

# Energising PR

McKinnon & Clarke

## Background

Established in 1976, McKinnon & Clarke is the world's largest independent energy consultants purchasing in excess of £1 billion of gas and electricity for customers in the UK and Europe.

Employing around 350 staff, including analysts and energy engineers, the company specialises in the improvement of efficiency in both consumption and pricing for a significant number of the world's biggest water, telecoms and energy users. Operating in over twenty countries, the company has unrivalled expertise in monopolised, semi-liberalised and fully deregulated markets.

Privately-owned, McKinnon & Clarke appointed O'Leary RM Public Relations to raise the profile of the company in national business media to support the company's aim of attracting investment. This would allow the current chairman, Sandy McKinnon, to retire and provide the company with additional funds to allow further expansion into new markets.

M&C's previous attempts to generate coverage focused on trade titles. Becoming the voice of the energy market in national business media was considered key if a suitable investment partner was to be found.



## Strategic Goals & Objectives

### Goals

Become the voice of energy in the UK

Dominate the energy debate and drive new agendas

Showcase knowledge and expertise both in energy and environmental services

Build the M&C brand and reinforce brand personality – successful, confident and ambitious

Ultimately attract new clients and investment

### Objectives

Develop a proactive media offensive – respond to and create opportunities to showcase expertise.

Energise M&C staff on the power of PR.

Build robust relationships with key national media – print and broadcast

### Challenges

Starting from a position of such low awareness, positioning M&C as the experts – in an industry full of knowledgeable people – was always going to be a challenge

With little to no internal PR culture, getting staff to embrace PR and include it in their already heavy workload, would take tenacity

## Strategy/Planning



It was agreed, considering the desired objectives, that the agency focus purely on media relations - not supplemented by paid-for advertorials - just pure column inches and broadcast coverage.

Third party endorsement through respected media channels was agreed to be the best way of influencing our target audience - large energy users, influencers and investors.

Generating coverage on a company's services, where there is little differentiation, is generally of limited news value, therefore the agency's approach was proactive selling-in of expert comment on topical energy issues allowing McKinnon & Clarke to ride on the back of the news agenda.

### Client Briefing

Understanding the complex offer was essential to the effective media sell-in.

A day spent with key analysts provided the PR team with a solid grounding on the industry.

### Media Training

There was an inherent fear-factor of 'saying the wrong thing' that needed to be overcome if the PR campaign was going to make any headway. A full day of media training with board members and key staff not only helped distil key messages, it also provided new found confidence.

## Briefing Packs

Basic but essential – a concise Note to Editors was created and professional

photography taken of all key board members

### Target Media

An 'A' list of media was devised to keep the agency focused on delivering the right coverage in the most influential media

### Technology

M&C prides itself on effective use of technology. A media centre was created on the company's award-winning website to encourage media/influencers to register interest.

Additionally the agency provides news releases to McKinnon & Clarke's online agency for exploitation through web channels.

### Campaign Integration

It was important that the PR campaign support other marketing initiatives. A list of key diary dates was drawn up shape the PR and marketing campaign. Examples included changes to legislation, new services, acquisitions etc.

### Creativity

Creativity in business to business communication is often overlooked, however the agency was keen to impart some of its bright thinking to this account.

Good photography allowed some of the McKinnon & Clarke personality to shine through. Additionally, the agency adapted the writing style to match the target media ensuring excellent pick-up of quotes attributed to McKinnon & Clarke in both high-readership tabloid and broadsheet media.



*Mr Hunter added: "Smart meters are to be welcomed, but only if they are combined with realistic and fair pricing. If all they do is flash up in lights how much we are being ripped off every time we make a cup of tea, then perhaps Britain's favourite drink may not be quite so refreshing."*

## Implementation/Effectiveness

### Media Mailing

To introduce McKinnon & Clarke, O'Leary RM sent out a media pack containing a note to editors and a branded memory stick containing a short film showcasing the company's energy expertise.

Beautifully packaged, the mailing had the desired effect with fourteen of the twenty journalists logging on to the media centre and registering interest in receiving media releases.

In 2009, over forty journalists and interested parties have registered on the McKinnon & Clarke online media centre including City am, Platts, Centrica, Talk21, BBC and Mentorn TV.

### Responding the News Agenda

M&C's business is to keep abreast of what's happening in the industry and monitor live reports coming in from energy suppliers and generators. A procedure was set up whereby analysts contacted the

agency when news which could effect price and/or availability of supply. This allowed the agency to be

'ahead of the game' when providing comment to the energy, environment and consumer affairs writers.

Over a period of months the consultancy established itself as a credible and effective provider of comment.

*"McKinnon & Clarke provides me with timely, newsworthy stories – I trust what they say is correct – that's why I have featured them extensively in Scotland on Sunday during the year. McKinnon & Clarke is top of my contact book when I look for comment on energy & the environment"*

*Rosemary Gallagher, Business Editor, Scotland on Sunday*



Journalists began to take our calls and started telephoned us to speak to our experts

This important shift resulted in a significant uplift in coverage – a total of 142 articles and interviews appeared during the campaign period (January 2009 to December 2010) in the following media:-

The Independent, The Daily Mail, Wall Street Journal, Sky News, BBC Reporting Scotland, Reuters, Bloomberg, The Scotsman, The Herald, The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, Scotland on Sunday, Sunday Times, Financial Times, Radio 4, Radio 5 Live, Mirror, The Express, Platts, The Sun, Sunday Mirror, CNBC, The Times, Sunday Times, BBC Scotland Politics Show, Metro

In addition to key spokespeople from McKinnon & Clarke being quoted in the majority of the coverage (92%), the media also picked up on a number of our key messages such as 'energy consultants (100%)', 'advising clients on energy procurement and environmental legislation (37%)', 'largest energy consultancy' (63%) 'and 'independent of suppliers' (12%).

With the majority of the nationals publishing on-line, McKinnon & Clarke now regularly appears in a number of blogs including smart grid blog - the most influential industry blog.

### Proactive News Releases

The agency also kept a close eye on opportunities arising from changes in legislation and key diary dates.

Energy providers' interim and end-of-year results were news pegs for the consultancy to comment on the disparity between wholesale and retail energy prices.

Additionally, new environmental legislation provided an opportunity to highlight the consultancy's expertise in this sector.

## Key coverage Highlights

Unfortunately due to copyright issues, the agency is unable to include cuttings, however we have included a selection of links to newspaper titles at the end of the document

[BBC Reporting Scotland](#) – Live interview with David Hunter

[The Independent, The Guardian & City AM](#) – front page

Interview on [BBC Scotland Politics Show](#)

[Wallstreet Journal](#) – international coverage

[Bloomberg](#) - live interview

[CNBC](#) – live TV debate

## Influencing the Policy Makers

As a direct result of the high profile coverage, energy analyst, David Hunter was invited to speak at the Westminster Energy Forum Keynote Seminar on UK Nuclear New Build, in Whitehall, London.

The seminar was co-chaired by Lord McNally (Liberal Democrat Leader of the House Of Lords) and Lord Jenkin (former cabinet minister under Margaret Thatcher).

David spoke at the seminar and answered questions on the subject of timescales and challenges for new nuclear power stations and the energy gap. Other speakers included the Head Of Nuclear Policy at EDF Energy; the President Elect of the TUC (Trades Union Congress); the Senior Policy Adviser at the CBI (Confederation for British Industry); and the Commercial Director for EOn / RWE Nuclear Joint Venture.

## **McKinnon & Clarke at Downing Street**

The consultancy was invited to meet with Nick Butler - the Senior Policy Adviser to the UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown - in No. 10 Downing Street, to discuss and advise on the government's nuclear power and energy security policies. A major coup for the energy consultancy.

## **Influencing Internal Staff**

The agency has developed an excellent working relationship with the McKinnon & Clarke team. Through regular contact, the agency has instilled in the team the need for timely responses to journalists' requests for information. Through the marketing department's commitment to PR, there is a seamless flow of information from the consultancy to the agency which is delivering impressive results.

## **Influencing Clients**

According to McKinnon & Clarke, £617,000 worth of new business was directly attributed to PR activity - an impressive return for an investment of £40k.

Success can also be measured on the increase in the number of web hits achieved on the company's website - a jump of 100% on 2008 stats.

## **Achieving the Ultimate Goal**

In December 2009, McKinnon & Clarke announced that it had been bought over by investment firm Lyceum Capital for £22m.

According to M&C's CEO, Simon Northrop, the successful sale was in no small part attributable to the profile of McKinnon & Clarke achieved through sustained, quality media coverage.

## And the last word from the client ...

*"The results O'Leary RM Public Relations achieved for McKinnon & Clarke exceeded all expectations*

*"Through knowledge, tenacity and the agency's ability to respond with well written copy at short notice has not only resulted in the successful sale of the business, but also in attracting a number of clients along the way.*

**Wilma Kinniburgh, Marketing Manager, McKinnon & Clarke**  
**Tel: 01383 735000**

## Links to Coverage

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/gas-row-hots-up-as-labour-calls-tories-scaremongers-1867224.html>

<http://www.liverpooldailypost.co.uk/ldpbusiness/business-features/2010/01/13/uk-needs-more-gas-storage-to-prevent-fuel-shortages-92534-25586900/>

<http://www.allbusiness.com/energy-utilities/utilities-industry-electric-power/13710074-1.html>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/ofgem-calls-for-new-year-cuts-to-home-energy-bills-1836145.html>

<http://smartgrid.testing-blog.com/2009/12/04/smart-energy-meters-will-only-benefit-customers-if-combined-with-fair-pricing/>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2009/dec/02/smart-meters-go-ahead>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/smart-meters-for-every-home-1833146.html>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1232707/How-green-energy-revolution-set-cost-household-UK-extra-500-year.html>

<http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/143760/Energy-firms-told-to-slash-family-bills-by-120-a-year>