DECISION

Black & White Communications

strategic communications
– an independent report

DECISION

DECISION BUSINESS MAGAZINE
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The following report on the work of Black & White was researched and compiled by DECISION business magazine and published in December 2004 as part of the Strategic Communications Showcase project.

The purpose was to identify and then validate the attributes, actual experience and performance of the firm. Its compilation took place over a four-month period.

The content was completely sourced and written from interviews undertaken by DECISION.

Black & White were not able to make any changes to the report, apart from the correction of any factual inaccuracies should they have occurred.

As a consequence the views expressed by those who have been interviewed are not necessarily those of the firm.

Larry Dillner
Publisher

Background

Established 1998. Consultancy Management Standard accredited by the Public Relations Consultants Association.

People

2 directors; 2 account directors; 2 account managers; 2 account executives; 1 administrator.

Rachel Owen, founder and managing director – BSc (Hons) Civil Engineering, Member of the Institute of Public Relations; former technical writer at Dryden Brown (1986-1988); account manager, Rex Stewart Grayling (1988-1990); freelance technical writer (1990-1992); account manager, Wordsun (1992-1998).

Paul Noble, non-executive director – BSc (Hons) Physics, Member of the Institute of Public Relations, Institute of Public Relations Approved Trainer; technical writer promoted up to account director, Interco Business Consultants (1978-1981); managing director, Interco West (1981-1983); managing director, Barneys PR (1983-1988); corporate communications manager, Abbey Life (1988-1991); senior lecturer in PR and marketing communications, Bournemouth University (1992-2000).

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF WORK – 1

Premier EDA Solutions, Ware – brief was to position the company as the leading PCB design training organisation; Black & White enabled Premier to comment on significant issues in specific trade journals to demonstrate their understanding of the subject and authority.

Solatron Mobrey, Slough – manufacturers of instrumentation for measuring level and flow; for the launch of a new product for the marine industry to comply with new legislation, Black & White devised a campaign which would enable the target audience to understand the reasons for acquiring the product as well as the benefits; Black & White developed case studies to support existing models as specifiers like to know that they are buying something which comes with the endorsement of their peers.

Zellweger Analytics, Poole – launching and supporting global brands in the USA, across Europe, and Asia for the Swiss-owned manufacturer of gas detectors.

Morgan Advanced Ceramics, Stourport – developer of materials for diverse applications, from aerospace to medical; Black & White worked on internal PR strategy to integrate skilled people brought together from the company's growth by acquisition; Black & White developed case studies to communicate applications to specific vertical markets.

BOC Edwards, Crawley – manufacturer of vacuum pumps for industrial processes; Black & White communicated the new technology of a dry pump concept as well as the benefits of the product; identified 'flagship' site where client-company had installed the product and arranged a visit for trade press journalists; with impending ATEX legislation, Black & White saw the opportunity for BOC Edwards to demonstrate their authority on the subject with case studies of how the company had helped customers gain the necessary approvals for compliance.

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF WORK – 2

NDC Infrared Engineering, Maldon – production process sensor manufacturer; Black & White devised a strategy to educate new customers in the concept of being able to measure critical parameters without taking samples off a production line for testing; technical reports demonstrating a reduction in costs and downtime were placed in trade journals, with the applications specific to the target audience of each publication.

Molex Premise Networks, Fareham – IT cabling; Black & White developed a strategy to raise the profile of the company with IT departments and IT consultants, rather than just installers, in order to be placed on tender lists of high value, prestige contracts as a matter of course; to position Molex as an authority rather than an anonymous third-party supplier, Black & White looked at national news events and identified editorial opportunities where the company could comment on cabling issues, such as flooding and the effect of water ingress on networks.

REFERENCES – 1

"I would describe Premier EDA Solutions as a small company that is very good at what it does, but with finite resources. What I look for as MD of that small company are professional partners that I can rely on when I delegate some of my role, which applies from accountancy to human resources and includes PR. One of the initial attractions of Black & White was that they seemed to be in tune with technical people. Quite often PR firms tend to get a bit overpowering. At our first meeting Rachel Owen sat back, listened, took notes and asked relevant questions.

"Previously we had a PR firm which did a reasonable job for us, but they put a price tag on every single contact we had with them in addition to the retainer. Black & White's proposals were clear and precise, competitively priced and showed, importantly, that they wanted to build a relationship.

"Initially Black & White faced an awkward situation because really we could do our own press releases thank you very much! I know a lot of the editors in the electronics press personally due to my longevity in the business. Really what Black & White offered was a structure for what we did to turn it into a coherent PR campaign which had a clearly defined purpose – to establish Premier as the leading provider of technology training.

"With Black &White we have had the opportunity to formulate some quite interesting campaigns, initially revolving around press briefings and then, and this indicates the way we work together, we sat down to decide what to do with some of the research we had done collaboratively. From that spawned the idea of having an industry panel discussion, which gave us virtually a full page piece in Electronics Weekly and a series of threads to follow up.

"In the next phase we will try to join up the PR, sales and marketing processes and will be looking for a combination of strategic and tactical marketing. The first aspect will be a breakfast briefing talking about skills training programmes under the title 'Maximising Electronic Design Resource' positioning the company as one that understands the challenges the industry is facing. Rachel (Owen) is good at the conceptual positioning, and her team provides the 'leg work' associated with these events, such as providing background and statistics to help with the preparation of the presentation, as well as arranging for journalists to attend. It works well. I would say we have synchronised my expectations with their ability to deliver!"

Phil Mayo, managing director,
Premier EDA Solutions

REFERENCES – 2

"I have found that Black & White are always looking for new ways to do something, rather than using what they've done before for us as a template. In other words, instead of flogging the same old stuff, they are constantly looking at ways to improve coverage for the client, to evaluate what needs to be done to make each campaign as productive as possible. I would say that Black & White are more than team players, and would describe our relationship as a strategic partnership – big words I know, but it's based on trust and the fact we can rely on the integrity of their advice. If the timescale doesn't allow enough time for Black & White to provide a full-blown quote for a project, which can include a range of marketing communication activities, not just press relations, their pricing structure is sufficiently clear and there is no question of any hidden extras; not surprisingly, we have never had to query an invoice.

"A PR consultancy needs to be able to ask the challenging questions, and I use Black & White as a sounding board. For every three projects we discuss there can be one which we don't move forward, because if Black & White don't think it will achieve my objective, they say so; they aren't in this to gain short-term fees."

Martin Coulthard, marketing manager,
Chloride Power Protection

"At the time the main reason for engaging Black & White was their technical understanding, which is tremendous, as well as their relationships with the relevant trade press which means we get good coverage.

"Black & White have put in different ways of measuring how they are meeting our communications objectives. We get evaluation reports from them on the value of all the editorial press coverage we have obtained, and another way we measure the effectiveness is by the number of quality leads we get as a result of the editorial coverage.

"Black & White carry out the research for the stories and write the material after consultation with the product manager, who supplies the basic information, as well as with our customers.

"We have regular meetings about every six weeks or so which Black & White attend together with all our product managers so we can look at how we can generate stories which reflect our marketing plan."

Peta Glenister, marketing communications manager,
Solarton Mobrey

REFERENCES – 3

"Over the last three years, like in many other companies, our marketing budget has come under close scrutiny, and we made a conscious decision to reduce our advertising placement spend but at the same time use PR to try to maintain and then elevate our presence. That's something we have done successfully with Black & White, and Black & White themselves are very disciplined in measuring their effectiveness, for example, measuring editorial page space they have obtained and equating it to how much it would have cost in advertising.

"Our business is constantly evolving, and each year we come up with a more challenging marketing communications requirement and plan. We have been using Black & White to bring our company to the attention of end users, our customers' customers, who could specify that we should be included on a tender list because they have been influenced by what they have read.

"What has helped is that Black & White have got involved with our people as opposed to just knowing the marketing department. I think that helps them deliver what we need."

Anne Watmore, marketing manager,
Molex Premise Networks

REFERENCES – 4

"We have a limited budget and were looking for a conduit to take us into the magazines which would reach our target audience. Black & White were operating a scheme whereby they are paid by results, so if nothing appears in the appropriate media, it doesn't cost us anything! But they obviously have the contacts and understand how the industry works because they have succeeded in getting our PR placed on a regular basis in both UK and European publications. It works because between us we were able to clearly define the objectives."

Bruce McEachran,
Crydom International

"I'm particularly impressed by the way Black & White pro-actively look for PR opportunities and follow them up directly with our product managers. They started off just looking after the UK for us but are now handling media in the US and the rest of Europe. They have an excellent success rate in placing articles for us, and liaise directly with our own people in specific countries for translations or they get it done elsewhere and arrange for the copy to be checked by our marketing communications people."

Andrew Davis, communications manager,
BOC Edwards

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