

Business interview – The Very People

The Very People is a co-operative of highly experienced editorial, PR and marketing consultants, set up in 2006 to offer our combined strengths as senior specialists. Being a co-operative allows us to pool our skills and knowledge to deliver the right mix of expertise and attention for each client brief. It also enables us to deliver high quality work whilst keeping overheads and administration to a minimum – a key selling point in tougher economic times.

We service clients across the UK from our bases in Glasgow, Edinburgh and London. And we use the full bandwidth of converging media and communication channels, ensuring your messages are delivered with maximum quality and impact.

The interview is with Vicky Masterson, one of the founder members of the co-operative. The full interview can be found on the VLE.

Q1. What circumstances led to you setting up The Very People?

A few of us already worked together but it was felt that, to be taken more seriously when bidding for larger contracts, it would be better to formalise the situation.

Q2. Had you any experience or knowledge of co-operatives at that point?

None.

Q3. Why did you choose a co-operative consortia model rather than a traditional private limited company or a partnership?

After a brief meeting with Hugh Donnelly (an expert on co-ops and employee owned businesses) we decided that the simplicity of the model (co-op as marketing vehicle) appealed to us. We would have incurred considerable legal costs and spent a lot of time setting up a partnership and none of us wanted such a rigid model.

Q4. What support did you receive during your early years?

Co-operative Development Scotland funded our meeting with Hugh Donnelly, who gave us important advice on setting up. We have not needed further support.

Q5. Could you give a brief explanation of the company's governance model?

Six out of seven are directors of the co-op and one is a member. We hold a meeting every 6-8 weeks at which we discuss and agree matters. Minutes are kept and circulated following each meeting. We adhere to the one page Members' agreement.

Q6. How important are the co-operative values and principles to the business?



They are important because each individual has significant expertise and experience in his or her own field, therefore any hierarchical structure would be inappropriate. One of the reasons for setting up the co-op is to offer mutual support to each other (we each have our own sole trader business running alongside the co-op) and this 'chimes' with the co-operative values.

Q7. What is your attitude to growth being a co-operative?

We do not see a need at the moment to grow by adding new members. We have agreed that if we need additional or specialist skills, we will work with associates. If one or more of our members left, we would consider replacing them with individuals possessing similar skills, should we feel these are vital to the make-up of the co-op.

Q8. What is the greatest benefit or competitive advantage you derive from being a co-operative business?

Being able to field a multidisciplinary and highly experienced team. Clients prefer to know that the people they engage will actually do the work, not pass it on to someone more junior. We offer marketing as one of our core skills, so we are able to apply it to our own organisation and are in fact currently developing a new marketing strategy and promotional material.

Q9. What is the biggest constraint to your business by being a co-operative?

Occasionally the lack of leadership slows decision making and sometimes the other commitments of our members (to their own business) interferes with our progress and business development activity.

Q10. What are the key things you need to get right to run a successful co-operative consortium (shared values or ethos etc)?

You have to like and trust each other.

Each member must be prepared to invest a certain amount of time regularly (non fee earning) to ensure the sustainability of the co-operative.

Advice for budding co-operative entrepreneurs

Sometimes there can be an imbalance in the commitment and time individuals are prepared to make in running and developing the co-operative. This results in one or two people doing most of the unpaid work and can become a serious problem. Fortunately we are not in this situation.

