

**PUBLICITY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS FOR THE 1999 SKILL OLYMPICS
COMPETITION IN MONTREAL**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In 1999 UK SKILLS was able to appoint a public relations agency to publicise the UK team, thanks to DfEE funding. Pure PR was appointed in the spring of 1999 and was responsible for issuing news and feature stories to national, regional and specialist trade media before, during and after the event in November. Much of the campaign capitalised on events in the preparation for Montreal, though more general feature stories (such as training diaries of competitors) were also placed in a range of media in order to maintain the momentum between these landmarks.
- 1.2 From June 1999 onwards, news releases about the competition and the UK team were targeted at the following media:
- national broadcast media with an interest in education, training and employment
 - national news media and appropriate supplements (such as IT, education)
 - the training/human resources and education press
 - regional and local print and broadcast media, including business titles
 - national trade and technical journals
 - existing UK SKILLS contacts, including DfEE publications, National Training Organisations (NTOs), skills competition organisers, etc.
- 1.3 An innovation this year was the creation of an 0800 telephone number UK SKILLS press hotline which was launched in November to make it as easy as possible for members of the press to contact Pure PR for information and competition results. Journalists were also pointed in the direction of the new UK SKILLS website, which, together with IVTO and Montreal sites, proved to be a valuable source of information about the competition background and results.

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2. Campaign successes

- 2.1 One of the most successful elements of the campaign was gaining feature coverage on national broadcast media. Three members of the team appeared on Channel Four's *The Big Breakfast* in August where they demonstrated their specialist skills. UK SKILLS board member, Peter Rainbird (also Chairman of SkillBUILD) was in the studio too, to explain the principles of Skill Olympic competitions to viewers, along with 1997 gold medallist, Lee Blower. In August a journalist from the BBC attended the team-building weekend at Brathay in Cumbria and recorded a piece which was broadcast on BBC Radio 4's *The Learning Curve* in September. In October Chief Executive Patricia Snell appeared on the Radio 4 programme *Nice Work* in a live studio piece which also featured material pre-recorded with some of the competitors. In November a live interview with a UK SKILLS representative was also run on the British Forces Radio which is broadcast around the world. BBC Radio 5 Live interviewed three team members on the day before their departure to Montreal.
- 2.2 Other feature coverage about the Skill Olympics competition appeared in national newspapers. This included a major article in the London *Evening Standard* just before the competition. *The Guardian's* education correspondent also profiled the Skill Olympics at the time of the results in a piece which appeared in the education section of the paper. Both these articles were positive in presenting the value of skills competitions on a national and international level.
- 2.3 There was also extensive coverage in some of the specialist trade titles. Examples include:
- *Professional Painter & Decorator* included a training diary about Julie Lark (Painting and Decorating) and *Professional Builder* and *British Decorator* featured Q&A-style profiles
 - *Foundry Trade Journal* and *The Foundryman*, both of which ran training diaries about the pattern-making competitor
 - *Caterer and Hotelkeeper* featured the Restaurant Service, Cookery and Confectioner (Pastry Chef) entrants on several occasions
 - *Electronics Weekly* covered Mechatronics as well as the electronics trades
 - *Newscheck* and *Employment News* – both DfEE publications - gave good coverage, the latter featuring Montreal on its front and back pages in the December issue.

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3. Video and photography

- 3.1 DfEE also supported video and photography projects for Montreal. The video project consisted of a competition for media studies students, run in collaboration with the Further Education Skills Competitions Council (FESCC)). Contestants had to devise a treatment, within budget, for a broadcast-quality video on the UK entry. Entries were judged by representatives of DfEE and UK SKILLS and by Richard Patching, director/producer of three previous videos on the Skill Olympics. The winning team - from North Warwickshire and Hinckley College - went to Montreal to cover the event under the overall direction of Richard Patching. The final edit is due for completion in early February.
- 3.2 The photography project enabled freelance photographer Jacky Chapman to visit Montreal (covering the competition for the fifth time) to build up a portfolio of photographs of the British team in action, as well as general views of the event. The value of this has already been shown by the extensive use by the press of some of these shots, eg, *The Guardian* and *Employment News*.

4. PR landmarks

- 4.1 The following is a brief summary of landmark activities undertaken and coverage gained.
- *Team briefing event at CITB in Bircham Newton – June 1999*
News releases were issued to sector and training titles, as well as to local media. These covered the announcement of the 1999 team for Montreal and the appointment of Tracy Edwards as team patron. There was extensive interest from the media – particularly from local press and radio, many of which ‘adopted’ their local competitor and ran successive stories about them in the run-up to Montreal.
 - *Team-building weekend at Brathay in Cumbria – August 1999*
News releases about the event were issued to training titles and local Cumbrian media. The BBC also covered the event for local Cumbrian radio and BBC Radio 4 (see above).

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- *Team send-off, Claridge's Hotel, London – November 1999*
With two employees (chef and confectioner competitors) featuring in the 1999 team, Claridge's generously sponsored a reception for team members, their families and other guests immediately before the team flew off to Montreal. A press notice was issued in the week leading up to the reception, encouraging local press to run a story about their competitor. Many did so and Pure PR received just under 40 enquiries from regional press and broadcast media wanting to interview their local competitor before the send-off.
- *Video competition – November 1999*
UK students on media-related courses were encouraged to take part in a competition (see above) to devise a video treatment for the UK team in Montreal. The successful team won an all-expenses paid trip to Montreal and news releases were issued to appropriate education and regional media.
- *Skill Olympics results – November 1999*
A series of news releases were drafted and issued to horizontal sector, training, national and regional media. Each release highlighted the medal or diploma success of the appropriate competitor(s) and was accompanied by a photograph of the young person in Montreal.
- *Post competition reception, V&A Museum, London – December 1999*
A reception for the UK team and other guests was generously hosted by DfEE and attended by Education and Employment Minister Baroness Blackstone. Members of the press did not attend, although the event presented a further opportunity to photograph successful competitors with the Minister and issue these to appropriate press.

4.2 Overall, the level of interest from the media is very encouraging although there remains some scepticism among some national newspapers, whose coverage was disappointing. Regional media, however, (particularly radio and newspapers) show a strong interest and are keen to follow the fortunes of their local competitor. The specialist sector-based journals also continue to be loyal ambassadors for the competition and many featured successive articles about their competitor as he/she prepared for the event. A breakdown of the press coverage follows. Although the coverage appears to be only on a par with 1997, it should be borne in mind that (a) the 1999 period was three months less than that for 1997 and (b) the team announcement was combined with the team briefing and so the team missed an additional ministerial photocall at the National Training Awards ceremony.

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5. **UK team for Montreal – overall press coverage**

Press cuttings collected since the team announcement in June 1999 up to 21 February 2000 give the following breakdown (February 1997 - December 1997 figures in italics):

- national newspapers - 3 items in 3 publications (*9 in 5*)
- regional newspapers - 154 items in 103 publications (*113 in 71*)
- education/training/
personnel journals - 12 items in 8 publications (*31 in 21*)
- trade/technical/house
journals - 99 items in 68 publications (*114 in 73*)
- Total** - **268 items in 182 publications**
(*1997: 267 in 170; 1995: 307 in 168;*
1993: 244 in 144; 1991: 125 in 95)

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BROADCAST MEDIA COVERAGE

Local radio – according to enquiries

BBC Radio Trent
BBC Radio Nottingham
Tracks FM
Metro News
BBC Radio Lancaster
Orchard FM
BBC Radio Devon
Mansfield 103 FM
BBC Radio Cumbria
BBC Radio Newcastle
Gemini Radio
Essex FM
Sun FM
Home 107.9 Huddersfield

National radio

BBC Radio 4 The Learning Curve
BBC Radio 4 Nice Work
BBC Radio Five Live
British Forces Broadcasting Service

Local TV – according to enquiries

BBC Wales
HTV Wales
BBC TV North West
Meridien TV
Choice in Wales – digital channel

National TV

The Big Breakfast

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