

Phil 'The Power' Taylor's fitness challenge

Situation

Phil Taylor was named both Sportsman and Sport Personality of the Year at the BBC Midlands Awards ceremony in December 2006. At the ceremony he admitted to Steve Town, RD Sport England, that he had beaten sportsmen and women in the region to the titles who trained hard for their sport and who are fit. He also recognised that his failure in being beaten in a recent tournament was partly down to his fitness level. Steve Town told him that Sport England, through its partners, could help him get fit and Phil took this challenge on board.

Delivering a programme of exercise and gaining good PR for active recreation

A 12 week programme was devised for Phil – key to this:

- Full co-operation and commitment of Phil Taylor, working through his agent.
- Working through the 'Delivery System' to achieve this, involving the county sports partnership, Sport Across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and their partner, Staffordshire University, especially the team within the Sports Performance Centre who devised Phil's programme and carry out fitness assessments.
- Incorporate a full range of media coverage. The BBC in the Midlands has covered Phil's progress in regular recordings that have been televised widely – both on the BBC and Sky TV. The Sentinel newspaper has also had a feature column following Phil's progress. The national press, through the Times, covered the initial story and has been interested in being kept up to date with progress.
- Programme devised to cover a range of activities both to give Phil interesting activities to keep his fitness regime on course, but also to provide new story angles for the media. Introducing him to playing different sports and giving partners the opportunity to gain media coverage e.g. playing badminton with RSB chair Rauf Mirza.
- Realising the potential to inspire other groups – local schools and university students getting involved as Phil provides an ideal role model as he loses weight, reduces cholesterol levels, etc.

Difficulties to be aware of:

- Working with Phil's timetable (or any celebrity's timetable) – not always easy and there has to be flexibility due to his own changing commitments.
- Difficulty of once the programme is up and running the CSP's role becomes almost extraneous in that the key people, in this case Phil, the BBC and the University staff, are the only people necessary to keep the programme going. Sport Across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent found that this creates its own communication loop which can make keeping everyone informed of progress and developments tricky.
- Getting the right message re the other people involved. The tendency to invite schools to get involved in the media activity when they are not really SE's target audience. It is easy to invite schools into the media opportunities, so close liaison with those organising the days needs to be maintained to ensure that the best/most appropriate messages are being sent out.
- Ensuring that all partners have the opportunity to gain good PR. Best achieved through setting out a clear programme of activity managed by the main partner (in this case Staffs CSP) and flagging up which partner should be the one initiating the media news/press release at each stage. Every partner can then gain from involvement in the project.

Result:

- The major contributing factor to the success of the programme has been Phil's absolute commitment rather than it just being a PR exercise.

- Phil's own fitness/health success – his whole appearance now makes him an ambassador for living a more active lifestyle.
- The inspirational element in the achievement – a role model all partners can use. **The sports performance centre at the University has received numerous enquiries from people of all ages and backgrounds as to how they can 'make the change'.**
- The co-operative working with the BBC and other media outlets in maximising the coverage. This was established at the awards evening back in December, when the challenge was accepted by Phil.
- The process of working through the 'Delivery System' to evolve the programme of activities.
- Good PR for all key partners involved.

Lessons for others:

- Use the professionals at your disposal to deliver an excellent programme. Staffordshire University's Performance Centre was originally funded by SE and was ideally placed to work in partnership on the programme and provide the professional input.
- Be flexible when dealing with a celebrity/high profile sports personality – their schedules change.
- Make things interesting and varied – both for the people taking part and the media.
- Communicate all the time and share the programme schedule/keep it up to date – not easy as stated previously.
- Keep the impetus going – again one key person at the helm.