



Category: Corporate and Business Communications Campaign

Company: Faith PR and Johnsons of Whixley

Entry title: Cultivating Johnsons' rooted reputation

Brief and objectives:

Johnsons of Whixley Ltd is a family-run plant nursery business run by three generations of the Richardson family since 1964.

Johnsons appointed Faith PR to raise its profile as a trusted supplier of plants and trees to the amenity and garden retail sectors in the UK and deliver ongoing proactive communications activity to help increase sales across its wholesale commercial, garden centre sales and Xpress divisions.

Rationale behind campaign, including research and planning:

As one of the longest established and largest commercial nursery businesses in Europe, Johnsons wanted to cultivate its reputation to ensure it remained at the forefront of the industry.

Faith carried out an extensive audit of Johnsons' existing marketing activity, creating clear messaging for each of its three divisions. It set out key objectives, targeting and a bespoke marketing, PR and social media strategy.

Activity would:

- Capitalise on Johnsons' news across its sub-brands plus proactive feature opportunities
- Maximise Johnsons' horticultural and business expertise
- Position Johnsons as thought leaders and experts in their field
- Build up Johnsons' limited online presence through regular posts and social media activity, bespoke to each audience
- Generate increased brand awareness through dedicated, 'ownable' content in print and online (local, regional, trade and specialist media).

Strategy and tactics, including creativity and innovation:

Activity included:

- Focusing on achievements, new contract and award wins, successful projects and milestones, initiatives such as the launch of Johnson's own aviary to boost the local bee population as well as CSR with local schools and charities to generate a drumbeat of proactive and timely media content.
- Reacting to news agenda – securing a live comment for Johnsons on predictions for how drones may shape the future of horticulture with BBC Look North NE, plus coverage around International Women's Day, featuring long standing female employees commenting on the changing role of women in horticulture.
- Developing synopses to secure opinion articles in key trade and vertical media around horticulture and current affairs, such as the Xylella (plant virus) outbreak, family-run businesses, Brexit's impact on migration and employment.
- Using founder John Richardson's 80th birthday as a hook to showcase the heritage of the business and his reputation as a horticulture expert.
- Distinct social media channels were created by division to ensure messaging was on brand and specific to each audience. Activity was increased to ensure consistency and proactive engagement amongst press, retailers and customers, and increase leads, sales and pathways to potential customers.
- Development of an online content strategy around key content pillars to ensure weekly, relevant updates to the website and bite-size content for LinkedIn and social channels. This included informative/educational assets and advisory content such as 'top tips' guides, blogs case studies and infographics.
- Creating a personality for the business, showcasing the team through Q&As on the blog, 'day in the life' features on social media as well as profiling in the media.

Implementation of tactics:

June 2017 – June 2018:

Ongoing media relations activity (48 releases issued), blog posts (56 posts uploaded) and organic social media activity.

Key dates to drive activity included:

June 2017 & October 2017: entries drafted for Family Business of the Year Awards and Yorkshire Post's Rural Excellence Awards.

July 2017: A short brand video was produced to promote Johnsons for organic use on social media and website.

November 2017: National Tree Week provided a catalyst to showcase Johnsons' net contribution to the UK tree population reinforced with stats to showcase its impact on the industry.

April 2018: John Richardson's legacy was celebrated with a statue unveiled on site by BBC Look North's Harry Gratton.

June 2018: Johnsons collaborated with garden designer Chris Myers' on his RHS Chatsworth Flower Show garden, Hay Time in the Dales, which won silver.

November – March 2018: Xpress campaign - a social media-optimised video promoted the Xpress division (email marketing and social media advertising), targeting dormant customers and prospects. The campaign was monitored closely and put on hold during inclement weather.

Measurement and evaluation:

Outputs:

187 pieces of coverage generated by a mix of news, thought leadership, comment seeding and profiling between June 2017 and June 2018 across target media:

- 8 DPS
- 8 full pages
- 14 features
- 105 online (28 with links to website)
- 1 national media (The Sun)
- 5 broadcast – 1 national (Five News), 3 regional (BBC Look North and Radio York). Johnsons also appeared on DIY SOS supplying plants for the project.

Coverage exceeded target KPIs:

- 72% more coverage generated YOY
- 488% increase in reach YOY to 13,200,356
- 87% of articles carried key messaging
- 75% included impact measures (headline mention, product shot, logo, quote, CTA)

Coverage covered target sectors including: landscaping, horticulture, consumer gardening, residential and commercial development, beekeeping, conservation, charitable, forestry, tourism and business.

Johnsons were runner-up in the Family Business of the Year Awards and founder John Richardson won the Lifetime Achievement Award in Yorkshire Post's Rural Excellence Awards.

The net Twitter following for the Wholesale Commercial account increased 12%; Garden Centre Sales increased 46%; LinkedIn followers increased by 60%.

The Express campaign generated a reach of 55k over 16 weeks with 78% video views. An A/B test email campaign to 234 customers resulted in an increased open rate, from 27% to 31%, with a 3% click-through rate.

N.B Web analytics are currently not available to help measure the success of blog content and social media activity as a driver to the website.

Business outcomes:

Marketing and media relations activity worked in tandem with Johnsons' business growth, reinforcing Johnsons' position as one of the leading horticultural businesses in the UK. We differentiated the business' offerings and value proposition by educating customers and providing compelling content on relevant industry issues. Turnover for the year ending 2017 increased by over 17% - its most profitable year to date.

Johnsons also added 500 new customers to its 4,700 strong database of existing and historical customers. Twelve permanent employees were recruited, and the forward order book value increased by 22%.

Budget and cost effectiveness:

5 days of PR and social media blog content creation was carried out as part of the monthly retainer.