

IASP 2011 Copenhagen
from Manchester Science Parks Ltd.
for

Key Discussion issue 1c : Communication strategies and media relations.

'Punching Above Our Weight - a Small Park with a Big Brand'.
MANCHESTER SCIENCE PARKS

These notes take Manchester Science Parks Ltd. (msp) as a case study, outlining the development of our PR strategy and communications activity over the past 10 years. The strategy has changed and media relations have developed with each stage of msp's growth.

1 - BACKGROUND

Introduction

Starting with just one building on a large brown field site in 1984, **msp** now owns or manages a total of 31,390 sq.m of lettable space at 4 locations across the Manchester city region.

Details of the current tenant community :

- 122 companies employing around 1200 people
- Principal sectors : biomedical & healthcare; ICT; digital media; industrial technologies
- 20% of companies are university spin-outs/spin-offs
- 17 overseas owned companies from 9 overseas locations
- 75% of companies < 5 employees
- Year-on-year growth and innovation
- 40% of tenants in operation for 5+ years

Our basic mission statement has remained unchanged over 25 years :

“To enhance the economic and technological wealth of the Manchester City Region” :

In the light of current and future planned expansion we have extended that statement :

“To encourage the establishment of a knowledge-based economy within the Manchester City Region, which will increase the employment opportunities of its residents. We will achieve this by harnessing the resources of the City Regions’ academic institutions to enhance the economic, technological and creative base in the area” :

with the shortened ‘tag line’ : “Building Manchester’s Knowledge Economy”

msp SHAREHOLDERS

msp's shareholders fall into 3 groupings :

- Public sector
- Universities
- Commercial

It is important to bear these in mind when devising a communications and PR strategy and plan, in order to satisfy the interests and objectives of these individual stakeholders, ie :

Public sector: **msp** impact on regeneration and knowledge economy
Universities : **msp** impact on knowledge economy and graduate retention
Commercial: **msp** impact on business growth and knowledge economy

Our strategy must encompass messages that satisfy all stakeholders :

1 - Public Sector

This shareholder group has an interest in success stories and news from **msh** and its tenant companies; positive press has a benefit for the image of Manchester as a 'knowledge capital' and as a hub for innovative companies.

2 - Academia

The city's universities have been the birthplace of many innovative companies which have gone on to take accommodation within **msh**. It is therefore beneficial to highlight successes to this sector to encourage further links and collaborations and for **msh** to be the location of choice for spin-out companies from the adjacent academic and healthcare base

3 - Business Community

The high tech business community is a source of potential tenants; it is beneficial to highlight to this sector **msh**'s role as a thriving enterprise and influential player in the business world, providing important credibility for the **msh** brand and for tenant companies.

4 - Science Park Community

The science park community on a regional, national and international scale is a source of collaboration and links that benefit both **msh** and its tenant companies; keeping this sector up to date with **msh**'s success and developments maintains our credibility for active links for ourselves and for our tenant companies

CORE BUSINESS

The property is our core business; however, the property facility and function is a means to an end, supporting the dual objectives of economic development and knowledge transfer.

For over 25 years **msh** has supported the growth of innovative companies across sectors such as ICT, biotechnology, industrial technologies and digital media, and is now recognised as a key player in the economic regeneration of the city region and in knowledge transfer from the academic and research base.

CREATING THE TENANT COMMUNITY

In support of our objectives, **msh** provides a range of business development support to its tenant companies, to help them grow and to sustain that growth. We call this support value added services or Innovation Services, and these comprise :

- Networking & community activities
- Links with the academic and healthcare base
- Business development support
- Making introductions and connections
- PR support
- International links

We use third party intermediaries and professional providers to help deliver the business development support.

2 - 2000-2004

On the arrival of a new CEO (Jane Davies) in 2000, the position with Manchester Science Park Ltd. was :

- there were new buildings on the main site to be promoted
- there were 2 buildings on an adjacent site to be promoted
- the strategy was to promote Manchester Science Park as a quality, fit for purpose location for science and technology businesses

This set the scene for buying in the services of a local PR company who had a niche in the property sector. The PR and communications objectives drawn up with them were :

- To build brand awareness within the commercial property sector
- To promote the new CEO's reputation within Manchester and the regional business community

- To communicate the Manchester Science Park brand so that it should be perceived as one of the most desirable locations for high-tech businesses

The PR activity comprised :

- wide circulation of press releases focused principally on Manchester Science Park, its CEO and its chairman
- liaison with our property agents
- new corporate and consistent design of our printed materials
- sponsorship of events
- organising our own events (eg. our 20th anniversary)

PHASE 2 / ENHANCED PR & COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITY

2004 - 2009

By 2004 Manchester Science Park Ltd owned and managed property across 3 locations in Manchester and was developing its offering of added value services (the “Innovation Services”) which set us apart from all other business accommodation offerings in the city region and are our unique selling point.

The strategic PR and communications objectives were therefore enhanced and extended to :

- Promote and embed **msp** as the brand for Manchester Science Park Ltd., since we were now a multi-site operation
- Develop that **msp** brand independent of location
- Promote regionally, nationally and internationally, the **msp** brand across all sites
- Articulate and communicate **msp**’s value proposition (high quality accommodation tailored to clients’ needs, offered on flexible terms, in a supported business environment with connections to the academic community)
- Improve communications with all higher education establishments in Manchester, in order to support academic links as part of **msp**’s value proposition

THE msp BRAND

Independent of location, the **msp** brand encompasses the following elements :

- a world-class science and technology community
- an internationally recognized centre of excellence
- the home of successful innovative companies
- value added services
- connections to the universities
- international links
- excellent landlord/tenant working relationship
- quality accommodation
- a supportive environment
- flexible terms
- corporate citizen
- highly regarded management team

We needed to aggressively promote all sites under the **msp** banner rather than Manchester Science Park, so that all market targets and partners began to associate those three letters with the entire offering of Manchester Science Park Ltd.

The new **msp** logo was used on all our signage, publicity material, etc and was quickly introduced into our own thinking, speaking and referencing - ‘putting the word around’. We felt that if MIT can be an international brand, we were setting **msp** on the route for similar recognition, at least regionally and nationally!

Whilst communicating the **msp** brand for and across all locations, the individual characteristics and opportunities of the different sites were still recognised.

SMALL PARK, BIG BRAND

Success of the campaign was evidenced by :

- Increase in number of invitations for our CEO to visit regions and countries developing science parks
- Increase in number of requests from regions and countries developing science parks to visit **msp**
- Increase in the number of requests from science parks across the world for 'special relationship' with **msp**
- **msp** won the UKSPA award for "Outstanding Member Park for services to tenants and the local community"

IN-HOUSE PR FUNCTION

After 3 years of this successful campaign, **msp**'s strategy changed from merely promoting itself as a quality, fit for purpose location for science and technology businesses, to "a community of science and technology companies supported by value added services". Part of that strategy was to use tenants' success to promote our own success : our tenants' stories become our story.

To support that particular strand of our strategy, the decision was made in 2007 to bring the PR & communications function in house :

- With c100 companies covering all sectors and all stages of development, our PR company was not qualified to quickly understand the tenants' businesses and had insufficient time to get to know them
- Their niche market was property, which was good for **msp**'s core business, and they had been successful with that remit. However, we now required PR in the wider environment of the knowledge economy, innovation, business generation, as well as needing a wider perspective in order to offer the PR service to our tenants.

Advantages of an in-house service :

- We could have simply changed our agency; however, we achieved better value for money and a more dedicated and committed service from an in-house PR executive
- Our tenants received on-the-spot free PR support from someone who knew their individual business and PR needs
- Media outlets have a better understanding of the nature of **msp**'s tenant companies
- The post-holder's personal relationship with local and national press and media established a direct line of communication which gave more opportunities for comment on issues in our sector
- The executive was able to be even more proactive in identifying opportunities in the press and elsewhere for **msp** and tenant companies
- The PR executive's personal relationship with suppliers (eg designers) gave us better service and improved quality

Success since we brought the PR function in house :

A notable overall increase in the press coverage achieved (nearly 50%) and an improvement in its placing and rating (ie relevance of coverage and message)

An increase in the number of press and media invitations for comments by/interviews with **msp**'s CEO, chairman and senior management, and with our tenant companies

The PR Executive builds up a personal relationship with our tenant companies, so that they more readily approach us with stories

Trade publications : because of that relationship, we quickly understand what messages need to reach a tenant's customer base and what trade and other publications might be useful to target. It is always

difficult to get press releases in such publications as the publishers look for mainly paid features; it has therefore been an achievement to have press releases accepted for publication.

We can spend more time alongside our tenants and keep in regular contact

We are able to keep our website continually alive with stories

The achievements for some of the tenants following our press release distribution have been excellent, for example :

- One tenant gained a new client following an article placed in a trade journal;
- An article in the local newspaper was picked up by British Satellite News and subsequently the company featured in a short news video
- Another received a number of potential customer calls after their short piece in a trade newsletter;
- A mobile apps tenant received much positive feedback via bloggers after their article appeared in various high ranking mobile phone websites.

The PR for **m_{sp}** itself has increased in intensity and relevance, raising the profile of **m_{sp}** and its role in the growth and development of the Manchester city region and in particular embedding **m_{sp}** within the city region's knowledge economy sector.

Integration of the role into the **m_{sp}** Innovation Services team means that the PR Executive works alongside the Marketing Executive on a daily basis, therefore easily feeding PR into the overall marketing strategy

We are able to respond immediately to any situations likely to give us 'adverse' press and therefore remove or limit any possible damage to our brand

PHASE 3 / SHIFTING THE CORPORATE IDENTITY

In 2009 Manchester Science Park was preparing for expansion the following year into the adjoining city of Salford (within the Manchester city region), by taking over the management under contract with Salford County Council of Salford Innovation Park.

To convey the concept of this expansion, the corporate identity was shifted from Manchester Science Park Ltd to Manchester Science Parks Ltd (**m_{sp}**), in order to encompass the operation of **m_{sp}** not only across multiple sites but also across city boundaries.

The '**m_{sp}**' brand also now encompasses our remit to cover knowledge-based companies, not just science and technology, as conferred by 'Manchester Science Park'.

The brand message had to be communicated into an area of the city region where it was not so well known. It was agreed that the **m_{sp}** brand would not change but be used as **m_{sp}**:Salford Innovation Park:



, in the same recognizable format as all our logos :



The **m_{sp}** brand was already very successful and it was this that Salford City Council wanted to buy into :

- **m_{sp}** was already seen as the home of successful and innovative companies
- it has long-standing national recognition for excellence.
- **m_{sp}** has an international reputation (which it can use for the benefit of its tenants)
- it has a strong association with science and technology, and/or with the academic and research community.
- **m_{sp}** brand confers credibility to new and growing companies
- **m_{sp}** is perceived by the various agencies and networks within the city region as a major player in economic development
- it has a positive influence within its own immediate local community.
- **m_{sp}**'s brand confers credibility with the city region's universities
- **m_{sp}** is active within its local communities

What we took into Salford was the credibility, ethos, culture and best practice which is common across all our locations. Promoting **msp** as the home of successful companies demonstrates the strengths that we bring to all our operations.

As we were taking a Manchester brand mark into a neighbouring and historically 'rival' city area, we had to be prepared for certain sensitivities of 'ownership'. Our strategy had to include regular communications with the principal stakeholders in Salford : the city council, the university and the local community.

From **msp**'s own viewpoint, whilst 'marketing' each site's individual features, our strategy is to promote the property portfolio as a whole; this reinforces for the Salford stakeholders the credibility, influence and impact of their association with a major regional and international player in the knowledge economy sector.

THE INTEGRATED BRAND NETWORK

To maximise its effectiveness, the **msp** brand depends on an integrated network. This includes tenant companies, **msp** staff, partners, suppliers, investors, and even non-customers and competitors. For the **msp** brand to thrive there is a complete eco-system which is centred on mutual contribution and benefits :

msp Management	NURTURE	msp Staff
msp Staff	SERVE	msp Tenants
msp Tenants	ATTRACT	Investment
Investment	SUPPORTS	msp Management

Partners and **Suppliers** succeed by helping the company succeed.

msp's ultimate vision for the brand :

- a brand kite mark for tenant companies who will include **msp** logo on their materials as a brand of success and almost like a mark of accreditation
- an indication of being part of a community rather than just a location

BRAND INTERNATIONALISATION

The internationalisation of the **msp** brand has been achieved over a number of years via :

High profile and active membership of IASP

- CEO as IASP Board member / President of the European Division / Member of Policy Board
- **msp**'s Chairman from 2000-2006 was (and is) an internationally recognised consultant for developing science parks

Special relationships forged with some science parks around the world for benchmarking and exchange purposes

Promotion of **msp** by Manchester's inward investment agency as one of the city's major assets for attracting businesses from overseas, owing to its role in the knowledge economy and its association with a world class university.

Establishment of Manchester International Innovation Centre (MIIC) at Manchester Science Park : a soft-landing facility for overseas companies.

As international recognition grew, **msp** became one of the European science parks approached for learning visits by countries/organisations developing science parks for the first time.

CURRENT msp PRESS & COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY :

The press strategy has been developed to run alongside **msp**'s marketing strategy and communications plan as an important element of ongoing activities aimed at promoting the **msp** brand and image and embedding **msp** as a major player in the city region's knowledge economy. It focuses on **msp**'s aims regarding coverage in media outlets such as news publications, business journals, TV, radio and online.

Objectives :

- To attract and retain successful tenant companies, ensuring that **msp** continues to be profitable and grow, cementing its reputation as a world class innovation hub
- To raise awareness of **msp** regionally, nationally and internationally as a leading science park and a respected voice within the global science and innovation park community
- To support the development of tenant companies by promoting via media outlets individual companies and their commercial offering

STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES : an integrated campaign encompassing :-

Regular placing of news items in business press and on-line business publications; intermittent coverage does not keep **msp** at the forefront of readers' minds.

Identification of opportunities for publicity over a range of publications to maximise readership

Broadening coverage from written outlets to include increased exposure on radio, online and television by pitching press releases at targeted contacts

Identification of opportunities for **msp** senior management and tenant companies to provide comment on particular issues

Highlighting stories which have the potential to interest the national press (pitch a press release at one targeted outlet and offer it as an exclusive)

Identifying news stories of relevance to **msp** and/or tenant companies and keep record of journalists who write these; they can then be targeted with relevant press releases that should interest them.

Working with partner organisations and stakeholders to maximise publicity

PR INTEGRATED INTO msp MARKETING STRATEGY

An effective and relatively cheap marketing tool:

Since employing a Communications Executive in-house we have been further developing our PR strategy as a major element of our marketing activity. Media outlets play a fundamental role in helping **msp** achieve its marketing and communications objectives in a relatively cheap but very effective way.

Increasing the amount of press and media coverage for our tenant companies raises and maintains **msp**'s profile as a location for successful innovative businesses.

We remain aware of the topical news stories and identify how we can capitalise on them. We have to become opinionated on national issues of relevance to our sector and to those of our tenant businesses.

The Communications Executive works with the Commercial Team, targeting communications to reflect the current state of the market, analysing where enquiries come from and tracking marketing / sales conversions

The best marketing tool one can have is the product itself; we maintain the high quality of our offering but also concentrate on promoting our USP (unique selling point) : the added value services.

Our product/service has to be perceived as one of excellence. We continue to align ourselves with the big players in our field : the city region's universities, business and professional networks; **msh** is a key player in the city region and must be seen as such.

BRAND - we have to ensure that all **msh** staff are knowledgeable about the objectives, vision and values of **msh**. They need to be engaged with the PR messages, especially those who meet visitors and engage more openly with our tenants

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND TOOLS :

Traditional channels : press, radio, TV

Newsletters of associated organisations

Printed materials - brand guidelines established to pass on to designers

Electronic newsletter

On-line - **msh**'s own website having links to and from other appropriate websites

- search engine optimisation (SEO) - the need to ensure that site constantly updated, keywords updated and maintained

New/social media : LinkedIn, Twitter

Networks : people who know people

Networking events : Relevant staff to receive training in networking so that they maximise these opportunities.

Speaking engagements for appropriate senior management

Organisation of own high profile events, eg. Foresight, IASP "Measuring the Success of Science Parks"

Hosting of events for associated organisations; these bring new people onto the Park and we have the opportunity to begin a relationship with them that could lead to future tenancies

Advertising : targeted publications; profile raising

Sponsorship of appropriate events in the region maintains the profile of **msh**

Community Initiatives inform of **msh**'s commitment to its 'corporate citizenship' - being a good neighbour

Outdoor campaign : signage (plus Salford's banners - appropriate for that location)

EVALUATION

Over the past five years **msh** has defined and developed performance indicators for the PR & Communications activity :

Performance indicator Measure

Media coverage	-Monthly average number of pieces of coverage over a year -Monthly Average tone of coverage over a year
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Accurate communication of msh purpose	-Total number of external enquiries over a year -% of annual enquiries from appropriate companies
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International profile	Number of good quality invitations and request for visits
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Referrals from other Organizations	% of enquiries from referrals
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Size of msh 'community'	Number of enterprises signing up to msh newsletters etc
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THE FUTURE

Maintain the brand profile; build up the **msh** community profile

Relationship building : reinforce our relationships with key organisations in the city region, nationally and internationally

Continue to enhance internal communications, ie with our tenant companies : 90% of new→ converting referrals come from our existing tenants, we cannot ignore that.

Enhance the on-line communications (web, SEO, intranet, business 'social' media, eg LinkedIn, GINN) and bring them all together so that there is a consolidated and consistent message and image across all channels.

Social media isn't the 'be all and end all', and twitter followers, LinkedIn contacts, for example, do not always translate into enquiries. However, there are networks through which people can connect with our brand; we cannot afford to ignore these new technologies/communication channels - we are a science park - but we should use them in the context of our own specialised market place.

Maintain good use of the traditional communications channels

With a small advertising budget we have to be a bit more clever in how we use all the tools available. We can't do everything so we need to make sure that what we do is effective - and measured.

Identify what is successful for us then focus and build on it; be consistent with our values, messages and behaviours. We need always to respect the context of our business and where our referrals and enquiries come from.

CONCLUSION

Our PR & communications plan works! - the evolving strategy has been very successful for **msp** as we have constantly achieved or exceeded the targets set

The results of the performance indicators give full justification to our communications strategy and to the decision to bring the PR & Communications function in house.