

**SME Column (Perspective, Winter 2008)**

## More Than Just PR

Public relations is about effective communication, and one of the major tasks is to create and promote favourable news for clients. It's much more than that to Anna Fang, Director of Anna Fang Public Relations, who is looking for clients she values and those who have a worthwhile story to tell.

As a vibrant and dynamic field in the business environment, public relations is a distinctive management function which helps foster and maintain communication, understanding and acceptance between an organization and its public.

Many aspiring public relations specialists are engaged in practices that are widely considered beneficial to society, such as publicizing scientific research, promoting charities, raising awareness of public health concerns and other worthwhile issues in the community. Anna Fang is one of them. To be more specific, she is more interested in working for clients from the intellectual world who provide specialized knowledge – knowledge on leadership, arts and culture, or even on the pursuit of happiness.

In the fall of 2005, Anna Fang, Director of Anna Fang Public Relations, promoted Andrew Matthews, best-selling author and international speaker on happiness, to the Hong Kong business and student communities. Mr Matthews received over US\$200,000 in media coverage for the launch of *Happiness Now* in Hong Kong. He also spoke at the American Chamber of Commerce, South Island International School and other organizations. The Center for Creative Leadership, a US-based organization that focuses on leadership education and research, is another client of Ms Fang.

Ms Fang said that she enjoys working for clients who provide solid intellectual or academic knowledge, rather than clients that focus solely on the provision of goods and services. "I am very interested in what my clients have to say or what they want to say in the press. I need that intellectual stimulation. I always learn something new from my clients. I learn new information when I write the media pitch," she said.

"Actually, I like to study people and companies. I study the companies and observe the CEOs. I observe the CEOs that I want to work for in the press. I don't really look for the famous people, but they may be interesting or have some interesting theories or ideas to talk about," Ms Fang said.

Anna Fang Public Relations raises the profile of US and foreign multi-nationals and companies based out of Hong Kong for the Greater China region. The company specialises in CEO branding and CEO profiling. "CEOs and managing directors of corporations are the leaders of their organizations, and represent the 'brand' of the company," Ms Fang said.

Ms Fang grew up in the US. After graduating from the University of California, Santa Cruz (USA) and completing a degree and a master's degree in Comparative History, she wanted to go for her dream – that was to work overseas, and more specifically, to work in Beijing. "I was living in the west coast of the US, and it was my dream to live and work in Beijing," she said.

At Hutchison Telephone in Hong Kong and for four years in Beijing at the Great Wall Sheraton Hotel and Tianlun Dynasty Hotel, Ms Fang acquired solid experience and established networks in

public relations and media relations. After working for a regional role at Motorola, Ms Fang started her small PR firm in 2002 and she got Right Management as the first client.

Ms Fang sources clients from the media and related articles. "They are actually people I admire. There has to be some synergy between you and the client, because it is really important that you get along with your clients. You have to be able to work things out when you get into arguments and disagreements." One time, someone asked Ms Fang, "What kind of clients are you looking for?" Her answer is "nice people". "That is very important. There are jobs that I turned down as I know that I won't be able to get along with those clients. I would think, 'What would this person be like if he is really mad at me?'" Ms Fang also noted that there would be people out there who want a free deal or who are manipulative, so one has to use his or her own judgment.

On a typical working day, Ms Fang gets up, gets a cup of coffee and checks her e-mails. Most of her clients are based in the US, in Europe or in Australia, besides Hong Kong. Despite the different time zones, Ms Fang doesn't have to work around the clock. Her clients are nice enough to schedule conference calls at reasonable hours.

Ms Fang writes the proposal and the media pitch, and is involved in liaison work. Very often, she doesn't see her clients until they fly in for the media interviews or the actual events she organizes for them.

Carrying on her business as "a one-man band", Ms Fang never takes on more than she can accomplish. She would only take care of about three to four clients a month, making sure that she works within her limits. She has had a mentor for her business since the spring of 2006. The mentor, who is living abroad, has provided plenty of useful advice to help bounce off ideas. Ms Fang also arranges internship programs with students from The City University of Hong Kong. The interns would work on the translating work, the design work for the brochures and the stationery, updating her media lists, contacting the local press and participating in client PR events. .

As to the secrets of meeting and getting clients, Ms Fang said that a lot of business comes from referrals by "word of mouth". She is currently working on an e-mail campaign while learning how to carry out business development. She sends e-mails to a list of about 800 potential clients who are her personal friends, connections and former clients.

"You can't put too much information in that e-mail. It simply reminds people about what I do. The CEO branding that I do is very unique and I try to think of what is so special about the CEO. I want to present the real thing, not the fluffy social stuff," she said.

Ms Fang has her own network of clients in the region, and to a certain extent, her involvement in voluntary work helps build her extensive network. In the past two years, she has been a member of an international taskforce on mentoring for Business and Professional Women International. She is the content editor for the web section on mentoring – so, she deals with a multitude of countries and cultures from around the world. She is also a member of the BPW International Public Relations Committee and she helped to edit the English brochure of the association.

Looking ahead, Ms Fang said she wants to keep on running her business like this for the next 20 years. "I want to stay small. I don't want to have a big fancy office with lots of staff as it takes a lot of projects to keep them busy. My business model will not work with a person who wants to build a big company. You have to keep honest with your clients, treat them nicely and give them the service. I make mistakes and my clients have told me, then I try to do better the next time. It's all a learning process," she said.

Eunice Wong

### **How to prepare in becoming an entrepreneur or running your own business (SME)**

1. Get as much advice as possible but don't act on any of it – think about it and research it further.
2. Beware of people who don't have your best intentions at heart (there are a lot of these type of people out there!).
3. In order to transition from the corporate world to owning a small business – one needs to be self-motivated and have a passion for what you do.
4. Have the start-up funding and finances.
5. Come up with a monthly budget - the costs and the income.
6. Know your target audience.
7. Get a trusted business mentor – someone not in your field (so, there's no competition) but with good business sense and has your best interest at heart.

### **Lessons Learned**

1. Even if you encounter a "bumpy road" or a "bad experience" in your business life – learn from it! And move on...it is all a learning process.
2. Don't try to take on more than one can do.