

Don't let spin damage your company's image

Michelle Whitefoot offers advice on how businesses can achieve positive PR



HELPING HAND: Michelle Whitefoot is director of Whitefoot-Forward PR.

WHEN US President Barack Obama was unexpectedly awarded the Nobel peace prize some of those commenting on the surprise announcement speculated why it was that he had been recognised rather than the more prolific and long-standing global peace-maker former president Bill Clinton.

The reason why the latter has repeatedly been snubbed for the prize, some said, was that the politically-correct Nobel committee could not forgive Clinton his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

Closer to home, I was reminded of one of our own public relations clients; a long-established, market leading business that came to us a couple of years into a mystifying slide in its sales and business-to-business reputation.

The problem, it eventually transpired, was that its customers – who had been voicing various areas of dissatisfaction for several years – were fed up that the company had not acted on their concerns.

So, although our PR efforts were achieving plenty of positive editorial coverage in the national and international trade press, it simply didn't wash with the customers. Only when our client implemented the surprisingly simple changes that were needed to its business practices did customers' first-hand experience match the PR promise and sales benefited accordingly.

Although apparently unconnected, these two diverse

examples are really illustrations of the same core issue. What you do is as important as what you say. In business terms it's no good getting great PR, spending thousands on advertising or even entertaining customers on the golf course if behind the scenes deliveries are inconsistent, product quality is shoddy, or staff are rude. Ultimately, no marketing masterpiece can cover up for a lack of integrity.

Looking across our clients over the years, the most successful businesses have been those that recognise their reputation is in their own hands, as well as ours.

They know that effective public relations is never about 'spin', but a vital opportunity to communicate news, nurture positive word-of-mouth and open the right doors.

Of course, no business is perfect, but if yours excels at what it does and you make sure people hear about it, then you'll be on track to win the rewards.

Whitefoot-Forward PR is a division of Whitefoot-Forward Ltd, and sister company to Whitefoot-Forward Smart Storage. Michelle Whitefoot can be contacted on 01299 250588.

Living together isn't as easy as you think

Nigel Davis, head of family law at Thursfields, has a few words for people thinking of moving in together

AS more people are deciding to cohabit rather than get married there are certain issues they will need to consider.

The fact that a couple have lived together for years and/or have had children together does not entitle them to the same rights as a married person. We are constantly informing clients that there is no such thing as a "common law marriage". In fact, common law marriage has not existed in England and Wales since 1753.

While proposals are being considered that the law should change with regard to couples who cohabit, the present situation can be very difficult for those who have not entered into a cohabitation agreement. The main features that need serious consideration prior to living together are easy to define:

THE HOUSE: If your partner owns the house and there is no written agreement then on any breakdown of your relationship you will have no right to stay in the property and no right to claim anything from it.

This may be slightly different if there are children involved but unless you have recorded your intentions when you began living together you will have no claim

against the property. If one of you put more money into the purchase of the property that contribution should be protected by a trust deed. If this has not been done then when a jointly-owned property is sold both receive half each.

IF YOUR PARTNER DIES: If there is no will the surviving partner will not automatically inherit anything from the property or the estate, or be entitled to remain in the house if it was in the other partner's sole name.

PENSIONS: Check your pension scheme and that of your partner. Some pension providers do not pay benefits to unmarried partners.

There are a number of other considerations that will need to be resolved and my advice to those who are seriously considering living together is to enter into a cohabitation agreement sometimes known as a "living together agreement".

This will record the basis of your relationship, who owns what and of course in the event of a breakdown of the relationship what is to happen. This is not an easy thing to address at the start of a relationship, but should it end it is an effective way of resolving a situation.

ADVERTISING FEATURE

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Company	SB Training (UK)
Business type	Fork lift truck and plant operator training
Directors	S Beaumont, N Beaumont and P Beaumont
Established	1993
Telephone	01905 358175
Website	sbtrainingltd.co.uk
e-mail	suerossler@sbtrainingltd.co.uk
Location	The Adroit Complex, Trow Way, Diglis, Worcester WR5 3BX



SAFETY: From left, Mike Robins, Spa Display; NVQ assessor Lloyd Millership; Paul Caffell, Spa Display and SB Training (UK) office manager Sue Roessler. 42330701

It is no exaggeration to say that factories and construction sites can be among the most dangerous places to work. With lots going on, such as heavy materials and plant machinery constantly on the move, the potential for accidents is considerable.

But of course, this is greatly reduced if the right people receive the right training at the right intervals, as required under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974. Which is where expert training companies such as SB Training (UK) of Diglis, Worcester come in.

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instructors have individual experience ranging from five to 38 years. All training can be carried out on-site or in-house, from either the company's head office in Skelmersdale, Lancashire, or from its training centres in Worcester and Aintree, all of which are specifically tailored to meet the needs and requirements of all courses.

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MICHAEL PRYCE

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