



## Background

Southampton City College is a vibrant college in the centre of Southampton. A £38m building scheme is underway and student achievements are consistently rising. Despite this, it rarely featured in the media and there was, perhaps, staff reluctance for becoming involved in promoting the college.

Target Market - Southampton and its environs  
Feeder schools, career teachers, pupils, parents, influencers  
Businesses - employers and employees  
Potential apprentices  
Career changers

## PR Objective:

To raise awareness of the college within the target market through achieving consistent, targeted coverage within the local, regional and specialist print, online and broadcast media.

## Strategy:

We immediately embarked on improving relationships with local media, speaking to journalists regularly and discovering individual interests. Thus releases gained 100 per cent hit rate.

A 'multi-pronged' approach with every media outlet, delivering stories that fitted into different categories - childcare, food, health, beauty, entertainment as well as the standard news and education sections. This way we avoided bombarding only one correspondent. Importantly, we organised lunch and a college tour for the editor of the key publication, Southern Daily Echo, to open his eyes to the work of City College and hear first-hand from the Principal, plans for the future. This led to the editor arranging his education correspondent to spend a day at the college.

We engaged the lecturers, attended staff meetings and described the stories we needed. We befriended heads of departments, had our own security passes and spent time talking to students. We worked as journalists, digging out success stories and feeding them to the press. We offered up tutors for comment on national stories within their curriculum area, constantly showing the high level of expertise at the college. Students were involved at all levels, from talking at open days to performing at events. To overcome TV's shortage of live filming we worked with the head of media and students to film key events, circulating the footage and gaining regional and national TV coverage. To highlight student success and educate the community about the benefits of the college's vocational courses, award ceremonies were given high-profile, newsworthy keynote speakers.

To capture the imagination of 15-year-olds and their parents, we transformed open days into interactive events called CityEx, with young people given the opportunity to try a range of activities.



We maximised our relationship with Rt Hon John Denham MP, then minister for skills as well as our local MP, inviting him to events and involving him in the life of the college. In turn, he brought the Prime Minister and Minister for Education to launch National Apprenticeship Week at City College. Knowing media would focus on the financial collapse of the banks, we dressed students in City College branded clothing, resulting in every TV news featuring City College.

We targeted 'glossy' magazines with photo spreads to elevate the college's reputation with decision-makers. This was enhanced by HRH The Princess Royal who was key speaker at City Training Awards. We did the same with the youth magazines, showing prospective and current students that City College was the 'cool' place to study.

We backed up these lighter stories with hard-hitting releases for the business press, focusing on the redevelopment programme, again showing the college as a top-class facility.

### Creativity

City College is itself a creative place. Therefore everything we do has to emulate creativity; excitement must shine through every piece of work produced. Personalities must add to the mix. Events with Levi Roots, the PM and The Princess Royal were planned carefully to capture this same excitement. While everyone else was talking about university education, City College stood up and shouted about the excellence of vocational courses, their relevance and the importance of practical skills and up-skilling.

We got to the core of what mattered and showed off the college personality and character. We recognised the potential in writing about students to promote the college and letting them speak to the community, through the media.

We turned an open day into something completely different with CityEx. We reflected the college's hands-on learning approach with a hands-on version of an open day.

We continue to work on the media mix, hitting at every angle - from student magazines to TV - with stories on food, childcare, marine, hair and business. In addition, we proactively sourced the stories by turning ourselves into journalists and infiltrated the college.



### Evaluation and measurement

November 08 to June 09 print and radio coverage totalled 133 published stories, including national and regional TV, radio, newspaper coverage and a plethora of online stories.

### Final results against objectives

A year ago research undertaken showed general low awareness of the college and its work. This year's research has just started. The evidence to date from the college is that perception and awareness within the all-important feeder schools career staff and teachers has greatly improved.

City College is now turning from a shrinking media violet to a Venus fly trap. Media coverage went through the roof within the first month. Higher brow glossy magazines, that had never dedicated a column inch to the college before, were running release after release and coming back to us for more.

The relationship with the Southern Daily Echo dramatically improved and stories have appeared in everything from education to health and beauty, week after week. The paper has become the college's strongest advocate, running 63 stories online and in print since November, becoming media partners for events and sponsoring and handing out awards at events. Reporters now come to City College tutors for local opinion on national issues.