

# This charming man

**Jim Hawker**, co-founder and director, Threepipe

Three and a half years ago, when Jim Hawker was writing the business plan for the launch of a new PR agency from his bedroom in his Y-fronts, he made a plan to win *PRWeek*'s New Consultancy of the Year Award. Aiming for this ambitious target (which, by the way, he achieved last year) is typical of how Hawker sets high standards for himself and constantly strives to improve.

Throughout our conversation it becomes evident that he is highly self-critical if he does not achieve excellence in everything he does. For example, he describes himself as 'not a bad' tennis player, even though he is a qualified tennis coach. He thinks he did an 'average job' presenting at a conference recently and could do a lot better. And he says of his three-year-old agency Threepipe, which is set to bill £1 million this year and boasts a raft of blue chip clients including Persil and UK Online, that it is 'doing alright'.

But it is not only himself from whom Hawker demands a lot. Being such a hard taskmaster means people often do not live up to his high expectations: he found his stint in Amazon's in-house PR team 'disappointing'; and he describes Hill & Knowlton as 'too big' and 'frustrating', and Spreckley Partners as 'not a particularly exciting place to be'.

Of all his previous career experiences, he cites his 12 months aboard a bus that travelled from Canada to South America – when he was promoting a Tommy Hilfiger-sponsored American reality TV show called *Big Bus Ride* – as the most beneficial in terms of gaining the skills needed to succeed in PR.

Now, however, he finds his working environment more satisfactory. Having moved out of his bedroom, the 14-strong agency rents space in Covent Garden. But life at Threepipe is certainly not about taking advantage of the many wine bars and restaurants on its doorstep. 'We don't sit around and have a lot of laughs all the time,' he says, adding that more than anything he believes 'bloody hard work' is behind the agency's success.

Hawker and co-founder Eddie May work long hours and weekends and have been doing so since they first de-



ecided to join forces. 'We were both 29 when we had the idea for a new agency. We didn't have kids and weren't married, so could take a risk. I remortgaged and Eddie left his job at Umbro.'

Hawker repeatedly stresses the importance of the complementarity between him and May as another key reason that Threepipe is thriving. Ben Maynard, director of client services at Harvard PR, believes that they make a good pair because 'Jim is definitely the charmer and the ideas man; Eddie is the guy that makes things happen'.

Several people who know Hawker indeed describe him as the exuberant frontman with the gift of the gab. Nick Taylor, commercial director at Chime Communications, for instance, remembers a party just after Harvard was acquired by Chime.

'Hawker immediately engaged Lord Bell in conversation, while everyone else was slightly wary of talking to a peer of the realm,' he says.

But, while Hawker is often painted as the creative, charismatic totty that gets the client in the door, leaving the

## CV

**2004** Director, Threepipe

**2003** Associate director, Spreckley Partners

**2002** Account director, MacLaurin PR

**2001** Freelance PRO (worked at Hill & Knowlton and Amazon.co.uk)

**2000** PR and sponsorship manager, US reality TV show *Big Bus Ride*

**1996** PR manager, Harvard PR

strategic thinking to May, this is an unfair caricature. He is undoubtedly good at this part of the job, but it does not come as naturally as others think; he openly admits that he is 'actually quite shy' and 'an introvert'.

He's much more comfortable doing the thinking behind the scenes. In fact, the name Threepipe is meant to reflect this quality.

As Hawker explains: 'When Sherlock Holmes was given a complex problem to solve, he would smoke three pipes and he'd come up with a solution. We came up with the name because we think a lot as an agency.'

One thing he does not think about, though, is where he would like to be in five years' time. When asked which he would choose if he had to decide between enjoying marital bliss or work success in the future, he asks to 'pass' on that particular question. Later, when the tape stops rolling, he answers it in his typically self-deprecating manner. 'Marital bliss,' he says, with an endearing chuckle.

**Suzy Bashford**