

Basic Information

Region (Check Region):

South of England and Channel Islands

Category:

27. Independent PR Practitioner of the Year

Entry Information

Entrant company name:

Second Mountain Communications Ltd

Entry title:

Ben Veal MCIPR - Second Mountain Communications

Entry

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

I have worked in public relations for the last 15 years, with in-house and agency-side roles spanning sectors including food and drink, property, healthcare and creative services. My experience has been wide and varied, yet I've always been drawn towards the purpose that lies behind organisations - specifically, telling the stories of business leaders that look to use their firms to make a positive impact in the world.

Throughout my career, I have always been proud to be a PR professional and CIPR Member, ever since studying for the CIPR Advanced Certificate while in my first PR role at a housing association: I believe that the CIPR's commitment to ethical standards and a strict code of conduct is what sets us apart as true communications professionals with the ability to influence, guide and support senior decision-making.

I am a CIPR Accredited Practitioner and have been an active volunteer member of the CIPR's South West committee for the past two years, serving as the region's social media officer. In the last year particularly, during the pandemic, our committee has successfully delivered some valuable training events, supporting members with CPD, ongoing best practice learning and providing a sense of connection throughout the isolating lockdown months.

Outline your work-related achievements over the last 2 years, including your business objectives and/or plan:

I founded my independent communications consultancy shortly after the first UK lockdown

in 2020 with a clear goal: Second Mountain Comms helps good people and businesses do good. As a specialist practitioner, I directly support ethical and purpose-driven companies and charities by using my PR and communications experience to share their vision and achievements with the audiences that matter most to them, acting as an amplifier and storyteller for my clients.

The business, established less than a year ago, has already built up a focused portfolio of ten clients: a mix of paid, pro-bono and reduced-rate charitable work, all of which I deliver personally, including: The Charlie Waller Trust (one of the UK's most trusted mental health charities), Business against Poverty (a community of businesses using their firms to address issues of poverty), Organic India (a leader in sustainable teas, supporting small family farmers across rural India) and Wiltshire Youth for Christ (a charity providing pastoral care, youth work provision and mentoring to secondary school children). I also partner with several South West agencies as an independent extension of their PR and marketing teams.

My consultancy has grown via focused PR and social media activity and word-of-mouth referrals. I have been clear about how I operate as an independent practitioner from day one, establishing the business based on core values of reliability, honesty, transparency and putting quality above all else, with close adherence to the CIPR's code of conduct.

Provide an outline of a work-related challenge you have faced in the last 2 years, including details of what happened, how you overcame it and what you learnt from it:

At the beginning of 2020, I had just started a new role as an Associate Director at a fast-growing Bath agency. I'd made firm strides in professionalising the business and its operations when, less than nine months after being hired, my senior position was the first to be cut as the business was placed under great economic pressure by the COVID-19 pandemic: I was made redundant for the first time in my career.

Yet this unexpected setback provided me the opportunity to embark on the next stage of my PR career, becoming an independent practitioner.

Losing my job and income at the outset of global pandemic was a huge personal blow. I had a six year old son with additional learning needs to help homeschool, a one year old son and an NHS key worker wife at home - and I genuinely did not know what I was going to do to support our family.

I needed to take time to focus on the next step. Shortly after receiving notice of redundancy, I decided to undertake an indoor cycling challenge to fundraise for mental health charity Mind, cycling the distance from Land's End to John o' Groats (874 miles) on an exercise bike. The many hours of focused cycling provided time to think about working in a more purposeful and authentic way going forward. The idea crystallised to build a boutique comms consultancy that would align my professional expertise, family life, personal motivations and support my mental health: Second Mountain Comms Ltd launched to a positive reception with a striking brand identity and website, all created on a very tight budget during lockdown.

It's been a challenging period - but I've learnt more during this time than at any other point throughout my career or life: how to align work and family, the value and satisfaction of doing work that I'm personally passionate about, and how resilient I am as a

communications professional: I've spent the last year learning new skills, from brand development and business planning to the craft of SEO copywriting, while continuing to commit time to voluntary causes I believe in. I am proud to have established myself as a specialist independent practitioner with a clear niche and purpose, and look positively towards a brave new world with foundations laid for future growth.

Provide an outline of a piece of work you have delivered in the last 2 years that you are particularly proud of, including details of the brief, objectives, strategy, tactics, outputs, outcomes and budget:

The Charlie Waller Trust, one of the UK's most respected mental health charities supporting young people and their families, was my first client as an independent practitioner; I have now been working with the charity for almost one year throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During this time, I have provided the business with professional comms expertise, delivering a range of communications materials for topics ranging from coping with self-harm to managing stress in today's world to mental health in the workplace and dealing with the disappointment of exam cancellations - all written with the charity's audiences firmly in mind.

This ongoing work, delivered at a reduced charitable rate for a budget of under £10,000 to date, has helped the charity to effectively reach its audiences in a professional and engaging manner as part of a wider digital transformation strategy, providing essential support and practical, accessible and reassuring mental health guidance at a time when it has been sorely needed.

Supporting Information

Additional supporting information (images, artwork, clippings and other media):

Provided
