

# LET'S GET DIGITAL

Public relations is changing as social media transforms the PR and marketing landscape. But the fundamentals of the discipline remain the same. **Neil Crossley** reports

Mergers, collaborations and a shift to digital delivery have shaped the PR industry in the South West over the past year. The recession has had an impact, of course. But by and large the PR industry in the South West seems to be weathering the downturn well.

"Anecdotally, you hear of there being challenges but, essentially, the community that we see today is the same community that was around one or two years ago," says Tom Bowden-Green, West of England chairman of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and consultant with Grayling. "The same faces and companies are still around, so there haven't been any particular headline casualties. Generally, the picture is a good one."

There are approximately 80 PR consultancies across the region and Bowden-Green is encouraged by the fact that the CIPR's membership has risen from 532 at the start of 2009 to 560 now.

The relative health of the sector is partially a result of the proactive approach of the CIPR in the region and the fact that the institute has made a real effort this year not to be too Bristol-centric, staging events across Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire.

It's also the result of a shift by some consultancies to introduce different business models. Some are finding that contracts are more short term or project-based, as retainer work dwindles. Consolidation through mergers is also evident. Ascent PR recently rebranded from Berkeley PR, and in January this year Trimedia UK, Bowden-Green's former home, became part of Grayling as part of a restructuring by parent company Huntsworth.

"This consolidation means we'll become the third-largest independent PR company in the world," he says.

Some PR agencies are offering added value by becoming full-service agencies. JBP Public Relations and Stuff Advertising recently entered into a strategic partnership and are working from the same offices in Clifton in Bristol, offering prospective clients a full advertising and PR service.

Such collaborations, says Caroline Harris, managing director of consultancy Spirit PR in Bristol, are important to the success of consultancies in the recession. Spirit has been working with companies in allied sectors such as video production, web design, social media and branding.

Its clients include the South West Regional Development Agency, Wallace And Gromit's Grand Appeal and the University of the West

of England (UWE). Harris admits that projects have taken longer to reach fruition but says the company has seen steady growth over by remaining active in its particular niche.

But the nature of the PR industry is changing at a startling rate. "It's like the toolbox has grown enormously and you have to work very hard to keep up," she says. "Clients seem to be looking for advice on how to navigate what some see as a minefield. They're aware that they need to engage through social media. So they're looking for the strategic advice – and we can bring in partners with other areas of expertise when needed. The role of PR consultancy in being strategic communicators remains. It's just that a lot of the channels have changed."

One of those is digital or online PR, as companies look at get a handle on how to use social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Blogger.

"Digital PR is a far more instant way of communicating with audiences and the media," says Shelley Fletcher, account manager with Deborah Clark Associates, a PR consultancy in Bodmin, Cornwall. "Press releases are still there, and newspapers, but if you want to get news out quickly then all forms of social media can offer an extremely effective way of doing that."

DCA's diverse client base includes Air Southwest, Tourism Newquay, Digital UK and St Austell Brewery. Fletcher cites the St Austell Brewery campaign as an example of how social media can really benefit a brand.

"St Austell Brewery was one of the first regional brewers on Twitter and we got a big feature about that in *The Publican* magazine for our client, basically by 'tweeting' them, and communicating with them," she says.

Social media campaigns have also worked well for Tourism Newquay, particularly in cases when travel journalists have been tweeting about discount offers in the region.

"It's all about picking up on opportunities that we wouldn't have been aware of had we not been using those channels," says Fletcher. "Clients find it a cost-effective way to reach their market, achieve influence and reach opinion-formers".

Bray Leino has had a lot of success in reaching markets and opinion-formers. The full service agency encompasses PR, advertising and marketing. Set up 31 years ago in



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Robert Fenner,  
Director, Grayling

## NEAR AND FAR

Sometimes, all a business needs to do is reach customers and prospects in its own neighbourhood; but increasingly companies are operating across a region, nationwide, across Europe, or even around the world. No matter how near or far those audiences may be, businesses must reach them and communicate with them.

In short, what's needed is PR that's scalable, reaching audiences in the South-West, but when needed, also reaching right across the UK, or worldwide.

That's why two of the leading PR businesses in this region, Grayling and Trimedia, have joined forces to form a local business with global reach. The new consultancy, which launched in January 2010, is called Grayling – and together, we now have a network of 900 people in 70 offices.

Here in the South-West, we serve professional, consumer, third sector, business and public sector clients, with links to, and experience drawn from, everywhere from Wiltshire to Cornwall. But as you can see, if our clients' horizons are broader, we're plugged into something much bigger.

Last year was a tough one for most businesses in the South-West, and no one is quite out of the woods yet. Reaching your audiences, talking to them, building a relationship with them, is a key step on that path. Talking to us at Grayling would be a very good start. We provide a different kind of thinking for a different kind of world.

**For more information please contact:**  
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**BOWDEN-GREEN** Bright outlook

Filleigh, North Devon, the agency has offices in Bristol, London, Chester and St Andrews, and had an annual turnover of £56m in 2008/2009. Clients include Airbus, Clarks, the Highways Agency and Sustrans.

Bray's PR division generated a £2m turnover in 2009 and grew by almost 13 per cent. The company has built a reputation for ingenuity with campaigns such as cheddarvision.tv, for West Country Farmhouse Cheesemakers, which features a 24/7 webcam of a round of cheese maturing in a Somerset dairy.

While some PR consultancies look to collaborate with allied sectors such as marketing, Bray Leino's full-service status has enabled it to use all options when creating solutions for clients.

"It's beneficial to have full-service access, and clearly clients are looking to derive the greatest benefits, so we go in with an open mind at the outset," says Roberta Fuke, managing director of the PR division. "Being part of a broader agency means you can quite happily say to a client: 'The solution in this case might not necessarily be PR. You might want to think about doing something slightly different and let me introduce you to another colleague.'"

Marketing is another route for clients, and digital channels are used equally by the company's marketing division. Fuke says: "We work hand-in-hand; I would say it's almost indistinguishable. So we might be doing a website, undertaking search engine optimisation (SEO) or be thinking about viral. One doesn't work independently of the other. It's what you do in the round that matters."

For the businesses, ensuring the PR agency gets the right message across is essential. When development partners Land Securities and Hammerson plc were developing the Cabot Circus retail development in

Bristol, Grayling's earlier incarnation Trimedia UK was the agency charged with the PR brief. And as Rob Graham, marketing and communications manager for Land Securities, says, the relationship between client and agency was pivotal.

"Trimedia UK helped with the stakeholder relationship side of the business: how the planning application was briefed to journalists and local media, for example. They made sure our position was clearly articulated and that people bought into the vision. They were also successful at helping us understand what makes Bristol special, as well as interpreting our vision and plans for the city centre back to the people of Bristol and the region."

As shifting trends take hold, higher education courses will need to equip the next generation of PR professionals with the skills to meet the changing demands of the job. In 2008 the CIPR launched a mentoring scheme, which enables students from any academic discipline to receive one-to-one advice and work placements from PR professionals in the South West.

There are also two degree courses in public relations in the region: at the University of Gloucester and the University of Falmouth. To help local businesses that have been affected by the downturn, the University of Falmouth and Cornwall College have launched an initiative to train graduates in marketing and PR to advise those businesses.

"The bottom line is: are these companies at risk of having to make people redundant and will they suffer without help?" says Jon Cope, course leader on the BA (Hons) Public Relations course at the University of Falmouth. "If they broadly meet those criteria we can offer them help. We've selected an elite group of seven graduates who are working with businesses to improve their online marketing and PR."

While large London agencies still have a lot of clout in the sector, many South West PR companies have achieved a presence to match the capital. According to Jason Clark, co-director with Deborah Clark Associates (DCA), the region's emerging technologies and innovation only adds to the credentials of home-grown PR consultancies.

"The innovation here around the low-carbon agenda and the new environmental technologies emerging really play to the strengths of the region. There's an awful lot to shout about; we have a fantastic quality of life, fantastic clients and in many ways we can say we are the envy of the UK."

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## TIMOLEON GETS BRANDED

Matthew Fairweather Design Consultants, which has offices in Bristol, Bath and Exeter, has won a contract to create a brand identity for Timoleon, a start-up in Exeter specialising in renewable under-floor heating. Timoleon provides bespoke underfloor heating that delivers the correct heat output efficiently. Darren Trivett, managing director at Timoleon, said: "We were hugely impressed with the work completed for us by Matthew Fairweather. The agency quickly understood our sector, target market and the messages we wanted to convey to our audience."

## CREATENET PITCHES CLIENT WEBSITE PERFECTLY

Cretenet, the website design and marketing studio, has developed a website for Perfect Pitch Communications in Bournemouth, a business that helps people to improve their presentation skills for job interviews, sales pitches or general corporate communication. Natasha Tobin of Perfect Pitch said: "Cretenet developed a very good website for us, creating some great intuitive tools that are clear and easy to use."

Tobin said the business "wanted something more complex and advanced than the traditional start-up site."



ONLINE Perfect Pitch



WINNER The Audi Experience

## AUDI EXPERIENCE IS A WINNER

Plymouth's Twofour Communications has scooped IVCA LiveCom Awards for its 'The Audi Experience - At The Goodwood Festival of Speed' in two categories. It was highly commended in the sports category and also highly commended in the festival category. The Audi Experience, created by Twofour, was a mix of interactive experiential installations and live shows at the Goodwood festival. Hosts included Sir Bobby Charlton, Ben Fogle and racing driver Allan McNish. The IVCA Livecom Awards focus solely on live events and experiential marketing.

## CHARITY BEGINS IN EXETER

Web marketing and design business Rokk Media has donated its email marketing system to St Loye's Foundation, a training charity in Exeter. The email system, KKORespond, helps businesses to exploit their databases and set up and self-manage e-marketing campaigns. The system is already used by organisations including Devon County Council, Exeter Airport, Exeter Chiefs and Exeter City Football Club.

## DMG HAS 20:20 VISION

Digital Marketing Group, a digital agency with businesses in Bristol, Swindon and elsewhere in the UK, has acquired 20:20 London through a wholly owned subsidiary for up to £2m. The deal comprises an initial payment of up to £1.5m in cash, plus £250,000 in DMG shares on completion and a further £250,000 in shares if

performance targets are hit. 20:20 London is a full-service digital agency operating in the digital and mobile space. Its founder, Peter Riley, will become chief executive of a new DMG division called 20:20.

This division will be the pure play digital marketing division of the group, consisting of 20:20 London and DMG's existing digital marketing agencies, including Swindon's InboxDMG and Bristol's HyperLaunchDMG. The agencies in this division are expected to be rebranded shortly.

## MARKETERS HEAD TO BOURNEMOUTH

Bournemouth University will this year host the Chartered Institute of Marketing's Annual Communications Lecture. The event, which starts at 6.30pm on 3 March, will include several big-name industry professionals talking about the latest trends and techniques.