

**WIKIPEDIA
BEST PRACTICE
GUIDANCE
FOR
PUBLIC RELATIONS
PROFESSIONALS**

VERSION 2.1

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ABOUT THESE GUIDELINES

These guidelines have been developed by the [CIPR Social Media Panel](#) (CIPRsm panel) and are intended to provide clear and detailed advice on how public relations professionals should engage with the Wikipedia community.

These guidelines include case studies and frequently asked questions that were not included in the first set of guidelines issued in 2012 by the CIPRsm panel. Version 1 of these guidelines were created in consultation with Wikimedia UK and are available to [view via this wiki project](#), the guidelines were co-badged by the Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA), Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS) and the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA).

Any discussion referring to public relations best practice or professional conduct is informed by the [CIPR's Code of Conduct](#) even when this isn't specifically referenced. In addition public relations practitioners should make themselves aware of the legal considerations of engaging with social media in the relevant legal jurisdiction.

These guidelines do not constitute legal advice. The CIPR, supporting institutes and associations cannot accept any liability for any action taken or not taken as a result of this information.

Reading this guide is worth [5 CIPR CPD points](#).

WHAT IS WIKIPEDIA?

Wikipedia is the sixth most popular website in the world according to web information firm Alexa; beaten only by Facebook, Google, YouTube, Yahoo and Baidu.com. It is a crowdsourced online encyclopedia of more than 30 million topics in 285 different languages ([About Wikipedia](#)) and is frequently the start point for online research.

Wikipedia was launched in January 2001 by Internet entrepreneur Jimmy Wales using a social media technology called a wiki. This is a web platform that allows content to be added, modified, or deleted via a web browser.

Initially Wikipedia was created as a site for amateur contributors to complement an online encyclopedia created by subject matter experts called Nupedia. Wikipedia had none of the formality of its counterpart. It could be modified live whereas Nupedia had a seven-step approval process to control the content of articles contributed to the site. Wikipedia quickly overtook the site that inspired its creation and Nupedia was shut down in 2003.

Wikipedia remains an open community supported by the Wikimedia Foundation, a US charitable organisation, whose goal is to bring free educational content to the world. Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales is a trustee of Wikimedia and an ardent advocate of Wikipedia's community status. Wikipedia has established a strong brand and has become a destination site on the web. It also ranks highly for search. These two features combined mean that Wikipedia has a significant reputational impact for any individual or organisation that is discussed in its articles.

WIKIPEDIA AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Critics claim that Wikipedia has become too powerful and that it operates without the recognised processes or oversight common for more traditional media. This is the issue that puts Wikipedia in conflict with the public relations industry. Errors in traditional media can be dealt with swiftly through well-established processes. Correcting content in a Wikipedia article requires engagement with the community and, crucially, adherence to its rules.

The reputation of an organisation can be attacked in a matter of hours through changes to its Wikipedia page. Monitoring Wikipedia pages for modifications has become a key part of managing the reputation of an organisation. In reality rogue attacks on Wikipedia pages are few and far between but when they occur an organisation has no option but to seek redress via the community's own workflow.

RELATIONSHIP WITH PR PRACTITIONERS

The relationship between the public relations industry and Wikipedia is an uneasy one although there have been numerous efforts in recent time to bring the two constituencies closer together.

Herein lies the issue. Wikipedia did not set out to create a business directory.

“The issue I have with PR editing is that it just takes up too much time. Wikipedians didn’t turn up to help manage a business directory written by PR and advertising folk, they were attracted to Wikipedia for some far less worldly subject: philosophy, in my case, or military history or whatever it might be,” said Tom Morris, a Wikipedia editor with more than 10 years-experience.

While an individual may contribute or edit articles on Wikipedia they may not do so where you have a conflict of interest. That means that if you have a vested interest in an organisation, individual, client or product you may not edit content.

The Wikipedia community believes that editors with a conflict of interest make bad Wikipedians.

“What I have found – and the evidence for this is pretty comprehensive – is that people who are acting as paid advocates do not make good editors. They insert puffery and spin. That’s what they do because that is what paid advocates do,” said Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales.

A group of public relations practitioners has created a group called the [Corporate Representatives for Ethical Wikipedia Engagement](#) (CREWE) to lobby Wales and the wider Wikipedia community to review the community’s processes and policies in favour of improved corporate engagement. This remains a work in progress although thanks to the efforts of CREWE and organisations such as the CIPR in the UK and the PRSA in the US the relationship and understanding between Wikipedia and the public relations industry is much improved.

On 10 June 2014, several predominantly USA-based participants from the CREWE group issued a [‘Statement on Wikipedia from participating communications firms’](#). The statement recognises Wikipedia’s unique and important role as a public knowledge resource, and stated that it:

“is in the best interest of our industry, and Wikipedia users at large, that Wikipedia fulfill its mission of developing an accurate and objective online encyclopedia. Therefore, it is wise for communications professionals to follow Wikipedia policies as part of ethical engagement practice.”

The statement outlined five key principles, and was initially signed by representatives of 11 public relations firms, but the number quickly grew (and continues to grow). The CIPR was an early signatory to this Statement.

WIKIPEDIA COMMUNITY AND CONTENT GUIDELINES

To engage with the Wikipedia community, contribute articles and edit pages successfully you must have a good overview of the site and an understanding of its ethos. The community is ruthlessly transparent and you can review its governance on the Wikipedia site. Its core principles consist of five key pillars.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF WIKIPEDIA

- 01 Wikipedia is an encyclopaedia.
- 02 Wikipedia is written from a neutral point of view.
- 03 Wikipedia is free content that anyone can edit, use, modify, and distribute.
- 04 Editors should interact with each other in a respectful and civil manner.
- 05 Wikipedia does not have firm rules.

In addition to these key pillars Wikipedia has three core content policies covering neutrality, verification and attribution which public relations practitioners should understand.

WIKIPEDIA CORE CONTENT POLICIES

Neutral point of view. All Wikipedia articles and other encyclopaedic content must be written from a neutral point of view, representing significant views fairly, proportionately and without bias.

Verifiability. Material challenged or likely to be challenged, and all quotations, must be attributed to a reliable, published source. In Wikipedia, verifiability means that people reading and editing the encyclopaedia can check that information comes from a reliable source.

The subjects of articles should also meet Wikipedia's **notability** criteria – a test used by editors to decide whether a topic can have its own article. If no reliable third-party sources can be found on a topic, then it should not have a separate article. This helps avoid indiscriminate inclusion of topics.

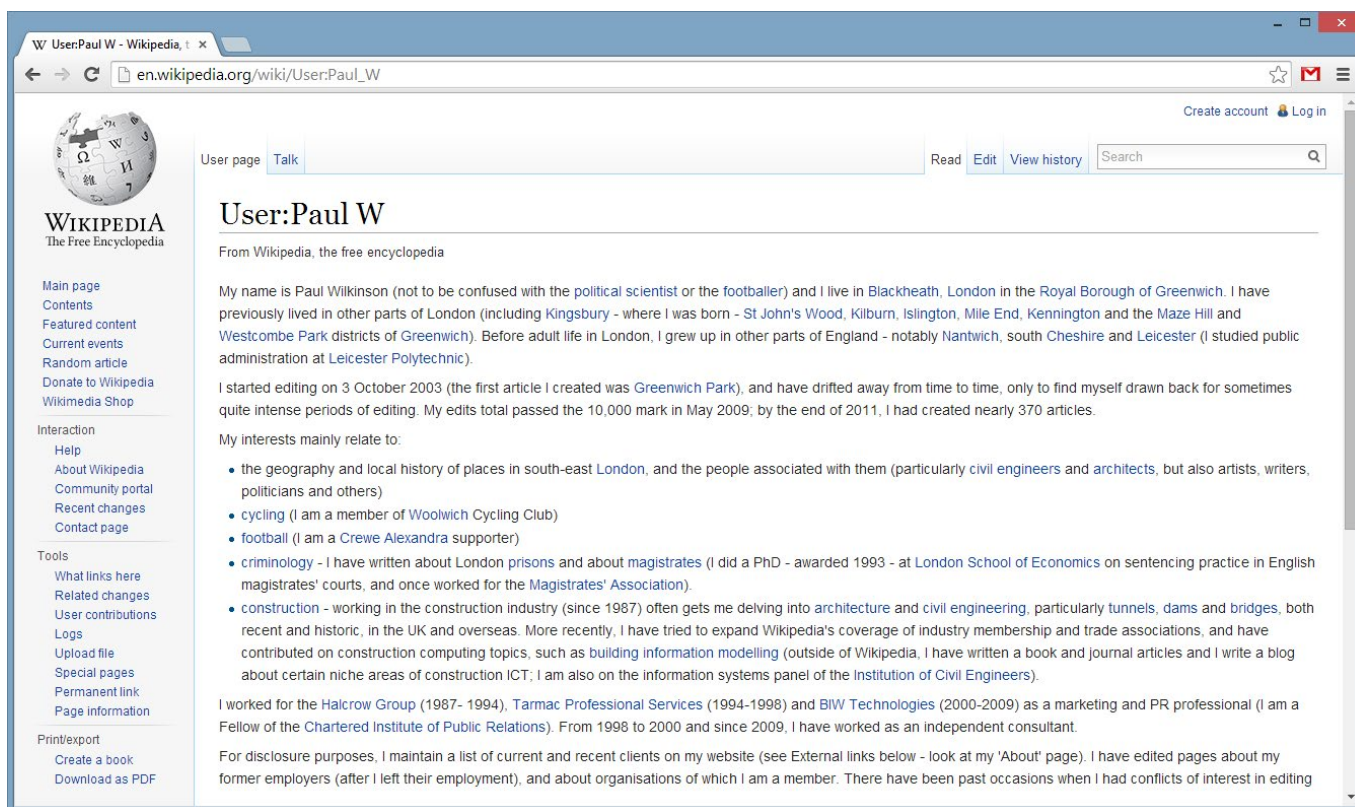
No original research. Wikipedia does not publish original thought, all material in Wikipedia must be attributable to a reliable, published source. Articles may not contain any new analysis or synthesis of published material that serves to advance a position not clearly advanced by the sources.

WORKING WITH WIKIPEDIA

All editing should be conducted in an open and honest manner. Public relations professionals should create an account with Wikipedia and create a user page associated with this which discloses their place of work and a list of their clients.

From 16 June 2014, seeking to control the issue of undisclosed paid editing, Wikipedia's [Terms of Use](#) have explicitly required anyone paid to edit articles to clearly and conspicuously disclose that arrangement (see section 4 of the Terms). In short, you must disclose your employer, client, and affiliation with respect to any contribution for which you receive, or expect to receive, compensation. Disclosure might mean at least one of the following: a statement on your user page, a statement on the article talk page, and/or a statement in the edit summary accompanying any paid contributions.

This is an example of a Wikipedian's user page (the user [Paul W](#) is open about his past and current involvement with employers and other organisations which have Wikipedia articles).



Wikipedia policy doesn't allow user accounts to be shared, so each person should have their own account and user page.

Take care with selecting a user name; avoid using a company name, anything that might be seen as misleading or promotional, or implying shared use, or which includes words such as 'admin'.

WORKING WITH WIKIPEDIA

// ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Once you have registered with Wikipedia head to the Talk section of the article where you are seeking changes to the article (the tab at the top of a Wikipedia entry labelled Talk).

Further restructure to the Chime Group since the sale of Bell Pottinger a year ago [\[edit\]](#)

Sorry - I posted this earlier, but was not logged in. Please see my posting below:

Hi,

I work in marketing at Chime. There has been a further restructure to the Chime Group since the sale of Bell Pottinger a year ago. I've outlined some of the changes below and wondered if you thought these updates would be useful to include on the page?

Chairman - Rodger Hughes is no longer Chairman; he is now Senior Independent Director and Chair of the Committees. - Chime has a new Chairman – Lord Davies of Abersoch

Chime now has a five division structure – this includes the Open Health Group in healthcare communications.

Lord Coe has been appointed Executive Chairman of CSM Sport & Entertainment.

Jackie Brock-Doyle, ex LOCOG Head of Communications, has been appointed CEO of The Good Relations Group.

Ian Priest, Founder of VCCP and MD International at Chime, has been appointed as the IPA President.

Thank you so much, Sasha Pearce — Preceding [unsigned](#) comment added by [Sasha Pearce](#) ([talk](#) • [contribs](#)) 09:58, 14 June 2013 (UTC)

Hi, Sasha. I have changed the chairman to Lord Davies, with an appropriate reference. The article already correctly stated five divisions, but I have detailed these more clearly; I have updated the board listing too. However, I haven't included the references to Coe, Brock-Doyle or Ian Priest (instead I have updated the Good Relations group page and Coe's article); The article is mainly about the group, not individuals within subsidiary operations, I think. - [Paul.W](#) ([talk](#)) 11:54, 2 November 2013 (UTC)

Further amendments to the Chime Communications plc Wikipedia page [\[edit\]](#)

Hello,

The Chime Group has changed considerably since Bell Pottinger was made private. The strategy has to become an international communications and sports marketing group. Are we able to submit some words we think describes better, what we say to staff, shareholders and clients?

Thank you so much, Sasha Pearce — Preceding [unsigned](#) comment added by [Sasha Pearce](#) ([talk](#) • [contribs](#)) 11:03, 28 January 2014 (UTC)

“If something has been written about your client, tell them your client has a response, or a response that has been published elsewhere and should be on the site. Talk to the community with respect. State your job title, identity, interest and company. Escalate with kindness. This is effective almost always,” says Wales.

Engaging directly with the original editor or an editor of the page can prove effective. By going to the ‘Toolbox’ section in the left-hand sidebar and looking for their list of contributions, you will be able to check if they are still active on the site. If not then try other more recent editors. Recent edits are listed on the ‘view history’ section; see tab at the top of an article page.

WORKING WITH WIKIPEDIA

// ESCALATION PROCESS

If you don't get a response from the Talk pages, proceed to a relevant noticeboard. These pages are watched by groups of people with a particular interest: in effect specialists. Noticeboard pages are very active and provide help quickly. If you are concerned about an entry for an individual, you can go to the Biography of Living Persons Noticeboard. If you want to make changes to a company page, or you think that someone editing the article is biased, it is a good idea to ask someone from the Conflict of Interest Noticeboard.

Inevitably there are sensitive situations where you may not want to disclose your identity because it may inflame an already difficult issue. In such instances you should email info-en@wikimedia.org. This is managed by a small group of Wikipedians that will act as your advocate within the community and offer advice. When you have a reply, keep the reference number so that any further correspondence can be tracked.

// DEALING WITH DISPUTES

If a subject is controversial, or there are repetitive edits better known as edit wars taking place, you can apply for the page to be protected. There are various stages, from full protection, where only a Wikipedia administrator can make an edit, to semi-protection, where only Wikipedia editors who have been registered on the site for more than four days and have made at least ten edits are allowed to make changes. To apply, ask an administrator or email info-en@wikimedia.org.

There is a dispute resolution system within Wikipedia, but the best advice, almost always, is to seek informal negotiation or mediation. The Administrators' Noticeboard can be effective in dealing with obnoxious conduct; there is also an ['Extant Organizations' noticeboard](#) where issues relating to non-neutral articles like attack or puff pieces may be flagged for wider review or discussion. Wikipedia's conflict resolution mechanisms are based on the simple tenet of good faith.

Administrators will almost never get involved in disagreements over the content of a page but they may ban one of the parties from the page or from the whole site for rude behaviour or sabotaging efforts to reach consensus. If an administrator does get involved then listen to any advice they have to give you, even if it is not what you want to hear or believe is correct.

CASE STUDIES

// BP

Arturo Silva, a member of BP’s corporate communications team in Houston, created a transparently open Wikipedia user account ([Arturo at BP](#)) and used it to interact with the Wikipedia community in order to improve BP-related Wikipedia pages, making it clear he will only contribute to those article’s Talk pages. (He could perhaps have stated clearly that he worked for BP’s corporate communications team and there is question mark over inclusion of the company name in the user name, but he earned barnstars from other Wikipedians for his openness.)

He then used his [‘userspace’](#) on this account to draft improvements to the relevant BP articles which he then linked from their talk pages. He wrote everything from a neutral point of view and importantly always provided credible third party references for everything he wrote. This is precisely what is recommended in the CIPR guidelines and the idea is that this information is then checked by independent ‘Wikipedians’ and eventually incorporated into the actual Wikipedia user page by those independent third party editors.

Despite his effort to ensure the articles retained a neutral point of view, there were still contributors who remained suspicious of ‘big business’ and would prefer for it not to be included as a ‘significant view’ at all. However, his approach is commendable for erring on the side of caution.

(Arturo is not unique in adopting this approach. At Verizon Communications, executive director for corporate communications Bob Varettoni ([User:VZBob](#)) “won’t be making direct edits to articles but intend to make suggestions on discussion pages”.)

CASE STUDIES

// INSTITUTION OF CIVIL ENGINEERS

To improve the extent and quality of Wikipedia content about a particular subject, some Wikipedians get involved in Wikiprojects, where groups of editors work together as a team. For example, among over 2000 Wikiprojects on the English Wikipedia, there is one focused on coverage of topics related to civil engineering. Wikiprojects can help identify editors with interests in a particular topic, and can also be used to canvass support for activities such as ‘editathons’.

Following an earlier workshop in July 2013, the Institution of Civil Engineers organised a day-long ‘[editathon](#)’ at its London headquarters. This was organised as a ‘GLAM’ (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) event, supported by Wikipedia volunteers and the ICE’s library and archives team. Attendees – a mix of Wikipedians and complete beginners – were given a tour of the building, shown where to access reference information and then began editing.

Experienced editors worked on new articles included some suggested by the ICE as subjects not currently covered in Wikipedia. Beginners made their first steps (creating user accounts, then starting new articles in ‘sandboxes’).

By the end of the day, the pool of editors had grown, 70 photographs had been added to the Wikimedia Commons (a Wikipedia sister project comprising over 18m freely available media files), and a dozen new civil engineering articles had been created, some of which subsequently appeared on the home page’s “Did You Know...” section.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

01 HOW DO I SET UP A WIKIPEDIA PAGE FOR MY BOSS/CLIENT/COMPANY?

Wikipedian Tom Morris provided [this answer](#) on Quora:

Wikipedia is an encyclopaedia, not a business listings directory. If you want to market your business, buy some advertising, get on social media and so on. Wikipedia isn't a marketing platform.

Articles about businesses get written if the business is notable. Notable business are ones where there are multiple, independent reliable sources that provide significant coverage of the business. I wrote an article about a business a while back, and they had a lot of articles on the more professional tech blogs, and in the press. Seven of these sources were solely about the company..

The best thing to do is to not write an article at all. Sit back and wait. Or, rather, build up your business. When it starts being notable, a Wikipedian will write about.

02 WHO CAN EDIT A WIKIPEDIA PAGE?

In short, anyone can. However, Wikipedians would prefer it if you didn't edit any page where you may have a conflict of interest...

03 MY COMPETITORS HAVE A WIKIPEDIA PAGE, HOW DO I GET ONE?

Your competitors don't have Wikipedia pages ([nobody owns a Wikipedia page](#)) - Wikipedia has pages about your competitors, and presumably because they are sufficiently notable and there are facts about them that can be verified from authoritative sources.

To get one, see FAQ 01 above. If you can't wait to be noticed, approach an editor (perhaps one who wrote about your competitors or about your market segment) and ask if they might write about you, or post a request in [Articles for Creation](#).

04 CAN I PAY AN INDIVIDUAL OR AGENCY TO WRITE MY WIKIPEDIA PAGE?

Please don't. Since June 2014, Wikipedia's Terms of Use have explicitly required anyone engaged in paid editing to make a clear disclosure about their employer, client and/or affiliation. Many Wikipedians regard paid contributors as having conflicts of interest which may impair their ability to maintain a neutral point of view and reflect a balance of all viewpoints.

It is better, if you think you or your organisation is sufficiently notable, to approach an editor and ask if they might write about you (see FAQ 03), or post a request in [Articles for Creation](#).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

05 WHAT ARE THE MAXIMUM NUMBER OF EDITS?

There are no maximum numbers of edits. Some articles have been edited tens of thousands of times: the George W Bush article has been [identified](#) by Jimmy Wales as the most frequently edited, with over 44,000 edits, and the Barack Obama article has over 21,000 edits. However, some administrative/community pages (including article Talk pages) can have even higher numbers of edits.

06 WHOSE APPROVAL DO I HAVE TO SEEK BEFORE PUBLISHING?

Nobody's. However, be aware that all new articles are carefully scrutinised by existing Wikipedians and any article or content they feel is inappropriate or copied from copyrighted sources will be mercilessly rejected. Many existing articles are also monitored by Wikipedians who retain 'watch lists' covering topics they are interested in, helping control article vandalism and inappropriate content.

The community is particularly careful about biographies of living people, where there will be care to ensure facts are verifiable and that the person is not subject to defamatory statements..

07 DO I HAVE TO CITE REFERENCES AND RESOURCES?

Please do. It helps provide evidence of notability, and gives sources for key facts in Wikipedia articles that might otherwise be contested.

08 WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE FOR ANY MISTAKES?

Wikipedia defines, accountability, in ethics and governance terms, as “answerability, blameworthiness, liability, and the expectation of account-giving”. In editing Wikipedia, good practice is for editors to login as users and to create edit summaries as they edit, so that changes are explained and attributed to the relevant Wikipedian. Mistakes often occur in Wikipedia, but a fundamental principle is to [Assume good faith](#). In a nutshell:

- Unless there is clear evidence to the contrary (eg: vandalism), assume that people who work on the project are trying to help it, not hurt it.
- If criticism is needed, discuss editors' actions, but avoid accusing others of harmful motives without clear evidence. In short, criticise the edits, not the editor.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

09 WHAT IS THE ETIQUETTE FOR CREATING AND EDITING WIKIPEDIA ENTRIES?

See FAQ 01 and FAQ 04 above.

10 HOW ELSE COULD WE HELP WIKIPEDIA?

As well as helping expand and improve Wikipedia articles yourself, you might consider holding events that encourage people to learn about and become Wikipedians.

If you speak other languages, consider translating articles and submitting them to the relevant language version of Wikipedia.

If you are a photographer or illustrator, you could share your own works freely on the Wikimedia Commons (or on other sites such as Flickr with an appropriate Creative Commons license or similar) so that they might be used to illustrate Wikipedia articles.

If you or your organisation has archives of illustrations, you could donate the images to [Wikimedia Commons](#).

SUMMARY

The table below provides a quick reference summary of how to join and engage with the Wikipedia community.

WORKING WITH WIKIPEDIA

- 01** Anyone can join the Wikipedia community and edit and contribute to content on the site. Register a personal rather than a corporate account and disclose your conflicts of interest on your user page.
- 02** If you are concerned about the accuracy of a Wikipedia article but have a conflict of interest you must address this via the community. Don't edit any page you have a conflict of interest on, except to remove vandalism.
- 03** Head to the Talk page for the Wikipedia article concerned and draft your response. This works in almost all situations however if you don't get a response then raise it on the relevant noticeboard.
- 04** Escalate with kindness and don't be an idiot. When faced with a situation where you have a choice to be an idiot or not be an idiot, choose to not be an idiot. Following this rule will mean you will very rarely get into difficult situations.
- 05** You can freely contribute articles related to your profession, hobbies and interests, where you do not have a conflict of interest. In fact Wikipedia actively encourages this and it's a great way to get to know how Wikipedia works.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

GEMMA GRIFFITHS MCIPR (@GEMGRIFF)

Gemma Griffiths is Managing Director of The Crowd & I, who hit a career high in 2013 when CIPR named her the UK's Outstanding Young Communicator. The judges praised Gem for her commitment to best practice across communications disciplines and for being at the cutting edge of where the industry is heading.

Gem's existing and previous portfolio consists of companies of all shapes and sizes including large corporations (TDK, Motorola and LG), membership organisations (Nominet, CEA

and Wikimedia UK) and venture capital backed companies with disruptive technologies (Rebtel, iZettle and Wrapp).

In 2012, Gem was a contributor to the CIPR's 'Share This: A PR's social media handbook', a No. 1 Amazon bestseller and endorsed by Lord Sugar. Gem also contributed to its sequel 'Share This Too' in 2013. Her chapters cover how to write social media guidelines and how to change an organisational mind-set when it comes to social media.

PAUL WILKINSON FCIPR (@EPAUL)

Paul Wilkinson is the founder of pwcom.co.uk Ltd, a specialist PR, marketing and construction technology consultancy. He has been working in construction industry marketing and public relations since 1987, in-house at Halcrow, Tarmac Professional Services, and BIW Technologies, and as a consultant with some of the sector's best-known names in professional services and information technology.

Paul is also a leading authority on the use of construction collaboration technology platforms, deputy chair of the Information Systems Panel of the Institution of Civil Engineers, and a steering group member of Constructing Excellence and of Construction Opportunities for Mobile IT. A Wikipedian and member of the CIPR's social media panel, Paul is a B2B exponent of social media, having co-founded the built environment social media community Be2camp in 2008.

RACHEL MILLER MCIPR (@ALLTHINGSIC)

Rachel Miller MCIPR PG (Dip) is an internal communication and social media strategist and was named one of the UK's leading social business influencers.

She started her career as a journalist and founded [All Things IC](#) consultancy after a decade of working in-house.

From conducting communication audits and focus groups with tiger keepers, to advising

on social media strategy and training frontline railway employees how to use Twitter, Rachel's current work reflects the changing world of communication today.

Her clients include Tullow Oil Plc, Heathrow Express, Zoological Society of London, London Ambulance Service, Northern Trust bank, Cambridge Assessment, St Andrew's Healthcare and Notting Hill Housing Trust.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

STEPHEN WADDINGTON MCIPR (@WADDS)

Stephen Waddington, CIPR President 2014, has earned a reputation as a public relations moderniser, thought leader and consumer engagement advocate through senior roles during the last 20 years as a public relations consultant, author and journalist.

Stephen is European digital and social media director for Ketchum advising clients throughout Europe as well as those assisted globally by the agency from North America, Asia and Latin America. Stephen

understands how the media landscape works online and offline and champions best practice as a writer, conference speaker and award winning-blogger.

He is co-author of [#BrandVandals](#) (Bloomsbury, November 2013) and [Brand Anarchy](#) (Bloomsbury, February 2012), and editor and contributor to [Share This](#) (Wiley, July 2012) and [Share This Too](#) (Wiley, September 2013). All four books have received critical acclaim.

STUART BRUCE MCIPR (@STUARTBRUCE)

Stuart has almost 25 years' experience in PR, corporate communications and public affairs. He founded a specialist online PR consultancy and in less than four years grew it into a PRWeek Top 150 Consultancy and Top 30 Digital Consultancy. Clients included Unilever, Sony Mobile, HSBC, Carlsberg, First Direct, PayPal, Discovery Channel and GlaxoSmithKline.

Today he provides online PR and digital corporate communications training and consultancy to clients in the UK, Europe and Middle East including the European Parliament, EU agencies, Middle Eastern governments and some of the world's largest companies as well as helping PR and public affairs agencies to improve their online PR capabilities. He is also a part-time lecturer on digital communications at Leeds Metropolitan University.