

'Talk to EU'

Presentation to Communicating European Citizenship

UACES Conference organised by the
Foreign & Commonwealth Office

London, 22 March 2010

The logo consists of a yellow rectangular background. In the center, there is a white horizontal bar. Inside this bar, the text 'www.talktoeu.ie' is displayed. 'www.' is in a small, dark blue font. 'talktoeu' is in a larger, bold font, with 'talk' in green, 'to' in dark blue, and 'eu' in a lighter blue. '.ie' is in a small, dark blue font.

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ABSTRACT

TalktoEU is a year-long EU communications project currently being delivered in Ireland on behalf of the European Commission Representation in Ireland. The core element is listening to the views of Irish citizens and increasing general awareness about the contribution which the EU makes to the everyday lives of Irish people. This is done at events organised with project partners; on the project's web site www.taktoEU.ie; via social networking; by press and media advertising; by cinema advertising; by a schools' essay competition; and by providing facts about the EU's contribution at local and community level. While **TalktoEU** is still work in progress, initial findings are positive, with significant numbers of the national population being made aware of the **TalktoEU** project. The approach and methodology of the **TalktoEU** project could be replicated, suitably adapted, in other Member States, at regional level, and indeed in candidate countries.

Background

On 20 January 2009, the European Commission Representation in Ireland (ECR) published an Invitation to Tender (ITT) for the provision of services for public information on the European Union (EU).¹ Specifically, the service provider, within an indicative budget of €1.6m, was asked to develop and implement a number of information and communication initiatives in Ireland in relation to the EU, its policies and its Institutions. The successful contractor was required to develop a detailed communication plan. The target groups identified were younger people, women of all ages, and lower income families and individuals.

The contract was subsequently awarded for one year (to 19th May 2010) in April 2009 following a competitive tender.

The consortium that won the tender was branded **TalktoEU**, and comprises:

Edelman (www.edelman.com) – a PR company with 58 offices world-wide – is the lead contractor. Edelman is a global player with in depth and considerable experience in the fields of PR/Communications.

EPS Consulting (www.epsconsult.ie) brings unparalleled EU expertise and expert knowledge of EU policy as well as practical experience in relation to stakeholder consultations and communications.

Zoo Digital (www.zoodigital.ie) is responsible for the web site (www.talkto.ie) and social networking, and has a solid track record in these areas. In addition, they look after the digital content and advertising.

PHD Media (www.phd.co.uk) is responsible for media planning and buying.

This paper sets out the project's key aims, approach and methodology, and provides the performance metrics derived to date. The lessons learned from **TalktoEU**, one of the Commission's largest and most ambitious communications initiatives, are also described.

Introduction

TalktoEU is an exciting, yet challenging project for several reasons.

Firstly, the project is being delivered at a time when the public mood in Ireland is quite negative as a consequence of the economic recession.

Secondly, there is a high level of disinterest in European affairs within the target groups identified in the ITT. Indeed, there is a chronic and deeply rooted lack of knowledge about Europe in Ireland.

¹ OJ 2009/S 12-015428, 20 January 2009.

Finally, and in contrast, Irish citizens are among the most supportive of the EU and the communication plan was designed to build on this.

Survey findings and the events programme organised by the ECR in 2009 pointed to key learning lessons about the style and tone of communications on EU issues prior to the launch of the project.

These key lessons could be summarised as follows:

- The main challenges are a chronic and deeply rooted lack of knowledge about European affairs and the fact that a quarter of the groups to be targeted have no interest at all in Europe.
- Improving awareness of matters European can best be done by making 'Europe' relevant at the level of the individual with reference to issues that strike a particular chord in terms of a person's daily life.
- Improving people's knowledge of the EU involves a significant effort to convince them that 'their view counts.' In turn, one needs to be careful in selecting the policy issues that are used to demonstrate this empowerment.
- Not only must there be a genuine commitment to listening, but there must also be open communication of this commitment.
- Each of the three target groups has its own distinct agenda; the elements of the communications campaign have therefore been differentiated and the consortium must be conscious that, for example, what interests women may be quite different to what will engage manual workers.
- Selecting the topics around which the communication campaign concentrates is a critical success factor. The debate must be on meaningful topics that resonate.
- While the main communications medium is the internet, outreach sessions with relevant information multipliers are also an important feature.
- The campaign also strives to take advantage of the generally positive attitude that Irish people have towards Europe; therefore the 'benefits of Europe' at personal, local and national level, subliminally communicated as required, are an element of the campaign.
- The style, tone and manner of communications is to be clear, accessible, and avoid being high brow. For example, the younger audience will expect messaging pitched at their level.
- Encouraging debates on matters European within the family, at work or socialising with friends is a high focus. Getting discussions going on EU issues in an informal and non-threatening setting is therefore a top priority.
- Some socio-economic groups are not at all inclined to participate in events such as lectures.

Another positive identified at the outset was the high interest in politics in Ireland and the willingness of Irish people to engage and seek to influence when issues impact on them or on their family.

The starting point was that as this is clearly a 'listening' programme, the project partners needed to listen - and be seen to listen - from the very outset. We therefore set everyone's expectations at a realistic level, while recognising it is unlikely that this programme will completely reverse the general Irish population's disinterest in European affairs.

Project Aims

TalktoEU aims to:

1. *Listen* to the views of citizens;
2. *Engage* with citizens to determine their concerns;
3. *Explain* how the EU may play a role in addressing those concerns (and to explain when the EU isn't the appropriate outlet);
4. *Seek* feedback as to whether citizens are aware of the EU's effort in specific areas;
5. *Obtain* views on the future direction of EU policy; and
6. *Facilitate* citizens to articulate their views directly with decision-makers (and making better use of media in the process).

The project seeks to demonstrate in the clearest manner possible that *we are listening*; that our unambiguous aim is to engage in the most meaningful manner possible; and that we will not be at all directional about the opinions that citizens might wish to express: *they set the agenda*.

The **TalktoEU** project is, in tone and style, intended to sit at the centre of citizens' needs; on issues that will be seen as affecting their daily lives.

TalktoEU engages with citizens and groups, irrespective of their background or opinions on Europe, in an open and discursive manner, endeavouring to prove that the EU has nothing to hide or fear by such a debate.

The **TalktoEU** project falls broadly under four sections

- 1) Listening and events programme
- 2) Enhanced web presence and social networking
- 3) Advertising – including cinema, print and radio
- 4) Alternative Promotions

Context

The implementation of this project has regard to the principles already agreed between the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers; namely in order for citizens to exercise their right to participate in the democratic life of the Union, decisions will be taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen, observing the principles of pluralism, participation, openness and transparency.²

Therefore **TalktoEU** is endeavouring to provide fair and diverse information about the EU so as to enable Irish citizens to exercise their right to express their views and to participate actively in the public discourse on the EU issues covered by the ITT.

In addition, and having regard to the Memorandum of Understanding signed between Ireland, the European Commission and the European Parliament, we are endeavouring to add value to the collective effort in relation to Communicating Europe.³

A key part is to 'listen better' and to 'explain better' while 'going local'. In specific terms, Irish citizens need to be empowered to get accessible information that enables them to be in a position to hold informed debates on EU affairs. The ITT therefore envisaged that the three target audiences would be able to articulate directly with decision-makers from the Commission and Government Departments (as Irish public servants are also EU policy-makers) and in so doing make better use of the media in the process. It was critical to rectify the current gap that exists between Europe and its citizens; a challenge that the European Commission has long recognised.

This project builds on the success of similar but earlier civic society initiatives completed in other Member States that involved, for example, internet debates; visits by Members of the Commission; and the supply of detailed briefing material.

The projects undertaken to date are far more limited in terms of their desired outputs than the Irish project.

The Communication's Challenge

One of the challenges for this project was to meet the ambition to 'bridge the gap between politics at national and European level'.

Another challenge was to identify and even brand the project as quite separate and distinct from any activity relating to the second Lisbon referendum, including activities carried out by civic society groups who were engaged with this information and communications initiative.

² The project builds on the Commission's Plan D for Dialogue, Democracy and Debate; the White Paper on a European Communication Policy; and the Commission's (October 2008) Communication 'Communicating Europe in Partnership'. COM (2005) 494 final, 13 October 2005 and COM (2008) 158 final, 2 April 2008. See also the White Paper on a European Communications Policy; COM (2006) 35 final, 1 February 2006.

³ Department of Foreign Affairs, Invitation to Tender, 23 October 2008.

Thus, before the project partners started work on the design and optimal implementation methodology of the four modules which are the core elements of the information and communications campaign, we spent some time reviewing Irish attitudes to the EU, the current state of citizens' knowledge, and in particular the views of the target groups that are our priority focus.

While recent reports and surveys deal primarily with Irish attitudes to Europe in the context of recent referendums, these projects provided over-arching findings that were critical for the way that this project should be organised and delivered.

Addressing the following research findings, and adapting the campaign accordingly, is therefore critical for the successful delivery of the project.

Knowledge of the EU

At the time of the Nice Treaty referendum there was a distinct lack of knowledge in relation to the EU and its institutions (with a staggering 63% registering zero awareness).⁴ This dearth of knowledge was the primary – and indeed the most spontaneous – reason across the three target groups why they voted 'No' in the first Lisbon referendum (or the main reason why they abstained). As a consequence, it is perhaps understandable that there continues to be a high degree of misunderstanding about the EU, its institutions and in relation to EU policy issues. The 'lack of information/knowledge' problem that underpins negative views on Europe goes well beyond the boundaries of the Lisbon Treaty. With almost half the population expressing a poor grasp of EU affairs, this project faced a particular challenge to make the EU more accessible and meaningful to the average person.

Interest in European Affairs

On average, some 24% of all people have stated they are not interested in European affairs. Women (26%); young people (23%); and manual workers (24%) fall into this category of disinterest. Given that decisions taken at European level have a direct and significant influence of individuals' daily lives, the fact that almost one quarter of the population is completely disengaged was a matter of concern.⁵

Sources of information

The effectiveness, or otherwise, of communications about the EU had a significant impact on Irish peoples' response to European issues. The highest rated sources of information were 'Discussion With Family and Friends' which scored 55% in terms of being 'somewhat or very valuable' and 'Newspaper Articles' at 48%. Worryingly, according to the Millward Brown data, given the emphasis on the internet as the primary medium for the **TalktoEU** project, only 12% believed this source of information was rated as being 'valuable';⁶ the Eurobarometer findings were higher (16%), with some 26% younger people (18-24 year olds) relying on the web.⁷ Booklets and leaflets did not work

⁴ *Attitudes and Behaviour of the Irish Electorate in the Referendum on the Treaty of Nice*, results of a survey of public opinion carried out for the ECR in Ireland by Irish Marketing Surveys Limited in association with EOS Gallup Europe. Analysis and report by Professor Richard Sinnott.

⁵ Flash Eurobarometer, *Post-referendum survey in Ireland*, Analytical Report, July 2008.

⁶ Millward Brown IMS, *Post Lisbon Treaty Referendum Research Findings*, September 2008.

⁷ For an assessment of the outcome of the second Lisbon referendum refer to *Lisbon Treaty Post-Referendum Survey*, Ireland 2009, Analytical Report, Flash Eurobarometer, October 2009.

as a communication medium. The complexity of the issues being explained was a factor in people's perceptions as to what communications medium was most effective. Encouragingly, some 26% of respondents rated information from the European Commission as a primary source. On the other hand, only 8% believed that material provided by the trade unions was their preferred source. Importantly, younger people rely on family, friends and colleagues for information. The lower socio-economic groups do not rate debates or public meetings as a good source of information about the EU.

Women

Some 56% of women voted 'No' to Lisbon, and they expressed 'disinterest in politics' (34%) and 'no interest in European affairs' (27%) as key reasons for this view. Of this group, female students (72%) comprise a large portion followed by housewives (63%).

Younger people

Some 59% of 25 to 34 year olds voted 'No' on Lisbon. This cohort is less enthusiastic about Ireland's membership of the EU, with quite a number struggling to identify specific benefits associated with it. Their focus was on what they perceived to be as 'EU negative' such as rising interest rates, and a perception that the euro was responsible for 'rip-off Ireland' and rising prices generally. Young people generally 'cannot be bothered' to read and absorb information about the EU. As a consequence, younger people are far less likely (on a ratio of 2 to 1) to get engaged on European matters.

Socio-economic groups

Up to 65% of the blue collar C2DE socio-economic groups did not support the Lisbon Treaty, with a full third not at all interested in European affairs (this figure was as high as 41% for manual workers). This group's views on the benefits of EU membership was similar to those expressed by the under 30s. Also in common with younger people, the lower socio-economic groups appear to have a fairly limited appetite for additional information and appear generally disinterested in European issues.

Support for the EU

In contrast to these findings, the vast majority of Irish people (between 70% and 87% depending on which survey is cited – the second highest of all member states), are very positive in terms of their attitude towards the EU. Even among 'No' voters, a majority believe that Ireland's best interests are pursued by remaining fully involved within the EU. While this sentiment contrasts sharply with the poor level of general awareness about the EU, it does suggest that if a person perceives that the EU is relevant to their personal situation their level of support for the EU is higher if one discounts their opinion on Treaty specific issues.

Therefore, the intent of the EU to "listen better" is in line with the seismic shifts that have happened not only in communications, but in the democratic public environment.

A new model for communication is emerging, one that *TalktoEU* has termed 'public engagement'.

To understand the model and to implement the best possible 'listening' plan, we needed to consider some key guiding principles before launching *TalktoEU*. These were:

- The citizen is emergent, if not resurgent.

- Communication can never be divorced from what is being communicated.
- Communications should not be institution-centric.
- Affording the Irish public an opportunity to express their needs, wants, thoughts and opinions clearly and effectively is only half of the communication process needed for an effective campaign...the other half is listening and understanding what they communicate back and doing something about it.

Style and Tone

The Millward Brown IMS findings made pertinent observations about the style and tone of communications on the EU that are relevant to this project. For instance, jargon should be avoided; more visuals and images should be used; simple explanations of decision-making are essential; EU benefits should be highlighted; the importance of advances in human and workers rights are especially important, as are environmental and climate change issues; and finally, it is critical to set out how Irish people can influence the development of the EU.⁸

Therefore **TalktoEU** pitched its tasks and work programme at the centre of citizens' needs; on issues that were seen as affecting their daily lives.

Coupled with knowledge of the subject matter, we decided to encourage and cajole citizens to get engaged with Europe – many for the first time. The target groups – NGOs and individuals – are driving their agendas. Our job is to facilitate dialogue and conversation with policy makers and, of course, between the stakeholders themselves.

We have made it possible through easy reading and jargon-free (less high brow) communications; for Irish citizens to be wowed by Europe; to become aware as to how Europe affects their daily lives; and building on this foundation, and relying on active listening, to improve general awareness of and interest in Europe.

We expect once the project is completed that through various media – the internet and social networks in particular – there will be a truly meaningful and liberating 'Conversation with Citizens'.

Methodology

While the numbers reached by **TalktoEU** communications is important, so too is the quality of the listening and dialogue.

Communications are jargon-free, accessible, relevant and based on several platforms; the web especially. The main challenge has been to pick topics that engage and excite the interest of the target groups.

⁸ Op cit Millward Brown IMS.

Having reviewed the list of issues suggested in the ITT and the Commission's legislative and work programme for 2009,⁹ and bearing in mind the target audiences and their general disposition to EU affairs, the project partners have concentrated resources on the three to four issues identified from this research. The final selection of topics was stress tested with the project partners before a final decision was taken.

The key desiderata was whatever topic is chosen must have the potential to resonate with the target audience. It was important therefore that the list covered areas that citizens can get their teeth into. As we are seeking to build a dialogue with EU policy-makers, issues that are relevant to the daily lives of Irish citizens were chosen.

Our main challenge is to ensure that the *TalktoEU* project is viewed by the project stakeholders as a genuine effort on the part of the Commission to engage with people and explain its work rather than to allow detractors dismiss it as propaganda. Therefore the project is subtle in terms of the messages it sends out. The hope is to engage citizens and create a positive disposition towards Europe without necessarily suggesting this directly.

Listening Events

Purpose

The overall objective of the listening events programme has been to listen to the views and concerns of Irish citizens and to explain how the EU may play a role in addressing those concerns. The concerns of citizens cover a large number of areas, including employment, the economy, human rights, security, the environment and climate change. The EU wishes to hear if citizens are aware of EU efforts in these and other areas and to hear views on the direction that EU policy is taking in each of these areas.

Overview

Some 46 events will have been organised within a twelve month period to end-May 2010. The focus has been to give the 'champions' within the civic society partner groups a high profile and an opportunity to communicate with their members and EU policy makers.

The format of each session typically includes:

- Short talk from the person proposing the topic
- Debate – exchange of opinion
- What we would like more of
- What we would like less of
- Suggested new actions, encouraging everyone to take responsibility, by action orientated intentions

⁹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Commission Legislative and Work programme 2009, Acting Now for a better Europe, Volume 1, COM(2008) 712 final, 5 November 2008.

One of the main aims of the signature events is to involve a strong, structured and deep engagement with Irish citizens. These seminars have been designed to secure real engagement on real issues (the environment, women in Europe, social Europe, reform of the Common Fisheries Policy etc.), thereby giving the overall events programme the necessary momentum. A key output of these seminars is the identification of the issues that the civic society groups (and other individual participants) believe to be important to them and issues upon which they hold views that should be communicated to EU policy-makers.



Figure 1: Eddie McVeigh (ECR) at a listening event

The invited audience to each half-day signature event – with the project web site providing the necessary practical details – are given a clear explanation about current and emerging EU policy in these areas. Presentations also focus on how these proposals affect the daily lives of Irish citizens; how best citizens can engage with EU policy makers; and the key issues to which citizens wish to contribute.

To date, 17 listening events have been held in locations all over Ireland, including key urban centres such as Cork, Galway, Limerick, Dublin and Waterford. The programme also included one signature event in partnership with environmental NGOs. The format of each event has been a public discussion, led by Chairperson Dr. Peter Brennan and an ECR spokesperson – Tim

Hayes, Eddie McVeigh or Ruth Deasy.

In advance of the listening events held prior to the holding of the Lisbon Treaty referendum, invitations were distributed by email and post to community groups, County Councils, local politicians, businesses, Chambers of Commerce and third level institutions and then followed up by telephone by EPS Consulting. Many of those contacted, in turn, distributed information on the events to their members. In approximately half of the locations, posters and flyers were also distributed to promote the listening events. The events were also supported by advertisements in regional newspapers and on regional radio.

A public relations strategy has also been implemented to complement the listening programme, with tailored press releases distributed to relevant regional and local media in each area two weeks in advance of the event and photography with extended captions being released to each outlet the day after each event.

The quality of dialogue at all events to date has been very good, with participants asking a myriad of questions, most of which were responded to on the night. All questions have been noted and are posted and responded to on the **TalktoEU** website. Every event has been recorded by webcast, and edited sections have been posted on YouTube and on the **TalktoEU** website as a means of answering questions.



Figure 2: A participant addresses the ECR at a listening event

While the numbers of people made directly aware of the **TalktoEU** campaign are high, the numbers attending the events themselves to date has been low (927). The low attendance can somewhat be attributed to timing, with events taking place in the peak holiday season of July and August. This was particularly evident

amongst local politicians and the business community, who did not engage with the campaign due to holidays. As the Lisbon Treaty was not yet on the national agenda, many of the groups and individuals contacted were not inspired to turn up. While all of the 'Yes' campaign organisations advertised ECR events, very few actually attended the events, preferring to support their own.

A different strategy was adopted in relation to the second phase of the listening events programme, with all events being organised by organisations with whom **TalktoEU** has partnered. These include Junior Achievement,¹⁰ Network Ireland,¹¹ ICTU,¹² and poverty groups.¹³ This approach is working with 484 people attending four events organised in the past weeks. For example, the Junior Achievement partnership provides a two-hour EU quiz and 'Fact Fest' to transition year students and the expectation is that given initial positive feedback it will continue beyond the period of the **TalktoEU** project.

A webcast of all events is prepared, as well as a listening report for the ECR that includes an assessment of participants' feedback based on questionnaires distributed at each event.

Online Communications

Purpose

The ECR wished to enhance its internet presence and ensure a more interactive and responsive internet presence to communicate with citizens and update EU news on an ongoing basis. The specific aim has been to provide an avenue of engagement with specific audiences on topics of interest.

Overview

www.talktoeu.ie is the hub of the project.

It is rich in content; updated as required; influenced on an on-going basis by what **TalktoEU** learns from all listening activities; and easy to use and navigate. The site is capable of providing video streaming and podcasts. It is the medium for chatter and blogs. It includes youtube posts and other promotional material. It is humorous, newsy and informative.

We also use the site to support the events and schools' essay competition.

¹⁰ www.juniorachievement.ie

¹¹ www.networkireland.ie

¹² www.ictu.ie

¹³ These include the Simon Community, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and APN.

Google Analytics is installed as this allows us to track and report hits and messaging and to undertake surveys. In addition, we employ a SMS platform and use Really Simple Syndication (RSS) streams to allow us to broadcast direct to users' desktops. The site is also used for web-based consultations. These channels include twitter.com, facebook.com and bebo.com and are targeted at women and the 18-30 age cohort. These listening platforms have let loose all kinds of interaction and debate; some positive, some negative. bebo.com – with one million subscribers in Ireland - has the potential to generate new interest in Europe from a generation that has little or no awareness of the EU. The majority of facebook.com's 462,000 Irish members are female and so this is a key channel. As some 74% of all Irish internet users visit youtube.com, we generate content to re-enforce the identity of the campaign.

With the reach of these social networks, it is possible to generate discussion and conversations on the impact of the EU at levels never previously contemplated in Ireland.

Talk to EU Website

www.talktoEU.ie was launched on 7th August. The style and tone of the site is humorous, newsy and informative – intended to appeal to a younger target audience. To date *TalktoEU* has received approximately 29,000 unique visitors who have stayed on the site for an average of 1 minute 40 seconds. *TalktoEU* has answered 813 questions from the public. Edited sections from each listening event have been posted on the website as a means of answering questions. The website has also been used to support alternative promotions, such as the county reports, video booths and the schools' essay competition.

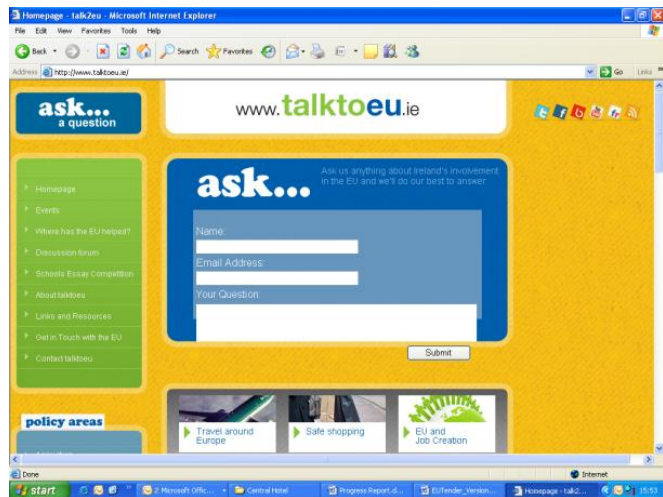


Figure 4: TalktoEU website

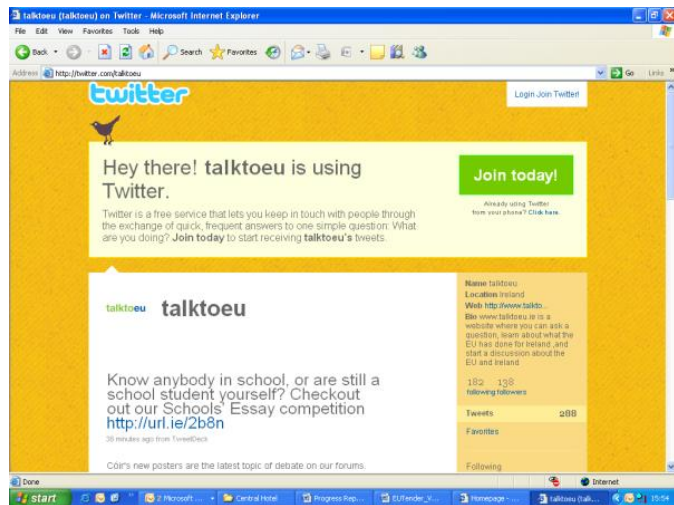


Figure 3: TalktoEU's twitter page

Social Networking

Online activity commenced in July 2009 with the introduction of a robust social media campaign - now active on:

www.bebo.com/talktoeu

www.youtube.com/talktoeu

www.twitter.com/talktoeu

www.facebook.com

www.dipity.com/talktoeu

The aim of the social networking activity is to raise awareness of the EU, encourage open dialogue with Irish citizens and to provide further information. Selected channels are primarily targeted at women and the 18-30 age cohorts. These listening platforms allow for lively interaction and debate. **TalktoEU** has also been actively engaged on Irish forums and blogs, such as politics.ie clarifying issues and driving awareness of the initiative and the listening events.

Eurotrip

In order to further engage with the target cohort of young people, **TalktoEU** is running a competition that will send two people on a trip around sixteen countries in Europe – covering member states and accession states – in April 2010. The winners of this competition will have been selected based on various criteria, including personality, motivation, ability to use social media, and their interest in European issues.

During their whistlestop tour of the EU, the finalists will have to complete twelve ‘challenges’, each of which will highlight the benefits of EU membership. They will also have to report regularly through a blog, facebook, twitter and in interviews with Irish media.

Over 350 entries were received, and huge interest has been generated – particularly on facebook – by entrants attempting to be selected for a unique experience that could also see them win the communications hardware (laptops, mobile phones, etc.) that they use during the course of the trip.

Further information on Eurotrip can be found on <http://talktoeu.eu/eurotrip/>.

Challenges and Key Learnings

To date, it has been a challenge to engage our younger target audiences through social media channels, in particular bebo.com. Sustaining ongoing discussions on the forum is also a challenge as people's current behaviour is to dip in and out of the debate.

We have learned that it is necessary to participate heavily with internet users in order to engage them. One needs to provide users with information first in order to encourage them to share it with others. Monitoring of conversations is also paramount in developing relationships with key online influencers.

Opportunities

In the run-up to the second Lisbon referendum there was a significant increase in the amount of "web chatter" about the EU and Ireland. **TalktoEU** set out to engage with people as they debated the merits of the Lisbon Treaty. The task was to provide people with the correct information and direct them to the talktoeu.ie website where they could ask more questions or engage further in a dialogue with the EU on the forum.

We have seen a steady build in activity across our social media channels.

An online advertising plan designed to drive traffic towards all web channels commenced on 4th September 2009.

Advertising

Purpose

The aim was to develop citizens' awareness of the EU, its importance in their lives and to explain the essential purpose of the Union through advertising, in particular cinema, and media which are favoured by the target groups of youth, women and lower income groups.

Cinema

Attendances at cinemas is very high in Ireland, in particular over the summer holiday period. We therefore ran a nation-wide advertising campaign over a six week period from 1 August. During this period almost 20% of the adult population attended a cinema; with 35% of younger people attending at least 2.5 times.

The creative was designed to give relevant, engaging examples of how the EU has had an impact on the ground in Ireland and also to drive audiences to www.talktoEU.ie. The commercial was light-hearted, accessible and engaging and spoke in the language of our audience and directly relevant to the situation they are in i.e. in a cinema. It gave them tangible examples of the work of the EU using the environment around them. The piece culminated in a strong and direct 'call to action' for the audience to get involved and have their say.

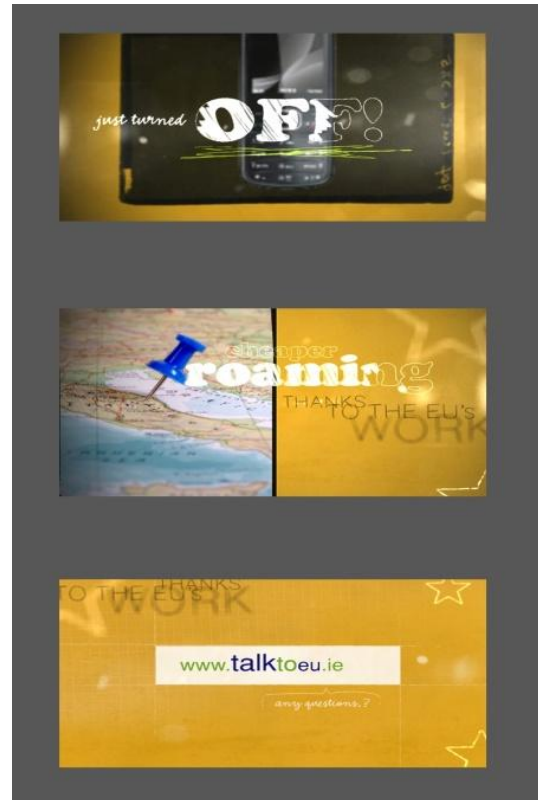


Figure 5: Talk to EU cinema advertising

Print and Radio Advertising

The strategy behind the print and radio media strategy has been twofold: firstly, to promote the listening events and drive attendance, and secondly – and perhaps most importantly – to showcase the **TalktoEU** brand through mass media, allowing us to raise awareness of the EU's role within Ireland and within each individual county. The strategy has encompassed both radio and print publications.

To date, the media plan has involved a number of elements:

- Specific event advertising in regional press and radio and a one-off advertisement in a key national publication - the *Irish Examiner* – with the intent that even if individuals do not

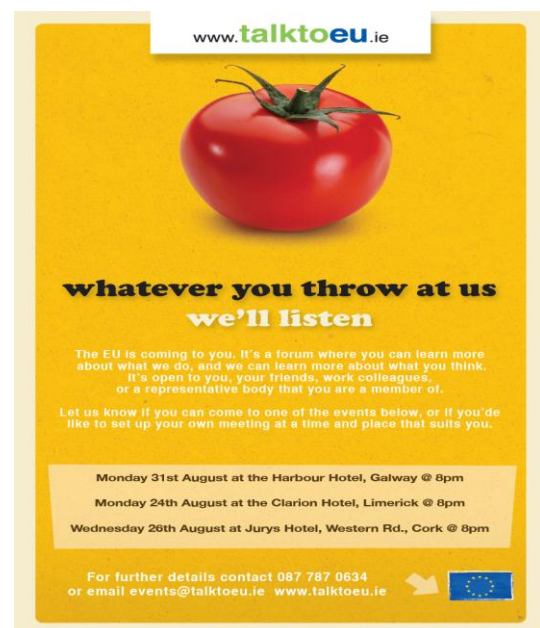


Figure 6: Print advertising

attend the actual events themselves, they will be aware that an opportunity exists to engage with the EU.

- General regional advertising targeting specific areas throughout the country that have traditionally engaged the least with Europe. In addition to providing advertising copy, these titles have also been encouraged to use the county reports as editorial content.
- Media partnerships with major regional titles in key urban centres, including Dublin (Metro) and Galway, Limerick and Cork Independents. This package combines both advertising and also key features which allow for the dissemination of EU information.

The key challenge was engagement and the need to keep the debate ongoing after the Lisbon vote.

Alternative Promotions

Purpose

The aim was to reinforce the core campaign messages by using innovative communications methods.

Overview

Three tactical areas were chosen by the consortium in order to offer a wide reach and a platform from which to open dialogue with Irish citizens, particularly the priority target groups. Each was designed to drive home the impact of the EU in Ireland on a personal and local level.

County Reports

An important part of understanding the importance of Europe is to gain an appreciation of the benefits it has brought and its effects on the daily lives of citizens. Irish people are particularly aware of their sense of community and often place local needs ahead of national on many issues.

With this in mind, we developed individual briefing papers for each Irish county, detailing the level of investment that has been made in projects and programmes using EU funding.



Figure 7: Talk to EU county report for Kerry

The material was written to illustrate the range of projects that have received EU funding. The reports therefore, were not a comprehensive account of all projects and programmes that have received EU co-financing. They gave individuals a much greater sense of how Europe has impacted

positively on their everyday lives. The county reports were brief and informative and were distributed with local newspapers and at various locations throughout each county, as well as on the www.talktoEU.ie website. The main theme of the reports – which were largely factual in nature – was to highlight that Europe works in partnership with local people and groups.

The county reports were distributed during July and August 2009 to all local and regional press (numbering over 200 outlets), as well as TDs, Senators and County Councillors and are available to download on the www.talktoEU.ie website. The county reports have also been made available at every listening event.

Video Booths

In September 2009, two *TalktoEU* video booths travelled around Ireland – targeting areas of major footfall such as busy shopping streets and major events and festivals. These booths used interactive, touch-screen technology and encouraged their users to find out more about the EU, make comments and ask questions by video message. Questions and answers were then posted at www.talktoeu.ie. The video booth provided opportunities to talk to a wide range of audiences even after the Lisbon Treaty referendum.



Figure 8: Talk to EU video booth

Schools Essay Competition

The schools essay competition was created to bring Europe into Irish households, as we know that many people make up their minds on issues by discussing them within the family. There is also evidence that through information they got on bebo.com, many children brought some Lisbon issues to the attention of their parents.

To secure a wider awareness of the EU and its relevance to Irish citizens, in particular those in the target groups, a nation-wide essay competition was organised targeting 760 secondary schools. The competition asks ‘What is this European Union thingy doing for you?’ and elicited 403 entries.

Ideally incorporated into the CSPE or English curriculum, the essay competition was designed to encourage awareness and knowledge of the European Union and Ireland’s role within it, and it also allowed students to develop critical and contextual thinking, analysis and expression.

The web-managed competition meant the www.talktoEU website provided all the necessary background documentation. The completion was advertised widely and was promoted at all listening events. A preliminary announcement will be made in September, having contacted school and teacher representatives. The closing date for essays was October.

There were two categories:

Category 1: Senior Cycle: 15-18 year olds

Category 2: Junior Cycle: 12-15 year olds

Approximately €30,000 worth of prizes, including laptops and mobile phones, were provided for winning students, while cash for school equipment was awarded to the winning school. Prizes were awarded at a national-event and all the winning essays were published on the web and in regional press.

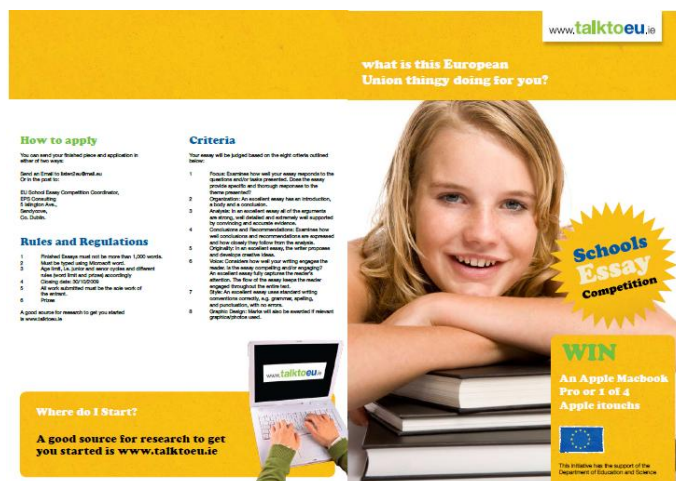


Figure 9: Talk to EU essay competition entry form

Performance Metrics

The consortium reports monthly to the ECR on key performance metrics. These measure the quantitative impact of the various strands of work. Table 1 captures the latest set of available figures:

Table 1: Performance Metrics for Talk to EU as at March 2010

Work Stream		
Listening	Events completed	17
	Numbers attended	927
	Further events planned	29
	Reach via adverts, press and radio	1,081,080
Social Media	Unique site visitors	39,319
	Number of questions answered	813
	Page views	90,150
	Facebook friends	833
	Bebo	1,828
	YouTube	5,918
	Twitter	335
	Flickr	481
Cinema Ad	Total attendees	4,435,008
Video Booths	Exposure at events	409,500
	Engagement	5,356
	Messages captured	184
County Reports	Printed hard copies (also on web)	3,500
Schools Competition	Schools contacted	760
	Entries	403
Media	Circulation of print placement	1,825,186

Conclusions

Any successful EU communications policy must centre on citizens' needs. Citizens should be encouraged to set their agenda.

Delivery by itself is not enough unless there is real engagement with partners, in particular civic society groups.

Lively, open and well-informed discussion is critical on- and off-line.

Civic education should help people of all ages to use tools to access information on public policy and to join in the debate.

Although *TalktoEU* is still work in progress (the contract ends on 19th May 2010), some preliminary conclusions could be drawn:

- The most successful **events** are those which were organised with partner organisations. Town hall meetings do not work in Ireland.
- Web based **social networking sites** have the potential to engage a younger audience.
- **Cinema advertising** is a cost effective way to communicate to a large audience within a short period.
- People generally like **hard facts** such as what the EU has done for their county at local and community level.
- **Young people** respond well to events targeted at their information needs; they enjoy writing and contributing when encouraged to do so.
- **Women** enjoy participating at events where womens' issues can be debated.
- **Regional and local press and media** is a powerful method of achieving wide reach and awareness.

By way I conclusion, I believe that the approach and methodology of the *TalktoEU* project could be replicated – suitably adapted – in other Member States, at regional level and indeed in candidate countries.