

Marketing maven

Diana Robinson's clients have included Beyonce and Sean "P. Diddy" Combs

By Elisabeth Johns

Diana Robinson's big break involved a pickle.

It was 2001 and Robinson, a Guelph-based marketing specialist whose clients include pop singer Beyonce Knowles and rapper/fashion icon Sean "P. Diddy" Combs, had just been laid off for the third time due to corporate downsizing. Before she was let go, she had been doing some communications work with Strub's, a Canadian family-owned pickle producer.

When the Brantford-based company asked her for help with a marketing campaign, she decided to strike out on her own. She pitched her idea for the campaign, landed the job and hasn't looked back since.

Robinson has won numerous awards for her work, including being named the 2008 Independent Agency of the Year at the International Association of Business Communicators Toronto Ovation Awards last year.

For the 43-year-old, who's been in the marketing and communications business for more than 20 years, stepping out on her own was about self-realization and the belief she didn't need to earn six figures to live comfortably and do the job she loves.

She has no employees — her friends and family, including her husband, Greg, help by stuffing media kits and doing some design work — so she calls on website designers, creative designers and photographers she's worked with before to help with large projects.

One of those large projects came in 2006, when she organized a launch party and media tour to reinvigorate P. Diddy's fashion line, Sean John, in Canada. Due to the success of that program, she was hired in 2007 to do the Canadian launch party for Dereon, Beyonce's junior fashion clothing line. The event, held at the Ultra Supper Club in Toronto, generated 107 stories in the media, with an estimated editorial value of more than \$9 million.

"It was very, very intense," Robinson says "I was literally working 20 hours a day and I also had other clients, and had to work in such a way so that none of my other



Diana Robinson started her own marketing business after being laid off for the third time.

Photography / E. Brian Clark

clients felt neglected. But I knew what it meant for me. It was going to take me up a notch in terms of how people would see me. The launch of Diddy and Beyonce's fashion lines in Canada immediately puts me above the norm. It simply meant the calibre of my work was enough that if they were going to hire me, I must be somewhat good at what I do."

Because of the growth of her business, Robinson is considering taking on a junior employee or intern. Current clients include Pritt glue, Mosaic Spa in Fergus and AIM Environmental Group in Stoney Creek.

Robinson offers these tips on how to create great marketing campaigns:

1 Stand out from the crowd, creatively and factually. Media and the public are inundated with hundreds of messages every day. To reach them, you need to take an honest, open and creative approach.

2 Identify who you need to reach with your message. When you know and understand your target audience, you are better able to communicate with them in a way that resonates with them and inspires them to act.

3 Ask yourself: what problems do our customers or potential customers have that our products or services can solve better than our competition? Figure out the answer and then clearly and concisely communicate that information to build a positive image in the public's mind.

4 Develop a crisis communications plan. That way you will know exactly what to do and who to call should a crisis ever happen, regardless of the situation, time or day. Test your plan so you are sure it works, and you and your staff are familiar with what needs to be done.

5 Bring in experts if you don't have the required experience or knowledge yourself. Everyone thinks they can write or design communication materials that deliver results. You wouldn't act as your own lawyer, so why would you jeopardize your customers' or potential clients' opinions of you? When you are building your reputation is not the time to practice or make bad decisions. In today's internet world, information, especially negative information, lives on forever. **R**