



Entrant company name: **Story Shop & The Maclean Brothers**

Entry title: **The Maclean Brothers Pacific Row**

Category: **Best Use of Media Relations**

Brief, Objectives and Budget

Three Scottish brothers undertook a world first: a 9,000-mile row from Peru to Australia to raise £1 million, providing clean water for 40,000 people in Madagascar. The communications challenge was immense. Ocean rowing is typically a media black hole – slow, unpredictable, and quickly forgotten. Our task was clear: turn a remote boat in the Pacific into a sustained, global news story for 139 days.

Objectives

Maintain sustained international coverage throughout the expedition

Avoid the “mid-ocean slump” in endurance campaigns

Secure top-tier global broadcast coverage

Convert media attention into donations toward the £1 million target

Budget

Story Shop applied a 50% agency discount, delivering the campaign for £36,000 with no paid media budget.

Idea, Research and Planning

Endurance campaigns notoriously go quiet between launch and arrival. Ocean rowing is even harder to pitch, offering limited visuals and no fixed schedule.

Our solution was to ditch the traditional press office.

Story Shop built a journalist-led Live Newsroom that treated the row as a rolling international story, continuously feeding fresh angles and publish-ready content to journalists across global time zones.

Our approach focused on three principles:

1. Build deep relationships with key journalists
2. Engineer news moments rather than waiting for them
3. Treat crises and unpredictability as editorial opportunities

Strategy, Creativity and Innovation

Building Embedded Journalists

Instead of sending broad press releases, Story Shop built close relationships with a small number of influential reporters.

Before departure we conducted background briefings with international broadcasters including CNN and PBS, ensuring producers understood the scale and stakes of the expedition.

We also secured early buy-in from journalists such as:

Chris Foote – BBC Scotland (multi-platform)

Claire Ryan - BBC Breakfast

Digby Wermtuller – ABC News Australia

Niall Pooran - PA

Nuno Mendonca - AP

By granting deeper access, we cultivated "embedded" correspondents. This sustained strategy yielded 20+ hits on ABC, multi-platform BBC coverage, and multiple syndications across AP and PA.

Broadcasting from a 28-foot boat required a bespoke workflow. We coached the brothers via satellite to capture broadcast-ready content and scheduled live TV and radio appearances around their grueling two-hour shifts.

To hit the £1M target, the crew agreed to a radical strategy: media interviews took absolute priority over rowing.

Turning crisis into narrative

Rather than hiding adversity, we responsibly transformed challenges into powerful editorial stories.

When Lachlan was swept overboard during a violent storm, Story Shop carefully coordinated coverage to balance family sensitivities with the scale of the incident.

The rescue became a BBC multi-platform exclusive, generating television, radio and online coverage that dramatically increased public engagement.

Later, when ocean currents forced the boat to divert toward Cairns, we reframed the story as a “race against starvation” narrative. This secured an exclusive with The Times, reigniting media attention during the final weeks of the expedition

To sustain media attention when the boat was quiet, we activated land-based spokespeople connected to the brothers.

Their grandmother’s nursing home organised rowing fundraisers and bake sales (given as an exclusive to the BBC with an 8 minute package and live interview, followed by the front page of the Edinburgh Evening News and plenty more coverage), while former rugby teammates completed endurance rowing challenges (achieving significant local coverage).

These stories generated regional broadcast coverage and human interest features that kept the story alive during quieter periods at sea.

Delivery and Implementation of Tactics

Story Shop effectively ran a global newsroom for 139 days - as well as in the weeks before and after.

Operating across Pacific, UK and Australian time zones, we maintained a 24-hour rota managing interview requests and story development.

Stories were distributed globally through PA and AP, allowing the expedition to appear across hundreds of outlets worldwide.

Coverage included major broadcasters such as:

- BBC
- ABC
- CNN
- NBC
- NPR
- PBS
- Sky News
- Strategic exclusives

Major moments were deliberately offered as targeted exclusives rather than widely distributed press releases.

This strengthened journalist relationships and encouraged deeper storytelling.

Rather than allowing the expedition to drift into silence mid-journey, we created deliberate “editorial moments” that generated new headlines, placing exclusives to ensure widespread media impact, e.g.:

Blair Kinghorn’s promise to meet them for a beer in Australia / The Times

Mark Wahlberg’s promise to play the brothers in a movie / BBC

A care home raising funds with physio rowing sessions / BBC Breakfast

Ewan McGregor promising to join the brothers for a row / AP

The near death experience / BBC

Flea comparing touring to rowing the Pacific / PA

When the brothers finally reached Australia after 139 days at sea, international media demand surged.

A Story Shop co-founder travelled to Australia to coordinate global coverage and manage requests from broadcasters worldwide, including Sky News, ABC, NBC and more.

The campaign concluded with a carefully managed media tour across Australia and the UK.

The brothers’ first major UK television interview was given to Lorraine Kelly, recognising her long-term support and delivering an emotional final chapter to the story, followed by a visit to

BBC Breakfast, BBC Scotland and more.

Measurement, Evaluation and Impact

Media Reach

The campaign generated extraordinary global media coverage:

2,410 pieces of coverage

147 million coverage views

1.96 billion total audience reach

Coverage appeared across international outlets including:

BBC, ABC News, CNN, NBC, PBS, Sky News, The Times, The Guardian and The Independent.

Fundraising Impact

Media attention directly fuelled the fundraising campaign. The expedition ultimately raised £1,027,727, exceeding the £1 million target and providing clean water for 40,000 people in Madagascar.

Sustained Global Attention

Most importantly, the campaign avoided the traditional mid-expedition media slump, maintaining consistent coverage across the entire 139-day journey.

ROI

With an agency fee of £36,000, the campaign generated £1.02 million in donations, delivering a 28:1 fundraising ROI through earned media alone.

Legacy

The story continues to resonate beyond the expedition itself.

The brothers have secured a book deal, discussions are underway for a film adaptation, and the clean water projects funded by the campaign are now beginning in Madagascar.