



PRIDE AWARDS 2017

Category: Outstanding Independent Practitioner

Entrant: Clare Graham MCIPR

Company: Advantage PR

An overview of your experience, your commitment to professional development and how you contribute to the industry:

I have over twenty years' experience in PR, starting off with seven years in an Edinburgh agency, followed by thirteen years with my own company Advantage PR, a company which I started from scratch, with no clients to speak of. Advantage PR now specialises in food and drink, property, travel and the leisure sector – many types of consumer PR. I believe I am a champion for PR and have convinced many a PR virgin to invest in the service, showing them the fabulous return it can give them, and the difference it can make to their profile. I have also mentored a couple of young people who now work in PR – this was through giving a sponsored media prize to my old High School.

As a sole trader it can be very hard to know if you are keeping up with your peers in terms of professional development but my guiding passion has always been to act professionally in myself. I always explain my Media Degree to all prospective clients too and explain how this has helped me in my career. I would also outline all my experience in PR and say that I am a member of the CIPR as I think this gives you much more credibility.

I want to be classed as a true professional – a consultant you bring into your business to get the very best advice and results at a good price. Networking with other sole traders and small PR firms has been helpful, as has enabled me to measure my skills with theirs. I have invested in social media training of late and the demand for this and digital content has acted as a driver for me to keep abreast of the very latest developments in PR. But I think ultimately that keeping on winning clients is the very best way to commit to what you do.

Outline your work related achievements over the last three years, including your business objectives and/or plan:

Over the last three years I have celebrated ten years in business with Advantage PR, (2017 sees me at 13 years in business). I am at my highest level of turnover and have recently become a limited company, which was in my business plan compiled a few years ago. This is very much a personal achievement for me but has prompted the questions of what now to do and where to go with this business. Can I take it further and achieve yet more?

When I first started charging VAT a few years ago I had to learn to manage that financial side of things, and becoming limited has meant the same– there are yet more demands on my time, managing the business.

Also in my plan was to boost the social media side of the business, by running more facebook pages and twitter feeds. This has really taken off for me with around seven facebook pages and twitter feeds being managed by Advantage PR. Social media is very much a driver in the business.

Two years ago I also launched a sub company called Advantage PR Food and Drink, designed to create a buzz and win more foodie business from restaurants and food producers and suppliers. This has also proved to be the case, as I have more restaurants on my books than ever before, and there is huge potential in this sector.

Outline the biggest work-related challenge you've faced in the past three years, including details of what happened, how you overcame it and what you learnt from it:

Making my business more secure in the current, constantly fluctuating economic conditions, bringing long term clients onto contracts, increasing fees across the board quite significantly – all of which I have achieved, at the same time attracting more clients and retaining my core ones.

Facing and meeting the demands for digital /social media and getting myself trained and ready. I have learned that I am fearless and that a company with a good reputation will survive and prosper whatever the economic conditions.

A summary of a campaign you are particularly proud of, including details of the brief, objectives, strategy, tactics, outputs, outcomes and budget:

I am particularly proud of my recent work for my client William Frame, who has two businesses that I look after, an upmarket, award winning fish and chip shop in St Andrews called Cromars, and a 5 star self catering house in Crieff called Gamefield. I handle the facebook and twitter accounts for both businesses. The brief for Cromars was to arrange media reviews, secure recipe spots, secure business and staff profiles, promote the experience and excellence of Colin Cromar the fish fryer, secure coverage on the development and growth of the business and handle the entering of all types of industry and business awards for Cromars, plus promote the awards they have already won.

For Gamefield, there was the desire to attract upmarket, UK wide travel reviews and interior features on the house, plus PR the story behind the business with William, who developed the site, as the entrepreneur. Advantage PR promoted many strands of the business – the fact that it is family run, the fact it has recently grown to offer a bespoke wedding service etc. Advantage PR also handled the entering of all industry awards as with Cromars and connected with trade bodies like Visit Scotland etc to maximise the House's exposure. Advantage PR also provided copy for a quarterly e newsletter.

For both businesses my objective was to grow the social media, keeping everything very seasonal.

Both businesses had a very modest PR budget, but Advantage PR was able to make every pound of spend count by being very targeted with its approach to the task. Cromars has achieved strong coverage across the Central Belt, nationally and online, and in trade publications. The business has won yet more awards which I have helped it to enter, identifying the best ones to go for and promoting them through PR and social media.

Cromars now fully exploits all of its PR opportunities through memberships of organisations like Food From Fife and MSC Seafood.

Gamefield has also achieved some fabulous and wide ranging travel review coverage both online and in print – even some overseas- worth thousands of pounds as equivalent ad space. A fantastic interiors feature ran in Scottish Field featuring William and his own family. The social media has been particularly successful in promoting the in house concierge service and personal chef, which media have experienced on their press trips, along with tie ups with chocolatiers, activity centres, top restaurants and whisky distilleries in the area. The House now has its first wedding booked. The coverage on Gamefield has also prompted national London based Concierge companies to get in touch about using the house for clients. Wedding planners have also been in touch.

William has said that I am quite simply the best PR he has ever worked with. I have given him a massive return on his PR investment which is what it is all about – delivering results clients can measure.