



Anna Fang

The Missing Links

For small public relations companies, personality is often the key differentiator in service quality. Kenny Lau interviews industry specialist Anna Fang to find out her secrets of success

As a high school student, she was a regular columnist and writer for the *Gazette-Times* in her hometown of Corvallis, Oregon, in addition to her role as executive secretary for the business manager of the city's daily newspaper. "I did a lot of unusual things at an early age," Anna JH Fang, director of anna fang public relations, now recalls. She entered the School of Journalism at the University of Oregon-Eugene. During the time she had a radio show on KWAX-FM, the university's radio station and city's classical music station, and worked as a reporter for

the *Oregon Daily Emerald* side-by-side with the late Randy Shilts, author of "And the Band Played On..."

"My dream at a young age was to become editor of an international magazine," Fang remembers. However, she took the advice of a professor to be more "well rounded," switched her major of study, and earned a Bachelor's and Master's degree in history from the University of California-Santa Cruz after having worked for two years in Lake Tahoe, California. "I tell my interns even today that you have to be an info-junkie and

know about current affairs, if you want to work in communications or marketing," she says. "It's because you have to have that knowledge."

Beijing exposure

Fond of the Chinese culture and history and longing for work in a place where there is a Chinese community, Fang arrived in Beijing working for the Great Wall Sheraton Hotel as the Public Relations and Advertising Manager. The posting gave her the opportunity to work for a multi-national company (MNC) "side-by-side with members of the Communist Party."

"Some people can't take living overseas because it can be quite a shock. But I had a great desire to do that," she says of her first overseas job. "Beijing was very different at that time," and it was not always an easy place to work as an expatriate. Soon after June 1989, all expatriates at the company were evacuated, and ultimately lost their jobs. It was a turning point for Fang, which allowed her to have a taste of real life in Hong Kong.

Fang later returned to Beijing for a two-year contract at Tianlun Dynasty Hotel Beijing as the Marketing Communications Services Manager of the hotel's pre-opening team, and she was one of seven who completed their contract out of 45 expatriates. The days as a communications specialist for MNCs continued with Hutchison Telephone and Motorola in Hong Kong in the 1990s, where she learned the fine art of public relations on a regional and global scale.

"For corporation communications, you have to know the field and the culture of a company by learning on the job," Fang points out. "You need to be open and be able to pick things up quickly as information travels at an even quicker pace."

Years of experience in the corporate communications sector had exposed Fang to a variety of agencies, and she had come to notice the missing links in PR. Fang eventually founded

her own business in 2002, and the model of Anna Fang public relations is a direct result of her previous experience in corporate communications. "When I started my business, I found out what a lot of 4As [large PR agencies associated with the Council of PR Firms in the US] didn't do," Fang points out.

Media pitches

Media relations, Fang points out, is largely dependent on creativity because of the need to think of different angles to market a story. In a product that may be of intellectual or academic in nature, the key lies in "CEO branding" because the "CEO is the brand of the company; the CEO is the company," Fang believes.

Instead of depending on press releases, she does media "pitches," something short and easy to understand about a subject while suggesting to the press with an "interesting" angle of a story as a journalist. Instead of following a formula or template, Fang creates a customized strategy and execution plan for individual clients based on the character of the project or personality of a targeted CEO.

"Pitches take a long time because you need to think about how you can attract the media to do the interview," Fang says. In supporting a client in media relations, "you often have to ask what they do not want, as their in-house communications department already does certain things," she adds.

At Anna Fang public relations, Fang herself is the sole proprietor, taking care of different aspects of the business. Despite the interest of overseas PR agencies to partner, her vision is to keep it small and refrain from forming business partnerships, in order to "be your own boss, at your own hours," handling one to two projects and a few other clients at a time. "That's why I can work from anywhere in the world, except to be present at media interviews of clients," she says, adding that staying small is a way to guard against breach of

stringent quality control and standard of care.

“But you have to be very organized and motivated, doing everything on your own,” Fang adds. “You also have to be very cautious in things like whether you would get paid. A big company can absorb shocks, but for small businesses it is devastating.” And there has been “zero” business support from outside sources from the beginning. She recalls the fact that “Me, myself, and I” had done the research and due diligence before establishing the small company, sometimes on a trial and error basis.

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“I wouldn’t say I am the best businessperson,” Fang says. “[But] I am very goal-oriented and like to please people, and I know how to think of the angles that would interest the press and visualize what type of publications they can be in... it is about getting the editor to do the interviews.”

The combination of an outgoing personality and an open mind has always helped in writing media pitches, for which “I just don’t do things black and white,” says Fang, who is fully aware of the high level of expectations from her clients. “Sometimes

clients try to sell sales stuff instead of knowledge.” And that’s when creativity will come in handy. “That is what it is all about...telling an interesting story to the public, and hopefully the process will then raise the profile of the CEO, the company or the product.”

The edge

anna fang public relations has won APEX Awards of Excellence for company website and for company brochure, in 2008 and 2009 respectively, which Fang believes shows her unique way of doing things. She has won over 16 awards since 1998. But she can also be harsh on herself in times when clients’ expectations are not met, she admits. Despite the small scale on which she operates, Fang does not consider herself a freelancer but a full service provider of a specialized sector in the PR field. However, it isn’t any cheaper to hire her service than the industry norm for a standard PR consultant.

A believer of synergy in client relationships, Fang is selective on whom to enlist as clients for a match of mentality and belief. “I actually do research on who I like as a potential client. It might take me a couple of years to get them as clients,” she says. And she does not target the same clientele as big firms do. “There are different niches. We don’t collide on what we do,” she says. “I don’t select people who are famous but people who have a passion or an interesting way of doing what they do and who have an interesting story to tell.”

The competitive edge of her company, Fang believes, is the combination of knowledge of the PR industry and local culture from having lived and worked in Hong Kong and the vision to offer service in a mature market with a unique personal viewpoint. The missing links of the PR supply chain Fang found years earlier have now become the signature of her company. “What makes me happy is when clients get a nice article published about them as a result of my efforts,” she says.