

# DECISION

**Hallmark PR**

strategic communications

– an independent report

# DECISION

DECISION BUSINESS MAGAZINE

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The following report on the work of Hallmark PR was researched and compiled by DECISION business magazine and published in December 2004 as part of the Strategic Communications Showcase project.

The purpose was to identify and then validate the attributes, actual experience and performance of the firm. Its compilation took place over a four-month period.

The content was completely sourced and written from interviews undertaken by DECISION.

Hallmark PR were not able to make any changes to the report, apart from the correction of any factual inaccuracies should they have occurred.

As a consequence the views expressed by those who have been interviewed are not necessarily those of the firm.



Larry Dillner  
Publisher

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# RESOURCE

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## Background

Established 1984. Investors in People accredited. PRCA Consultancy Management Standard. Worldcom Quality Standard.

## People

**Steve Osborne-Brown, director** – member of the Institute of Public Relations; Advanced diploma in communication studies; Advanced diploma in consultancy management; public relations officer, Royal Navy (1984-90); owner-director of Concept Photography (1990-92); public relations adviser, Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service (1992-99); Hallmark Public Relations (from 1999).

**Helen Symes, director** – BA (Hons) English; public relations officer, Glass and Glazing Federation (1986-88); senior account executive, account manager, Hallmark Public Relations (1988-89); associate director (1989-92); director (from 1992).

**Steve Wilson, director** – Company Director's Diploma, University of Sydney Graduate School of Business; member of the Institute of Public Relations; graduate member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors; account manager, AIMM (Public Relations) Ltd (1998); shareholder adviser, Lloyds TSB Registrars (2000); account manager, senior account manager, account director, Hallmark Public Relations (2000-2003); director (from 2003).

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## SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF WORK - 1

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Mott MacDonald/Highways Agency – Ahead of a major maintenance scheme on the M4, managing agents Mott MacDonald wanted to avoid the ‘Motorway Madness’ headlines which accompanied a similar project on the M27. Hallmark PR met with both parties to identify the ‘stakeholders’ who would be affected, including event organisers in the west country, businesses, hauliers, and then to decide what the specific messages for each sector would be. The strategy, which was started six months before contractors began work, included individual briefings arranged by Hallmark PR for major interested parties, including the media, and an information bus tour to local town centres and motorway service areas in order to explain the reasons for the disruption.

Vail Williams – For the merger with planning consultants Robert Shaw & Partners, Hallmark PR managed the communication process, including identifying the possible reactions of staff, clients, and other specific target groups, which formed the basis of the programme.

Siemon – The brief for the world’s largest privately-owned manufacturer of network cabling systems and components, based in the US, was to get the brand better known for the UK subsidiary, not just to end-users but to installers and systems integrators. Hallmark’s strategy was to be issues driven rather than focus on product information, so that media coverage positioned Siemon as an authority on the subject, which would have an effect on the perception of the product. In addition, Hallmark PR manage and handle the company’s relationship with PR consultancies appointed to assist the subsidiaries in France, Germany, and Italy.

London Remade – Financially assisted by the government to promote waste management by developing local markets for the capital’s recycled materials. Hallmark PR’s communications strategy started by getting the boroughs ‘on line’ with the message and purpose of the organisation, and that it was worth investing in the products because a sustainable local economy generates jobs and creates wealth. A key element of Hallmark PR’s work was to demonstrate there was a cost as well as an environmental advantage.

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## SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF WORK – 2

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Portsmouth City Council – For the Clean & Tidy City initiative, Hallmark PR researched target audiences and their attitude to litter (and their role in creating it) so that the resulting campaign would target specific groups in order to achieve its objectives. Hallmark PR also identified that a number of departments at the local authority had litter as part of their remit, and produced a strategy for them to work together on the campaign. The title put forward by Hallmark, Proud to be Portsmouth, was designed to be an inclusive brand, a positive approach rather than admonishment.

MTAG – Set up by the major mobile phone operators, this advisory group appointed Hallmark PR to communicate information relating to masts to planners, councillors, and other interested parties across the UK, including meetings with a panel of representatives from the operators.

B&Q plc – A previous planning application to sell some of the grounds of a FE college for development was refused after local uproar, but the college needed to sell the asset in order to fund better courses and facilities to improve student numbers. Appointed ahead of a new application, Hallmark PR completed a political and community audit which formed the basis of a strategy which included private, round-table discussions with interested parties, briefings for business groups, and meetings with individual journalists who had campaigned against the original proposals so that the issues they raised could be addressed – all of which was designed to prevent a hardening of attitudes before the local council considered the proposal, which was subsequently approved by its planning committee.

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## REFERENCES - 1

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“We wanted a PR company to extend our reach. We have no problem reaching the cabling industry press with product information as it’s a very small world, but we do have a big challenge to get business publications from key vertical industries interested in what we are saying, as it is not necessarily the most exciting subject!

“To give an indication of how successful Hallmark PR has been for us, it’s best to look at my colleagues’ response to their work, rather than mine. When we first took up the challenge of increasing brand awareness of us in Europe, where our offices were very new, the sales managers there wanted to do advertising, but I didn’t. I was a very strong advocate for PR. It was a real challenge for me to convince them, but now they all say they are glad that they decided to go down the PR route instead. I think everybody would scream and shout if Hallmark PR were to be taken away from them!

“Hallmark PR have their own software, Appraise, for monitoring the effectiveness of their campaigns, which helps the country managers understand what we can expect to be achieving and what areas they should be focusing on more.

“We are in the process of signing the contract now to work with Hallmark PR’s contacts in four or five countries in Latin America as well as those we now have in Europe – contacts they have through the Worldcom PR Group which they are very involved in. It was one of the main attractions of Hallmark PR initially, that they can manage programmes on a global basis, using like-minded professionals abroad to roll out plans that Hallmark PR have put together.”

Gill Kay, marketing manager EMEA, Siemon

“We have managed to get planning permission without using PR firms for years of course, but I think the whole climate is changing gradually. In this day and age one is expected to address the public perhaps more than in the past, and get them involved in what one is doing in the community, and so we invited Hallmark PR to help us with a reasonably involved planning application for a nursing home.

“Hallmark PR challenge existing assumptions rather than taking them as the starting point. They have ideas about how to demonstrate to the public what we are trying to do – and to convince people that not all developers have got two heads. There is very often a knee-jerk reaction against new developments, but Hallmark’s approach dealt with that.”

Adrian Otten, managing director, Colten Developments Ltd

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## REFERENCES - 2

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“We asked Hallmark PR to come up with a brand new campaign for us. We didn’t want to do the same as other local authorities, so we asked them to go away and think of something brand new, which is what they did. Unfortunately it was rejected by our members who thought it might be a bit too controversial for Portsmouth. So Hallmark PR had to start again from scratch, but they were very patient and came up with a new concept. They understood that with local authorities it often takes a long time to get approval for campaigns and you have to go through lots of channels.

“They made the effort to attend meetings here so they could get an understanding of what was going on – even if PR wasn’t on the agenda, they’d still be there. I was never passed onto an assistant if I had any questions either; I was in constant contact with the Hallmark PR director who was in charge of the campaign.”

Sonya Saini, Clean and Tidy project officer, Portsmouth City Council

“Hallmark PR are helping us promote our six south-east regional offices, and to do that they have been working with the local marketing person and key partners in each of the offices and with our national press office. They receive the national stories and try to give them a local slant. More recently they have been trying to help us promote our south east sector capability and AIM expertise. I was initially attracted to them because they had already worked for an accountancy firm in our area so I felt they would be used to the patch and service mix, and used to the partnership culture. We definitely have better press coverage now. They are also very good at writing, and importantly, they are a really nice team to deal with.”

Virginia Cook, marketing manager (southeast regions), BDO Stoy Hayward LLP

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## REFERENCES – 3

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“Hallmark PR are responsible for generating press releases for all our regional and business media contacts. We have been using them for about two-and-a-half years. Prior to that we had another PR company working for us, and we had rather lost our way in focusing on regional press in particular. Hallmark PR have worked very hard at generating stories, getting them signed off and issued. Our coverage has increased dramatically. I also needed a PR company capable of writing lengthy articles as well as short press releases. Hallmark PR can write 1500 words on something quite technical and make it readable.

“Hallmark PR are now a very important part of our set-up here. We have two people working on our account and I probably have daily contact with the account director. We’ve built up a real trust. We discuss future strategy, in terms of which key service lines of our business need to be promoted.

“They are also involved in a proposed brand awareness campaign for us – I’ve virtually out-sourced the organisation of it to them. It is quite a significant proposed campaign for us, and Hallmark PR have come up with the ideas, costed it, done the fact finding, and put the proposals together. They liaise with me regularly on it, and the thing I particularly like about Hallmark PR is that they are very organised and they deliver.”  
Graham Munday, marketing manager, Vail Williams

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## REFERENCES - 4

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“Hallmark PR have been doing our media monitoring and analysis for nearly three years, but they don’t just collect the press clippings. They apply a formula to determine whether they are positive or negative, what sort of tone they have, what sort of reach they have had.

“They work very hard to define exactly what our objectives are, and their understanding of what our business is about is very good. This is so important. If your PR consultants get that wrong, or aren’t up to speed, you are lost.

“We have quarterly reviews with Hallmark, in which they often help us to see the wood from the trees and make recommendations. They will say ‘there is an issue here, have you thought about doing this?’. They look at our business with a different set of eyes and that’s very useful. For instance we used to hold our information days about issues concerning, motorway works for example, but for some reason we didn’t always invite the public! We used to aim them mainly at local stakeholders such as the utilities, and local authorities. It was Hallmark who came up with the proposals for getting the public involved. That’s why we hire them – they are an extension of my own team, really.”

“Mott MacDonald is a multinational company, staffed by professional engineers, so when we look to employ someone, they really have to share the same sort of values and vision. They are part of the PRCA (Public Relations Consultants Association) just as we are members of the Institution of Civil Engineers, and they are Investors in People, just as we are.

“As part of our quality management system, we also do our own audits on organisations we employ, on how they are performing. Hallmark PR came out of it well, scoring eights and nines out of ten throughout.”

Mike Kean, area 3 communications manager, Mott MacDonald

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## REFERENCES - 5

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“When we first employed Hallmark, they made real efforts to understand what we were about, what our objectives were. They interviewed a range of staff throughout the organisation, found out what we did in terms of day to day housing management, and our relations with tenants, local authorities and developers. That gave them a good overall view of what we were about and they then used that to tailor their approach to the various projects we have given them. This results in maximum impact within the sphere in which we operate, and we reach the people we want to target. Hallmark PR take a very strategic approach – it goes beyond writing copy and gaining a bit of publicity.

“As a good example of the way they work for us, one of their consultants is currently sitting in the office just around the corner from me. She works from here three days a week, which makes more sense than us deploying someone to feed stuff up to Hallmark.”

Patrick Shelley, services director, Atlantic Housing Group Ltd

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## CONTACT DETAILS

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