



CIPR PRIDE AWARDS 2019 GOLD WINNER

Category: Outstanding Small Public Relations Consultancy

Company: Clark Communications

Number of employees - including executive / support staff - and annual fee income:

Employees: 9.

Open positions: 2 graduates.

Business objectives and analysis of performance against budget over the past three years:

We are in the final year of a five-year plan. While initially focused on financial growth (to unlock our ambitions in other areas), we have developed to encompass cultural and innovation growth.

Objectives:

- Increase profitability / maximise capacity
- Shape leadership team
- Improve data-driven effectiveness, backed by training and support
- Improve culture and environment
- Remain debt-free.

A brief overview of business / team strategy:

We want Clark Communications to continually improve. To be an attractive employer, an outstanding partner to clients, and an industry leader. And for the team to have fun, and benefit personally, from achieving this. It's a big ask, but a good driver for the team.

Our strategy is focused on:

1. Culture

We have established that our natural culture is one of our key attributes. It's the reason our team stays, and others want to work for us.

We don't like policies. They can be impersonal, oppressive and prescriptive. Instead, we have developed a set of grown-up 'behaviours' to underpin everything we do.

Allowing us to be individuals that succeed together.

- Trust: trusting staff to give 100%, and directors to be fair - and to say 'yes'
- Output: Focus on what you deliver, not where you are
- Communication: Keep the conversation going, particularly about client work
- Being present: Work from wherever 20% of the week – but be 'present'
- Out of sight: Tech-free time off – respecting the right to be absent
- Technology: Use up-to-date tech to support the above
- Accountability: Honesty, openness and thinking of colleagues, clients and the business alongside yourself.

2. Growth

Now that we are on a firmer financial footing, proper growth can be achieved, through:

- Incentivising (% first year fee) all staff to participate in business development
- Focusing on what we're good at and winning more of it
- Innovating around services and approach
- Growing the staff team to better support business development
- Focusing on what we already have. Our largest client has grown from an annual fee income of £10k in 2015 to approx. £100k this year through offering new ideas, new services and impeccable delivery.

3. Innovation

Independent, stable and ambitious, we have the freedom to do things differently.

For example, this year have developed a unique partnership with a leading UK law firm to offer crisis and issues support under a white label agreement. They offer clients reputational services to augment legal services, we develop the strategies and deliver the work. Having started this partnership in January, we have already landed four new clients via this route.

A summary of commitment to CPD and professionalism:

All our PR team are CIPR members and participating in CPD, and 5 of 6 PR staff have secured Accredited Practitioner, with the other working towards. We are represented at the CIPR Scotland Committee and attend many events.

Each member of staff has a training budget, and at appraisals we agree how to spend it on a meaningful programme of improvement and diversification of skills.

We have a strong HR programme which runs throughout the year, so that all staff know what's happening when. Therefore, they can focus less on whether they are getting a pay rise and when, and more on client work and growth (both business and personal).

Milestones in the calendar include full financial updates, CPD deadline day, appraisals, CSR activity, wellness, bonus month, scheduled pay rises, focus on making our business better.

A summary of recent outstanding achievements, including client list growth / retention:

- Retaining our largest client (via competitive tender) for a further two years
- Having a long-standing PR client transfer all its digital & design work to us – forming a full integrated offering, worth an additional £40k pa
- Adding £206k new fee to our business in the last financial year. In the first month of this new financial year, we added £36k of new client work
- Increasing our honesty with our team about our commercial goals, engaging them in our journey by ensuring they understand their contribution and how they benefit from our success
- Maintained 100% staff retention in the last financial year
- Our client retention is robust; around one third have been working with us for 5+ years
- We have demonstrated innovation in finding new revenue through a unique law firm partnership, and through setting our own culture path
- Increased profitability by maximising capacity, introducing a new timesheet system to provide data and reduce over-servicing, and recruiting admin support to free-up consultant time
- Improve senior leadership, appointing a new director to the board (from within) and implementing a senior team structure to focus on growth
- Improve team effectiveness by refining our appraisal process with a simple 'stop, start, continue' colleague feedback
- Improve culture and environment by providing more flexibility around holidays and our behaviour led culture, and introducing meaningful perks, such as Summer Fridays (4pm Friday finish) and 'Pay Day Fridays' (monthly early finish the rest of the year), and a personal enrichment reward, which staff have invested in driving / photography / Spanish lessons.

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

The Elms School (£9k)

Objectives:

- Work with school management and legal advisors to communicate restructure
- Create robust messaging to articulate rationale and impact, including redundancies
- Manage media reaction.

Implementation:

- Strong partnership with lawyers to ensure messaging was consistent and timely, and completely integrated into the legal process
- Developed communications material: core story/message staff presentation, parents' presentation, letters, meeting scripts, media statement, Q&A
- Coordinated announcements to ensure audiences received information simultaneously
- Provided counsel to school principal for presentations and meetings
- Advance briefing ex-principal, identified as a key influencer
- Creating single core rationale for the activity meant that all comms – both engagement and legal – echoed each other.

Results & evaluation:

- Restructure communicated in a timely manner; information was well-received with no negative reaction
- Staff members approached ex-principal for opinion; advance briefing ensured he could underline messages
- No media leakage, due in large part to robust planning.