



The biggest public information campaign in history may have gone missing

By Michael Cluff

We thought we missed something? A brief check around colleagues in the Conservative Group for Europe indicated very little exposure to the “Get ready for BREXIT” campaign. Only last night did the campaign seem to move onto TV.

Boris Johnson promised as part of the required preparations for 31st October the largest ever public information campaign to prepare the people and businesses for the possibility of his no deal BREXIT. The campaign is widely reported to cost £138 million.

The campaign definitely launched on 1st September and is scheduled to spend more money in eight weeks than Unilever spend in a whole year. Most campaigns start with the unmissable launch before reducing their weight to continue to remind people of its existence. This one started with a very slow burn and is only just picking up speed.

This could be why when you look at the site activity report for www.gov.uk in the week to September 15th. It is only the fifth ranked utilised service, falling behind the public’s desire to check their Universal credit account, check the MOT history of a vehicle, tell DVLA you have sold a vehicle or signed onto HMRC.

This is important. If the Prime Minister is correct that we will be leaving on October 31st, with a good chance despite Parliament’s dictat that this cannot be a no deal exit, then we all need to be prepared. Yet the only real communication for most of the population seems be the forced publication of the early August Yellowhammer summary, and a promise that sometime soon an improved replacement will appear.

Of course, advertising regulations mean that advertising must be truthful and reflect the law of the land. Interesting the first line at <https://www.gov.uk/get-ready-brexit-check> says The United Kingdom is leaving the European Union on 31 October 2019. Arguably the current legal position should probably replace “is” with “may be”.

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There seem to be two possible interpretations for the slowness in the start of activity. That, just like our slowness on renegotiation and meeting Mrs. Merkel's 30 day deadline to put new proposals on the table, this governments seems to have a habit of leaving a large gap between general rhetoric and detailed proposals. Alternatively, there is a real problem in getting copy created and signed off which conforms both to the current legal requirements and the governments message. There has to be a conflict in communicating that you should spend time, money and energy on preparation, apparently for some small bumps in the road.

Both the advertising and the website you are sent to tells you that "we will leave" on 31st October. If you think the law makes this very unlikely and possibly not truthful - you are free to complain to the Advertising Standards Authority (<https://www.asa.org.uk/make-a-complaint.html>)

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