

The logo for the CIPR PRIDE AWARDS 2019 Gold Winner. It features the text 'CIPR PRIDE AWARDS 2019' in white on a black background, followed by 'GOLD WINNER' in large, multi-colored letters (pink, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple).

Category: Outstanding Independent Practitioner

Entrant name: James Donaldson

Company: Engage PR

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

A third-generation journalist, I worked in newspapers for nearly 20 years - latterly as chief sub-editor at the Evening Express. I stood in for the Editor on numerous occasions. In 2009, I launched Aberdeen-based Engage PR following a brief stint with a large PR firm. My commitment to clients has led to long-term relationships with companies, largely in the in B2B sector. I have contributed to the industry by offering opportunities to the next generation. Two graduates were taken on as staff despite limited experience. One is now a senior comms manager in Edinburgh, while the other runs his own PR firm. A number of other Engage placements have gone on to find jobs in media, marketing and PR sector, with one (around 120 hours, June-Dec 2017) landing an account executive role with a large marketing communications agency. I was the only member of staff from January 2009 to May 2012 and again since March 2017. Due to work commitments, Engage has – unfortunately – only had one placement (around 10 hours in total) since December 2017. I attend business networking events and engage with others in the PR, marketing and design sectors. Engage has helped a number of charities for free, or at vastly reduced rates, to support the community in which it operates. In October 2018, I supported a campaign to provide podiatry services to homeless people free of charge. The press release received page lead coverage in the Press & Journal and was also covered by the Evening Express.

I continue to support a social enterprise organisation that encourages diversity, inclusion and the next generation of engineers at a very reduced rate for a retained contract. The client's profile has been raised through regular coverage with articles appearing in the local print media, Energy Voice, The Scotsman, OGV Energy, Aberdeen Business News and others throughout 2018 and 2019. For the launch of the social enterprise's diversity and inclusion awards in 2018, I engaged with oil majors, who were sponsors, to ensure sign-off for projects and that all parties were kept in the loop. Media coverage was secured before and after the event.

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

The aim is to deliver high quality projects to companies and then be recommended to their contacts to handle additional PR projects. Engage has been built on word of mouth rather than any significant marketing spend. In 2019, I signed two FTSE-listed clients. For one, I secured coverage in the the Scottish media business and oil and gas media in April. The other, a FTSE-250 company, was signed in June.

By ensuring a press release had plenty of 'news lines', I secured coverage on the BBC (online) and in other media, including international oil and gas publications, for the launch of a new drilling firm. In October 2018, I secured approval from an oil major to be named in a press release following two weeks of communication with its Paris office. With the oil major named, the press release stood a better chance of securing media coverage. It appeared in a number of local and international oil and gas publications. My objective is to deliver a service to my clients that exceeds expectations.

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:

The massive drop in the oil price led to several firms curtailing PR marketing spend altogether, which impacted on a number of companies including Engage. The solution has been to find work elsewhere. I delivered an Edinburgh bar project (Father Ted, Jan 2018) with coverage in joe.ie (2.5k shares of the story from this site alone), Edinburgh Evening News, Irish Post, Daily Edge, Scottish Field and others. I handled the PR launch (July 2017) of a new life sciences development in Ireland which involved an endorsement from a government minister. Coverage was secured in the Irish Times and others.

The entire media side of the project was delivered by me from Aberdeen. I signed an £8m-turnover North-West of England business in September 2018 and handle its communications strategy, press releases, LinkedIn and award entry activity. I also reviewed tender/contract proposals and business plans as well as project managing design work for clients to make up for the shortfall in traditional Aberdeen PR projects as the region recovered from the low oil price. In addition, I provided content for design agency projects. I'm retained to handle social media pages for six clients – something I previously did not think I would be able to support. I handle advertising and sponsorships for a few clients. The drop in the oil price made me diversify into other areas of content and project management.

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

Accountancy firm Infinity Partnership has been a retained client for Engage since September 2014. A key part of communicating the company's first-rate services has been achieved by winning national industry awards. Infinity was nominated for 10 awards at London events in 2018 - all were written by myself. The firm won four awards at the inaugural IRIS Customer Awards; won at the Accounting Excellence Awards and won at the British Accountancy Awards for the fourth year in a row. These successes have led to coverage in the business

media and traction on the managing partner's LinkedIn page (one post received 15,000 views). The awards successes led to the company being mentioned in the Scottish Parliament (twice) - creating the opportunity for press releases.

Simon Cowie, managing partner and owner of Infinity, said: "James has been a contributing factor in the success of the business. He regularly puts forward ideas on how to better promote Infinity and responds quickly to our requests for assistance on a variety of subjects. Engage will remain a key part of Infinity's growth strategy."

Infinity has increased turnover by 20% in the past two years, and increased staff by 50% in the past year. Press releases written for Infinity has led to coverage in the Press and Journal, Scottish Business Insider, the Evening Express, The Scotsman, The Herald, Business Now and others.