

Category Name:	Consumer Relations Campaign
Title:	Where Reputation Matters
Submitting Organisation:	Midnight Communications
Budget:	£50k per annum

Checktrade.com was the first web site in the UK to provide a platform from which customers could choose a tradespeople from an independently vetted database. Midnight's campaign has positioned the company as the **consumer's champion** and the **answer to the UK's rogue trader problem**. Visits to the site have doubled in the last twelve months, trade customers have increased by **25%** whilst turnover has increased from **£5.5m to £7m**.

Background & Objectives

The Checktrade.com web site provides access to qualified, vetted and monitored tradespeople. People can search for nearby traders, **check qualifications and experience**, review **previous customer feedback** and leave their own when a job is complete. Midnight's brief has been to raise awareness amongst consumers, drive traffic to the site and ultimately support the company's growth.

Midnight's main objectives are:

- Make Checktrade.com **stand apart** from its competitors (e.g. MyBuilder, Rated People)
- Demonstrate that Checktrade.com genuinely **cares** about customers, **drives** work to reputable firms and is **not** just about making money
- Communicate the Checktrade.com's brand values of **authenticity, integrity, honesty, and accountability**
- Position Checktrade.com as the **preferred choice** in the midst of imitation competitors and its members as the **preferred choice** in the hearts and minds of consumers looking for tradespeople

Strategy & Implementation

Rather than simply tell people about Checktrade.com we needed to show how different this company was. We were blessed with an outspoken and entrepreneurial managing director, Kevin Byrne, who had initially set up the company for altruistic reasons and we decided to use his story as one of the vehicles for demonstrating brand credibility.

We therefore adopted a strategy which focussed on the company's own strapline - "where reputation matters" and sought profile features, identified speaker platforms and used rapid response to news to ensure Kevin's profile and the voice of Checktrade.com was heard above its competitors.

Our campaign was supported by a broad ranging research-led programme of media stories which we could cut both horizontally (women/men) and vertically (regions).

Profile opportunities:

Local radio was identified as a key vehicle for driving consumer awareness and engagement, enabling Midnight to take a **region by region approach** to growing the Checktrade.com brand in priority areas. These broadcast hits included BBC Surrey, Wessex FM, Town 102fm and Reading107fm.

Further profile opportunities for Kevin Byrne were secured in leading business titles, such as **Money Maker, Sussex Business Times, Entrepreneur Country**, to bolster awareness amongst influencers.

Speaker opportunities:

Midnight secured opportunities for Kevin to judge the **2012 Startups Awards** alongside **Duncan Bannatyne** and participate in a debate with **Bear Grylls** and **Julie Mayer** at **Entrepreneurs 2012**, alongside former **US President Bill Clinton**. In addition, speaker platforms were identified with

London School of Business & Finance, the Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Conference and the Eco Technology Show.

Rapid response:

Midnight maintained a watching brief on the news agenda to identify relevant comment opportunities, before drafting relevant comment and issuing to the press. These included tips on how to spot rogue traders, and business-related matters such as employee ownership, retirement and overseas markets.

This has generated coverage in publications such as *The Financial Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, many leading home titles and key regionals such as *The Brighton Argus*, *Chichester Observer*, *West Sussex Gazette* and the *Worthing Herald*.

Research project:

Midnight conceived and commissioned an independent survey into consumer home improvement trends in 2013. The results were analysed by gender and region and developed into a series of targeted press releases. These were placed with national and regional newspapers, as well as home and lifestyle titles including *The Sun*, *At Home*, *Croydon Advertiser*, *About Property* and *Real Homes*. To date this has generated **30+ placements**, reaching an audience of nearly **28m**.

Media relations:

Midnight has issued over 18 press releases covering a range of topics and addressing different target audiences. These range from local news stories and charity efforts to the firm's appointment of celebrity designer Linda Barker as its ambassador and record website traffic figures. These have secured coverage in titles such as *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Sunday People*, *Ideal Home* and *Homemaker Magazine*.

Several feature pieces were also developed for key home and lifestyle titles including *Housefixer* and *Hampshire County Magazine*.

Budget and results

Over the last 12 months Midnight has secured **153 print editorial placements** (74 x print; 79 online) across national, women's lifestyle, regional and trade publications, reaching over **32.1m**.

During this period, **visits to the web site have doubled** from 246,827 to 490,934, whilst **unique visitors have also doubled** from 160,986 to 327,010.

This has had a major impact on the success of the company as it has grown from 70 to **100 staff** with a turnover in excess of **£7.2m (previously £5.5m)**. It now offers consumers access to over **9,700** (previously 7,800) genuine trade members and is growing by an average of **260** (previously 200) new members every month.

Additionally, Checktrade.com's ambitions to extend the **nationwide** are being realised, **expanding** from its South East heartland into Suffolk, the North East, Birmingham and the South West.

Over the past 12 months, Checktrade-certified tradesmen carried out a combined total of **£1.2b** worth of work, with complaints at just **one in 213**, compared to the national average of one in four.

"Midnight's PR campaign has played a significant role in driving consumers to our web site and ultimately business growth. Their PR campaign has proved inventive, effective and has achieved impressive results for us. In the last twelve months alone they have helped us nearly double the number of visitors to our web site (an additional 230,000 a month) along with a 25% increase in tradespeople signing up as members. I have no plans on moving away from their services."

Kevin Byrne
Managing Director