



**IT'S A
BLOODY
BIG DEAL**



SUMMARY

What to do when people don't understand that the biggest thing to happen to Major League Soccer is happening

The Toronto FC was a soccer club on life support. Once brimming with promise, the team was struggling to win matches, and its loyal fans were losing faith. Toronto's foray into Major League Soccer wasn't working.

The massive player acquisition of Jermain Defoe from Tottenham Hotspur gave us the opportunity to run with a campaign that would reverse the team's deteriorating perceptions, and shatter sales and broadcast records.

We knew the only way soccer would ever usurp hockey in the Canadian press would be for it to become front-page news in Europe first. If Brits weren't chatting about it in the "Tube" or on the Guardian, Canadians wouldn't pay attention. By provoking footie-obsessed Brits, our campaign dominated sports conversation, firing up Canadians about Defoe's arrival and injecting

much-needed energy into the TFC brand.

By showing a literal outpouring of emotion in England, we made Canadians understand just how big this Bloody Big Deal was – not only for the future of the team, but for the city of Toronto, and the advancement of soccer in Canada.



BACKGROUND

A soccer club hemorrhaging passionate, and ticket-buying supporters

For the seventh consecutive season, the Toronto FC (TFC) sat near the very bottom of the Major League Soccer (MLS) standings. Initially welcomed with great enthusiasm in 2007, TFC was not living up to expectations.

Protect yourself and get ready for the kicker

Toronto as a city was having a harder time finding reasons to support this struggling club and

TFC's brand love scores confirmed this sad reality. Only 8% of people considered TFC to be a club they believed in, and only 9% were proud to be fans.*

TFC was fading away in the memories and consideration of Canadians. Top-of-mind awareness was below all other major pro sports and – incredibly – below that of Manchester United.* TFC might as well have fallen off the face of the earth.

Obviously, TFC's business results wouldn't be immune to the dreadful public opinion. In early January 2014, season ticket sales were moving at glacial pace. Cumulative season sales hovered at 15% and

the renewal rate languished at 62% – nightmare figures, as described internally.

A team defining move

So to resuscitate this flat-lining patient of a soccer team, TFC signed star striker Jermain Defoe from the Tottenham Hotspur of the English Premier League (EPL). One of the league's top scorers in the prime of his career, Defoe was an important (and very costly - \$43 million) investment, one that represented their commitment towards the club's transformation.

TFC falls again, breaks record for worst MLS start

The Canadian Press | Posted: May 05, 2012 6:28 PM ET | Last Updated: May 05, 2012 8:21 PM ET

Worst TFC ever? We're getting close.

By Duncan Fletcher @DuncanDFletcher on Aug 24 2012, 12:48p



THE CHALLENGE



Creating a stir in a city that increasingly couldn't give a damn about its soccer team

A signing of this magnitude warranted an equally high-profile campaign that would **make TFC dominate the sports conversation.** Defoe needed to be the talk of the town, and excitement had to be surging prior to his reveal.

At the same time, the campaign needed to **crush TFC's brand and business objectives to improve the health of the franchise:**

- Restore the crumbling TFC brand: *increase equity*
- Put the franchise back on the sport radar: *increase familiarity*
- Position TFC as a team on the rise: *increase momentum*
- Pry open wallets: *increase ticket sales*
- Command attention outside BMO Field: *increase TV viewership*



THE TARGET

Winning over TFC-apatetic Canadians

Rumours of Defoe's move swirled for months before it was finalized. Hard-core TFC fans already knew of Defoe's soccer prowess and would be ecstatic of this marquee signing. It wasn't this group that needed convincing.

The target: lapsed and casual fans; **TFC-apatetic hockey-lovers**, who didn't understand the magnitude of this deal.

This crowd couldn't identify Defoe from a one-person police line-up. They took in the sport when there was a reason but TFC's 6-17 seasons weren't giving them anything to work with.

Why would they spend their hard earned disposable income to reward a team that wouldn't reward *them*?

The planning team knew that the campaign needed to create conversational currency to force casual fans to reconsider TFC. A subtle approach wouldn't capture their attention. They needed to be disruptive - not an easy task in the hockey-obsessed Toronto market.



THE INSIGHT

To make soccer big news in Canada, it needs to become “footie news” across the pond first

Soccer is consistently overshadowed by hockey, as well as by basketball, baseball, and football in terms of broadcast and editorial coverage. When soccer does land time on TV, MLS is drowned out by European action. Talk to any soccer fan here and you’ll hear twenty Champions League stars before any home-grown talent is mentioned.

Believe it or not, there’s a foundation here for hosting a world-class football club. The Greater Toronto Area is a hotbed for soccer, and the sport has quickly become the nation’s most popular participation sport with 350,000 more registered soccer players than hockey players.*

It was clear that there was a latent interest waiting to be unleashed. But how would we ignite this inherent love for the game and link it to TFC?

Since international soccer news was what made headlines here, we needed to borrow from our brethren across the Atlantic. Their anguish over the loss would create reverberations that would definitely be felt in Canada. If we could capture this emotional outpouring by the Brits and draw Canadians into the fray – from a fly on the wall perspective – then we’d be able to truly win them over and elicit the feelings and positive sentiment TFC so sorely needed.



THE BIG IDEA

IT'S A BLOODY BIG DEAL

Rubbing salt in the wounds of the Brits to spark momentum and interest in Canucks

We had to light a fire under Canadians – unfortunately it had to come at the expense of the Brits who would be reeling from the news. By embellishing and showcasing British footie fan reactions, we'd command the attention of fans here. It wasn't "you don't know what you have till it's gone" but rather "you don't know what you have till you see shocked Brits."

It's A Bloody Big Deal was our star-forward for the campaign. It became the main message – and not just because it might be heard coming from shocked Tottenham fans. It nodded to Defoe's English and EPL origins, and signalled the massive direct & indirect impact he'd have on TFC.



THE WORK

**A slice – albeit
over-the-top slice –
of British footie life
in Canada**

Typically, soccer acquisitions in Canada are intimate press conferences met with small media coverage. There's no real build-up. We devised a two-part campaign that revolved around

the January 13, 2014 press event to ensure prime media real estate:

- A teaser campaign from January 6-12 would fuel speculation; and
- An integrated media assault on January 13 to control and amplify the message.



PHASE 1 - TEASE

Toronto FC @torontofo · Jan 8
It's A Bloody Big Deal! Coming 01.13.14 bit.ly/1kqRoPv
Collapse Reply Retweet Favorite Buffer Instapaper More

YouTube

PLAYLIST Uploads from Toronto FC



It's A Bloody Big Deal! Part 1
Coming 01.13.14

A screenshot of a Twitter post from Toronto FC. The tweet includes a YouTube video player. The video player shows a man in a white shirt holding a white mug, looking thoughtful. The video title is "It's A Bloody Big Deal! Part 1" and it is scheduled to come out on 01.13.14.

We knew TFC diehards were an engaged bunch. By dropping a series of 0:10-second teasers over the course of several days on its social media channels, we orchestrated avid fan sharing that would set chat forums and blogs ablaze. These teasers hinted at what everyone knew was coming, but kept it purposefully vague for intrigue's sake. Broadcasting the teasers in high rotation on top sports networks leading up to the televised press conference further dialled up anticipation.



PHASE 2 - REVEAL



With excitement at fever pitch, we went full monty the morning of Defoe's press conference. An extensive integrated campaign (print, broadcast, digital, out-of-home) put Canadians in Brits' shoes – whether in their “lorries” or “on the Tube”. Wild postings, digital commuter boards, newspaper ads, pre-roll, page dominations, a front-page announcement on the cover of the biggest commuter daily newspaper, and a full TV spot

ensured everyone knew what the Bloody Big Deal was. A bright red double decker bus emblazoned with the message drove around the city, and was parked outside of the busiest subway station as a photo-op to maximize earned and paid media.



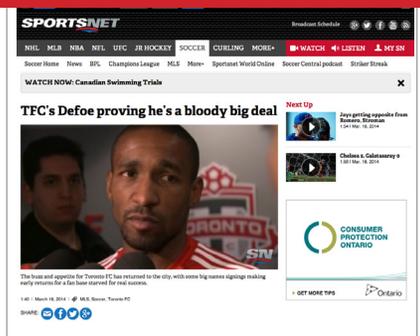
THE RESULTS



Toronto FC massively misjudge Jermain Defoe's status in England



IS MAJOR LEAGUE SOCCER ABOUT TO BE A BLOODY FKING BIG DEAL?



Bloody Big PR

- 40+ Canadian & international news, sports, and lifestyle publications (including Globe & Mail, Metro UK, Toronto Star, ESPN, Esquire) covered the story and lifted the message in their headlines
- We succeeded in pushing Brits' buttons: the Metro UK & Daily Mirror newspapers wrote snarky rebuttals, claiming us Canadians "massively misjudged Jermain Defoe's status in England"
- Were able to make 56% of fans exposed to the campaign more interested in the upcoming TFC season*

* Nielsen, 2013-2014 MLSE Brand Tracking Survey, May 2014.



Bloody Big Online Engagement

- Website traffic grew 400%
(over 55% were new visitors)
- Facebook traffic grew 450%
- Over 70,000 social mentions
in 7 days
- 16,000 social mentions on
January 13 alone (+395%
greater than average)

Bloody Big Brand Love

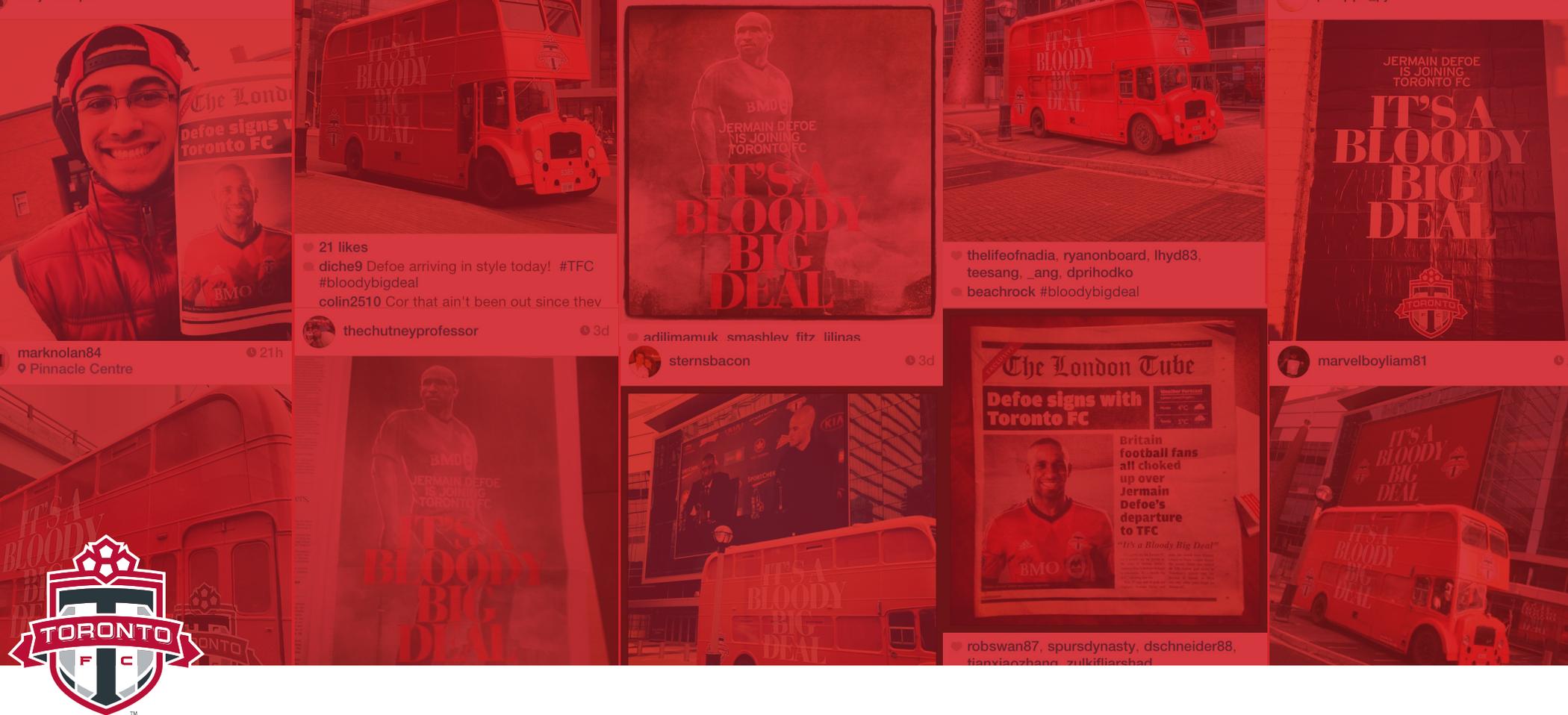
- (All scores significantly higher
than in the previous wave)
- Equity grew +7.1 to 54.0*
 - Familiarity grew +8% to 64%*
 - Momentum grew +9.6 to 60.9*

Bloody Big Business Results

- Cumulative season ticket sales sold
jumped from only 15% to 92%
complete between January 7-13
- The season ticket renewal rate
increased from 62% to 95%
- Total ticket sales of the home
opener increased 150%
- The Canadian television
broadcast of the home opener
was the most-watched english-
language MLS game in history
(1.6 million viewers)

* Nielsen, 2013-2014 MLSE Brand Tracking Survey, May 2014.

Data was collected in two waves: November 21-30, 2013 & April 9-22, 2014 (post-campaign). Equity is determined by a calculation of familiarity, quality & purchase consideration. Momentum is a score determined by a calculation of energy, ubiquity, future outlook and popularity.



By understanding the nuances of the category and consumer, we were able to create a cultural property around a massive player trade that was true to the brand and its culture. Where only a year ago TFC was a team seeking recognition and credibility in the football world, we managed to carve them a space on both the Canadian and international pitch.

A **Bloody Big Deal**, indeed.