

## ICCO Global Awards – Employee Communications

**Agency:** Milk & Honey PR  
**Client:** Milk & Honey PR  
**Budget:** £20,000 (Marrakech spend is £9K, Essex £3.5K)

### Objective and budget

We are a small, energetic PR agency, managing and nurturing reputations for ambitious growth companies. Established in 2017, we have successfully secured a new retained client every month since inception. Delivering award winning campaigns, smashing our targets and cementing our position as a forward-thinking consultancy that puts people first.

The business has grown from one person, to a team of 18 in under three years. More than doubling revenues year on year and delivering a 20% profit margin every year. We are proud to have won awards for every client we have worked with for more than nine months. Our 80% pitch conversion rate is testament to a high performing team, led by an all-female board. 10 nationalities and an enviable client and team retention rate.

But... whilst being fast growing is certainly exciting, bringing in new clients every month and new team members too makes for a lot of disruption. Each time there is a change in portfolio, everyone's roles evolve.

The internal challenge is to build a value-centric culture, develop our people and continue to grow, without losing talent or clients.

### Target audience and strategy

The agency is made up of a team of 18 professionals, mainly office based but one is now in Paris, one in New York and one about to move out to Sydney.

Data tells us that the longer a company is in business, the harder it is to thrive...

- In the UK 20% of small businesses fail in their first year
- 30% of small business fail in their second year
- 50% of small businesses fail after five years in business
- 70% of small business owners fail in their 10th year in business

Digging a little deeper, relevance and having the right team is paramount...

- 42% of small businesses fail because there's no market need for their services
- 29% failed because they ran out of cash
- 23% failed because they didn't have the right team
- 19% were outcompeted
- 18% failed because of pricing and cost issues
- 17% failed because of a poor product offering
- 14% failed because of poor marketing and communications
- 14% failed because they ignored their customers

Communications is central to connecting the team.

### Implementation and creativity

To keep the team connected and to ensure they feel that this isn't a company they work for but that this is their company, we share a lot of information, regularly, with everyone.

### In the moment

- Team WhatsApp group that we use to share updates and insights. Celebrating client successes and chatter
- Our Hive email group is there to keep the whole team abreast of wins, losses, successes and learnings
- We have a company rewards app, Hapi Hive – that has all our team HR documents in one centralised place - team handbook, insurance document, payslips, discount vouchers

### Weekly

- Monday Morning Meeting kicks the week off with team movements, agency priorities and new projects that we need to recruit help with
- Every Friday we gather as a team for Fizzy Friday, time to share out top three successes of the week and the one thing we are looking forward to next week. Over a glass of bubbles

### Monthly

Client manager meetings feed into monthly board meetings, which are then debriefed back to the whole team within 48 hours. Everything is shared (except salaries) client performance, commercial performance and benchmarking against the broader industry.

This debrief session is followed with a team training led by one of the team. We then vote on what we want to discuss and learn the following month. The team debrief is closed off with our Honey Pot award. Every member of the team is invited to celebrate their colleagues, putting forward submissions on how other team members have demonstrated our values. All the submissions are shared, and the winner gets a shiny certificate and spa treatment.

### Quarterly

- Bee good to yourself - £50 budget to treat yourself
- Hive Happiness survey
- Seating plan rejig – we keep mixing it up, moving around regularly to better get to know one another

### Annually

Every May the whole team, interns and all, go to Marrakech for a three-day planning and brainstorming offsite. It is the highlight of the year. Bringing everyone together to discuss our business and set our targets for the following year.

We then escape for an over-night in September/October time to check in on our progress and put some more specific detail on the next years' plan.

### Results and evaluation

**Happy Hive** - We are proud to be employee owned, everyone in the business becomes a shareholder on their two-year anniversary. We are currently two years and 10 months old and have four shareholders. So far in 2019 we have added 13 talented new team members. And promoted six.

**Work-life balance** - this is promoted from the top. Employees are able – and highly encouraged – to choose their own hours to fit their lives. We've had an individual doing a master's degree around work commitments, running dance classes, learning a language, home-schooling their child and planning a wedding! None of these can exclusively happen outside of work hours; the team flex as they need to, to create their own personal work-life balance.

**Bee-buddy** - on top of private healthcare insurance for all team members, everyone has a 'bee buddy' whose role is to support on any non-client specific issues that they may be facing.

**Mental health** - one of our associate partners is a Mental Health First Aid champion, our shared workspace provides lunchtime mindfulness sessions, whilst walking meetings are a popular way for team members to catch up whilst getting outside to clear their mind.

**Account number** - actively ensuring that employees have time to think and go that extra mile, whilst not feeling over-worked, no employee works on more than five clients.

**Training** – as well as the £1,000 training spend the whole team receives, we ensure everyone carries out 'Insights' training to find out their 'colours' and work communication preferences. The results not only help understand their own behaviour but how to communicate most effectively with each other.

**Professionalism** - our managing partner mentors as part of the PRCA, London Business Women, Big Youth Group and PRWeek programme, and one of our managers participates too. Every member of the team is encouraged to absorb and share best practice – speaking on panels, guest lecturing at former universities, and presenting at digital meet ups.

**360 feedback** - we have a 360-appraisal system seeking feedback from clients, media and team members, enriched with quarterly check ins to ensure there are never any surprises.

**Hive Happiness survey** - our people first approach is paying off! We have 83% staff retention and our quarterly Hive Happiness survey shows that we are doing well with 100% feeling their work is valued, meaningful and that they are appreciated.

- **Team:** 18 (Managing partner, 3 x associate partners, financial director, editorial director, creative director, head of digital, 4 x client managers, 2 x senior exec, 2 x executives, 2 x assistants). 13 of whom are new joiners in 2019
- **Balance:** No-one works on more than five clients
- **Choice:** Everyone has right of refusal, at any stage. All open to flexi-work
- **Benefits:** Benchmarked against the best in the marketing industry
- **Bonuses:** 20% bonuses paid to all
- **Joint ownership:** We are a partnership, owned by all after two-years
- **Grow our own:** Two PRWeek 30 under 30 winners, one per year; 100% intern conversion rate. Successful school placement programme running for two years supporting local council
- **Diversity:** We are a team of 18 people from 10 different countries, speaking eight languages
- **Revenue:** year 1 £250K; year 2 £554K; forecast year 3 £1.1M (£800K secured to date with 15% attrition allowance and five months to go). We expect to join PRWeek's top 150 next financial year, with revenues of £1.6M
- **Client:** won a new retained client £4K or above monthly since inception, lost only one (knock on wood!)
- **Rated:** we have five star ratings on Glassdoor, Google, Facebook; Drum Recommended for six services; have a Net Promoter Score amongst clients of 85