

Anna Rafferty, Digital Marketing Director, Penguin Books

Talking Directly to Consumers

Anna Rafferty is responsible for the online and digital marketing of Penguin publishing in the UK; from the Penguin, Puffin and Penguin Classics brands websites, to 'innovation' projects like www.spinebreakers.co.uk, www.blogapenguinclassic.co.uk and www.blogaholidayread.com. This includes looking after the online marketing campaigns of Jamie Oliver and the Sebastian Faulks' James Bond novel, *Devil May Care*. She leads a team of eleven marketers, designers and producers and has been with Penguin for five years.

Anna started work in 1999 as a copywriter at www.lastminute.com, moving on to become the head of customer experience. She left lastminute.com to join a digital creative strategy agency called Dowcarter but hated working on pitches for tobacco companies and banks. After two years left for the Victoria and Albert Museum, happy to be a client again, working on her own web projects. However, eight months after starting at the V&A, she spotted her dream job on the Penguin website ...

Radical transparency

There are three key themes in Penguin's digital communications that it seems sensible to cover. They are *radical transparency*, *letting go of control* and *getting other people to do the work*.

Five years ago, Penguin's direct communication was mainly undertaken through the e-mail list. While this is still very important, the explosion of blogs, sms microblogging services like Twitter and the opportunities that social networks have opened up mean not only do we speak directly, do so transparently, in a public environment, and are on-demand for our readers, but that they expect us to do this – not to do so is a brand risk. Wired Magazine calls this '**radical transparency**' and states that smart companies and organisations are sharing secrets with rivals, blogging about products in their pipeline and even admitting to their failures.

With radical transparency comes the ability to develop a more meaningful and intimate relationship with readers, turning the brand into a lovemark, not just a logo. We can ask them questions, get their feedback on new ideas quickly and cheaply. We can directly engage them to work on our behalf and we can ensure that our message is delivered as we intended it – there is no intermediary to add its own agenda and flavour the communication.

The responsibility that comes with speaking directly to our readers is not to be taken lightly; they expect their questions answered and their comments responded to and they expect this fast. When they answer the questions we've asked them and give us the feedback we want, they expect us to listen to it and act on it, or explain why we're not going to.

A company which does this very well is Innocent (www.innocentdrinks.co.uk).



They've built their brand on core values of goodness and purity which they translate to their communications as well as their product and packaging. They promote the real people who work in their offices as does the Penguin Blog (<http://thepenguinblog.typepad.com>).

Their website features a large and prominent 'about us' section with photos and very personal biographies of staff, (they also e-mail these to their mailing list when new staff join). They called for advance questions for their AGM on their blog and ran a live Twitter stream while the AGM was happening. They have also famously called for comments on internal decisions they make or are thinking of making in their blog and they consider and respond to those comments, or certainly put up a good show of doing so.

Recently they made a decision to sell their smoothies in McDonalds. Anticipating the furore that this might cause with their loyal and loving customers, they explained their decision-making process on their 'daily thoughts' blog and invited debate with this post:

'This week our kids smoothies are going on trial in a few branches of McDonalds. We're excited about this, but we also know some people may feel a bit funny about us being there, so we wanted to share our thinking. Basically, if there is one thing we like doing it's getting more fruit into people, especially kids. So when McDonalds asked us we decided to do it. It wasn't a decision we took lightly, we even held a meeting for the whole company one lunchtime to get people's thoughts on whether we should or not. And the result was we decided it was the right thing to do, both for our business and for our drinkers. We'll keep you posted with how it goes. And we'd love to hear your thoughts.'

They received over 200 comments including 'McSellout', 'Boycott fruitstock' and 'I knew you'd crumble and go for the money eventually, depressingly predictable'. So Rich, the co-founder, responded with another post a day later which said:

'I know some people are upset about us doing this. Obviously we would never want that. Our whole business is only possible because of the fantastic support from our drinkers, and I am gutted to lose and upset even a single one. We didn't make this decision lightly.

'What it comes down to is this – we will never change our principles or the way we do business for anyone – McDonalds or anyone else. We will continue to try to tread lightly as a company, we will continue to keep things natural, we will continue to support rural development in impoverished countries, and we will continue to get fruit into people's hands/mouths wherever and whenever we can. Thanks for all of your comments. Please keep posting them, good or bad.'

I think the whole episode makes Innocent feel genuinely transparent and therefore honest and trustworthy, even when they might be doing something overtly commercial.

Letting go of control: blogapenguinclassic.com

The real difference between the marketing of just five years ago and marketing today is the control that brands have over their message.

Penguin wanted to do something new and inspiring with the Penguin Classics list in order to encourage a new set of readers to consider these books or inspire an old set of readers to reconsider them. The benefit of letting go is that you can end up with a site that doesn't need much internal maintenance and management – readers run it themselves.



So a call was put out to book bloggers. Each participant received a free copy of a Penguin Classic (randomly selected) and once they had read it, they had to blog a review. The reviews weren't edited or censored, just published. 1400 books were sent out, the reading started and so did the conversations.

The beauty of sending the books out randomly was that the results were often extreme – readers often hated their title – or thought they were going to hate the book. There were plenty of reviews, the gist of which was 'this book was rubbish, I didn't understand it and I never would have chosen it'. It was scary to read those reviews. But the key to letting go is ultimately to trust your content and thankfully, there are plenty of readers who disagree with the negative reviews and reply with comments, passionately defending the book.

Some of the best results come when readers remark that they have been encouraged to read a book/author they otherwise would not have thought of:

'This is the first classic I have read since school. The Blog-a-Penguin-Classic gave me a wonderful excuse to move away from my normal crime/thriller genre. I am pleasantly surprised that I actually enjoyed this book! Thanks Penguin.'

And another user commented:

'Gustave Flaubert is not an author I had previously read so when I started the book it was with some trepidation as I thought it would be hard going. How wrong I was.'

There's also a recurring theme in the comments, applauding Penguin for the project's credibility; readers really believe in the site: **'I like these reviews because they are honest.'**

There are now around eighty thousand visitors to this blog every month, engaging in articulate and vibrant debate about books that might have been written 2000 years ago. And the real beauty is that Penguin doesn't have to do anything.

Letting go of control: spinebreakers.co.uk



The Spinebreakers project was conceived as the result of a pressing business need to launch a list of teen books coming hot on the heels of research that showed teenagers weren't at all turned on by Penguin's traditional marketing channels.

It would have been great if MySpace or a similar site had prioritised books on their sites but when it became apparent that nobody was going to deliver an online community for teenage book lovers Penguin bit the bullet and set up its own site ... and soon realised that we were exactly the wrong, non-teenaged, people to do it.

So, Penguin contacted and created networks of teenagers and asked them to tell us what to do. They chose the URL and the brand, helped to select the design company to build the website, commented on what it looked like and what it should contain and it was tested with them as it went along.

Once launched, it was 'handed over' to them. This crew of nine teenage 'editors' and over fifty regional deputies working from their bedrooms up and down the country now run the website – with marketing teams from Penguin pitching their titles to them once a month. It is the teenage editors who choose what goes on the site, which authors or books are interesting for their audience (a few months ago they all raved about Atomic Bazaar, an Allen Lane hardback about the nuclear arms trade to Penguin's surprise). They also create the content for the website and engage the wider teen community by thinking up promos, competitions and promoting the site on their own networks – they manage independent Facebook groups and Bebo profiles for the site for instance.

The ambitious mission for Spinebreakers is to make books as culturally relevant to teenagers as the other forms of entertainment they consume: games, music, movies, TV. This meant following the example of those other industries, listening to the teens and making marketing a conversation. So far, it's working; the site has been short listed for a New Media Age Effectiveness award and has received some great publicity:

'I'm loving Penguin books at the moment, everything they are doing just hits all the right buttons with me on marketing, using digital and social media tools to connect with their customers, building up the brand as well as the individual books... One error that is sometimes made with marketing online is to think of what the brand wants to say instead of what the customers want. By using different types of sites for different customers, Penguin avoid that. [Spinebreakers](#) is a site aimed at teenagers. More importantly, it's run by teenagers, a group of 9 aged from 13-18 with many other contributors. Here, Penguin provide the platform and let the book fans run it.'

[*Behind the Buzz*- written by the Digital Strategist at JWT in New York]

There are 3500 teenagers visiting per month, 40,000 altogether and about 30 pieces of content being submitted each week.



Getting other people to do the work

Penguin likes to get readers to do its marketing for them as much as it can. Often this is just word-of-mouth and business as usual, but more frequently it means creating structured environments and transparently incentivising them to get on board.

Here are two examples of recent campaigns:

The Missing

Penguin wanted to launch a book thriller like a film and punch above its weight. A great piece of media was secured – a film trailer slot at the Odeon Leicester Square running for a week and launching at the premiere of Spiderman 3. So all that was needed was an asset – one that the public would create.

A movie trailer competition took place at this website: www.themissingbook.co.uk. The brief simply was 'a short trailer that scared everyone who saw it into needing to know more...'. The book jacket and synopsis was provided for inspiration and some of the junior marketing team did a raid on filmmaking associations and colleges, either e-mailing them directly or contacting them via their blogs and websites. The entries were uploaded on to the website. The filmmakers then began their own underground marketing campaign to win the competition, seeding their films (containing Penguin branding) onto YouTube and Myspace – this is the winning entrant's MySpace page - http://www.myspace.com/themissing_trailer.

It created a great deal of pre-awareness buzz for the book as well as getting a fantastic asset with which to market it, for the price of one cinema ad slot.

Bond MySpace promotion

May 2008 brought a whole new challenge to Penguin marketing - *Devil May Care*.

The good news was obvious – it's James Bond, it's Sebastian Faulks and it's an established mega-brand with millions of existing fans. The challenge was generating pre-awareness for the book without a) giving any hint of its content away, b) creating Bond-fatigue in the media and readers before the book was even published and c) making sure that James Bond, and Sebastian Faulks were for young people too.

A MySpace page was launched (www.myspace.com/devilmaycarebook), with the MySpace team creating a beautiful profile within the network, creating wallpapers for download, a countdown clock widget, a gallery of iconic artwork and started a behind-the-scenes blog with updates several times per week.

The big idea though was to engage the MySpace community of musicians, mostly under 25, with the publishing process. This included an 'X-factor' style talent contest to compose a theme tune for Devil May Care, which would then be released on the audio book. They didn't get any hint of the book to come but had to work with what they knew of the James Bond brand as well as a handful of iconic audio samples from previous Fleming audio books. The competition ran for 50 days, and the entries were first short listed by an eclectic panel of experts, including Sebastian Faulks and Jazzie B (of Soul II Soul fame) and Dominic Cook from MySpace. The five shortlisted tracks were then posted up for the community to vote on.

There were three stages of publicity – at launch, which made the *Evening Standard* and *Metro*; during the voting, with lots more user-generated mini-campaigns springing up trying to drum up votes for their song, lots of which were picked up by local and regional press; and finally, when the winners were announced – more coverage in *The London Paper* and on the BBC as well as in unexpected places like *NME* and *Drowned in Sound*.

The total result was over 30 pieces of branded coverage plus hundreds of blogs and forums picking the story up and commenting on it, as well as another asset for the publicity team to work with prior to publication – the new Bond song itself.