



Category: Outstanding Independent Practitioner

Entrant name: Deb Sharratt MCIPR

Company: DebSharratt Communications

An overview of your experience, your commitment to professional development and how you contribute to the industry:

My PR career started in 1996 at a charity. Then at Pubmaster, I was promoted three times before moving to government communications as a PR Specialist Advisor. During this time I completed CAM Certificate & Diploma and MA in Marketing and won Gold PRide Awards for Best Publication (twice) and Best Integrated Campaign.

I set up my own business in 2011 with the aim of providing a flexible PR resource and improve my work-life balance, as the mother of small children, giving me more control and flexibility.

Having always worked 'in-house' I studied project management, business & finance, attained a PRINCE2 qualification and a business finance qualification, to help me manage my own business, which I regularly update. In 2012, I won a Gold PRide award for Best Freelancer and also Gold for Best Sporting Campaign, followed by Gold for Best Corporate/Business to Business in 2013. Also winning Silvers with clients in 2015 and 2017.

I'm an accredited practitioner having joined the CIPR in 1996. I have contributed to the success of the CIPR Northeast Committee in a number of roles for 14 years and I'm currently Vice-Chair, PRide Coordinator and social media manager.

In a voluntary capacity I'm writing a skills and best practice guide for CIPR and have co-authored articles on ethical influencer relations for both Influence Online and Vuelio, and also hosted a webinar for Vuelio on the same subject. I'm also currently organising the CIPR Northern Conference which takes place in July 2018.

Outline your work-related achievements over the last three years, including your business objectives and/or plan:

As the industry has changed I have developed my digital skills and in addition to traditional PR activity, I now offer additional services in strategic digital PR, influencer relations, and social media. To grow the business I now work as an independent practitioner, an associate; a tutor and a blogger.

In 2016, to diversify and create new income streams I created a new part of the business, a lifestyle, travel and food blog. It supports my PR business by creating my own online media space. I chose a lifestyle blog as it fits perfectly the sectors I work in. It is a standalone business but is also integral to my freelance work. When relevant I include it in pitches for business, discuss opportunities with clients and other PR agencies who wish to reach my audience. I have also taken on new PR clients after working first with them as a blogger.

After 18 months My Boys Club has a DA of 30, is in the top 3% of UK family lifestyle blogs, receives over 10,000 page views from 4-5000 unique readers per month; over 12,000 social media followers and reaches over 100,000 people monthly, and generates traffic to clients websites, raises awareness of their business, and reaches audiences that are hard to reach via traditional media. In terms of supporting my business, My Boys Club already earns its own modest income with the potential to grow.

Anne-Marie Lacey, MD Filament PR said “Deb is a much-valued member of the team. We work with her across a number of client accounts as our Associate as well as commissioning her in a blogger capacity for the execution of ethical influencer relations campaigns. A consummate professional, creative thinker and strategic delivery partner, Deb is outstanding at her job and never fails to deliver against her KPIs. She really is a safe (and very much trusted!) pair of hands on all accounts.”

Outline the biggest work-related challenge you’ve faced in the past three years, including details of what happened, how you overcame it and what you learnt from it:

In 2015, a large contract with public sector client which equated to 3/5 of my income was cut. All external contracts with this client were not renewed and I found myself in a position where I needed to create new business.

After evaluating the existing business I decided to create a different business model with the aim of not being so reliant on income from a single source in the future. I would continue my PR & Marketing services and add three new income streams, which all now contribute to the business.

1. PR & Marketing services – 40% income
2. Associate work – 26% income
3. Teaching – 12% income
4. Blogging – 22% income

I’ve learned that as an independent practitioner you are not simply a freelancer but you really are a business owner and that defining and operating your activity as a business is necessary for growth and sustainability.

Having a strategic overview of cash flow as well as current and future income as well as day to day activity is vital. I’ve also learned that it’s beneficial to keep learning and to do things that are out of your comfort zone, such as hosting webinars. And that networking for independent practitioners is essential.

A summary of a campaign you are particularly proud of, including details of the brief, objectives, strategy, tactics, outputs, outcomes and budget:

Hall Hill Farm is a family-run visitor attraction, which in 2014 welcomed 50,000 visitors. For the past three years, I've worked with them to grow their business.

Objectives:

- Increase visitor numbers year on year by 10%
- Recognition as an outstanding visitor attraction regionally and nationally in at least two awards
- Promote farming values through public events and to schools – at least one annual event and 200 school visits

Strategy:

Traditional media and social media to reach new audiences; enter appropriate awards and work with schools to provide learning opportunities in line with the national curriculum.

Tactics:

Press releases, features, events, initiatives, social media posts and competitions

Outputs:

Broadcast, print, online regional and national media coverage including two live TV broadcasts. Social media followers increased to 26,000 from a couple of thousand in 2011. Videos on Facebook and competitions regularly receive over 10% engagement. Facebook lives on media social channels generate thousands of views.

Outcomes:

- 2017 visitor numbers increased by 15% (85,000)
- 2017 National Farm Attraction of the Year
- 2018 Silver VisitEngland Small Visitor Attractions - the only tourist attraction in the North of the country to be shortlisted.
- Farmer VisitEngland Tourism Superstar in 2017 – one of only 10 in the country.
- Lamb Cam and sheep shearing events attract hundreds of people both educating and entertaining the visitors
- At least one school visited every day in 2017, over 350 in total.

Budget:

£3500 annually