



# EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS



Noreen Bray

## Exceeding expectations

Noreen Bray, Chair of Good Relations Wales

How do you define Professional Services in a fast changing political and economic climate? It's a good question and particularly relevant in a nation that has now enjoyed a decade of devolution.

A quick search on Google throws up over 400,000 Welsh organisations which class themselves as offering professional services and they include web design, e-commerce, procurement and Welsh translation agencies alongside the more traditional legal, financial and communications service providers.

It's an interesting reflection of how the National Assembly's commitment to e-communications has influenced the breadth of professional services now available in Wales and suggests that a country only gets the range of services it demands.

However, I would prefer to think that Welsh professional services providers have been leading demand rather than simply responding to it. Innovation has to go hand-in-hand with effectiveness when you are in the service sector and the ability to anticipate emerging client needs requires good leadership as well as a sound business case.

I have noticed an increasing willingness among the leaders in professional services to move into new areas of business or to forge strategic alliances in order to provide clients with a more integrated response to their fast-changing requirements. The shift away from the 'one size fits all' approach to a more personal client solution has been dramatic in recent years and even more so since the credit crunch.

[ Certainly, we have seen the challenges and the benefits of this change in attitude in the corporate communications world as uncertain economic conditions mean that the need for good communications has never been greater. ]

Our Chief Executive has described the credit crunch as having triggered a global conversation about business and if you are not taking part in this global debate, then it's unlikely that you can become part of the solution. If you add to this the continuing explosion of communications options now available for our clients—even politicians are Twittering—the need for modern 24/7 communications is clear.

But, whichever professional service you are providing, the declining degree of trust that people have in all organisations is of real concern. Trusted organisations are those that can demonstrate that they walk in their customers' footsteps. They are confident about being transparent in what they say and in how they handle disagreements or criticism. Being seen to push vested interests or demonstrating incompetence undermines trust; understanding customer needs and addressing them helps build it.

Those of us in the professional services sector ignore this at our peril because sometimes telling the client what he or she doesn't want to hear is often the best piece of business advice we can offer them.

# Good Reputation

Helen Birtwhistle, Managing Director of Good Relations Wales

**Never have the reputations of governments, public bodies, businesses, brands and NGOs depended more on communications – so says Chris Satterthwaite, Group Chief Executive of Chime Communications plc, of which Good Relations Wales is a part.**



Helen Birtwhistle

Reputation is key to business growth, even to business survival in a tough economic climate. And reputation management is an integral part of what Good Relations Wales offers its wide range of clients to help them develop the right relationships with the individuals and organisations they need to work with. We help our clients to state their point of view, to talk clearly and in plain language and to embrace the modern information age by having a 24/7 approach to communication – be that meeting the demands of the media or taking part in social networks.

2009 is a year of 'big' birthdays in Wales – a decade of the National Assembly for Wales and Welsh Assembly Government; the iconic Millennium Stadium also celebrates its tenth anniversary; the Wales Millennium Centre,

a mere stripling, marks five years since its doors opened to allow 'these horizons (to sing)'; and Good Relations is twenty years old in Wales. Hard to believe that in 1989, when our London company decided to open an office in Cardiff to service the newly-won Welsh Development Agency (WDA) account, the Berlin Wall came down!

There have been other dramatic, literally world-changing, developments and events in the intervening years, not least the speed and complexity of modern communications. But, while the mechanisms for communicating effectively may have changed, Good Relations' core modus operandi has not. That boils down to the quality of our work and our reputation for innovative, flexible and effective communication solutions for our clients. Our track record and sound reputation depends on our successful management of the reputation of all our clients, whether in the public, private or third sector, whether in manufacturing, healthcare, transport, professional services, property development or energy from waste.

As for the 'big' birthdays referred to above, Good Relations is proud and thrilled to have been instrumental in all of them and, therefore, in helping to transform Wales into the vibrant, confident, nation it is today. For instance, it was our dedicated team who devised and implemented strong public and media relations strategies to harness widespread public support across Wales, which in turn attracted Lottery funding first for the

landmark Millennium Stadium and subsequently for the iconic Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff Bay. Good Relations launched the information campaign to explain how to vote in the first Assembly elections. And, of course, let's not forget the WDA account which brought Good Relations to Wales as a trailblazing inward investor back in 1989. With the WDA we helped tell the story of inward investment, economic development, community revival and urban regeneration, and set the scene for a continuing Welsh success story – establishing Wales as a nation with a 'can-do' reputation.

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