



IDEAS IN THE PIPELINE

INTERVIEW WITH PHILLIP DEWHURST, HEAD OF PUBLIC RELATIONS, GAZPROM MARKETING & TRADING

How would you describe Gazprom Marketing & Trading (GM&T)?

An energy trading company selling one of the cleanest fossil fuels: gas. We have about 15,000 commercial and industrial customers in the UK and Ireland, ranging from power generators and banks to energy wholesalers. We are also committed to developing the market for carbon credits – our view is that it will be a profitable business area as well as a valuable contribution to the environment.

We are also a relatively young company, but that plays quite well to our ambition to deliver innovative and competitive energy products to our customers globally.

Although a young company in the UK you are owned by the Russian energy giant Gazprom – how does this impact on your culture?

That's an interesting question. In the past, Gazprom was quite a conservative company, focusing on its domestic market and supplying gas wholesale to Europe. However, that is changing and at GM&T our relatively small size means that we can get things done quite quickly – which we have had to do to build our brand and customer base in new markets. We are becoming more confident in finding our voice and reaching out to our stakeholders.

The Russian element of our corporate culture is actually a very positive thing – it's all about being very much team-based and creating relationships that are based on trust and goodwill. I found this quite surprising when I joined, but soon realised that if there are any negative connotations relating to GM&T's Russian heritage, they are pretty much based on outdated stereotypes.

The other thing is that there is a 'can do' culture here – in the fast-moving world of energy trading, business decisions have to be made quickly and efficiently.

So how do you know the PR process is being taken seriously within GT&M?

I think this is all about our accessibility to the leadership, and that the communication objectives are very much in line with the business's commercial objectives. We do all the tactical stuff like the website and producing Annual Reports, but we are also exposed to the business planning process and taking a view as to how communications and PR can make a contribution.

What about a broader contribution to corporate responsibility?

In Russia, Gazprom is involved in a number of major philanthropic activities and has a clear stance on such issues as the environment. But in many ways here in the UK we are at the forefront of environmental best practice, from a commercial perspective. Gas is one of the cleanest fossil fuels, and our business is committed to distribution and marketing of this resource. We also have major ambitions with regards to Carbon Credit trading, which has a major role to play in controlling carbon emissions. For it to succeed, it needs commercial organisations to get behind it and start to develop the market.

We are also becoming involved in LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) where we are investing time and resources – allowing natural gas to be delivered to new markets such as Asia and the Americas.

So how do you know if your communications is having an impact upon your reputation?

We don't carry out any major surveys at the moment but rely on our internal and external networks to let us know if our messaging strategy is getting through. As in many ways we are a rapidly growing and entrepreneurial company, for many colleagues the ultimate KPI in terms of our reputation and its performance is: sales. For my part I want us to be viewed as a successful but responsible energy company making the right decisions for both the short and long term.

What are the specific challenges you face from a reputation management perspective?

Well the one I don't face, given our size, is to get my message across the organisation! It is pretty much based on word-of-mouth which is great luxury when compared to some of the huge organisations I've worked for. The leadership team are very much engaged and in effect shaping our brand and reputation from the front.

What are the bottom line implications of what you do?

Well, ultimately it is all about our license to operate and grow our business. If we are seen to be a good and responsible business, then we are given the opportunities to develop.

At the end of the day, building a strong reputation is a two-way process. It's not done by just firing out messages – it's as much about listening as it is about talking.