



Best Short-Term Activation

Dogs Trust #SoldAPup - Stop the Illegal Sale of Dogs

1) Background & Objectives

Every year, Dogs Trust launches a campaign in the run-up to Christmas as sadly, this is typically the time of year when people are most likely to rush out to buy a puppy as a gift. However, 2020 was a year like no other, and we saw a substantial surge in the number of people looking to add a puppy to their family. Google Analytics revealed a 400% increase in people searching the term 'puppies for sale' during the initial lockdown. Through research with vets, surveys, and speaking with dog owners throughout the year, we discovered that many people had unwittingly purchased a puppy from a puppy farm and sadly had suffered the consequences from the loopholes irresponsible breeders utilize for their own agenda. This research led us to create the multi-layered #SoldAPup campaign.

#SoldAPup aimed to highlight the cruelty and deception surrounding the breeding and subsequent illegal selling and advertising of dogs. The campaign asked people to sign a petition calling for enforcement of the [Sale, Supply and Advertising laws](#) to help end the cruelty of puppy farming.

The main facet of this campaign was an animation which was shown on TV and aimed not only to expose this vile trade and educate the public on where their 'cute' new puppy could come from but also ask the question – what happens to the mum left behind? We want to evoke real change and spare as many dogs as possible from a life of misery. We also want to save people from the potential emotional distress should their puppy farmed dog pass away, which sadly is frequently reported by upset dog owners.

Our objectives were threefold: to educate the public on the true nature of puppy farms and the lengths unethical breeders go to in order to hide this; to encourage dog lovers to sign our petition calling for the enforcement of the new laws surrounding the sale, supply, and advertising of pets; and to grow vital financial support to fund our life-saving work.

Our specific objectives:

1. To see robust enforcement of the new Sale, Supply and Advertising of Pets laws. **Goal:** 25,000 petition signatures to present to the Government, showing the public appetite for proper enforcement of the new regulations.
2. Generate high profile media coverage across Ireland, focusing our efforts on achieving significant national TV coverage. **Goal:** 8M reach
3. Drive traffic to our petition webpage that also educates the public about the new laws surrounding the Sale, Supply, and Advertising of Pets **Goal:** 50,000 views
4. Target a wider audience with adverts via TV, radio, and digital channels. **Goal:** 5M reach



5. Increase regular giving and one-off donations compared to a similar campaign that we ran in 2018. **Goal:** Increase both by 10%
6. Generate exposure for #SoldAPup across social media. **Goal:** 1M impressions
7. To increase the levels of brand trust and the likelihood of receiving support. **Goal:** Increase both by 1%

2) The Strategy

The campaign was executed by our in-house Communications and Fundraising teams, who created, developed, and implemented the campaign strategy and oversaw all aspects of its delivery.

Our primary target audience was parents, particularly those with young children who might ask for a dog at Christmas, as well as people aged 25-35 who may be thinking of getting their first dog and perhaps having recently moved out of the parental home. We also identified additional audiences who would also enable us to spread our message far and wide, including our supporters, dog lovers and national, regional, online and newspaper outlets.

We conducted research via an online survey asking people to tell us about their recent experience of purchasing a dog. We also performed in-house examinations of our records of contact with members of the public and external research with vets. Finally, we ran an [online quiz](#) to see if the general population were aware of the new laws and if they could spot illegally advertised dogs.

The results of our research made it very apparent that a worryingly high volume of people had rushed into purchasing a dog online and were tricked into thinking the puppy came from a reputable source, based on the details supplied in the online advertisement. We also discerned that a shocking 72% of respondents were unaware of the new laws introduced in early 2020, and even if they were, they could not spot an illegal advertisement for a dog or puppy. This confirmed our message needed to be strongly promoted in the weeks leading up to Christmas to urge people to carefully research where they obtain their puppy from and to deter anyone thinking of getting a dog as a Christmas present for their children, from doing so.

The campaign strategy cut across the entire marketing mix with ATL and BTL activation activities which included our emotional, animated [TV advert](#). The animation demonstrates the awful reality of where purchased puppies may originate and how easy it is for puppy farmers to hide behind the façade of online adverts. To reach as many people as possible, we used a wide variety of platforms and identified TV advertising as a way to reach as many people as possible.

3) The Plan

We created an animated ad that was suitable for national television so that we could ensure it would be seen by the maximum number of potential dog owners, dog lovers and cold audiences who may not be familiar with our work. It was played in the run-up to Christmas



when people would be most likely to consider purchasing a puppy in haste. We targeted peak television moments such as the launch night of 'I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here' and the ad break after the Nine O'Clock News and before the Late Late Show on RTÉ.

The ad was shown a total of 767 times across Virgin Media, RTÉ and Sky TV's channels. It ran for three weeks from November 11th-29th on all channels and then an additional week on Sky TV from December 5th – 13th.

We also identified RTE One's, 'The Today Show' to target, being one of the most-watched daytime programmes on Irish TV, with further increases in viewership reported during the pandemic. The presenters discussed the importance of the campaign in depth with a panel of guests and played the animation in full. A Dogs Trust Brand Ambassador, also appeared on 'The Six O'clock Show' on Virgin Media, to discuss the campaign.

As well as the TV ad, we had a radio ad that used the same audio as the animation. The radio ad was played on 3 national radio stations and ran during the same time period as the TV ad, to reinforce the message. We also ran a digital Ad campaign, seeded press releases and content, extensive use of carefully targeted social media and digital platforms and compelling case studies to give a face to the upsetting reality of puppy farming.

Before the campaign launch, we reached out to celebrities and asked if they would be advocates for us and share and tweet about our campaign. Many showed their support and #SoldAPup trended in Ireland on Twitter the day we launched!

We created Facebook lead-ads using captivating and emotive storytelling to convey the heart-breaking anguish of dog owners who had been 'Sold a Pup', as well as directly asking people if they wanted to help stop puppy farming by signing our petition. We used a mixture of different content and copy to ensure our message was performing to the best of its ability.

4) The Results

We were delighted to exceed every objective for this campaign.

Goal 1: Call for robust enforcement of the new Sale, Supply and Advertising of Pets Regulations via 25,000 petition signatures.

Achieved: Signatures currently stand at 52,307, and we intend to deliver the petition to Government in the coming months.

Goal 2: Generate high profile national media coverage, focusing our efforts on achieving significant national TV coverage and reaching 8 million people across Ireland.

Achieved: Featured nine times in national newspapers and five regional newspapers, while online news sites covered it 37 times. It was discussed on the radio 35 times in a combination of news bulletins and interviews and was featured organically on television on RTE 1 and Virgin Media 8 times in total. Through all of this media coverage, we reached over 12 million people. The Today Show alone reached over 1.3 million people! Thanks to this campaign the Irish Times also conducted a video interview with Dogs Trust Executive Director Becky Bristow, which was posted on their website. In the interview, Ms Bristow discussed how to avoid purchasing a dog from puppy farms, which helped further our campaign messaging.



Goal 3: Drive 50,000 views of our petition webpage that also educates the public about the new laws surrounding the sale, supply, and advertising of pets and why they are needed.

Achieved: 85,589 views.

Goal 4: Target a wider audience via TV, radio and digital advertising and reach 5M.

Achieved: 12.7M reach.

Goal 5: Increase Regular Giving and one-off donations compared to a similar campaign by 10%.

Achieved: Achieved an increase of 26% in regular giving, and one-off donations increased by 715%.

Goal 6: Generate exposure for #SoldAPup across social media via 1 million social media impressions.

Achieved: 4.66 million impressions.

Goal 7: To increase the levels of brand trust and the likelihood of receiving support by 1%

Achieved: Brand trust increased from 65% in December 2019 to 71% in December 2020, and 54% of people surveyed in December 2019 advised they would be more likely to support Dogs Trust, compared to 57% in December 2020. (Source: ICEM)

Being a charity, we must ensure that every euro spent, as well as the time that is taken to complete a task, is maximised to the fullest potential. We were delighted with the results we achieved with a limited budget, for both time and money. It is calculated that between team meetings, brainstorming, planning, and developing a strategy, the campaign planning and execution totalled 60 hours. This includes five full-time team members dedicating 25% of their working week, over the course of 8-weeks, to #SoldAPup.

5) Client Involvement

The campaign strategy was executed entirely by our in-house Communications and Fundraising teams. We employed an Irish production company, Cardel, to create our animation. We used KBM Media to purchase our TV and Radio ads and also targeted digital display advertising to ensure we reached the right audience.