

Category name: Best use of thought leadership

Programme/initiative name: The Perspective series

Agency: Circle Research and Geometry

Brand or client: Vodafone







SUMMARY

Perspective is a thought leadership campaign created to help Vodafone:

- Raise brand visibility and engagement
- Position themselves as a thought leader
- Create sales discussions

The campaign has:

- Created an ROI of over 8,000% on a budget of *[These details were provided to judges in the original submission but are commercially sensitive and therefore confidential]*
- Boosted associations between Vodafone and 'thought leadership' by *[These details were provided to judges in the original submission but are commercially sensitive and therefore confidential]*
- Received widespread coverage, e.g. 70 pieces of high quality PR

The campaign first identified a compelling, differentiated theme:

- All competing content was audited
- In-depth interviews were conducted with customers/prospects
- Key internal stakeholders were engaged

This also identified five 'golden rules'. Vodafone would stand apart by:

1. Sharing reliable facts, honestly presented
2. Bringing together multiple viewpoints
3. Including material which helps the reader act
4. Never overtly promoting themselves
5. Complementing 'hero' reports with 'bite-size' content

Six 'hero' reports were produced in 2013 and released sequentially.

These assets were hosted on www.vodafone.co.uk and www.yourbetterbusiness.co.uk (YBB) - a content hub established to freely share information and spur debate.

Alongside YBB, complementary activity raised visibility and enabled sales conversations. This included advertising, PR, social media, partner marketing, email marketing, events, sales enablement and direct contact.

We feel Perspective is worthy of winning this category for two reasons: the carefully designed strategy and the large proven ROI.

MAIN SUBMISSION

Objectives of the campaign

Vodafone had noticed a critical change in the mind-set of their business customers. Telecommunications were no longer being viewed simply as a 'utility', but as a strategic business consideration. This had two important implications:

- Business customers wanted to work with a supplier who understood the business environment and their strategy
- Rather than just talk to 'technology' roles about providing communications, Vodafone needed to talk to 'business' roles about their challenges

Perspectives was designed to best position Vodafone in this new environment. Our objectives were to:

- Raise brand visibility and engagement
- Position Vodafone as a thought leader who understands the world of work
- Create opportunities for one-on-one sales discussions

We selected a thought leadership, content-led approach as it allowed Vodafone to demonstrate (rather than simply claim) that they understand the target audience's challenges.

The target audience

Perspective sought to engage:

- Senior decision makers (especially 'business' roles, e.g. HR Director)
- In smaller (<100 employees) and larger (>100) UK organisations
- Across the Public and Private Sector

Media, channels or techniques used

The first step was to identify topics for the content which were:

- Relevant to each audience segment
- Relevant to Vodafone's desired positioning
- Not already 'owned' by competitors

To ensure this:

- All competing content was audited
- In-depth interviews were conducted with customers and prospects
- Key internal stakeholders (especially sales) were engaged

This identified a strong theme: *'The changing shape of UK PLC'.* Within this, four specific content topics were identified:

- Building a fanatical workforce
- Creating best-practice customer service
- Embracing changing working practices
- Mitigating new types of business risk

This stage also identified common pitfalls to avoid:

1. Much content is based simply on opinion or flimsy evidence. Vodafone would use reliable facts, honestly presented
2. Much content is an explicit sales pitch. Vodafone would never specifically promote their products
3. Much content is one-sided. Vodafone would bring together multiple views, but still clearly rubber stamp their own position
4. Much content provides just information. Vodafone would couple information with material which helps the reader to act
5. Much content is too heavy. Vodafone would produce 'hero content' in the form of a written report, but complement this with 'bite-size' formats

Creating content assets

Six 'hero' reports were released throughout 2013.

The report 'Fluid Society' illustrates the format extremely well:

- Vodafone UK's CEO provides an introduction
- Insights from an exclusive, statistically robust survey of senior managers in UK PLC are shared. These insights are coupled with narrative and supported by secondary research
- Throughout, case studies are provided which demonstrate how different organisations have responded to the challenges
- We then share unique perspectives on the topic from respected commentators, business leaders and entrepreneurs
- We end with a closing comment and five practical tips

Various supporting, 'bite-size' content assets were then created. For example, the report 'customer service beyond today' was supported with:

- A video interview with Linda Cheung (CEO, Cubesocial) revealing how to use social media to improve customer service
- An infographic visually illustrating what drives customer expectations and why a multi-channel approach is so important
- A short document giving five essential rules to optimise customer service delivery

Giving the assets a home

All content assets are hosted on www.vodafone.co.uk and www.yourbetterbusiness.co.uk - a content hub established to freely share valuable business information and spur debate.

Leveraging the assets

Webinars and face-to-face sessions were run to brief sales teams on the key insights from the content and provide ideas on how they might use it to engage customers/prospects.

We then promoted the content externally:

- Media briefings generated significant PR coverage from influential bloggers and mainstream print and digital publications
- A number of highly respected partner organisations were engaged to promote the content and give it further credibility, e.g. The Guardian featured Perspective on their Public Leaders Network portal
- Discussion around report topics was generated on Vodafone's social media channels. To widen the reach of this activity, individual contributor pieces were showcased which led to the content benefitting from their social reach
- Content from Perspective was integrated across all of Vodafone's email channels including monthly e-Newsletters
- The Perspective series formed a core part of 'Your Better Business Live' events. These engaged the target audience directly and also elevated the status of content by having leading thinkers debate it on stage, e.g. Emma Jones MBE, founder of Enterprise Nation and Start-up Britain
- Sales teams were armed with a 'sales tool-kit' providing ideas and collateral to create one-to-one discussions
- Perspective series reports were mailed with a personalised covering letter to Board level directors in major UK corporates and the Public Sector

Timescales of the campaign

The broad timescale was:

- Planning: April/May 2013
- Research: June/July 2013
- Report writing: July 2013
- Content assets produced: August/September 2013
- Promotion: September onwards

Budgets

[These details were provided to judges in the original submission but are commercially sensitive and therefore confidential]

Results

Remember those campaign objectives?

- Raise brand visibility and engagement
- Position Vodafone as a thought leader
- Create opportunities for targeted, one-on-one sales discussions

Perspective is creating a buzz around the brand:

- Over 5,000 report downloads
- 70 pieces of high quality PR, e.g. the Sunday Times, CIO Magazine
- Wide social engagement, e.g. 4,000+ shares of latest infographic in 30 days

Perspective has established Vodafone as a thought leader. Brand tracking research shows that associations between Vodafone and 'thought leadership' have risen by a statistically significant [These details were provided to judges in the original submission but are commercially sensitive and therefore confidential] since the campaign began. This now places Vodafone ahead of all but one of its key competitors.

And sales teams have found Perspective a valuable tool. Account Managers trained in using the content have generated [These details were provided to judges in the original submission but are commercially sensitive and therefore confidential] of *incremental* revenue.

Overall, hard data shows that Perspective has created an ROI in excess of 8,000%.

Client testimonial

"Perspective has surpassed all expectations. The content was resonant, unique and engagingly produced – even competitors admit that it has raised the benchmark. There is direct evidence that the campaign created [These details were provided to judges in the original submission but are commercially sensitive and therefore confidential] incremental revenue. And internally the feedback from our Senior Leadership Team and sales organisation has been overwhelmingly positive"

Natasha Davies, Enterprise Marketing Communications Manager