

Evolution: It's a matter of relationships and value

 By [Judith Middleton](#), issued by [DUO Marketing + Communications](#)

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Relationships matter in public relations (PR), and having retained a client for over 10 years is no mean feat!

Over a decade ago, we were approached by Vox (formerly known as DataPro) with the brief of launching a PR campaign to differentiate their brand from the crowded Internet service provider (ISP) space. Since then, we have orchestrated their listing (and delisting), announced more than eight mergers and acquisitions, and facilitated their day-to-day PR needs to build and retain their public persona as a South African end-to-end ICT and connectivity provider.

When we kicked off our partnership with them, DUO was a three-man team with offices in Cape Town. It was a risk for an entity as large as Vox to believe in a small, start-up tech PR agency, but, they threw caution to the wind and placed their trust in us. Ten years on, we're still working together – thanks largely to our strong relationship and value.

A successful long-term relationship is about the value of partnerships. Suppliers need to earn their credibility as a partner and their on-going budgets because when the relationship isn't working – and you're not adding value – it is very easy to terminate contracts.

Partnerships work when there is mutual value. We know the Vox brand value, the company's goals, vision and mission, and critical business pain points – a symbiotic understanding that elicits the best value in PR return on investment (ROI).

From the get go, our partnership with Vox has been built on a foundation of respect. There have been times when we got it wrong, or when we've had to say "no, that's not in your best interest". But this has been appreciated and Vox has come to rely on the consultative relationship.

There is no fixed way to work with a partner... it's about understanding their needs and requirements, and finding a way to fit into the mould, while keeping your core values intact. The ability to adapt at a moment's notice for the betterment of your client is key, because sticking to a rigid plan is the epitome of disaster.

It's not so much about stabilising the change, but more about being willing to adapt and change with your client, and their changing environment.

We also continue to learn a lot from them, especially when it comes to listening to what they need. So much so that we've embedded these principles and philosophies into our ethos. The trick with learning from clients is to really hear what they want and then to push the deliverables, as opposed to offering a standard PR package and insisting that they fit your mould.

Years ago, Vox decided that they wanted to launch a digital campaign. We listened and set about building a digital campaign. Simple. It wasn't something we'd tackled before, but we had their trust and low risk environment which enabled us to develop as we went along. We were able to develop a series of product offerings purely as a result of us listening to their needs.

With their support and commitment, we've taken the time to invest in our critical objectives too, and now also hold senior managers accountable for delivery. We never compromise our credibility and ensure that they work with a senior member of the team who has robust telecoms knowledge and experience. After all, we have direct access to the CEO – there aren't many tech PR agencies that get regular facetime with the CEO.

For me, the joy and magic of working on this account has been about evolution. Watching our client steer ahead of the

curve with their product evolution and development has been inspirational.

ABOUT JUDITH MIDDLETON

Judith Middleton is the CEO of DUO Marketing and Communications

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