



## Sabre Awards US/EMEA Certificate of Excellence

### Category: Employee Programs

#### Challenge

In 2008, the decision was made to rebrand and re-launch CPR Worldwide, a boutique healthcare public relations agency that had started in London in the mid-1990's and expanded to New York. The time was right: in 1999 Fleishman-Hillard (FH) had acquired CPR Worldwide but chose to absorb the CPR London operations into the FH Healthcare brand. The New York office was left freestanding and, having lost its UK presence, struggled for several years to establish its own identity. But beginning in 2006 under new leadership, CPR New York began to experience a significant turnaround, attracting new clients, new staff, and a fresh and exciting approach to healthcare public relations. As will happen, the rapid turnaround caused growing pains and the unintended consequence of a nearly 40 percent staff turnover in 2007.

During planning for the rebranding, agency leadership focused on developing not only a distinct and competitive offering for clients and prospects, but also a culture that would attract and retain the best talent in the industry while providing a supportive and challenging work environment. In April 2009, the CPR brand was extinguished; staff and clients were absorbed into the new TogoRun brand. The name "TogoRun" was selected to honor Togo, an undersized Alaskan Husky who nevertheless led his sled team more than 100 miles, through raging blizzards and across frozen tundra, in a race to deliver life-saving serum to the diphtheria-stricken city of Nome, Alaska.

#### Research

A comprehensive, competitive audit identified six agencies in the TogoRun competitive set. We interviewed 16 former staffers from these agencies, asking questions about the agencies' cultures and approaches to business. We interviewed current and former clients about their experiences working with these agencies, talked to editors and staff writers at *PR Week*, *The Holmes Report* and *O'Dwyer PR Newsletter*, and conducted research in all three publications.

The defining element for TogoRun is our culture. It is our strongest asset and the thing we heard repeatedly that set us apart from competitors in the minds of clients and prospects. We had to make ourselves a "culture first" organization. Our goals were clear:

- Minimal turnover (less than 10 percent a year)
- Attract experienced healthcare talent from competitive agencies
- Obtain high employee satisfaction scores on annual survey





## Strategic Approach

As part of our commitment to our clients to deliver the “best agency experience of their careers™,” we developed a set of promises that include our promise to be our clients’ voice to the patient and the promise to foster an environment of innovation. We wanted to bring those promises alive through – and to – our employees in ways that were both meaningful and authentic. We also wanted these initiatives to become a foundation for how TogoRun would attract, retain and value employees.

## Execution

- To support our client commitment of being “**their voice to the patient,**” all employees work pro bono in the therapeutic area in which they operate. For example, the Bristol-Myers Squibb virology team provided public relations support to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center to support, “Braking the Cycle,” a fund-raising bike ride for HIV.
- To reinforce that “**clients who hire our brains will get our hearts and souls for free,**” every employee, even the most junior, is provided with the technological tools that allow them to be accessible at all times, such as Blackberries and laptops.
- To demonstrate to our clients that we maintain a “**culture of innovation,**” all employees are eligible for an annual “**Passion Grant**” for non-work interests and activities. Violin lessons, cake decorating, French classes and theatre are among the passions employees have pursued – and passionate people are more innovative, more interesting, and more engaged.
- For employees, we sought ways of reinforcing their value to the agency through a high-growth period (TogoRun grew 150 percent in 2009, added two new offices in Washington DC and London, and added 21 employees). For example, we offer:
  - “Manic Monday” lunches: free employee lunches each Monday
  - “Wine-down Fridays:” wine and cheese on Friday afternoon to encourage socializing and the transition to the weekend
  - Free monthly Transit cards (or the equivalent in cash) equal to 20 roundtrip tickets for all employees
  - “Stay Interviews:” We conduct “Stay Interviews” with employees every six months – to avoid having to conduct “Exit Interviews!” These are also helpful for issues discussions and career progression assessments.
  - Birthday breakfasts: TogoRun President Kathy Hyett takes all employees out to breakfast on their “TogoRun Birthday” – or anniversary date
  - “Finder’s Fees:” Cash bonuses for referrals that lead to new hires
  - Summer outing days that have included Vineyard Tours, boat trips around Manhattan Island, and other activities.
  - Annual Thanksgiving “potluck” lunch to reinforce our sense of community





## Results

Despite explosive growth in our first year, which could have easily created employee unrest, TogoRun:

- Hired 21 new employees (virtually doubling in size), attracting top talent from many of our competitors
- Experienced a 100% retention rate for the past 18 months
- Received nearly perfect scores on employee satisfaction survey, particularly on questions such as “I feel my office offers a positive culture and team building”
- Continues to receive positive client feedback that exemplifies our commitment to providing clients with the “best agency experience of their careers,” including this email from a client to a new employee:

*“I just wanted to extend a warm welcome. You've joined an outstanding agency and an outstanding oncology team. This is a passionate, skilled team committed to excellence. And, we genuinely like each other.”*

