

# DOING THE LUCOZADE THING

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**KATHY HASLER** spent 12 years working for leading London PR agencies before setting up her own consumer PR agency, KHPR. KHPR worked with Bible Society on its reinvention and is currently helping develop a new PR strategy for communicating to a non-Church audience.

**PICTURE THE SCENE.** I am having a lunch meeting with one of the country's top lifestyle magazine editors. His time is precious. The meeting's going well – I've covered several of our clients and we've developed five or six ideas, any of which might be worked up into a magazine feature or broadcast piece. The meeting's nearly over ... "So, Kathy, before you go, have you got any other clients we might be interested in?"

I take a deep breath, summon all my creative energies and begin to navigate the minefield of talking about the Bible. I think I can hear my reputation shattering on the floor around me as he looks longingly at the door. Mercifully he stays put while I give him a practical example of what I mean – a creative idea we have been working on earlier at the agency. He likes it! By the time he's added some thoughts of his own, we've got the beginnings of a new way of engaging with the Bible as the basis of a high profile national home design event.

At KHPR we have been exploring how to build on the experience of the successful *Vogue* fashion campaign. That particular campaign took place over two years ago and was a deliberately experimental attempt to reinterpret some well known and well loved New Testament stories into a fashion feature. The objective was to connect biblical values and aspirations with one of the most important lifestyle areas of modern culture; the world of contemporary fashion design. The media showed a surprising amount of interest giving us the confidence to explore similar biblical themes in relation to other contemporary lifestyle areas. In recent months, we have reopened our portfolio in this regard and again there has been a surprising level of interest from the media – albeit after some initial scepticism.

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The painful truth is that within the sophisticated world of lifestyle media – and arguably much of secular culture – Christianity is so hopelessly disregarded as to be virtually unmentionable in its raw state. Use our buzzwords like "Jesus", "prayer", "church" and "Christian" at your peril – easier to suggest we all buy our working wardrobes from Woolworths! By stark contrast, however, mention spirituality and you're likely to generate a *frisson* of interest in even the most elevated of media circles. The PR challenge (at least in the minds of the media) is how to link genuine Christian faith and belief with the urbane and

sophisticated subject of emerging spirituality. Because emerging it is – from Feng Shui to monastic retreats, Zen gardens to Buddhist-inspired dietary regimes, spirituality is on the journalists' agenda in a big way.

There are a host of reasons why Christianity is so marginalised. Yet my own experience is that both the Bible and the Christian faith can take centre-stage again if we are prepared to pick up a few tips from the culture we live in.

For example, we live in a climate of constant change. Like Geri Halliwell, products and brands are constantly reinventing themselves to remain exciting and relevant – and one of the most powerful ways of reinvention is association. By associating itself with sport, Lucozade became the most famous brand transformation of the last decade. Instead of a drink for the sick and enfeebled, its new sports image made it the choice of the athletic and beautiful.

At one level, by associating the Bible with lifestyle issues, we achieve a similar objective – suddenly people see the Bible through the filter of fashion, home, garden, food or sport and it takes on a whole new persona. And all that we have done is connect the world of the Bible with the worlds that so many people inhabit nowadays. Worlds that mediate to people a keen sense of personal identity and form the horizons of their contemporary aspirations.

But before we rush off to organise the latest "Bible on the catwalk" fashion show after the 6 pm Sunday Service, let's remind ourselves that we risk tripping over the bodies of those that have perished on this road before us. Trendy religion syndrome is justifiably discredited as a transparent attempt by the church to talk the talk of modern society.

We will only succeed in taking the Bible into unusual or surprising areas – be they fashion, finance, architecture or astro-physics – with any real success if we're prepared to roll our sleeves up and, quite literally, wrestle with the difficult issues of biblical interpretation and application as we seek to generate a real and meaningful dialogue between the two disciplines.

The joy of working with Bible Society in this regard is that it has an unequalled network of academics and creative people, underpinned by a management and prayer framework that can sustain the task in the long term. This resource is capable of doing the hard work of providing the intellectual and spiritual collateral on which a bridge can be re-established between Christianity and the fabric of everyday living – albeit piece by piece.

However, there is no point in doing this work in isolation – that way we will simply remain alienated from culture ►

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► and locked inside our own Christian ghetto. We need the calibre of ideas that will inspire secular culture to want to work with us, re-engaging the world of the Bible with that of our contemporary world. Only in that way will the magazine, opinion former, designer or celebrity actually embody the message – talking about the Bible persuasively and credibly in their own field of influence.

To the envy of my 12-year-old daughter, KHPR did some work with Laurence Llewellyn Bowen. He quite legitimately and level-headedly told us that if he spoke about a particular product or place to visit on *Changing Rooms*, six and a half million viewers would be very likely to go buy or go see. The challenge in public relations terms is to use this kind of power and influence to help change opinion about the Bible: that commonplace and supposedly common sense opinion that assumes, quite wrongly, that the Bible has no place nor any authority to challenge and change the aspirations of countless millions engrossed in the consumer feast of modern society.

Clearly one TV feature, magazine feature, interview – however positive – isn't going to transform opinion overnight. Opinion tends to be shifted either by spending a very large amount of money on an instant, saturation campaign or by implementing a robust strategy gradually over a longer period of time. In my view, the quick-fix route is simply a non-starter as a means to try and change opinion about the Bible. I prefer to see a strong PR strategy building gradually and credibly through a series of high quality campaigns. Each campaign will add to the cumulative credibility and indeed "story" of the others – spawning a "coalition" of people, events and media who will join the debate about the role and status of the Bible in the modern world.

Together with theologians and those in various fields of secular culture, we begin a voyage of discovery. In answer to the question "how then shall we live?", we can explore together the sacred relationship between the Bible and our everyday lives. This debate will be one platform through which Bible Society in partnership with the churches and other agencies can fulfil its new mandate of making the Bible heard in the public spaces where the witness and wisdom of Scripture has for too long not been heard nor appreciated.

To be sure, for some people this lifestyle or recreation-based approach might look trivial in the context of world conflict, party politics, global warming and crises in health and education. However, the point was well made in Ridley Scott's acclaimed film *Gladiator*; that the hearts of

the people were won through the Games – not through good municipal management or fiscal policy.

By bringing the Bible into our recreation and leisure space we have an opportunity to surprise culture by initiating a debate many have long assumed didn't even exist. ■