

# BIG, BOLD AND SINGLEMINDED: the story of 2015's most successful Irish brand transformation



Irish International BBDO & OMD

## AGENCIES

**Irish International**  
Insight. Excite.



## CLIENT



## AWARD

NEW LAUNCH  
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## COMPANY PROFILE

**Virgin Media** provides Ireland's fastest broadband as well as digital TV, fixed line telephony and mobile to over a million customers. It is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Liberty Global plc, and is a brand deeply influenced by the dynamic and innovative spirit of Virgin founder Sir Richard Branson. Until late 2015, it was known to Irish consumers as UPC.

**Irish International BBDO** is an advertising, shopper marketing and CRM agency in Dublin, employing 80+ people, and making winning work for local and global brands across every category. It was established in 1966, and joined the BBDO family in 1998. Virgin Media (formerly UPC and NTL) has been working successfully with Irish International BBDO for over a decade.

**OMD Worldwide** has been named Global Media Agency of the Year a remarkable ten times in a row by the Gunn Report. OMD is Ireland's fastest-growing media agency, a confluence of technology, creativity and service rooted in a belief in the power of insight and ideas to deliver compelling business results.

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## INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Since launching in May 2010 and rolling out Ireland's first fibre-powered network, UPC had succeeded in establishing a broadband high ground, and securing market share<sup>1</sup>.

But it was a brand in danger of extinction.

UPC grew exponentially from 2007 to 2010, but as a brand it was all brain and no heart. In the eyes of the consumer, it remained steadfastly a utility and not a top tier brand. Instead of investing in brand building activity in the halcyon days of growth, UPC shored up market share through deep discounting and rational messaging.

The market changed and by 2013 it had become highly commoditised. Powerful brands like Sky were cleaning up and eating into the UPC offering.

Over 2014 and 2015, a new commercial team joined the business and began to look at the options, including repositioning UPC or launching a Virgin Media brand – a brand acquired by Liberty Global (UPC's parent).

Extensive research demonstrated that rebranding to Virgin Media was the most preferred solution, with Irish consumers more likely to purchase under a Virgin brand and 11% less likely to churn.

*1. Within brand's geographical footprint.*

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## MARKETING OBJECTIVES

The challenge was simple: launch Virgin Media in Ireland, retaining what was best about UPC while creating a red-hot telecommunications brand rooted in Ireland. We had circa 0.5 million households on our base, and simply dragging and dropping a UK Virgin Media brand could accelerate churn and kill the business totally.

### Commercial objectives:

Commercially, we set out to stem business losses and targeted churn reduction/losses as key to success. Additionally we needed to remove our reliance on discounting, build stickier customers and launch mobile.

### Marketing objectives:

We needed to launch Virgin Media in Ireland, making it a red-hot reality for Irish consumers, creating interest and excitement in a maximised category.

We had three core objectives:

1. Announce the arrival of Virgin Media.
2. Carry through the positive heritage of the UPC brand.
3. Reward existing customers (via the new mobile offer) to maximise churn and create stickier customers.

And ensure it didn't feel like a global brand arriving with no consideration for local market sensitivities.

No mean feat!

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## MARKETING OBJECTIVES

### The role for communications

Our rebrand campaign needed to be impactful, memorable, exciting and as persuasive as possible. There were 3 key asks:

1. Ensure everyone knew that UPC was now Virgin Media.

Another recent re-brand in the Netherlands by our parent company, from UPC to Ziggo, had turned out to be an unmitigated disaster, with such high levels of confusion amongst existing customers that they haemorrhaged from the business. All eyes were on us to make sure that this rebrand went without a hitch.

With spontaneous brand awareness for UPC at 80%, an ambitious target of 60% Spontaneous Brand Awareness was set for end 2016.

We had to make sure we launched the brand with so much impact that everyone knew there was a new brand in town, but also make it clear and memorable enough to be sure they knew it had replaced UPC.

2. Get people excited by, and interested in, Virgin Media.

We needed to quickly establish Virgin Media as a game-changing force with the category, and build enough excitement and interest in the brand to deliver consideration and preference scores of 40% and 20% respectively by December 2016.

3. Launch Virgin Media Mobile to customers and maximise uptake.

We needed to launch mobile and drive uptake among existing customers.

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## THE TASK

Although the ambition was - and our objectives were - straightforward, the task was by no means a simple one, and we faced challenges on several fronts.

### Time was against us.

The decision to rebrand from UPC to Virgin Media was taken in late May 2015, with Liberty Global setting a launch date of October 4th. In May 2015, our trading performance was so dire that we were given just 14 weeks by Liberty Global to launch Virgin Media into the market.

By October 4th, we had to prepare, develop, research, produce and deliver a launch campaign that would beat the band. And we had to manage 30+ senior stakeholders across Liberty Global, Virgin Enterprises and Virgin Media UK, as well as the senior management team in Ireland and more than 50+ business owners!

### Outsourcing customer care.

Earlier in 2015, the business had taken a financially-based decision to outsource customer care services to the Philippines. Consumers rarely respond well to customer care being based outside of their market, yet with an objective of churn reduction, we had essentially stacked the cards against ourselves.

### The arrival of eir and 1GB broadband.

Three weeks before the launch of our rebrand, one of our major competitors, and Ireland's only indigenous telco, Eircom, launched their rebrand to eir.

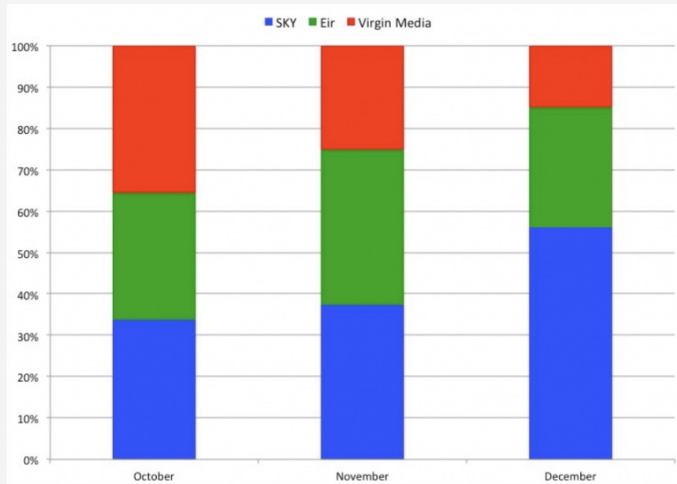
Over a year in the making, at a cost of €16m, and a further €3.2m media spend, eir's rebrand arrived with huge fanfare, and in the run-up to our own launch, eir was the talk of the nation.



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Source: Nielsen Ad Dynamix

## THE TASK

eir also arrived with a significant piece of news – their investment in their own fibre broadband in recent years meant that they were able to herald the launch of 1GB broadband in Ireland and immediately undermine UPC's broadband leadership.

We had lost the ace up our sleeve.

### **We had a lot to say and a smaller share of voice than others.**

With a much smaller budget for our rebrand, we could not outspend the competition. Although media spend in the category increased 50% year-on-year, and we had additional budget to support the launch, we still didn't have dominant share of voice.

Our share of voice was only 29%, versus 38% for SKY and 32% for eir. It's also worth considering that as SKY is a media owner, it is estimated that they had an additional €5m in owned media across the year that isn't accounted for in Nielsen data.

There was some good news.

The decision to roll out the new mobile offering to existing customers first meant that we had something good to share with existing customers – and it signaled a change to category norms.

It was unique to launch giving something back to customers, and completely in keeping with the Virgin Media brand purpose – “Make Good Things Happen”.

This was one way that we could bring that to life quickly, and differentiate the brand's offering from eir's.

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We're always:  
Open Minded, Fun & Generous

OMFG

## THE STRATEGY

You don't get a second chance to make a first impression, and the commercial implications of not succeeding at launch were too great for us to fail.

With a brand tone of voice of "OMFG!", when launching Virgin Media in Ireland we only had one option – go big or go home!

Given the scale of the ambition, and the challenges we faced - limited budget, short timescale and competitive pressure - we needed to be focused and dramatic.

### What we needed to say.

First and foremost, our job was to announce the arrival of Virgin Media. We needed to make it very clear that UPC was changing to become Virgin Media.

### What we needed to bring with us.

Although it had waned in recent times, UPC still retained strong legacy credentials around leadership in broadband and technology. We needed to retain what was good so that we didn't have to build those credentials from scratch with Virgin Media as well as create an exciting brand.

### What consumers needed to hear from us.

SKY - a key competitor with deep pockets - was perceived by consumers as a sexy, modern, big brand led by its leadership position in TV, and this created a halo effect driving consideration across their overall products.

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## THE STRATEGY

In contrast, UPC was seen as a utility, after spending several years talking about rational benefits such as speed and various product features.

We needed to visibly and tangibly behave differently to quickly demonstrate that Virgin Media wasn't just UPC painted red.

Our campaign needed to bring with it a sense of swagger and spectacle to cut through a cluttered market.

We adopted a strategy of **SPECTACULARLY BOLD SIMPLICITY** that could be summarised as:

**Create** a campaign to announce that UPC was becoming Virgin Media in Ireland

**with** a sense of bold spectacle that would generate as much bang for our buck as possible,

**and** demonstrate how Virgin Media was going to behave differently in order to create a sense of excitement around the brand

**to** make UPC customers feel re-energised by their provider

**resulting in** stickier customers, a reduction in customer losses and product bundle revenue improvement.

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## THE IDEA AND COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITY

### Creative Strategy:

Spectacularly simple is not especially easy – but after a few rounds of exploratory creative work and consumer research, we reached a creative theme that hit all the right notes.

We took a number of learnings about the most effective way to introduce this brand to Ireland. The need for simplicity was reinforced at every turn. The capacity for confusion (already in our minds given the experience of other markets) was significant. We knew we needed a clear and simple way to tell a story of constructive transformation, rather than “takeover” or “launch” and the promise of something better.

It also needed to feel big. Any of the work we tested that tried to conjure up excitement with small gestures was rejected in favour of bolder statements. The reason for this was twofold: the category and the UPC brand in particular were seen as lacking in excitement; and the Virgin Media brand was seen as deserving of a big splash.

The ambitious, playful personality of that brand was well received across all groups, in particular when it was personified by Richard Branson himself.

And finally, the need to make our campaign feel Irish was clear to us. Irish egos, and Irish people's sense of independence, were still fragile post-recession, so we needed to avoid any sense of an invader brand imposing itself for its own gain.

Our launch film kicked off with a modest UPC van being driven, Knight Rider-style, into a giant red truck speeding along an open road. The truck, glowing with tech and magic, was driven by Richard Branson himself. Pulling wide, we revealed a huge convoy of these trucks, about to deliver a dazzling new world of magic and entertainment across Ireland. It was a simple story, of constructive and exciting transformation – something reliable but modest turning into something bigger, energised and more exciting.



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## THE IDEA AND COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITY

This iconic red truck became a motif which represented that absorption of UPC into something bigger, sexier and full of promise rolling out across the country.

As a theme, it was deliberately simplistic and bombastic, and it delivered squarely on our strategy.

Ruthlessly clear about the brand change, it told a clear metamorphosis story about UPC-becoming-Virgin Media: the small van represented the reliable but dull old “utility” brand, becoming like the Intel-inside of the more exciting “entertainment” brand of Virgin Media.

It behaved with sufficient showmanship and swagger to whet the country's appetite for something more exciting and fun than its predecessor. It put Richard Branson (literally) in the driving seat, which at once thrilled, flattered and reassured the Irish audience. And finally, it made very clear that this campaign was created for Ireland – this was not a step-and-repeat launch, this was a conscious and bespoke transformation in a unique and valuable market.

The campaign was signed off with the promise, “Here comes the magic.” This was the most effective marriage of the Virgin Media brand promise with the needs of the Irish market and, in particular, the needs of existing UPC customers.

From the beginning, we were careful to pepper our campaign with executions which delivered on this promise of ‘magic’. We were especially conscious of this in those executions where the agenda was unashamedly to build memory structures around Virgin red, and the iconic but unfamiliar Virgin Media “infinity loop” logo. We pushed the capabilities of each medium to deliver a series of interactive and memorable versions of the Virgin Media logo.

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## THE IDEA AND COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITY

Bus shelters were turned into popcorn machines, where the popcorn travelled around the infinity loop before being dispensed for free in branded packs. Online, in expandable mastheads, we created simple but addictive interactive games that involved racing cars around the infinity loop, or passing a metal hoop around the shape of the logo without touching it. Simple, fun, almost Pavlovian ways of embedding our key memory structures in people's mind.

Throughout our hundreds of tailored EDM and DM variants, our many thousands of dynamic display variants, across our new brand website, and in our retail stores, we carefully balanced hard sell and playful entertainment. This was a brand that from the word go was doing things with more magic and customer focus, even if many of those things it was doing were the same things UPC had done before.

That we rolled out all of this transformative and joined-up material in just six weeks probably doesn't score us extra points, but it certainly added to our collective pride, especially in light of the results that followed.

### Use of channels.

With a media budget of just €2 million for Virgin Media's launch, we knew that behaving differently would be key to driving awareness, landing the brand and delivering the sales. We had two things to consider:

1. Smaller share of voice meant that we had to box clever and optimise as much as possible.
2. How could we demonstrate how Virgin Media makes good things happen?



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## THE IDEA AND COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITY

Investment in econometrics early in 2015 had taught us a few key lessons:

- ▶ Our multi-channel approach had been working well to date, but we needed to upweight the brand-specific activity in bigger media.
- ▶ We had to maintain a significant TV presence.
- ▶ New news campaigns boost TV ROI– we needed to focus on using TV to tell the big news for launch, not get bogged down in the detail of product offers.
- ▶ An increase in the weight of VOD increases the impact of TV spend – we un-weighted significantly for our launch campaign, and incorporated bespoke executions to optimise view-through rates.

As a result, we significantly altered the shape of our campaigns, to optimise it for launch.

We focused not just on what the communications were saying, but also how we could say it in a way that was true to Virgin Media.

We had two golden rules:

- ▶ Be full of surprises
- ▶ Disrupt the usual routine

Within each of our core mass awareness media channels, we planned to deliver moments which would answer one or all of the above golden rules.

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## THE IDEA AND COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITY

### TV

Alongside our standard heavyweight spot campaign, which drove mass awareness of the campaign message, we also ran a weekend takeover on Ireland's second biggest TV station – TV3.

The takeover saw short stings run at high frequency across the weekend on any unsponsored programming. This was surprising for viewers and disrupted their usual routine.

We ran a giveaway in The Late Late Show on the launch weekend, giving one lucky winner an amazing prize in the show that featured an interview with Richard Branson. The competition made people smile, and Richard's interview got people talking.

### Outdoor

Along with standard OOH, we built bespoke posters with 3D and lighting effects in high profile, urban locations.

In Cork, Dublin and Galway, animated light projections danced across iconic buildings, lighting up the cities and giving people a reason to smile.

Finally, we installed 2 popcorn-dispensing 6-sheets in Dublin city centre to bring joy to the mundane commute.

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## THE IDEA AND COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITY

### Digital

We planned a massive reach campaign – essentially blocking off the entire internet for the day of launch. A YouTube masthead and Facebook reach-block delivered reach of 3.16 million in one day, as well as HPTOs on Ireland's biggest websites.

We ran in-banner games that drove brilliant engagement and interaction rates, and allowed users to experience some of the fun which Virgin Media is renowned for. Delivering on all of the golden rules!

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## RESULTS

Despite all of the potential hurdles, and there were many along the way, the launch of Virgin Media has been a huge success for the business.

We created a campaign that outperformed our higher-spending competitors, and delivered against brand and commercial metrics to not only drive a reduction in churn, but actually saw the average product holding per customer increase – they now had more bundles with Virgin Media, making them more valuable to the business and less likely to churn. All in just under three months. Hooray!

### Campaign Impact:

“Here comes the magic” did exactly what it set out to do, and did it to great effect.

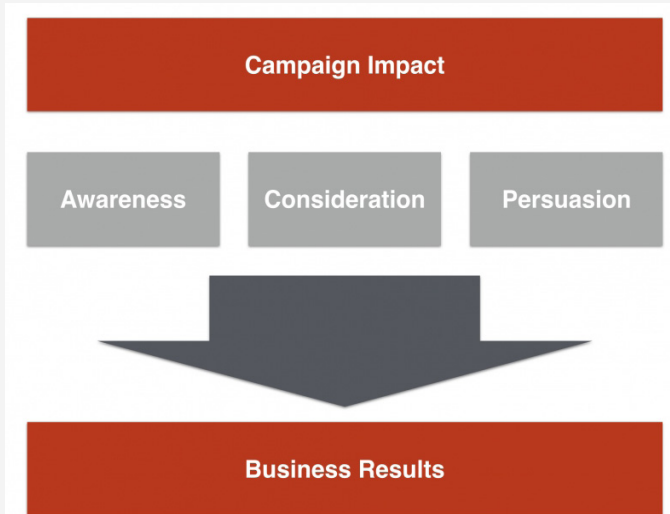
Our campaign had managed to cut through the clutter within the market to quickly establish Virgin Media as an exciting brand that was breathing new life into the category.

It also created massive bang for our buck, so that not only did our smaller share of voice not impinge our success, but we actually outperformed our competitors on several levels.

By Christmas, the campaign had achieved 44% spontaneous awareness. The campaign also met or exceeded category benchmarks for messaging, with consumers finding it clear, easy to understand, likeable and - most importantly - memorable.

In Link Testing, our ad far outperformed the competition in Awareness and Persuasion, landing us firmly in the top right-hand box.

With Awareness Index scores more than double the norm and three times that of eir, our standout was exceptional.



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## RESULTS

Our persuasion score was 66% versus a norm of 45%, due to the campaign significantly exceeding norms, with excitement being the dominant emotional response – just what we were hoping for.

Thrillingly, given the business' nervousness surrounding the re-brand after the Ziggo launch in the Netherlands, even though Richard Branson's appearance was an almost flawless branding cue, it was the Virgin Media brand that was the hero of the story. We exceeded the online norm in every single component measure of branding.

The campaign was successfully communicating the arrival of the new brand as a replacement for UPC, so we were minimising confusion amongst consumers.

### What was it doing for the brand?

The effects of the campaign have been strong from launch and we have seen significant results in each of the areas we were tracking – brand awareness, consideration and persuasion.

Our goal for brand awareness was to reach 60% by September 2016, and by the end of 2015 we had already climbed to 43%, well on the way to success.

Consideration levels for Virgin media grew rapidly. By December they were at 55% versus our target of 40%.

“Very positive” brand impressions were strong and building quickly, from 15% in October (launch month) to 23% in November and 26% by year end, versus only 17% for eir.

The brand was seen as modern and innovative – the legacy cues from UPC that we needed to retain and build upon. In addition, Virgin Media was already seen as being unique, future-proof and progressive. We were changing the game for the brand.

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## RESULTS

We are quickly coming to be seen as a dynamic, energetic and fun brand – approaching the levels of SKY.

We were retaining all of the positive UPC brand associations relating to broadband as a competitive strength, and were seen as a fun brand. Overall, our positive brand associations were developing much more quickly than those of eir.

We were also much more persuasive than eir. And SKY. By the end of the year, we had become the most preferred bundle supplier in the market, achieved 150% of our preference target within two months of launch, and increased further to 32% by February 2016.

Our rejection rates were also lower than any other bundle provider – they were only half of eir's! And connectedly, our associations for treating customers well and being worth paying more for were building quickly, and we reached parity with established category brands within two months.

### **But was this translating into a reduction in churn?**

It definitely was. By the end of the year, just under three months after launching, our churn rate had reduced – we were protecting our core.

Beyond churn reduction though, we had also seen the value of customers increase:

Our bundling rate had increased.

Our mobile acquisition rate exceeded target.

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## RESULTS

### Did advertising drive this?

Econometrics had told us ahead of campaign that advertising was increasingly responsible for driving sales.

Our launch campaign had quickly established Virgin Media as a game-changing brand within the market, bringing a much-needed level of excitement, and we had begun to lay strong foundations for further brand growth in 2016.

We are able to determine that for every €1 spent, the Virgin Media launch returned €1.72 to the business.

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## IMPACT ON BEHAVIOURAL ACTIVITY AND PAYBACK

Across the board, we have seen consumers' attitudes and behaviours towards the business change as a result of the rebrand.

As well as Virgin Media quickly taking on the positive attributes of UPC as detailed above, the brand is also delivering against positive impact statements that UPC did not, such as "Is unique" and "Is future-proof and progressive", indicating a shift attitude.

Virgin Media is building upon the legacy that it inherited and adding extra oomph!

Additionally, the brand is seen to treat customers well – consumers are already seeing that Virgin Media makes this better – and as a result, they believe that the brand "Is worth paying more for".

We have quickly reached parity with established brands within the category, and are outperforming eir.

Notably, this perception is translating into behaviour.

When customers have more products with a single provider, they become more valuable to the business, as well as being "stickier" and less likely to churn.

We are the most preferred bundle provide in the entire category after only a couple of months.

Overall, in a very short amount of time, the Virgin Media brand has made early but significant strides in delivering consideration and preference via positive shifts in attitude towards the business. We have seen this translate into an impact upon the business too, with reduced churn and improved customer value.

It's early days, but a very positive start!

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## NEW LEARNINGS

Econometrics taught us that while our multichannel approach is great, there's room for improvement. We have already initiated changes by:

- ▶ Reducing TV copy from 100% 40" to a mixture of 40", 30" and 20" copy to maximise ROI.
- ▶ Unweighting the volume of brand-led activity as it will still drive demand and sales tomorrow.
- ▶ Having fun with media formats to quickly bring the "Make good things happen" promise to life in a tangible way.

We also learned that you can achieve a hell of a lot in just 14 weeks with a bit of blood, sweat and only a few tears!

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## SUMMARY

Since 2010, UPC had established a broadband high ground and secured market share.

But it was in danger of extinction.

The market had changed and become highly commoditised. There was a race to the bottom via discounting.

We needed to do something drastic.

And we did.

In just 14 weeks, we created and launched a ballsy, single-minded campaign that said goodbye to UPC and hello to Virgin Media.

Ireland, and our customers, fell in love with us again.

Reducing churn, increasing value and building a brand primed for future growth.

Virgin Media really does make good things happen.

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## MEDIA GALLERY

TV



DIGITAL



OUTDOOR

