

# The real challenge for PR and Marketing

I read with interest the article last week about Recognitions acquisition of Outsource. It was a great article and I have to say that I agree whole heartedly with Adam Benson on most of the points. Close to three years ago my company, Einsteinz Communications started to shift from PR to integrated marketing and its good to see were being joined by others. Im inclined to believe that any PR company that hasnt already engaged at some level with clients on delivering integrated marketing communications is well and truly on the back foot. However Id like to put forward a different perspective on what it takes to make it all work.

When Einsteinz first started offering integrated marketing communications it was an attractive additional service for clients. Now however its become a vital component of our service offering. In fact we operate as a totally outsourced marketing manager for several of our clients and for another we are an active member of the marketing team effectively the arms and legs and local eyes for the marketing director who is based in Asia. It is a very stimulating, challenging and enjoyable side to our business and the successes of the last few years for our clients are proof that it a very effective service.

How do we make it all work? Well not by building a large agency or acquiring one (though neither is necessarily a bad option). I spoke some years ago with Media Connect about my decision to adopt a virtual team approach when I launched my PR company. I wasnt breaking new ground with that approach and there are still others doing the same thing but I dedicated a lot of time to building the team that makes the model work and as Ive shifted our focus from PR to integrated marketing Ive stayed true to my word. To my delight this virtual team approach has enabled our company to achieve measurable results that exceeded both my own expectations and most importantly - those of my clients.

Granted my team is a fairly firm set of favoured senior and dynamic contractors and indeed Ive just added an ex marketing director to the Einsteinz team but we flex according to the needs of particular clients and that is what delivers us an advantage. I can access a team that includes designers, internet architects, media buyers, event coordinators, web developers, telemarketers, copywriters and marketers as needed. Its a team that I have nurtured and developed over the last four years and who I know I can rely on to deliver on time and on budget to even the most demanding brief. Einsteinz has effectively built a big company but on a low cost base which means clients can access the skill sets they require without having to worry about high overheads which often arrive with larger agencies.

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So are Adam Benson and Mike Howorth right about their comments on the market changes? Absolutely yes - they are spot on. However I believe that while the continued growth in the marketing side of our business speaks volumes about the importance of shifting from PR to integrated marketing it is also due to the effectiveness of our virtual team approach.

Which brings me to a curve ball Id like to throw out for consideration one that Ive not seen in the discussions to date: How do traditionally structured marketing and PR agencies plan to staff up to meet demand?

Look around you - the number of senior marketing and PR managers and even journalists who are shifting towards the nirvana of a freelance life/work balance are increasing dramatically. According to many of my peers in larger agencies its already a challenge retaining senior staff members harbouring dreams of the freelance life and its even harder to find replacements for them when they leave.

So if were agreed that the way forward for PR agencies is integrated marketing rather than pure play PR then Id suggest that the next major issue is just how agencies plan to retain staff and build the teams with the necessary experience to deliver results. Because when it comes to truly successful integrated marketing theres no substitute for experience.

Existing agencies that currently rely on the pyramid staffing model (with a few senior consultants at the top and lots of juniors underneath) are facing a very rough road ahead and in my opinion they just wont make it in the long term. Why? Quite simply - marketing campaigns are 100% measurable - theres no bluffing the results and generally speaking a team staffed predominantly by inexperienced juniors who may have hearts of gold and an awesome willingness to please, just wont be enough to deliver the measurable results demanded by clients. Senior consultants are the key to success. And yes I can hear you cry out from here we need to invest in and train the consultants of the future. I agree but the outsourced marketing model demands a weighting towards experienced and senior consultants theres no escaping that fact.

Its a challenging topic and one that is worthy of more discussion. We all have a vested interest in our respective business models and there is no doubt each has benefits to offer clients. I believe (of course) that the Einsteinz Communications virtual team approach addresses the issues quite well but Id be very interested to hear what others have to say on the topic.

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