

**COMMUNICATIONS  
MANAGEMENT  
:BUILDING REPUTATIONS**

Our mission to be a  
best practice employer

## OUR MISSION TO BE A BEST PRACTICE EMPLOYER

Communications Management is a niche reputation consultancy which focuses on social and economic issues. Our work with public and private sector clients involved in education and training, health, enterprise, workplace and career issues means our work makes a real difference to the way people live. Effectively we are a commercial organization with a big conscience and we aim to reflect this as a best practice employer.

We're a values driven company – our 27-strong team worked offsite last year to review our values in the light of our new strategic vision to deliver "Influence with Integrity" and new spirit (mission) statement:

- **Bright people, bright futures**
- **Proud specialists**
- **Breaking the mould**
- **Building lasting reputations.**

The values the team felt characterize our behaviour and culture are summed up in the acronym SPIRE:

- **Supportive**
- **Passionate**
- **Integrity**
- **Respect**
- **Excellence.**

These values are lived day-to-day in our dealings with each other, our clients and other stakeholders and reflected in our operations, processes and systems such as our performance management system aSPIRE and internal awards scheme inSPIRE.



*"I joined Communications Management in November 2007 from a background working in-house for not-for-profit and public sector organisations. It was my first experience of working for a commercial company, and so I was nervous of the anticipated change of culture. I had heard stories of agencies that expected their staff to work 12 hour days, and which expected almost 100% billable time. I was pleasantly surprised at how easily I fitted into the culture of Communications Management. The working hours are flexible, and allow me to fit in other commitments outside of work such as a running club and being part of a CIPR committee.*

*I have developed new skills through formal and on-the-job training, and was given study leave to allow myself to complete a professional qualification. The main benefit I have found to working for Communications Management is the supportive environment from working with a like-minded team of colleagues drawn from a range of backgrounds in public relations, journalism and marketing disciplines. Regular cross-company creative sessions, knowledge days and away days mean that staff have excellent working relationships, making the company a truly enjoyable place to work."*

**Sarah Forrow, senior consultant**

## BEST PRACTICE IN PEOPLE PLANNING

As a people business, being an employer of choice is critical for us. Each of our four Practices produces its own people plan as part of the business planning process. This outlines the development objectives and support needed for every member of staff in the business. This feeds into to a corporate people plan which is reviewed and updated according to the needs of the business. As a result of our aSPIRE performance management process, everyone in the business has a personal development plan which encompasses formal training delivered internally and externally. This is reviewed regularly through the year.

With the help of an external hr consultant we have developed a competency-based model which enables us to recruit the best and brightest talent. The recruitment process is rigorous, starting with a behavioural telephone interview conducted by our hr consultant through to traditional face-to-face first and second interviews which include assessment exercises.

Staff turnover last year was 3% and we set an annual target of 5% - well below the industry average.



**Hannah Murray joined Communications Management as part of its graduate intake in 2008. She says:**

*"Having joined Communications Management just over a year ago as a graduate with no PR experience I don't think I would have progressed as much as I have in any other company. Moving from administration to consulting after 6 months was made so much easier by the support of both my line manager and practice director. It was getting the balance between providing support and giving me responsibility for my work that helped me to develop as a consultant and gain in confidence. I am lucky to have a really good relationship with my line manager and I have always had the support I needed; she even gave up some of her own time to train me in presentation skills.*

*My training, both external and internal, has been chosen specifically to help my development rather than following a standard training approach. I am also looking at completing my CIPR Certificate in the Autumn and the company has been very supportive in helping with the financial costs and offering study leave for exams. One of the best things about Communications Management is its people, everyone from MD to administrator takes an active interest in the work that is being done and it is easy to talk to anyone about anything!"*

## BEST PRACTICE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

A total of 220 days was spent on training and development in our last financial year equivalent to 8 days per staff member over the year. Total spend on training in the year exceeded £9,000 per person.

Development initiatives include:

- **Knowledge days:** three days of training per year for every consultant in the business on core professional skills. These are led by external experts who are leaders in their field. Recent knowledge days have included: a day long networking workshop; digital media training and development; delivering and planning innovative campaigns.
- **Media school:** led by our head of media delivery Judith Hunt. This is a rolling programme of journalist talks delivering the latest in best practice and future plans for media straight from the horse's mouth. Last year we delivered around six media school sessions to all the consultants in the business with guests who included: Parminder Bahra head of digital content at the Times on "broadsheet or broadcaster—the future of newspapers"; Jeremy Hillman, head of business output at the BBC, on "business and the BBC".
- **Bespoke development:** we commission bespoke development with external training providers to support common development needs across the business. Last year we worked with Aflame to develop a modular "Consulting Skills Academy" for our consultants.
- **Formal support for qualifications:** We provide funding for professional qualifications and provide interest free loans for personal study. In the last year two consultants completed the CAM diploma in marketing and the CIM postgraduate diploma in strategic marketing. We provide study leave, study support and the ability to implement projects and coursework in the business. In the past we have sponsored members of staff through an MBA at Henley Business School as well as development at Cranfield University Management School and Roffey Park.
- **Professional membership:** As part of our commitment to continuing professional development consultants are encouraged to join the CIPR and CIM and register their training on their CPD programmes.
- **Coaching and mentoring:** for new staff or those moving into a challenging new position we operate an informal coaching scheme which provides development and support from experienced colleagues.
- **Networking and knowledge development:** The company formally supports attendance and membership of CIPR/CIM committees and our staff are active members of City and Financial and Education CIPR committees and the CIM SME and CIM HE special interest groups.

In addition, we tailor roles to fit the talent in our business and to help people realize their potential by encouraging them to understand and work to their strengths, for example, Judith Hunt (principal consultant) was appointed to the additional role of head of media delivery in recognition of her expertise and knowledge. Owen Morris (consultant) spearheads digital media delivery as a result of his interest and know-how in this area.



**Justin Shaw has been with Communications Management for 15 years and has progressed from a junior account executive to a board director. He says:**

*"I joined the company 15 years ago – and the opportunities for my career progression have been tremendous. When I started here as a junior account executive I expected to stay with the company for 2 to 3 years and then return to an in-house PR role, which I had previously enjoyed. However, the drive to 'make a real difference' for clients and the contribution that the company makes to vital issues of society have so enthused me throughout my time here that it has made me feel at home and stay for the long-term. I never expected to become a commercially-minded director, but the company has promoted me to several positions and roles over the years and each time I gain a new challenge. Now I am a business director with my own team and sector practice – and I feel proud to have helped shape the company's growth and success. The opportunity to change as a person and to develop your talents in new areas are just fantastic."*



**Emma Price, principal consultant comments**

*"Communications Management works hard to give staff time out to develop together so that we can share information, build relations, learn from each other and influence key business decisions. Not only does this create a great working environment but the team ethos also benefits the clients we work with because they get access to a much wider array of networks, knowledge and information.*

*Communications Management works hard to ensure our individual training and development needs are met, supporting us through on-the-job training, coaching, soft skills development and professional qualifications. One thing that struck me when I first joined Communications Management was the openness – there is no such thing as a stupid idea and everyone, regardless of their role, is encouraged share ideas, to look for ways to develop and help meet business objectives."*

## BEST PRACTICE IN WORKLIFE BALANCE

Communications is a talent-based organization and recruits the best and brightest people in the industry. As a result we go the extra mile in providing a flexible working environment including flexible hours, home working for all staff and family friendly policies. More than a quarter of our team benefit from family friendly part-time working arrangements which include:

- Term time only working
- Part time working for three or four days per week
- Home-working: allowing parents to spend less time travelling and participate in drop-off and pick ups for their children



*"Communications Management's attitude to work-life balance has enabled me to pursue a highly satisfying career in public relations whilst giving my two children the personal upbringing that my partner and I wished for them. I am the primary carer and started work at Communications Management on a school hours, term time basis on the day my youngest child started school. Any parent will know, however, that especially during infant and junior school years, children prefer their parents to attend special assemblies, sports days etc that invariably take place during working hours. The company has always supported my attendance at these and in return I have always been happy to ensure my client responsibilities are discharged whether this is during school hours, or not. Additionally child illness has never been an issue for me as the company is happy for me to work from home when I am able.*

*I am the lead consultant on several of our most prestigious accounts, including Henley Business School. The company's culture means that my colleagues have always been supportive of my working arrangements, even when I disappear for six weeks during the summer! I am now in my eighth year working for Communications Management and have two very happy and successful daughters who are secure in the knowledge that they always come first. Equally they understand that it is perfectly possible to combine motherhood and a successful career. If companies in future want to attract the best and brightest talent they will have to ensure they are great places to work."*

**Judith Hunt, principal consultant**

## BEST PRACTICE REWARD AND RECOGNITION

A survey this year by an external human resources consultancy has benchmarked our salaries against the rest of the industry. It has shown that even without the discretionary bonuses it awards, the company is at or above the median for the industry. The benefits enjoyed at Communications Management exceed those typically offered within the industry and employees have the flexibility to tailor their package to fit individual needs. The emphasis is on well-being and helping employees achieve a good work – life balance. Generous holiday entitlements, gym membership, health insurance, child care vouchers and flexible working arrangements are just some of the benefits on offer.

Table of benefits
26 or 31 days holiday according to position
Discretionary annual bonus scheme
Training – internal/external
Performance reviews
Annual salary reviews
Closing Xmas/new year
Social events
Childcare vouchers
Interest free loans
Spot bonus/prizes for exceptional work
Free tea/coffee/biscuits
Private Health care
Use of company expensed mobile phone at senior levels
Use of company laptop (pooled)
Share options at director level
Use of Blackberry at senior levels
Subsidised gym membership
Flexible working
Childcare vouchers
Personal development plan
Knowledge days
Company/ individual birthday celebrations
Bounty payment for staff recruitment

Recognition is not confined to pay and benefits. Good work is routinely praised by managers formally and informally, great work is mounted on Impact Boards and the company has launched inSPIRE an internal awards scheme. Every six weeks entries are invited and reviewed by peers. The winning campaign team receive lunch on the company and present their campaign to the whole team at staff meetings. The work is then showcased on walls in the office. At the end of the year the team with the campaign judged overall winner wins a Red Letter Day experience.



*"I really appreciate the health and well-being benefits offered by the company particularly the cover provided for dental and optical costs – it's an encouragement to have regular check-ups which staff may not necessarily do if they have to pay for this themselves. It has also been extremely useful for me in the past as I was able to have a course of physiotherapy after suffering a fractured wrist – something I was very grateful for at the time.*

*The company also pays a contribution towards the cost of membership at a local gym. Again this is a benefit that is greatly enjoyed by health-conscious staff! Keeping fit is really important to me and it's another great benefit offered by a company concerned about the health and well-being of its staff."*

**Helen Connolly, PA to the managing director**

## BEST PRACTICE IN THE COMMUNITY

Through its 21 year history Communications Management has played an active part in the community.

- Our managing director Pam Calvert has served as non executive director of two enterprise agencies and a community trust supporting disadvantaged people in Hertfordshire where the company is based. She now acts as a mentor to the chief executive of a national charity.
- Other members of the team have volunteered their time to the Princes Youth Trust and to Young Enterprise. The company has worked on a pro-bono basis for the CIPR and the Lord Stafford national awards scheme for universities.
- Director Justin Shaw is treasurer of the CIPR Education and Skills sub-committee.
- The company has dedicated its annual awaydays to volunteering including working with the Groundwork Trust to clear debris from a local chalk stream.
- We provide work experience for local school children, and internships for under and post-graduates from UK and European universities.
- Four years ago after extensive research by the team, the staff at Communications Management selected Link Community Development as a partner charity. Link works with schools, parents and teachers to improve the quality of teaching and education in Africa. Over the past four years we have worked on a pro bono basis, sponsored a school in Uganda and last year, as part of its 20th anniversary year raised £20,000 for the charity.



*"When I joined Communications Management I was delighted to discover that not only did the company support a charity, LINK Community Development, but that the staff had been given free rein in choosing an organisation to support.*

*LINK was selected because its ethos and philosophy matches that of Communications Management, and because a large part of its work is in the development of education provision.*

*This all sounds incredibly worthy – which is it – but what also developed out of the company supporting LINK was a huge amount of fun (we have plenty of photos to prove it!) and a fantastic sense of satisfaction.*

*The main fundraising activity was our participation in a Dragon Boat Race at Marlow where we dressed as Dragonflies (our wings were mentioned in the closing speech they were so admired!) which helped us to raise thousands of pounds in sponsorship.*

*In addition the company matched our sponsorship, and donated £10,000 so LINK received more than £20,000 – £1,000 for every year Communications Management has been in existence.*

*In a sector and climate when money is all important it's heartening to work for an organisation which supports a charity in such a significant way – and encourages and enables staff to have fun when doing it!"*

**Fiona Leslie, principal consultant**

## BEST PRACTICE SOCIALIZING!

Throughout its history the company has organized social events and awaydays for the team. These have included:

- punting on the River Cam
- sailing
- cooking gourmet meals under the direction of a professional chef
- wine tasting
- horse racing
- murder mystery nights
- In between awaydays our social diary can include Easter bonnet competitions and Easter egg hunts, summer cream teas, lunch at the pub and picnics.
- For the company's 10th anniversary all the team went Euro Disney for a two night stay and last year, on the occasion of its 20th anniversary a two-day party in Palma Mallorca was organized.

*"I joined the company in 1996 just before its 10th anniversary trip to Disneyland Paris. There's nothing like seeing your colleagues in French night clubs and on the 'It's a Small World' ride to think of your work – a serious business in terms of the clients and issues involved – in a wholly new light. I feel fortunate to have been here last year for the company's 20th celebration. Everyone has some doubts about company social events: when should I start saying no to drinks, and should I really be doing a salsa? I think it showed how comfortable the company is with itself, especially with a group five times the size of the one I joined. We just had a lot of fun together in Palma..*

*"There's been a commitment to away days during my time at Communications Management, they've never been pushed off the agenda by other pressures, and have become even more valued over time as a way for the whole company to get together. I've been on boats, cooked in a professional kitchen, to the races – and picked up a huge amount for my own personal development along the way. Most of all, I've learnt there doesn't have to be a complete divide between work on the one hand and having a life on the other. There has to be some common ground."*

**Tim Blanchard, principal consultant**