looked like.

Taking Google's digital consumer journey for the travel industry, we added an awareness stage to ensure we were delivering to our specific challenge. We created personas for each segment and layered them over the consumer journey to map how our audience behaved at each stage of the journey.

This helped us to determine the type of content to create and deliver at each stage. At the Dreaming stage, for example, both segments are most influenced by videos, photos, blogs and articles shared by family, friends and peers. But at the Booking stage, both segments look for more straightforward information.

Bit by bit, we built up a picture of what form content needed to take at different stages. And this led us to two significant insights:

A. That to really resonate, the focus of the content shouldn't be about the city itself, but passions and interests you could pursue within the city.

B. That a large proportion of content would be more effective if it was created by influencers, trade partners and the tourists themselves.

THE STRATEGY

From our research we recognised that what resonates with people are things they are passionate about, whether music or food or mountain biking, and that's what they're likely to pass on to others.

Just as crucially, content passed on by family, friends and peers is regarded as more valuable than content passed on by organisations. (Source: 2014 Google 'Traveler's Road to Decision' Study)

These two insights would heavily influence the construction of our Content Model.

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The FÁILTE Ireland content model

THE IDEA AND COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITY

What we were setting out to achieve was to re-present Dublin as a modern European capital, brimming with the passions and interests we knew our target segments were interested in.

We would do this by counter-intuitively focusing not on selling the city itself but on these passions and interests that take place within it.

Our vehicle would be unique and interesting content that would be organically passed through networks. We called this the Nectar approach; just as plants use nectar to attract bees who then disseminate pollen, our content would appeal to those with passions and interests who would spread it through their networks.

How we actually went about this is explained below. Such a model requires not just a single idea but many ideas that build cumulatively over time. The model involves 4 stages : Analyse>Create-Publicise-Maintain.

THE FÁILTE IRELAND CONTENT MODEL

See diagram opposite

THE ANALYSE STAGE

Before we create anything, we research and investigate. This involves looking at up-to-the-minute social and search data to identify trends and microtrends in the interests/passions of our target. We also revisit the consumer journey to identify at which stage we need to target people and explore touch points to make sure we target people in the right places and channels. Our creative brief is informed by these insights and data.

THE IDEA AND COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITY

THE CREATE STAGE

This covers the conception and production of content, from crafting stories, films, articles and graphics based on our customer interests and passions that Dublin can speak to, to exploring existing content created by our trade partners or visitors. We also then ensure we localise our creative output to allow for the variations between the UK and US markets.

THE PUBLICISE STAGE

The Publicise stage puts rigorous outreach and distribution behind every piece of content produced. We first ensure the content is best optimised in terms of digital tagging and packaging so that we can accurately track its performance, but also as the more identifiable it is to search engines, the better our overall content distribution will be. We then share a content piece with a selected set of influencers in a relevant interest sphere and seek their interaction. Any likes, shares, comments, reposting or blogging here is crucial. It turns content into social capital. It transforms our communications from tourism body advertising to influencer-endorsed content of value. It is also essential in hitting scale as we specifically target the best connected influencers in niche areas across all our digital channels.

THE MAINTAIN STAGE

Finally we enter the Maintain phase. Every piece of content is tracked and monitored across the digital ecosystem as soon as it is published. The benefit of this is that we can track any issues and adapt to how content is performing to drive maximum reach. We also monitor all interactions with our channels, our hashtags or namechecks of Dublin as a destination so that we are always learning. The result is that this monitoring, with reports provided to client regularly, is used to drive the next production cycle, offering jumping off points ahead of writing new creative briefs.

THE IDEA AND COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITY

DELIVERING A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION

What's more, this model needs to be sustainable. From the outset, we planned on using content and an outreach strategy that would encourage both the trade and visitors to create and share content with our audiences. With peer endorsements so crucial to our success, we knew that this could in fact be the most effective content of all. We drove this behaviour by partnering with a range of influencers to co-create content pieces early on and show the community that we valued the content of others, not just pushed out our own.

We have an aggressive plan that reduces the amount of content we create over time which is outlined below:

2014: 80% created / 20% co-created – achieved

2015: 50% created / 20% co-created / 30% curated – achieved

2016: 40% created / 15% co-created / 45% curated – in progress

One example of this is Visit Dublin's Instagram channel, which now runs completely on curated imagery.

RESULTS

Up to now we have held off talking about specific KPIs, because we wanted to deal with them in some detail. The principal KPIs set down as the metrics by which we would judge our work were Impressions, Engagements and Search Volumes. We briefly explain these metrics below for those unfamiliar with them.

IMPRESSIONS

An impression is counted each time a piece of internet content is displayed, whether on a web page/ social feed /etc. It does not mean the content is necessarily looked at or engaged with, as such it equates to an 'Opportunity To See' in more traditional media. We knew we could take this as a valid measure that our work was getting out there, just as OTSs could be counted for a TV ad. Essentially, impressions can be taken as a measure of Awareness.

ENGAGEMENT

Engagement happens when users actively click on a piece of content in any form, whether to like it, share it, watch it etc. As such, it can be taken as a measure that a viewer has not just noticed a piece of content but has found it compelling enough to interact with. Engagements can be counted as a valid measure of consideration.

SEARCH UPLIFT

This shows that internet users are actually searching for something online. For our KPIs, we were interested in how people were searching for Dublin and certain defined terms associated with tourism and the city. We set Search Uplift as a measure of consideration/reconsideration.

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RESULTS

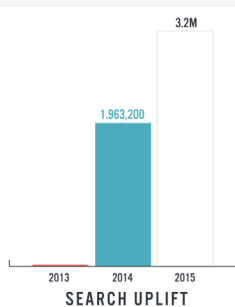
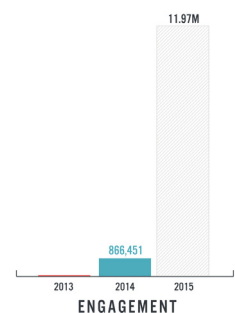
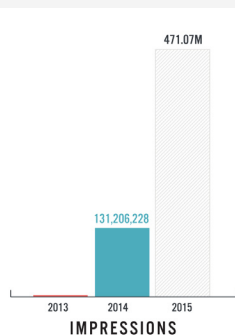
So how did we do? The results are shown opposite.

To start with Impressions, our content created to portray the city in a new light that matched the interests, passions and wants of Social Energisers and the Culturally Curious delivered a total of 608,076,228 impressions in the period Sept 2013 – Dec 2015. This figure is based purely on content – no online display or similar PPC activity is measured here. These results drove Dublin's awareness far beyond the KPIs set for this activity in 2014 and 2015. As we entered 2016, the third year of the three-year strategy, all of this metric continues to grow strongly.

Every piece of content was created to match the interests, passions and wants of Social Energisers and the Culturally Curious and drove 12,986,451 engagements in just over two years – proof that what we created not only got in front of our audience, but got their attention and endorsement. People were clicking on our content, watching it, sharing it, and engaging with it, serving as a valid measure that people were considering Dublin.

Finally, we come to the crucial metric of search volumes. When a potential visitor researches Dublin online as a destination of choice, they do so by searching in Google. Every search for Dublin that is tourism-related is a consideration. We measured over 5.2 million of these searches over 2014 and 2015. The 2015 growth was 63% greater than the 2014 levels. For example, there were over 33,100 average monthly searches for flights to Dublin (+49% YoY) and almost 50,000 average monthly searches for hotels in Dublin (+22% YoY) in 2015. These are key signifiers of a change in consideration and audience behaviour. (Source: Google AdWords search volumes)

We set out to deliver an additional 300,000 visitors to Dublin by the end of 2015. How did we do? Visitor numbers grew from 3.998m in 2013 to approx. 4.1m by the end of 2014. But the real impact wasn't felt until 2015, when visitor numbers to Ireland grew by 14%. Total visitor numbers to Dublin, although yet to be confirmed by the CSO, can then be estimated at 4.7m, which equates to an additional 691,000 visitors to Dublin across 2014 and 2015. And our work had major impact on these figures, especially when you discount a range of other factors that might have been argued to have an influence.



RESULTS

Discounted Factors:

1. Other spending/activities engaged in by Fáilte Ireland. Fáilte Ireland engaged in no extra activity over the course of this study compared to other years.
2. Other spending/activities by Fáilte Ireland's sister agency Tourism Ireland. Tourism Ireland engaged in no extra activity over the course of this study compared to other years.
3. Currency factors. Although the dollar was relatively stronger over the period, all destinations in Europe benefitted from this and no extra benefit accrued to Dublin.

ROI:

This model required a unique solution as there was no industry standard that could be transplanted. We explored how other agencies were doing it internationally and worked with the client to take the most accurate approach which is outlined below. We have not included the impact of our content that was shared on third party websites as there is far too much variance in the cost of online advertising across our influencers.

Our equivalent media value is calculated as €1 : €5.40.

Number of engagements x cost of engagement = equivalent media cost / total client investment

Number of engagements

Twitter: Reply, Retweet, Like

Facebook: Like, Comment, Share, Video View

YouTube: Video View, Like, Comment, Share

RESULTS

Instagram: Like, Comment

Pinterest: Repin, Like

Website: Homepage Visit

Cost of engagements

Cost of buying engagements through social channel listed above.

Equivalent media cost

Total investment required to have purchased all engagements.

Total client investment

Entire agency costs for 2015, including full digital media spend.

To Fáilte Ireland, this was proof that we had delivered a model that could reinvigorate Irish tourism, and they took the decision to roll it out beyond Dublin, to its other assets The Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East.

IMPACT ON BEHAVIOURAL ACTIVITY AND PAYBACK

The impact of our work can be seen in the new behaviours of Fáilte Ireland, the trade and its agencies (including ourselves), and of consumers themselves.

All parties now have an appreciation of considering the online world when it comes to Ireland's tourism destinations, and in putting in place the content necessary to best take advantage of it. There is an appreciation of how best to make that content resonate with passions and interests to ensure its outreach. And there is an appreciation that the creation of this content is more powerful when shared.

This in turn is leading to people being inspired to consider Dublin.

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NEW LEARNINGS

We spoke earlier of how we believe what we've done for Fáilte has learnings both for others in destination marketing, and the industry more generally. We believe the crucial role the internet and peer influence plays in consumer journeys has parallels for many other businesses and how we approached this opportunity has lessons for many marketers.

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SUMMARY

Following the financial crisis, Dublin tourism fell off a cliff. Emerging from this crisis, Fáilte Ireland was faced with a radically different consumer landscape, where the consumer journey had moved largely online.

To engage with this new online reality, Fáilte Ireland forged a new identity for Dublin to get tourist numbers back up using a unique and innovative comms model that has helped to transform the way the Irish tourism industry communicates, delivering over 471 million impressions, 12 million engagements and contributing to the best ever year for Irish tourism in 2015.