

Politics is too important a
matter to be left to politicians

If everyone is
thinking alike
then someone
isn't thinking

General George S Patton

The high-water mark of spin and hype has passed, both in politics and corporate life.

During the period of new Labour's first term, over-reliance on spin led to criticism of the government on delivery, while business hype was exposed by the dot com bust and successive corporate scandals. This reduced trust in government and business still further.

Now, 'trust me' has given way to 'show me'. Government, regulators, employees, NGOs, consumers and the media are all scrutinising the track record of companies and organisations. And, with the growth of shareholder activism and socially responsible investment, investors are taking an increasing interest in corporate responsibility and risk management.

Corporations were said to have grown in power. (Remember when they were supposed to be more powerful than governments?) In fact, never before has corporate reputation been so fragile.

Presentation can still help your case, but only if it is founded on substance. Getting the substance right before communicating the messages is now a key role for public affairs practitioners.

Confidence and trust need to be rebuilt and this makes transparency, responsibility and delivery the new watchwords.

Against this background, what principles guide our work with clients in public affairs and corporate reputation management?

Here is where we start

We are focused on [getting results](#). Politics is interesting, but it's delivery that counts.

[Building credibility](#) over the long term is required to earn the right to be taken seriously by policy makers. We will work with you to demonstrate that you practise what you preach, and help you support your case with independent research and third party endorsement.

Targeting politicians and officials is often not enough. With Labour's huge majority, [building coalitions](#) with a wide range of stakeholders in support of your case is vital.

The government remains highly sensitive to media, stakeholder and public opinion. So [being joined up](#), mobilising broader opinion and integrating your public affairs with your wider communications activity will make you more effective.

Finally, [being imaginative](#) will help you rise above the noise of others competing for share of voice.

The case studies later on set out how we have helped clients deliver each of these principles in practice.

Who we are

We are a top ten UK public affairs practice that has won three industry awards for best public affairs campaign and been nominated for a further two.

Our consultants include former civil servants, political advisers and lobby correspondents, as well as senior staff drawn from political parties, trade unions and NGOs. This means that we have first hand experience of all of the main stakeholder groups making and influencing decisions.

Our team does not just work hard when they're here. They had to work hard to get here in the first place. We only want people who are both great at their job and great to work with. So we put candidates through a minimum of three interviews with at least five different people and then add a writing test on top.

Thankfully, having gone to all that trouble, once they are here, they tend to stay. We have only ever lost one consultant to a rival agency. Continuity matters to you, so it matters to us.

Our practice is an integral part of a top twenty UK corporate communications consultancy. That gives us additional specialist expertise in corporate reputation management, media relations, crisis and issue management, corporate responsibility, internal communication and design. The consultancy as a whole won the Institute of Public Relations' award for outstanding consultancy in 2001.

I think it will be a clash between the political will and the administrative won't

Yes, Prime Minister

To a man who only has a hammer, every problem looks like a nail

Abraham Maslow

What we do

We act as partners to your team – objective insiders – to develop the right strategy to achieve your objectives.

We can conduct opinion leader research and stakeholder audits to help you assess where you stand with government and opinion formers. To monitor and analyse all of your key political, policy and regulatory issues, our research team uses a huge range of intelligence gathering and online research tools.

We help you put strategy into action, supporting you in making direct representations to government, Parliament, regulators, the EU and broader stakeholders.

To make your direct communications more effective, we can help you garner further support through broader stakeholder engagement, coalition building and media relations. To protect and enhance your reputation so that it underpins your case, we can advise on risk and issue management, corporate reporting and corporate responsibility.

Our experience and reach extend beyond just Whitehall and Westminster. We work with clients on issues locally, regionally, with the devolved assemblies, with the European Union and with global institutions.

If you need assistance on the ground, we have relationships with agencies in all the major centres of power. And because we're not tied to an owned network, we'll help you choose the best agency for your requirements in each market.

Our approach

We have always had an integrated approach to public affairs and communications. Ever since we started the practice in 1995.

Others in the industry have recognised in recent years that this is the right approach, but there is a key difference between us. They say it and we do it.

In most other agencies, public affairs is in a separate box from corporate communications. Our culture is to share expertise across disciplines. We do this because decision makers are also consumers. They read newspapers. And they will listen more carefully to you if you have a strong corporate reputation. This means that public affairs is more effective if it is integrated with broader communications – from PR, marketing and advertising, to investor relations, corporate reporting, corporate responsibility and internal communication.

Some agencies have units within public affairs devoted entirely to one policy area. We believe in specialism, but, when government is seeking to be more 'joined up', it is essential to have experience across a range of policy areas. Policy is increasingly developed by cross departmental teams or by independent reviews, and decisions will always take into account the (often differing) views of HM Treasury and Number Ten. There is a need, therefore, to focus on a broader front than just the lead department and to tailor your messages accordingly.

We offer senior people, hands on. All our consultants have at least eight years' relevant experience. We have the seniority to help you with strategy, planning and ideas, but we don't stop there. We help you turn them into action.

Getting results

We aim to get results for all our clients and we can work with you to evaluate them formally. Sometimes, though, it's just a case of winning or losing.

We have helped clients to win competition cases. For *William Hill*, we helped to persuade the competition authorities and the Trade & Industry Secretary to block the proposed merger of Ladbrokes with Coral. We worked with *J Sainsbury* during the 'Rip off Britain' furore to ensure that it came out of the Competition Commission inquiry into the major supermarkets with a clean bill of health.

We have worked successfully with a range of clients to amend legislation. For the *Commission for Racial Equality*, we helped to amend the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 to extend the duty to promote race relations to the police, the prisons service and Home Office. For the *Solicitors Family Law Association* (SFLA), we helped to amend the Access to Justice Act 1999 and the Child Support Act 2000. Our previous work with SFLA on the Family Law Act won the top award from the Institute of Public Relations.

Against the odds, the merger of Ladbrokes and Coral hit the hurdle thanks to our work with William Hill.






Building credibility

We have helped to reposition *Powergen* with government not only as a respected industry voice but also as leading the way on the environmental and social agenda.

With our assistance, Powergen raised the profile of its role in building Europe's largest offshore windfarm, demonstrated industry leadership by becoming the first energy company to announce plans to abolish the surcharge on pre-payment meters and developed a fuel poverty handbook, endorsed by the Energy Minister, for use in MPs' surgeries.

Our work for *Unilever*, one of the world's largest food companies, has included communicating its approach to sustainable development to government, opinion formers, NGOs and the media. By working towards best practice, Unilever has added strength to its voice on all the major UK/EU policy issues facing food, farming and fisheries. The programme has included: working with Forum for the Future, the NGO led by Jonathan Porritt, which has advised on the development of Unilever's Sustainable Agriculture Project; organising a major seminar on sustainable agriculture addressed by the Food Minister; and drafting and designing Unilever UK's first ever sustainable development report. Research has shown growing awareness of Unilever's responsible approach to its supply chain.

Renewable energy from offshore wind turbines like these in the North Sea at Blyth is helping to make the UK's energy supplies more sustainable. We are working with Powergen to help them develop their renewables business in the UK.



Building coalitions

We worked with *Transport for London* to manage communications around the planning for congestion charging – one of the most high profile and controversial transport initiatives in recent years. We managed political and media reaction, engaged stakeholders including business, local government and environmental groups, and co-ordinated a £12m public information campaign. Combining public affairs and media expertise, we secured editorial support in several national newspapers and significant third party endorsement when the Mayor confirmed go-ahead for the scheme. We have worked with every tier of government within the capital, from the Greater London Assembly and the boroughs to London MPs, and have generated extensive national and local media coverage.

The life and pensions industry was on the ropes following pensions mis-selling and poor performing endowment mortgages when Labour came to power in 1997.

We worked with the *Association of British Insurers* in developing new standards for the industry to restore confidence through the Raising Standards Quality Mark Scheme.

We helped to consult all of the relevant government departments, Number Ten, the Financial Services Authority, the National Consumer Council, the Consumers' Association and the national and trade media.

Three years later, a third of the industry is accredited with the new quality mark and 80 per cent has committed to seek accreditation over time. Qualitative research has shown a marked improvement in perceptions of the industry among key audiences since the launch of the scheme. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury paid tribute saying that the scheme “demonstrated that there is the will and the ability within the industry to take us up to a higher standard”.

The introduction of congestion charging involved one of London's largest ever consultation exercises.





Being joined up

The Schrodgers London Boat Show and the Southampton International Boat Show are well known. Less so is the *British Marine Federation* (BMF) that runs them.

We recommended that the BMF should be a far more visible presence at its two flagship annual events and use them more effectively for communicating with government, regulators and the media. Research we undertook also identified a need for a far higher profile at EU level, so we arranged meetings for the BMF in Brussels with Commission officials, MEPs and business organisations. Needing a greater voice in the debate over tourism, we helped open a new dialogue with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and other tourism bodies, as a result of which the BMF is now a member of the government's main advisory body on tourism, chaired by the Secretary of State.

The Association of University Teachers (AUT) is the union and professional body for 42,000 academic staff in higher education. We advised AUT that to win its case on pay and conditions it needed to highlight higher education's role in enhancing competitiveness and social mobility. With our help, AUT raised the profile of these issues in the 2001 general election and influenced both the Better Regulation Taskforce inquiry on university red-tape and the Treasury-commissioned Roberts Report on science and engineering. The ultimate target was Spending Review 2002, which included significant new money for universities, staff recruitment and retention and teaching incentives.

The Endeavour was used to open the 2002 Southampton International Boat Show on its return from retracing Captain Cook's voyage to Australia.

Being imaginative

As part of our work with the *Pre-school Learning Alliance*, we combined a major conference on early years education and childcare, addressed by the Education Secretary, with the presentation by pre-school children of a cake to the PM at Number Ten as it was his birthday. Pictures of a smiling Tony Blair alongside pre-school children were on the front page of the Evening Standard as the Education Secretary responded to our intensive campaign by announcing new money to help stop pre-school closures. Later we helped the charity to persuade Number Ten to hold its first ever seminar on the early years.

We also helped the charity to run a musical chairs competition for MPs prior to the 2001 general election to see who would lose their seats, with a specially made 'Swingometer' recording the results.

For *Pearl Assurance*, we created a public affairs programme about 'Money in the Real World' to show policy makers what consumers on low-to-middle incomes really thought about savings and pensions. This included inviting Whitehall officials and MPs to sit behind a one-way glass partition to watch focus groups of low-to-middle income consumers discuss their attitudes to pensions. One select committee chairman was cited in Hansard as saying that he was 'privileged' to have taken part. Our work for Pearl won the IPR's award for public affairs in 2000.

*Who says you should never
work with children?*



Awards won

- 2001 Institute of Public Relations Excellence Awards: outstanding consultancy of the year
- 2000 Institute of Public Relations Excellence Awards: best public and community affairs campaign
- 1999 Institute of Public Relations Sword of Excellence Awards: best public affairs campaign
- 1998 PR Week Awards: shortlisted for best public affairs campaign
- 1996 PR Week Awards: commendation in the public affairs campaigns category
- 1996 Institute of Public Relations Sword of Excellence Awards: best overall campaign; best public affairs campaign

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We are committed to an ethical approach to public affairs. As leading members of the Association of Professional Political Consultants (APPC), we adhere strictly to a code of professional conduct, and both our clients and consultants are registered with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and the Cabinet Office.



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