



IPRA GOLDEN WORLD AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE 2005

Category 7: RECOVERY FROM CRISIS
Entrant: CHROME CONSULTING LTD
Client: SCOTTISH QUALITY SALMON

SCOTTISH QUALITY SALMON. THE FACTS.

In early 2004 Scottish salmon farming came under unprecedented attack, the result of an article in the authoritative journal *Science*, which linked the fish with potentially carcinogenic contaminants. One year on, thanks to a public relations-led communications programme, Scottish farmed salmon sales are 20% up on the pre-scare period and the fish is regularly cited as an important part of a healthy diet.

Statement of Problem/Opportunity

Scottish Quality Salmon is the quality standards body for Scottish salmon farming, its members accounting for some 65% of the fish produced.

Scottish Quality Salmon had to act as the industry's spokesperson to minimise the effect of negative exploitation of the results of a paper in *Science* magazine (January 2004), suggesting high levels of persistent organic pollutants in farmed Scottish salmon. Such was the seriousness of the accusation that many believed the commercial future of the industry to be at stake.

It was therefore vital to reassure existing consumers by promoting the high standards of welfare and environmental care adhered to by Scottish salmon farmers, while addressing the specifics of the *Science* paper.

Research

Science is a highly credible medium. Our immediate challenge was therefore to tell the world's media that this estimable publication and the scientists who wrote this paper had it wrong. This required quick, detailed and authoritative research, largely undertaken in-house by Scottish Quality Salmon's technical advisor Dr John Webster, addressing each of the key claims in the paper and its methodology.

Planning

The objectives for this campaign were therefore to harness all of this experience in a concerted and sustained initiative designed to

- gain share of voice in the media as the story was reported
- rebut false allegations
- reassure consumers
- reassure the trade (production and retail)
- maintain sales
- maintain/strengthen links with 'independent' advisors (government, NGOs, etc) and the scientific community

Measurable criteria included media presence and balance of coverage, and trade and consumer sales.

The publics to be reached included UK and international consumers, all relevant media contacts (news, environment, trade) as well as MEPs, MSPs, civil servants, scientists and other influencers, and Scottish Quality Salmon members and associated companies.

Messages had to be formulated specific to these audiences which presented complex scientific arguments in understandable form. Communication channels were chosen to reinforce the objectives of the campaign in a variety of ways including via the media, as well as at point of sale.

After the initial 'crisis' phase of activity, regular meetings were held with the (member-based) management board of Scottish Quality Salmon to ensure support for the direction and execution of the campaign.

Execution

An integrated campaign was implemented across a period of nine months from January to September 2004.

The entire campaign was managed jointly by the client and its PR agency, to the extent, for example, that Chrome Consulting was responsible for appointing and managing an advertising creative resource and media buying company, to deliver a co-ordinated campaign, led throughout by PR practitioners.

Crisis Management:

Our actions during the first 36 hours of the crisis were to:

- Thoroughly review the *Science* paper, analyse inaccuracies, agree stance and brief internally

- Prepare and issue initial media statement to c.600 named UK media contacts as well as MEPs, MSPs, civil servants and via newswire distribution, some 22,500 international media outlets
- Issue a second statement focusing on the international scientific condemnation of the paper and the health benefits of regular salmon consumption
- Participate in over 120 print and broadcast interviews
- Initiate a consumer/trade response service to telephone and e-mail questions and comments
- Rapidly distribute consumer-friendly information to multiple retailers, fishmongers, and Scottish Quality Salmon members
- Liaise closely with the Food Standards Agency to clarify its stance on the issue and likely actions and advise of the Scottish Quality Salmon stance
- Update the Scottish Quality Salmon website and link statements to healthy eating information
- Monitor news coverage worldwide and act swiftly to address negative comment

Media Relations: After this initial, concentrated burst of crisis management activity we continued to develop and issue information, initiate and respond to media coverage. Highlights during this period included: activity to publicise the Food Standards Agency's positive recommendations on oil-rich fish consumption (specifically including Scottish farmed salmon); and close work with the BBC to maintain fairness in its major contribution to the ongoing debate, a crisis-specific episode of the "Should I Worry About...?" TV series (the answer being a resounding "No").

Information Distribution: Within a week of the 'crisis', a simple A5 consumer guidance leaflet on the issues raised by *Science* was produced and distributed widely via retailers (fishmongers and multiple retailers). More comprehensive information was included in a consumer leaflet produced during the summer: "Scottish Quality Salmon. The Facts." (120,000 copies), supported in-store by posters (two executions) (5,000 of each). All of these later materials reflected a consistent campaign theme - "Naturally they're the best". Copies of the leaflet were loose inserted in Press Gazette and aquaculture titles.

Consumer Advertising: The "Naturally they're the best" theme was also the focus of a £250,000 (ratecard) consumer advertising (two treatments) which ran in almost all national and Sunday newspapers and Scottish daily newspapers during July and August 2004. 52% of all adults in the UK, ie. 25,322,000, saw the ads on average 2.4 times. Within this audience we reached 64% of medium to heavy fish consumers (those who spend over £3 per week on fresh fish).

Trade Advertorials: As well as a trade media relations focus throughout the campaign, a four-page special 'Fact File' supplement was produced in conjunction with the Grocer. Additional copies of this publication were widely circulated.

Mailings: Two postcards, again reflecting the main campaign advertising treatments, were produced for direct mail use to the media, consumers and other influencers. These, along with all other campaign materials, were made available to Scottish Quality Salmon member companies for their own communications use.

The duration of the programme meant that it was possible to fine tune messages during execution while maintaining a consistent strategy and campaign theme.

Evaluation

The very first stories to appear focused on this crisis as a major food/health scare, yet within hours media were clearly and consistently reporting doubts about the veracity of the *Science* paper's conclusions. Within a day key media became actively hostile to the paper, its authors and backers, and strongly supportive of the Scottish salmon industry. In all, some 78% of all the 843 items of monitored print and broadcast media coverage included comment and views from Scottish Quality Salmon, either directly quoted or expressed through a third party.

While the production end of the industry experienced an immediate slump of some 20% in sales, the proof of the success of this campaign is that farmed salmon consumption bounced rapidly back. According to independent research, more than 86.4 million salmon meals were eaten in the UK between March and May 2004 (source: Taylor Nelson Sofres Family Food Panel). This is up from 72 million meals during the same period a year before - a rise of 20%, and thus an increase of 20% year on year. Later TNS data confirms that this trend has continued at the same rate.

1,200 words