



Category: Outstanding Young Communicator

Entrant: Joe Ball MCIPR

Company: Bristol City Council

Demonstrate your commitment to professional development and your career growth :

I started work as a PR professional just under three years ago and in that short time I believe I have proven my commitment in many ways. I am eager to volunteer for various assignments across a wide range of subjects whilst managing the reputation of a local authority in a busy and diverse city.

Upon joining the team I decided to join CIPR in order to develop my professional skills.

I have completed three years of CPD, taking part in several varied courses during this time, including social media, negotiating and writing skills.

The skills I have learnt have helped me to move from a probationary assistant to becoming a full time officer (the youngest on my team). I have now assisted and led on projects with subjects ranging from pest control to corporate transformation and environmental issues.

I have also spent time work-shadowing in frontline roles across the council in order to develop my understanding of how a large unitary authority works which has helped me to deliver effective, measured outcomes.

I have undertaken training across a range of software platforms including Precise, Vocus, Vuelio, SocialSignIn and PressPage to help me support my team.

Outline your work-related achievements over the last two years and how they contribute to the wider industry:

As Accredited Practitioners, I believe strongly that we should be pushing for more openness from our organisations in order to really engage the public in our messages (an aesthetic that is echoed by the CIPR's ethical charter). Working for a local authority, the projects we deliver often have a direct effect on the people we serve. In order to make sure that the work is received positively we need to be as inclusive as possible so that citizens feel like they can work with us to achieve our goals and theirs.

This approach is something I try to encourage senior stakeholders to follow when planning campaigns. Since beginning at the council I have been a part of many different campaigns, some highlights include:

Publicising the arrival of the 2016 Tour of Britain to Bristol whilst also making it as inclusive as possible.

- Official statistics show that thousands of local people attended the event and were inspired to cycle (see section 4 for details).

Encouraging a change in direction of the promotion of a large scale corporate change programme to address a potential £104m budget gap in council funding.

- I was asked to help promote a public consultation for the scheme but was concerned that the agreed messaging was not clear enough
- I wrote a series of press releases which challenged this and agreed them in discussion with senior leaders
- This change in messaging was welcomed by the Mayor and was continued in later outputs.

Helped to create a programme of communications for Bristol's year as European City of Sport without any funding through partnership working.

Promoted National Women's Health Day.

- Encouraged teams to release facts and data to help the public engage with current health issues, resulting in increased coverage and engagement than in previous years.

Aside from these specific examples I regularly deal with issues involving confidential information and liaise with the most senior members of the council to protect our organisation's reputation and maintain high professional standards of communication. My ability to deal with this pressure and achieve positive outcomes for the council has been recognised by my managers and other senior figures.

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

I had a particularly challenging experience working with private-sector sponsors on a major project. I came to the project late in its development to find differing expectations about involvement in media relations and how much profile sponsors could have.

This put senior relationships at risk of conflict, so having identified the risk I took advice and together with colleagues planned to convene all sides and negotiate a resolution. I checked this with our manager and was cleared to attend initial talks with the parties involved; with a senior colleague available to support the process.

Using tips and tactics from the CIPR's influencing and negotiating skills course, we agreed to meet face-to-face at their offices so as not to appear territorial. Having listened to their concerns we conceded that earlier conversations would have been helpful, which helped move us to a position of drawing a line under the past and looking practically at solutions.

I was closely involved in negotiating a compromise whereby the Mayor was the lead on publicity at promotional events, but with a clear, branded presence for the sponsor and pro active on-site PR support to pitch interviews for them as well as the Mayor. This helped prevent escalation of an issue to a point where project delivery could have been at risk, and taught me the value of face-to-face engagement, embracing challenging conversations and – in future – carefully setting expectations at the outset of any partnership project.

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

Objectives:

Contribute to spectator attendance of >175,000 through delivery of integrated PR and marketing communications in partnership with multiple stakeholders. Enable involvement of non-cyclists, hard-to-reach and minority groups in the event.

Strategy:

Using various channels (including specialist media, stakeholders and pre-existing cycling networks) we would amplify the message that the Tour was coming to Bristol whilst also explaining how the sport worked to encourage new spectators.

Tactics:

Press releases and media calls with simple messages and local figures demonstrated how cycling can be an accessible activity. This included a multi-partner Mayor-led ride of one portion of the route.

Worked in partnership to deliver direct communications and community engagement with hard-to-reach groups, including a visit of inner-city school children to the event.

Council budget: £0 (+ Officer time)

Outputs:

We provided our sponsors with social media and marketing toolkits to ensure our event messaging was controlled.

We held a successful media call which featured our Mayor riding part of the route. We also asked a local cycling club to come along for the ride, localising the event. All local media outlets covered the event including a ride-along with ITV and a live broadcast with the BBC.

I also arranged for the local paper to publish ghost-written articles as part of a special pull out feature that would be released a week before the race got to Bristol. This would include articles such as "track cycling for beginners" to give non-cyclists a chance to understand the sport.

Outcomes:

Data from the organisers (SweetSpot's 2016 Economic Impact Report) showed that the event attracted around 200,000 people. Nearly 70% of these were from the South West area and over 63% felt inspired to take up cycling.

The event was estimated to have bought in around £6,718,000 worth of investment and was a success for the city.