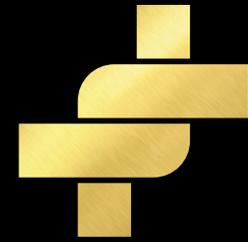




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**Aer Lingus - There's No Place Like Home - How to bring
Home Advantage around the world, and back again**

Rothco



Company Profile

Rothco

Rothco is a multi-award winning creative agency that is part of the Accenture Interactive network. We are passionate about ideas that solve commercial problems with creative solutions. We are 160 people changing the fate and fortunes of global and local clients.



Introduction and Background

Home Advantage, home ground, home field, home court advantage, it has many guises. One thing is for certain, when you're on your own turf, you have an edge. No matter how big or small that is. In 2015, Aer Lingus had undergone a takeover by International Airlines Group (IAG), a multinational airline holding company, raising concerns that this would dilute 'Irishness' which was such an intrinsic value of the brand. To combat this, they sought out a partnership with the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) with the aim of anchoring the brand in Irish pride and culture.

Aer Lingus is Ireland's national airline with a mission: 'To connect Ireland with the rest of the world'. And is a brand that has been ingrained in Irish life since its foundation in 1936:

'More than anything else, the green shamrock livery evoked national pride, and this was shared not only by the pilots and the cabin crew, but the people at large.'

- Kim Bielenberg, Aer Lingus: The Glory Days, 2015

However the company was entering a period of uncertainty. Now under the ownership of IAG, the brand needed to root itself in Irish culture, a shamrock on the fin wouldn't be enough anymore.

Introduction and Background

Aer Lingus partnered with the IRFU as the *'official airline of the Irish rugby team'* in late Spring 2015. While we would be bringing the rugby players to away matches to compete on the pitch we would be tussling with iconic brands off it, such as Guinness, Canterbury and most importantly, the new title sponsor as of 2016, Vodafone. As *'official airline'* we were technically a *'sponsor'* but we would always need to be referenced as *'Official Airline'*, thus knowing our role (for legal and creative reasons) would be crucial for our success.

Marketing Objectives

Before the 2016 6Nations, we set ourselves key objectives for the coming year:

Marketing Objectives:

Cement our position as the number 1 sponsor in rugby in terms of awareness and affinity. A massive ambition as Vodafone would be entering the field for the first time and not only would their bright red logo be on every players' jersey, we could also conservatively estimate that our marketing spend would be 20% of theirs. To achieve this we knew we had to set ourselves targets above and beyond the industry norm for sponsorship:

- +20% Increase in awareness of our partnership with the IRFU
- +10% Increase in brand affinity and, in turn, improve acquisition and retention rates

To ensure our sponsorship was impacting on level of consideration to purchase, we were going to measure the sponsorship on:

- +10% increase in consideration for using Aer Lingus for flights to/from Ireland

Marketing Objectives

- +10% increase in choosing Aer Lingus over alternative airline (where price is not a factor)
- +5% in recommendations of Aer Lingus to friends/family

Communications Objective:

The IRFU partnership was part of our broader vision to change perceptions of Aer Lingus to a more contemporary brand with a relevant, modern Irish context.

The KPIs we would measure this on would be:

- + 10% increase in Pride in Irish Heritage
- + 10% increase in Modernity
- + 5% increase in Innovation
- + 5% increase in Aer Lingus as the smart travel choice

The Task

Limited Opportunity

The people we wanted to talk to and engage with over the duration of our activity were fans of the Irish rugby team. Not surprisingly, these were also the people that all other brands would be talking to as well. And in Ireland, during a major sporting occasion such as the 6 Nations, the whole population tends to jump on board. And while Vodafone would be making a big splash in their first year as title sponsor, we also had Guinness, Canterbury and Ulster Bank to compete with, not to mention the countless other brands, not officially associated with the team or the IRFU, who would be utilising the buzz around the Irish Rugby team in these coming months.

International rugby in Ireland has two main focal points (outside of the World Cup) in a calendar year, they are: the 6 Nations tournament and the Autumn Internationals. We took over Aer Lingus' sponsorship of the Irish Rugby team following the 2015 WC, our case study hinges on three competitions and therefore three main phases of activity (see Fig. 1).

| 2016 6 Nations | 2016 November Internationals | 2017 6 Nations |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Ireland V. Wales (H) | Ireland V. New Zealand (Chicago) | Scotland V. Ireland (A) |
| France V. Ireland (A) | Ireland V. Canada (H) | Italy V. Ireland (A) |
| England V Ireland (A) | Ireland V. New Zealand (H) | Ireland V. France (H) |
| Ireland V. Italy (H) | Ireland V. Australia (H) | Wales V. Ireland (A) |
| Ireland V. Scotland (H) | | Ireland V. England (H) |

[Fig. 1: Irish Rugby Fixtures Phases 1-3]

The Task

This paper concludes with our activity for the 2017 6Nations. Outside of this time, Irish rugby fans are solely focused on their provincial teams. So in total, so we had 14 opportunities to be relevant and that was it.

Limited Permission

Aer Lingus was officially and strictly the 'official airline of the Irish rugby team', so we were fixed in quite a functional role. We were the airline that carried the players and fans to away games, therefore we needed to carve out a space for our sponsorship that gave us permission to speak to and engage fans of Irish Rugby during those weekends, but just as importantly, we had to remain relevant when the Irish team were playing in Dublin. And while Vodafone would be making long-form documentaries with the team, we had limited amount of access to create quality content.

Limited Spend

We knew Vodafone were prepared to outspend us 5:1. We recognised early on that we needed to utilise assets and occasions that we could solely own, such as fans travelling through Dublin Airport and our in-air experience. For our home games, we needed to guarantee quality engagement that would heighten the fan experience at games.

The Task

With all of this in mind, let's recap, we needed to:

- Cement our position as number 1 sponsor in terms of brand awareness and affinity
- Ensure the Aer Lingus brand stayed rooted in Irish culture as a contemporary, innovative brand.

We had to do all of this as 'official airline to the Irish Rugby team.' And while Vodafone would appear on the front of every players' jersey for every single game, regardless of where Ireland played, we would be competing to maintain our relevancy for home games just as much as away games.

The Strategy

As more brands are turning towards sports sponsorship to leverage the benefits of associating with sports teams and governing bodies, fans are becoming more sensitive to brand involvement and simply sticking a logo on a jersey or stadium branding is not enough anymore.

We knew to stand out in this crowded field of rugby sponsorship and to engage fans with our platform we needed to tell a story that was compelling, credible and different. And that whatever we did, it had to be rooted in truth (See Fig. 2: Irish Rugby Sponsors).

We went digging for three truths that would frame our sponsorship platform. Where the supporter, sport and brand truths intersected is where we found our sweet spot. [See Fig. 3: Strategy]

Our supporter truth was proved without doubt when the Irish fans broke the world record for attendees at a World Cup game:



[Fig. 2: Irish Rugby Sponsors]
[All official partners or suppliers of the IRFU]



[Fig. 3: Strategy]

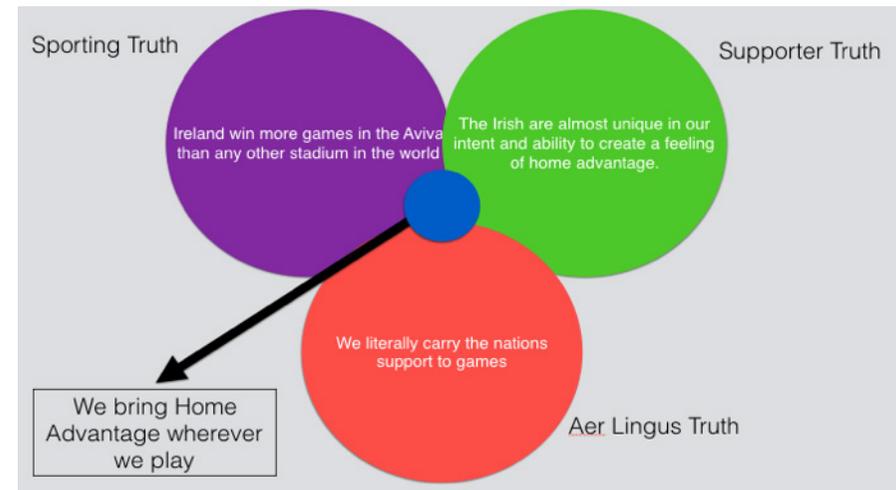
The Strategy

"We broke the record for the biggest attendance at a Rugby World Cup game... against Romania. 90,000 fans! That's crazy stuff!"

Rob Kearney, on World Cup support.

(See Fig. 4: Strategy)

The proposition that we landed on was simple, 'We Bring Home Advantage Wherever we Play.' The meaning of 'we' is very important here. As the old national flag carrier and a brand rooted in Irish heritage, Aer Lingus is one of the very few brands that has permission to speak on behalf of a nation. We wanted to position ourselves as not only the 'official airline of the Irish rugby team', but the airline that can make any stadium in the world feel like home.



[Fig. 4: Strategy]

The Idea

As the official airline of the Irish rugby team, Aer Lingus flies the team, and many of its supporters, to all of the away matches. This is its literal role. But, as Ireland's Airline, one of the few brands that can claim to be quintessentially Irish, it's clear that Aer Lingus plays a much bigger role. It's a role that's crucial to the team's support, and therefore has some influence on the team's chances of winning. Not many sponsors can say that.

The formulation we finally settled on was: 'we bring home advantage wherever we play'. In order to enhance rather than inhibit the fans' experience, all our creative executions had to pass a test: does it help deliver home advantage, either in how it makes the team feel or how it makes the fans feel?

At various points in the campaign our work attempted to swell our fans with pride; entertain them; encourage them to become more vocal, more impassioned, more effective. Whether it was by flying lucky charms to games or just a special announcement by the captain, we tried to bring home advantage, whether at home or abroad. All the while demonstrating that Aer Lingus is Irish rugby's ultimate fan and can make anywhere feel like home.

The Idea

Media Strategy - Use of Channels

(See Fig. 5: Role of Channels)

Phase 1: 6 Nations 2016

1.1 Home Advantage 90" Social Video - Our first piece of #HomeAdvantage creative was our stake in the sand, an indisputable positioning on our partnership IRFU but also our role as Ireland's Airline.

1.2 What does Home Advantage mean to the players?
We put it to the players themselves to see how they felt about the difference Home Advantage and the Irish fans can make to a game.

1.3 Irish Rugby Team Departs to Paris - We filmed the Irish Rugby team boarding the official Aer Lingus rugby aircraft 'Green Spirit' to battle France for the first away game of the 2016 Nations tournament.

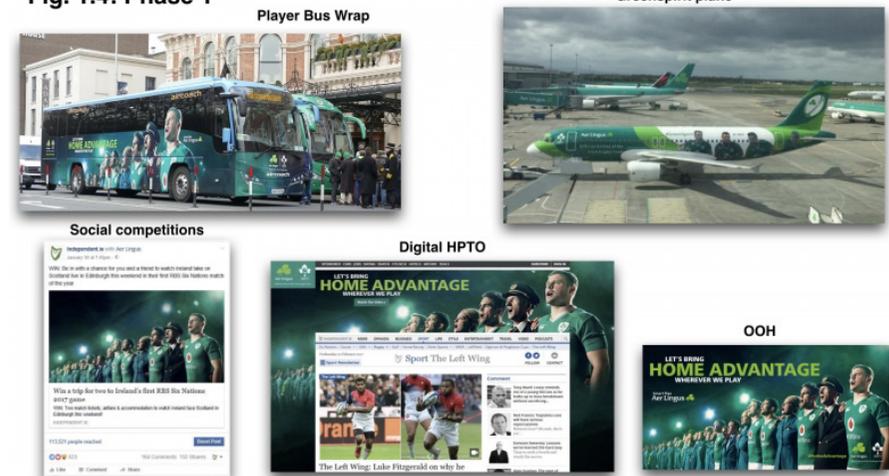
(See figure 1.4 to see how the idea extended across social, on-board, on OOH and press).

Fig. 5: Role of Channels

| MEDIA SELECTION MATRIX | | |
|------------------------|---|---|
| MEDIA | ROLE | ADDITIONAL ENGAGEMENT/INNOVATION |
| TV | Mass awareness amongst 25-44s | Rugby package, timed social posts with video content, during matches |
| VOD and Social | Seed and promote content/viral video | Allows comment/interaction with the content, additional content, behind the scenes footage etc. |
| Digital partnership | Reach 25-44s, create awareness of the association | Native content, newsfeed personalisation, promote viral video |
| HPTO's | Create awareness on key match days | Drive to video content/Google maps cache |
| Outdoor | National reach/awareness, upweight Munster and Dublin | Shazam to view video and score/news updates |
| Press | Awareness amongst 25-44s, detail the partnership | Stand out shapes, Shazam for content |
| Radio OB | Reach 25-44s, high frequency on away match weeks | Promotions, competitions, mentions from the airport |

[Source: MediaVest]

Fig. 1.4: Phase 1



The Idea

Phase 2: Autumn Internationals November 2016

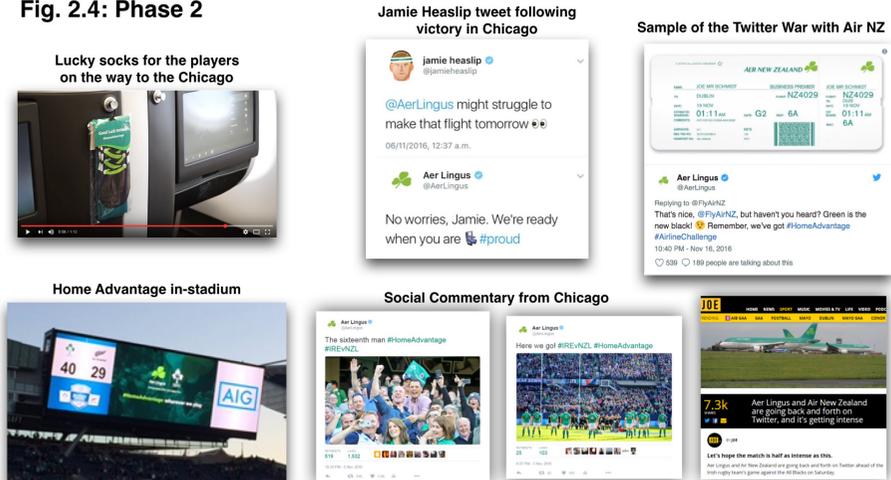
2.1. Let's bring #HomeAdvantage to Chicago - Ireland V. All Blacks in soldier field, a game that could not be discussed without the fact that Ireland Men's Senior team had never beaten New Zealand being mentioned. So, we flew 3 Irish rugby legends who had experienced victory against New Zealand to Chicago: Fiona Coughlan, Max Deegan and Tony Ward, to bring good luck to Soldier Field.

2.2. A Home Win for Ireland in Chicago - After the game we released a video on our social channels celebrating the teams historic achievement in Soldier Field but also to drive on the fans ahead of the return fixture in the Aviva.

2.3 Twitter war with Air New Zealand - Before the fixture in Dublin Air NZ and Aer Lingus had a tussle of their own on who would come out on top in the Aviva, and what the forfeit would be for the losing side. There are very few airlines in the world who can speak on behalf of a nation and Aer Lingus and Air New Zealand are two of them.

See figure 2.4 to see how we activated across OOH, Press, and in-flight on the Greenspirit.

Fig. 2.4: Phase 2



The Idea

Phase 3: 6 Nations 2017

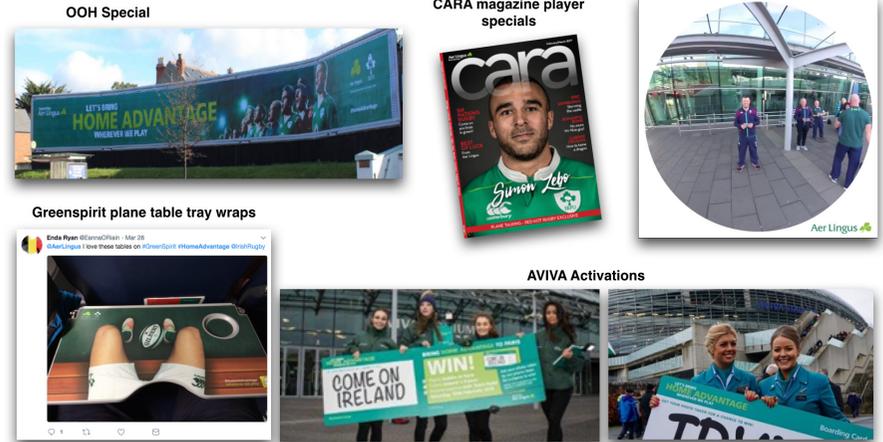
3.1 Pilot Announcement - To get Ireland's 6Nations campaign off to a flyer against Scotland, we made a special on-board announcement on a flight jam packed with Irish supporters travelling to Edinburgh.

3.2 Ireland's biggest Tweet: We turned an inspired fan message into Ireland's biggest tweet to surprise and support the team on their way to take on Italy in Rome.

3.3 Rally Cry Videos: To inspire support throughout the campaign we released 10-second rally cry videos ahead of each away game in Edinburgh, Rome and Cardiff.

See figure 3.4 to see how the idea extended to on-ground fan activation, on-board, social, OOH and press.

Fig 3.4: Phase 3



The Results

Business Results:

Sponsorship research specialists, Onside, developed an acquisition and retention profit model to evaluate the financial gains the campaign delivered for Aer Lingus. Four segments were framed, the model was built to estimate the value of customer retention and acquisition for both short-haul and long haul travel.

For the purposes of calculating ROMI we have based our calculations on a conservative segment of the model.

We can conservatively estimate that for every €1 spent on this campaign, Aer Lingus made €16 in return.

Marketing Results:

Cement our position as the number 1 sponsor in terms of awareness and affinity.

- Objective: +20% Increase in Awareness
- Result: +24% Increase in Awareness
- Objective: +10% Increase in Brand Affinity
- Result: +11% Increase in Brand Affinity

The Results

We smashed our objectives here and surpassed the industry average of sponsorship awareness (32%), by some way.

We also needed to ensure our sponsorship was achieving a level of consideration to purchase, we measured this as follows:

- Objective: +10% increase in consideration for using Aer Lingus for flights to/from Ireland
- Result: +19% Increase in consideration
- Objective: +10% increase in choosing Aer Lingus over alternative airline (where price is not a factor)
- Result: +23% increase in choosing Aer Lingus
- Objective: +5% in recommending of Aer Lingus to friends/family
- Result: +7% increase in recommending

Communications Results:

As the IRFU partnership was part of our broader vision to change perceptions of Aer Lingus to a more contemporary brand with a relevant, modern Irish context. We monitored this very closely with the following KPIs and their % increase in scores since the inception of the sponsorship:

The Results

- Objective: + 10% increase pride in Irish Heritage
- Result: + 18% increase in pride
- Objective: + 10% increase in modernity
- Result: + 14% increase in modernity
- Objective: + 5% increase in Aer Lingus as the smart travel choice
- Result: + 13% AL as smart travel choice
- Objective: + 5% increase in Innovation
- Result: + 6% increase in innovation

| Metric | % Increase since 2015 |
|--|-----------------------|
| AWARENESS | +24 |
| AFFINITY | +11 |
| PRIDE IN IRISH HERITAGE | +18 |
| MODERNITY | +14 |
| SMART CHOICE | +13 |
| INNOVATIVE | +6 |
| CONSIDER AER LINGUS FOR FLIGHTS FROM IRL | +19 |
| CHOOSE AER LINGUS OVER ANOTHER AIRLINE WHERE PRICE IS NOT A FACTOR | +23 |
| RECOMMEND AER LINGUS TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS | +7 |

(See Fig. 5: Brand Metrics)

Engagement Results

Phase 1: 6Nations 2016

1.1 Let's Bring Home Advantage Social Video 90"

Facebook: 2.4million views

Youtube: 16,183 views

The Results

1.2. What does Home Advantage mean to the players?

Facebook (combined views of both videos) : 381k views

1.3. Irish Rugby Departs to Paris

Facebook : 70k Views

Phase 2: November Internationals

2.1. Let's bring #HomeAdvantage to Chicago

The most important result here was the outcome of the game, Ireland beat the All Blacks for the very first time on a score line of 40 - 29, ending 111 years of hurt.

Facebook: 1.2million views

Youtube: 35K views

2.2. A Home Win for Ireland in Chicago

Facebook: 1.7million views

Youtube: 3K views

2.3 Twitter war with Air New Zealand

Reached publications in Ireland, the US, New Zealand, Denmark and Brazil.

Reach (Organic): 3,917,000

Estimated cost of buying space: €36,997

The Results

Phase 3: 6Nations 2017

3.1 Pilot Announcement or 'the best performing piece of Aer Lingus content ever on social media.' [Source: Aer Lingus social team]

Facebook: 2.3million views

Reach: 5,296,213

3.2 Ireland's biggest Tweet

Facebook: 164,000 views

Reach: 260,104

3.3 Rally Cry Videos

Facebook: 322,000 views

Combined Reach: 1.6million

Client Testimonials:

Mike Rutter, Aer Lingus Chief Commercial Officer: *This year, we have really established our Home Advantage successfully bringing together two strong iconic Irish brands and activating effectively at key rugby moments, including our key win against the All Blacks in Chicago and RBS 6 Nations. We are very proud of this successful partnership and the growing awareness and affinity amongst our national and international guests.*

The Results

Padraig Power, IRFU Commercial & Marketing Director: When Irish rugby sponsors amplify and elevate their activations to this degree rugby is a real winner, with new audiences and age groups encouraged into our game. From the 'twitter war with NZ' to the pilot announcement that included the 'Fields of Athenry' they showcased their support for Irish Rugby and they really did deliver a home advantage in Chicago.

Discounted factors

In the duration of the campaign (February 2016 - March 2017), we can discount the following factors having any impact on the results of this campaign:

1. No new flight paths introduced
2. No significant discount strategy outside normal industry activity
3. Our media spend was limited, considering that of the primary sponsors, ie. we spent 20% of Vodafone's media budget.

The Impact

The most important attitudinal impact we were interested in monitoring was on consumers behaviour towards Aer Lingus' Irish identity. Becoming part of the IAG group in 2015 could have had detrimental effects on the Aer Lingus brand. However our research has proven that people still trust Aer Lingus as an Irish brand which is proven by out +18% increase in IRish Pride and Heritage (as per above). This positive brand association continues to drive affinity and more importantly consumer acquisition and retention.

Also, as an airline there are a lot of factors that affect our service beyond our control which can always have a negative impact on consumers attitude towards the brand. To grow important attitude behaviours such as consideration of Aer Lingus over other airlines, choosing Aer Lingus when price is not a factor and recommending Aer Lingus to friends and family using a sponsorship is not only beneficial, but it's a necessity for a service in such a volatile industry.

New Learnings

1. Irish by nature: Although we are now part of an international airline group, we have shown that by rooting yourself in Irish culture and most importantly, adding to the overall enjoyment of a major point in the Irish sporting calendar you can remain Irish by nature.

2. You don't have to have your logo in the most prominent place if you know and live your role within the sponsorship. We broke the sponsorship industry norm and became the lead sponsor of the Irish Rugby team, by taking a contractually binding title, 'official airline', and using it to our advantage.

Summary

At a time when Aer Lingus had become part of the multi-national IAG, they sought a partnership with the IRFU with the aim of anchoring the brand in Irish pride and culture. However as we all know, associating yourself with a sporting team or organisation is not enough for fans anymore. The Home Advantage platform allowed Aer Lingus to become Ireland's biggest fan, our role became to bring Home Advantage wherever Ireland played, whether it be Twickenham, Chicago or Dublin. Our ambition was, and still is, to make any stadium in the world feel like home.