

Ones to watch

PRWeek profiles three up and coming agencies that could soon be snapping at the heels of the bigger players



Vero Communications
(clockwise, from left):
Kate Fismer, John Zerafa, Claire Furlong, Mike Lee, Jonathan Edwards and James Stewart

SPORT Vero Communications

Specialist sports agency Vero was founded in January 2006 and, with a staff of just five, has grown to a fee income of £620,000 with a string of international clients.

Founder Mike Lee – *PRWeek*'s PR professional of the year in 2005 – says Vero's success stems from 'real expertise in sport business and from people capable of working at a strategic, as well as an operational, level. Plus, we're a start-up, so there's a huge amount of enthusiasm and belief in what we're doing.'

The Vero team has impressive sporting credentials. Formerly director of communications and public affairs for UEFA, Lee subsequently held the same post for the successful London 2012 Olympic bid, for which he was awarded an OBE in 2005.

John Zerafa, previously head of government relations at 2012, came on board as a director in March 2006. Claire Furlong, from the English Institute of Sport, joined in July

as head of media relations, while Olympic medallist Jonathan Edwards is a consultant and chairs the agency's advisory board.

Lee says Vero's 'narrative-based and campaigning approach' makes it stand out from the competition. 'All great brands have a narrative – we understand what the real story is and work out the best way to tell that story.'

It seems to work: Vero became profitable in its first year and has not had to pitch for any business. Clients include the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), Lawn Tennis Association, Liverpool FC, Premier Rugby, UK Athletics, UK Sport, Virgin Atlantic, Visit Britain, West Ham United and Tour of Britain.

Colin Gibson, director of communications at the ECB, says the agency is unique. He asks: 'How many agencies bring the wealth of experience that includes direction and promotion of the Premier League, the UEFA Champions League – the two most success-

ful football brands in Europe – and also the political knowledge of the biggest prize of all – the Olympic Games? Few agencies can point to such an outstanding track record.'

International clients include Salzburg, Glasgow and Rio de Janeiro – bidding for the 2014 Winter Olympics, the 2014 Commonwealth Games and the 2016 Olympics respectively. Vero has also begun working in the corporate market, although the emphasis remains on sport. Indeed, Lee says the agency's future lies in the interface between sport and business. 'Increasing interest in sponsorship of sport means it is becoming a very interesting marketplace,' he says.

Vero is busy recruiting for two roles – a head of sponsorship and brand communications and a media manager – and recently entered into a global affiliate relationship with Edelman, giving it access to the US network's sports, sponsorship and marketing practice.