

PA Newsletter European Interview

Independent business and public policy specialist, Blueprint Partners, opened its doors in Brussels on 16 January 2003, determined to break the mould in Europe-wide consultancy. Managing Partner, **Julia Harrison** and Partner, **Louise Harvey** – who is also President of the British Chamber of Commerce in Belgium – spoke to PA Newsletter Publisher Steven Atack about the thinking behind the new partnership and their objectives...

Why did you decide to set up a new consultancy in Brussels?

Julia Harrison: Clients need senior people working on their business more than ever. Blueprint is designed to do that. There is a clear gap in the market for independent consultancies that can match the need for advice at board level with a team strong enough to deliver and who offer an understanding of the new dynamic within which business has to operate these days. So, it seemed the natural thing to do.

Julia, you founded GPC in Brussels some 12 years ago – how did you cope with leaving a company you had been with for so long and built from scratch?

JH: It was surprisingly easy. It's pretty rare for someone to be with the same company in consultancy for 15 years, as I had been with GPC, so of course life is very different. But now I can concentrate on doing three things that I love: getting back to more time working directly with clients; working with interesting and fun people and building a business. Having said that, as you know, our business is a people business and of course I still have very strong friendships and affections for people in GPC, most especially in Brussels.

Louise, you were with Shandwick for many years, do you share Julia's perspective?

Louise Harvey: Yes. We share the view that we

want to focus on serving our clients and having a happy ship. Having run businesses for global communications companies in several European markets already, we both feel it is hugely exciting to be in partnership now with other, like-minded, people and to be independent.

Several members of your team have worked for GPC – how would you answer the question 'aren't you just a GPC break-away?'

JH: No. At least half of us are from other backgrounds and we have no intention of recreating GPC. The whole point of Blueprint is to do something different: to respond to the changes in the market and in clients' needs.

Blueprint involves clear vision; communication of ideas and concepts; technical expertise and, most of all, the ability to work within a complex and changing environment to construct something that will endure

What about the name "Blueprint"; where did that come from?

JH: I am sure there are quite a few people reading this who have had those 'round the dinner table' conversations over a bottle of wine and have come up with some of the best recognised names in the busi-

ness. It helped that our FD and partner Sue Coulter had worked at Interbrand, the major branding consultancy, and it was her idea that stuck.

But seriously, a Blueprint communicates different things to different people: be they the architects, planners or builders in a business; the public consumers at the end result; or the authorities who have to be convinced about the project. And that is its strength.

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LH: Yes the name seemed to fit with our partnership here in the team and with our clients and their stakeholders.

Can you tell us what clients you have?

JH: I know you would not expect us to name names but we are already working for major clients in the pharma/healthcare, chemical, advertising and technology sectors. I know we are lucky to have such healthy client lists from day one of our operation.

What are your growth plans?

JH: A team of eight senior people is already significant but we're not focused on growth – that's what the agency factories do. We're focused on what our clients want and delivering it to them ourselves.

Is this a good time to launch given the economic situation?

LH: Yes. It is absolutely the right time in the eye. In difficult market conditions clients want the best advisors and real value from people who have been through this before, as we both have.

West Point for Politics?

Dominik Meier, President of degepol, German Society of Political Consulting

Jochen O. Keinath, Board member of degepol, responsible for continuing education and training write for PA Newsletter...

As early as in the 70s Robert Agronoff, the American political scientist, called for a "West Point for Politics", a practical place of training and continuing education for political consultants and campaign managers – built after the famous U.S. Military Academy at West Point. In the U.S. a number of "West Points for Politics" have been established with George Washington University's "Graduate School of Political Management" (GSPM) at the forefront of the practice as the most respected program.

The situation in Germany is different and to a certain extent discouraging. In fact, a professional school for political consulting and campaign management has been missing in Germany for years.

Today there are two programs: The "Master of Public Policy" program of

the University of Leipzig and the "International Degree Course in Political Management" (Internationaler Studiengang Politikmanagement) at the University of Bremen. Both programs are first steps to change the training situation for political consultants in Germany. However, the two programs really are academic programs with concentrations in institutional and normative politics in a conceptual framework that is theoretical at its core. The deficit in practical input and hands on political experience is unfortunate.

The originality and specific dynamics of political communications (as opposed to communications in general) is only inadequately taken into consideration. Unfortunately, this holds also true even for schools of continuing education and professional training programs. And the inflation of "Master of Europe"

JH: I started GPC at the bottom of the downturn in the early 90s and now is a similar time. Businesses need to adapt and be more flexible. Sometimes the bigger agencies have too much overhead and tend to be less dynamic.

Public Affairs is quite well insulated from the perils of a downturn. Legislation, especially at EU level continues and with Enlargement and the Convention a whole different balance and process will emerge which means that we are all going to be very busy for a while to come.

We are very bullish.

How will you compete against the big agencies?

JH: The difference in any company is its people. I think our team is one of the strongest ever to launch and we are all working directly for the clients. We will compete on the quality of our ideas, advice and execution.

LH: Yes, given the length and international nature of our experience we can advise clients at senior level in almost any situation and provide - through long-standing relationships - appropriate execution without obliging clients to take a heavy overhead on obligatory infrastructure.

There are clearly specific areas and sectors where we have the top experts in their fields. Our partner, Hana Bet-El, is one of the few real defence specialists operating in Brussels. Genevieve de Bauw has important in-house and consultancy experience in her specialism, environmental issues management and

CSR; and Mary Rice, like Genevieve, has worked on both sides of the fence but in her case on health, pharmaceutical and science issues.

What differences do you see in the public affairs market now?

JH: The environment clients operate in is particularly challenging at the moment. Political instability normally makes clients risk averse; policy and regulation can take a back seat when the economy is faltering.

But the growing Corporate Social Responsibility agenda; increasing client interest in Socially Responsible Investment; and the pressures in the civil society debate are combining with the highest levels of mistrust for both government and corporations post Enron that we have ever seen. Clients are moving into often unfamiliar communications areas where they need guidance.

LH: This dynamic impacts the way business, civil society and governments interact in all areas. This is Blueprint's territory.

Do you see differences in European and American commercial behaviour?

LH: There's always the great debate about a lack of understanding of European cultural differences. Of course, the European Union does not mean that society, culture or politics are in anyway homogenised. It is not just a question of linguistic diversity, but also the very different ways of looking at issues, of making policy, and of communicating which are specific to different countries. But it's our job as consultants to

help that understanding grow and prevent clients making mistakes which would be detrimental to their interests.

Brussels is a natural place to develop that understanding and hone those skills which we will apply working for clients internationally, not just in Brussels.

JH: On a personal note, many of my clients, colleagues and friends are American. I spent nearly two years there at the beginning of my career and I enjoy working with them very much. Although we too have to avoid stereotypes, their approach can be different from the way things are done in Europe.

They can be very direct, for example, in comparison with their European counterparts. Actually, that directness is something that strikes a chord with me since I come from Yorkshire and have a Dutch husband!

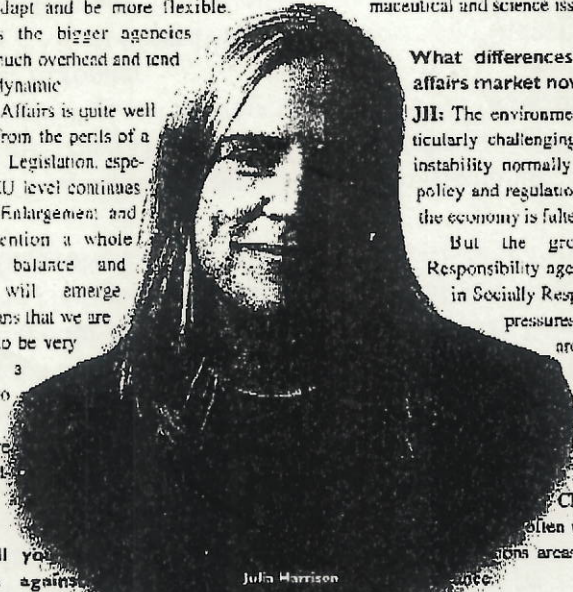
Blueprint has launched with an all women team - is this intentional?

LH: It's just a case of the best people for the job. As

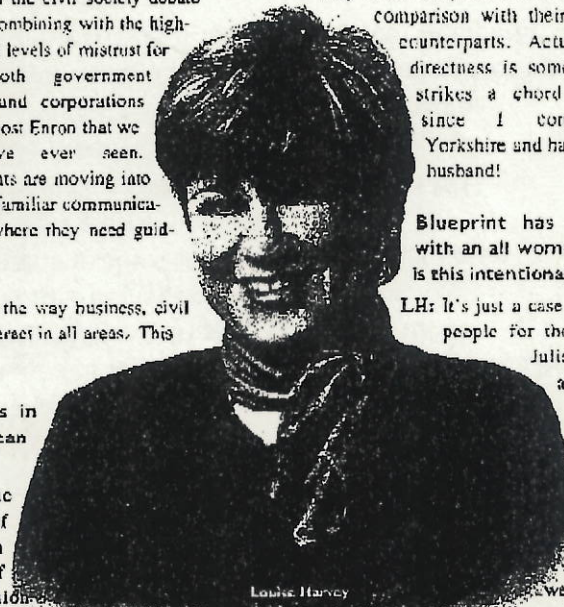
Julia has already suggested, our skills and disciplines are complementary and we all get on well together. I am sure we will be joined by male colleagues in the fullness of time!

How do you see your future?

JH: Very rosy!



Julia Harrison

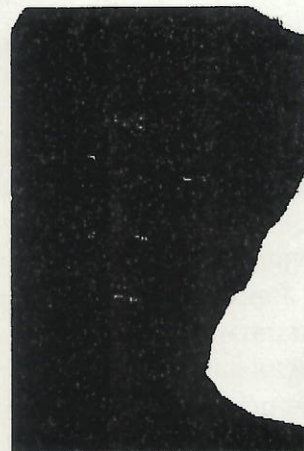


Louise Harvey

Affairs" programs throughout the German university landscape cannot fill the gap either.

Political consultants and public affairs professionals in Germany need to develop themselves as autodidacts who gain their expertise in political parties, governments, parliaments, public relations, public affairs and lobbying firms, opinion research companies, management consultancies, and in the media. Of course, this kind of self education will not meet the challenges of the increasingly specialised and internationalised environment of professional political consulting.

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Politikberatung e.V. (German Society for Political Consulting) is in the process of establishing its own academy for professional training and continuing education in the field of professional political consulting. The academy's premier goal is to examine and define the ethical and quality standards of political consulting in general. In addition, the academy's curricula will focus on the right blend of analysis, strategy, conceptual communications and hands on experience and expertise in campaign management, public affairs and political consulting. There will be workshops and courses for students as well as continuing education programs for young professionals and executive programs, both sponsored and certified by the German Society for Political Consulting.



Dominik Meier



Jochen O. Keinath