

North East Outstanding Public Relations Consultancy Gardiner Richardson

Our business objectives

The business was two years into an ambitious five year growth plan when the first effects of the recession became obvious. Like many companies we have been focused on steering the agency through uncharted waters while retaining a clear eye on continued growth.

Our main emphasis? Keeping a high quality and well motivated team during challenging times, strengthening existing client relationships, developing new business and improving efficiencies.

That we have achieved this and almost doubled the fee income in the last 12 months is down to two key factors - strong and determined leadership and the flexibility, hard work, attitude and self-belief of our entire team who have been nothing short of exceptional every step of the way.

- Retain and attract the very best people to ensure that our quality of service is second to none in the eyes of our clients and we continue to deliver
- Motivate and inspire the team in their roles at Gardiner Richardson
- Increase fee income by 20% to meet revised business growth targets
- Increase average client spend by 15% to manage efficiencies and increase fees per head by 15% in new economic climate
- Improve levels of staff involvement with strategic and tactical business development to shape service delivery

Outstanding achievements

Our successful growth and achievements have all been driven by our investment strategy and how we have made critical changes to key areas of the agency, which have delivered real impact. Some of these had formed part of our existing plans for growth, others have been made in response to a changing climate and we have had to be agile, open-minded and decisive.

Investing in our team:

- All staff given their birthday off, up to four extra days holiday introduced depending on service length – all fully paid leave
- One of only eight companies nationally to be awarded Health Work and Wellbeing Challenge Fund support - launched our own £5,000 Feel Great At Work scheme, which includes free health assessments, wellbeing workshops, a £40 fitness fund for each member of the team, fresh fruit in the studio and a number of community initiatives
- In partnership with Northumbria University, developed and run a bespoke six week Creative Thinking training course for staff to build skills (8 places), so successful the University is looking to roll it out to other agencies
- Introduced The Social, combination of internal workshops, external presentations, partnerships, conference and training and team competitions/Mad Briefs to build genuine understanding of social media

- Introduced a staff survey to provide the team with the chance to feedback on motivation, involvement and communication

Investing in our clients

- Doubled our annual client investment budget – non-charged fee earning time to develop new ideas for clients – from £30,000 to £60,000 to help clients during the recession
- Designed, developed and built a completely new online event management system offering in some cases up to 80% reduction in administrative cost of managing large events and workshop programmes
- Designed, developed and built a bespoke content management system for website updates and maintenance – used on over 15 websites since launch
- We are currently the only agency in the North East to have a license for Social Media Library – giving clients access to intelligence on new opportunities
- Launched an annual client survey online to provide clients with the opportunity to help us improve services in line with their needs.

Investing in our community:

- Introduced student competitions with Newcastle University and Northumbria University
- Supported staff in paid time off work (equivalent to more than £20,000 fee earning time) to lecture, run workshops for local colleges and give presentations to local schools/children's groups
- Our team has raised over £20,500 for charities close to our hearts through many different activities from a high profile swishing event, through Great North Run to sponsored to bike rides and even cupcake baking.
- Run over 20 two-week work experience placements to provide invaluable experience and CV material for current undergraduates

Investing in our business:

- Developed and launched company intranet to share information, provide updates and increase staff involvement in the business
- Developed our own unique online contact manager and pitch manager systems to track and manage business development information more effectively
- Created a new role in business development. With a new member of the team supporting senior management in driving growth through new business.
- Invested over £35,000 in developing our own studio to create an environment that offers different kinds of space for different kinds of work - one such space being The Cube!

Outcomes and evaluation of our achievements

Headlines

- **Fee income:** 47% increase from 08/09 to 09/10 (27% over target)
- **Average client spend:** has increased by 19% (4% over target)
- **Fees per head:** have seen an average increase of 22% (7% over target)
- **Client retention:** we have not lost an account in the past 12 months
- **Client wins:** we have won a number of high profile regional, national and international accounts, including English Heritage, Nova International and Tesco, Faber Castell, Marriott Hotels, NHS North East, Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust, Penn State Snacks, Balance/The Big Drink Debate
- **Recruitment:** recently received over 75 applications from local universities for two graduate positions due to increased profile and relationships built
- **Profile:** have been featured in PR Week's Top 50 Agencies Outside London and Top 25 Public Sector Agencies

Client relationships

We were rated as good or excellent by our clients for:

- Understanding client requirements: 96%
- Attention to detail: 96%
- Quality of work: 92%
- Creative ideas: 84%
- Strategy and planning: 80%

When it comes to our brand personality and beliefs; 100% of clients agreed that we are both Friendly and intelligent, 88% agreed that we are passionate about their account and 76% agreed that we deliver real impact.

Team perspectives

In our annual, anonymous internal survey, members of the team were asked to give a score out of ten for how strongly they felt on a number of factors, the average score out of ten across the team is shown:

- Kept informed and involved: 8/10
- Have been able to contribute to our growth: 8/10
- Valued by the agency and its directors: 8.5/10
- Proud of where they work and what they do: 9.5/10

What makes our team special?

We have exceeded our targets in many areas and we have built an even stronger and more powerful business as a result. That we have done this during some of the most difficult economic circumstances in living memory is a tribute to the leadership of the business. But more than that, it's a mark of just how special the team is. They have worked under constant pressure, longer hours, more demanding clients, against a backdrop of ongoing change and uncertainty. They have been a constant source of inspiration and motivation to each other, their clients and the directors of the agency. Their passion, commitment and dedication have never wavered and many clients have commented on just how special and refreshing an atmosphere they encounter when they visit our studio. That we have won so many new, high profile accounts, without losing a single account, that our clients on average spend more with us and that our clients are so happy with the level of service, just goes to show how good they really are.