

**Introduction**

The Royal Show has long been a feature of the summer season, ranked with Wimbledon, Henley and Chelsea Flower Show. In July 2007, the four-day showcase of farming and rural life at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire celebrated its 168<sup>th</sup> year and expected to attract over 140,000 visitors to see the country's very best livestock, browse trade and retail stands and watch impressive farming and equine competitions and displays.

In 2007, Mistral was presented with an unusual problem – 90% of the show's 14-strong organising team left as a result of a change in management direction. Sceptics believed an inexperienced team would be the show's downfall and the media caused industry-wide concern among exhibitors and visitors. From the outset Mistral's messaging was tailored to quell the rumours and present the efforts of the new team in a positive light. As well as handling this crisis Mistral distributed 28 pre-show press releases, 37 features, 57 reader offers and 37 competitions, resulting in 346 pieces of press coverage (75.5 million OTS).

The new show team held strong and delivered the event with conviction. The President of the Royal Agricultural Society of England, HRH the Countess of Wessex, was in attendance along with politicians and opinion formers. Mistral had turned the image of the 2007 show around to allay the aspersions of the cynics. However, the weather during the event transformed the busy press office into a crisis communications centre overnight. Due to an unprecedented level of rainfall, which left the 240-acre site at saturation point, the organisers had no choice but to cancel the last day of the show for the safety of visitors and the welfare of the hundreds of animals.

**Objectives**

- Cancel the fourth day of the show and stop public from attending
- Target online and broadcast media as main means of news dissemination and ensure sympathetic message was portrayed post-event

**Strategy**

From the start, constant monitoring of the showground was undertaken, including implementation of wet weather plan (car parks monitored, showground under constant scrutiny by health & safety officers); police monitored traffic flow; ongoing assessment of livestock by 12-strong veterinary team; regular updates with show stewards to clarify positioning and provide news to media; and proactive press office to report on show activities.

With this crisis, it was vital to call upon our broadcast contacts and key specialist titles to ensure prompt cancellation of the show and help spread the message (Radio 4, ITV, local radio, Farmers Weekly, etc). Coverage generated during and post show promoted 'Glastonbury' style atmosphere – visitors still had fun despite the conditions.

**Results**

- No public visitors on Wednesday – our primary success criteria
- All exhibitors and livestock were safely removed from the site on Tuesday night
- Press coverage gave sympathetic viewpoint with organisers congratulated for their valiant efforts

