

**Outstanding Freelance Practitioner**  
**Entrant: Matthew Ridsdale (MCIPR), Cannon PR**

**Overview of my experience:**

The past three years have been the most exciting, challenging and rewarding ones of my career to date. There have been many highs, some lows, but working as a freelance consultant has been one of the best career decisions I've made.

My career began after successfully completed an MSc in Public Relations at the University of Stirling where I became a CIPR Student of the Year finalist in 2001. Recognising the importance of creativity to the profession I sent a short poem, along with my CV to an Edinburgh-based consultancy, resulting in my first full-time PR role.

My diverse client portfolio included talking computers, cinemas, bingo halls, solicitors and even two of Scotland's MEPs. In return I devised Scotland's first BingOlympics and pioneered the world's largest popcorn sculpture, helping the agency to win one of its first industry awards. A move to a full-service East Midlands agency followed, before joining the northern division of a national PR agency. Within twelve months I was promoted to Senior Account Manager and by 2010 I was responsible for overseeing all aspects of the day-to-day running of its Sheffield office.

My career took an unexpected turn in the spring of 2011 following redundancy: the lowest point of my career. I saw it as an opportunity rather than setback and in September 2011, equipped with ten year's industry experience, Cannon PR was born.

**Achievements/ Milestones**

Freelance career highlights:

- Turnover rose from £11,000 in 2011/12 to £45,000 in 2012/13 with further growth forecast in 2013/14.
- Appointed to two national PR frameworks successfully delivering PR support to some of Britain's best known brands including Disney and EE.
- Finalist: 2012 CIPR PRide Awards Yorks & Lincs.
- One of the first PR professionals in South Yorkshire to CIPR Accredited Practitioner standard (Awarded 2011).
- Member of Barnsley and Rotherham Chamber Representative Council.

As PR practitioners I firmly believe we should use our skills and expertise to support the communities we serve. It is an ethos which I practice, delivering pro-bono work for a number of small charitable organisations. An example of my work with Rotherham District Scout Association helped South Yorkshire to receive a visit by Chief Scout Bear Grylls – media support being a pre-requisite for the visit.

## **Example of a recent campaign:**

Q. What happens if you bring together a world superbike champion, 40 bands, four charities, hundreds of volunteers, 250 real ales and sheep dressed as roman soldiers?

A. Over 12,000 visitors to the Rotherham Real Ale and Music Festival and the most successful event to date!

### **Brief:**

- Identify new ways of generating sponsorship income.
- Increase numbers of volunteers needed to set-up and run the event.
- Create a fun and friendly atmosphere whilst maintaining a responsible drinking ethos.

### **Implementation**

#### *Branding*

Designed festival logo, used on all programme, staff t-shirt and commemorative festival glass.

#### *Promotional materials*

- Developed promotional display stand used at the Rotherham Show.
- Pub promotional pack created.
- Produced 68-page festival programme.

#### *Media Relations*

A six month campaign was implemented. Highlights included:

- *All 'ale' the festival!* Launch used the ancient roman ruins excavated on the festival's site. Principle organisers and benefitting charities dressed as Romans.
- Successfully negotiated a partnership with Barnsley and Rotherham Chamber, aimed at driving local businesses.
- Competitions organised with regional press.
- Secured number of commissioned features.
- Re-creating *The Boardwalk*, an iconic South Yorkshire Music Venue within the festival.

#### *Social Media*

- Primary outlets for social media activity: Twitter and Facebook.
- Monthly e-bulletin, *The Festival Tap*
- Beer-rating app trialled: *The Festival App*
- Used to communicate information about James Toseland's impromptu festival gig

#### *Engaging with sponsors*

- Development of sponsorship pack
- Handled all sponsorship enquiries and negotiations on behalf of the festival.

**Evaluation:**

All campaign targets were exceeded:

- 500 posters, 10,000 beer mats and 500 promotional pens were distributed to pubs across South Yorkshire.
- Over 40 targeted media articles published, all featuring key messages about the festival attained from 8 press releases
- Four front cover pages secured.
- Social media metrics:
  - o Facebook 'likes' increased from 457 in 2013 to 1033 in 2014
  - o Twitter followers increased from 300 to 815, campaign reached 193,988 twitter accounts during the week of the festival.
  - o 908 subscribers to the Festival Tap
- Most importantly of all...
  - o 250 volunteers recruited
  - o 12,000 visitors attended the festival during the four day event
  - o Over £18,000 raised through sponsorship

**Client endorsements:**

*"Matthew was instructed to take over the production and PR work associated with The Legal magazine when the previous team left the magazine in a desperate state. Under his leadership, The Legal has gone strength-to-strength; not only increasing the magazine's readership but also reflected in our membership growth.*

*"His work has exceeded all expectations and the magazine is now regarded as one of our most precious assets. On behalf of the society and our associates, I cannot speak highly enough of his loyalty, enthusiasm and expertise. Matt is a pleasure to work with and has always gone above and beyond in his role to provide support our work - An example of this even saw him dress up as Father Christmas and ride a sleigh through Sheffield city centre to help promote a family fun day held by the society!"*

**Elizabeth French, Practice Manager, Sheffield & District Law Society**

*"Matthew has worked in a voluntary capacity as Media Manager/Public Relations Manager for the last five years with Rotherham District Scout Council giving many hours of service. He has been responsible for developing media stories and successfully securing coverage on behalf of Rotherham District Scouts during their many and varied activities, showing what young people can achieve, especially during the District's Centenary Celebrations.*

*"In this work he has successfully helped raise the presence, profile and awareness of Scouting across the Borough of Rotherham and I'm pleased to have him on board as a valuable member of my Team."*

**John Whitham, District Chairman, Rotherham District Scout Association**