



Case Study

Designing An Effective Website and Social Media-based Communications Strategy for Sophia Warner, Paralympic Athlete

Background

I met Sophia Warner, the British Paralympic athlete, at a business event in Dorking, Surrey in early 2011. I asked if I could offer my services as a marketing and communications consultant on a voluntary basis, to help her tell her story to key stakeholders, particularly potential sponsors who could support her financially in her quest for a gold medal.

The Brief

Sophia asked me if I could create a website whose:

1. **purpose** was to keep sponsors, the media and supporters up to date with Sophia's progress towards the London 2012 Paralympic Games
2. **design** was straightforward, eye-catching and British – just like Sophia
3. **maintenance** was easy – via an intuitive integrated content management system
4. **pages** consisted of home, biography, news, gallery, sponsors and contact pages – 6 in total

Sophia also asked me to suggest cost-effective ways in which we should launch the website to all her target audiences and then keep in touch with them in the future. As a solution that naturally shares information with a varied audience of stakeholders at virtually no cost, social media immediately came to mind.

The Design and Build

I called up Allen Betchley at www.progressiondesign.co.uk whose services I had used before and had always been impressed by. Progression's down to earth approach, combined with their understanding of integrated branding, design and communications strategy, meant they were an ideal partner on the project.

Allen agreed to design and build a website template, linking it to a bespoke content management system, which I could populate with relevant copy, images and links.

Content

Copy and images were generated from a powerpoint presentation Sophia had already put together for her motivational speeches for Brighton & Hove City Council, Mole Valley District Council and Chichester Rotary Club.

This was supplemented by photographs, links to press coverage Sophia had already received and three videos, two of her in action at the IPC Athletics World Championships in New Zealand in January 2011 and a short BBC South East Today feature about her work, family and training commitments.

The logos of sponsors, supporters and charities were also added, in recognition of their contribution to Sophia's mission, along with links to their sites.

Facebook and Twitter feeds were added to the site to integrate Sophia's social media communications into the Home page for topicality.

Timescales

From start to finish, the website design, build and content population took around a month, from concept to launch. We decided to 'soft launch' it on Sophia's birthday – 23rd May – as a present from everyone involved in the build!

Launch Activity

Having checked its stability for 48 hours, the site www.sophiawarner.com was formally launched on 25th May, simultaneously via email marketing to a total of around 180 contacts across three different database segments (corporate, media and personal), Facebook (to friends), Twitter (to followers) and LinkedIn (to professional contacts).

Launch Statistics

Since launch, over 1,000 people have visited Sophia's new site, viewing an average of 3 of the 6 pages, spending an average of 2½ minutes on the site. The 1,826 visits made by the 1,019 visitors were mainly from the following sources:

- 1,025 from Google (871) and Bing (137) and other organic search engines
- 476 from monthly emails to the contact database
- 325 from referring sites, including
 - o 75 from Facebook
 - o 20 from LinkedIn
 - o 15 from Twitter

Social Media and E-mail Communications Activity

A personalised news update email is sent from Sophia to her segmented database of contacts whenever there is something relevant and interesting to say (for example, when she signed her first two major sponsors). The aims of such communication are to:

1. keep her supporters involved in what she is doing
2. look for opportunities to speak to the media to tell her story
3. find new sponsors who can help support her in her quest for a gold medal in 2012

Sophia also uses **Facebook** (where she now has 367 friends) to post new photos of her in training and at events and **Twitter** (123 followers, 7 listings) to post short updates and news flashes on the many aspects of her life – mum, athlete and motivational speaker. These posts are linked back to

the website and the Twitter feed updates Sophia's status on **LinkedIn** (87 connections) so she only needs to enter the information once for it to then populate all her communication platforms.

Results So Far

Chandlers Brighton BMW and MINI have agreed to supply Sophia with a branded MINI Countryman in the lead up to the Paralympic Games in 2012.

<http://www.sophiawarner.com/uploads/textareas/The%20Argus%20070611.gif>

Procter & Gamble has appointed Sophia as an ambassador for its 'proud sponsor of mums' campaign for the 2012 Paralympics.

<http://marketingmagazine.co.uk/sectors/mediaentertainment/article/1074619/P-G-joins-roster-Paralympic-sponsors/>

Boots has agreed a long term sponsorship deal with Sophia and she spoke to 5,000 of its employees at a recent motivational event – as well as this recent coverage in the Daily Mail.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/olympics/article-2035128/London-2012-Paralympics-Sophia-Warner-wants-change-public-perception.html>

With the media and other multinational corporations taking an increasing interest in Sophia, other announcements will follow shortly. Watch this space!

Sophia's Comments

"Right from when he first met me, Ian has listened to what I wanted to achieve and designed a communications plan to meet my objectives. He found a really good web designer and has written great copy and used images really effectively to produce a website that I am proud of.

More importantly, the website has impressed some major sponsors and has saved me lots of time in explaining my story to various media and corporate contacts. The email, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn integrated communications campaign is working really well too.

I'm sure the communications plan is partly responsible for attracting the major sponsors I have found so far – and those that are still to sign me up.

I would recommend Ian to any business looking for an experienced communications adviser and, as importantly, someone who always does what he says he will do."

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