

# MusicWeek



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# Features



# PUBLIC IMAGE LTD

Master of the PR arts Alan Edwards has described his job at the helm of the Outside Organisation as everything from a 'vocation' to an 'obsession'. Music Week reveals the man and the motivation behind some of the most momentous PR campaigns in – and beyond – the music business

**Executive profile: Alan Edwards**  
By Adam Woods

**DON'T TELL THE CONSPIRACY THEORISTS.** But one PR company was at the centre of the Michael Jackson funeral, Climategate and Naomi Campbell's appearance at Charles Taylor's trial in The Hague. But there is no sinister hand at work or international plot afoot; it is simply the result of good contacts, excellent planning and clinical execution from a master of the PR arts. In nearly four decades of press, management and PR – including 15 years at the helm of the 45-strong Outside Organisation – Alan Edwards has played a major role in countless breaking news stories in the music and entertainment industries and beyond.

Looking a good deal younger than his experience would suggest he should, Edwards calls his job "a vocation", "a calling", even "an obsession". He apologises for his melodramatic language even as he does so, but when you look at his record, words like those are the only ones that could really account for the breadth of achievement. "You could call it a creative instinct or something that is within me, but at the end of every week, I hope I have improved at what I do," he says, early in a lengthy conversation that takes in everything from Johnny Thunders' chemical breakfast and Iggy Pop's politics to the deleterious effect of the corporate music business on its own PR skills base. It is a fascinating, peculiar world as Edwards describes it, inhabited by musicians, supermodels, brands and sportsmen on one side and the world's relentless media on the other. Many might like to think they could survive

so long in the choppy waters between them, but in reality few could; it is no accident that Edwards and Outside have. "I'm always trying to learn from different places," says the man who has also helped shape the careers of Amy Winehouse, Blondie, The Rolling Stones, Jimmy Cliff, David Bowie, Spice Girls, David Beckham, P Diddy, Kevin Pietersen and Shayne Ward. "It keeps it exciting, keeps it interesting, and I believe you stay fresh that way. But I believe ultimately, it is in your DNA – I can't help myself." Needless to say, he is not stopping. From Outside's offices halfway up London's Tottenham Court Road, Edwards has a new plan in mind: to combine global reach with 24-hour response and create a genuine worldwide media relations practice. Outside has successfully diversified before – into online PR and marketing, and photography – and its core

**ABOVE** Get the message: early press releases, fan-club publications, itineraries and letters written by Alan Edwards under the moniker Modern Publicity. As a 20-year-old PR executive, he used to hand-draw press releases "just so they didn't look like all the rest"



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CONGRATULATIONS TO  
**ALAN EDWARDS**  
ON HIS REMARKABLE CAREER!

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**SEAN "DIDDY" COMBS**

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# Features



business encompasses artist management, crisis management and a very broad definition of proactive media consultancy on behalf of artists, celebrities, sportsmen, brands and organisations alike.

"Simon Fuller said a funny thing to me quite recently," says Edwards, one-time PR handler for Fuller charges the Spice Girls and David Beckham. "He said, actually, the word PR doesn't really cover what PR is anymore. And it's true. The media has expanded to an extraordinary degree; it is a labyrinth and more than ever you need someone to point the way through it."

Once, he notes, the media stopped at Dover. But that was a very long time ago – before he formed Modern Publicity in the early 1980s as the first of his own three PR agencies, the second being Poole Edwards PR, the early-Nineties venture with Chris Poole. And long before he won The Rolling Stones' business.

"Mick Jagger said to me in 1981, 'If you can't handle Europe, you can't do the job.' Now you could plonk me in pretty well any major city, I would think, and without having to look it up, I would know roughly who the major media were, who did what."

"I can't think of a country we haven't worked, actually," he muses. "I was going to say Zimbabwe, but then I remembered we went there on tour with Norman Cook and Beats International, so we've been to Harare, too."

This worldwide perspective, gradually accumulated and now abetted by technology and a huge network of PR and media contacts, is the inspiration for Edwards' abiding international ambition.

"I have worked a lot in the States and internationally," he says. "We have got lots of clients we work internationally – P Diddy, Bon Jovi, Alice Cooper, Naomi Campbell, David Bowie, Prince at times. Just to do it in England doesn't work anymore."

"If you are not dealing with stories as they happen, within 10 or 15 minutes, they are in the public domain – you have got no influence over them. That's why my real vision is a global, 24-hour operation. That's what I really want and that's what I'm aiming towards."

In practice, that means joining the dots between a worldwide network of PRs and journalists but managing no small part of the workload from London, where Outside people can often be found still working even as the US shuts down its laptops.

"That virtual reality is with us, and that's really, really exciting, but there's an awful lot of British companies and record companies that don't see it in that bigger way, and it's a liberating experience if they can," says Edwards.

"For labels and bands, we are an incredible opportunity. I think consolidating international PR with one company gives you more control, because you are not dealing with hundreds of different people. It's simple, much more cost-effective. You get a creativity and synergy and it is so much better for the artist."

It is a big pitch, but why wouldn't he be able to pull it off? Friends and colleagues talk about a phenomenally hard-working, permanently switched-on character. The *Evening Standard* regularly considers him one of London's most influential people; Sony Music UK chairman and CEO Ged Doherty calls him "the most sensible, clear-thinking and strategic PR executive in the world"; The Who's Roger Daltrey simply describes him as "second to none. The Guv'nor". Friend and one-time business partner Dave Woolfe calls him "a legend of the music PR world. He's worked with them all and was an invaluable mentor to me – and many others I'm sure – in my early career."

"He is very driven, and he enjoys his work – you can't do business at that level without enjoying what you do," says booking agent John Giddings of Solo, a friend since the 1970s, when he and Edwards worked together on The Stranglers. "He has got natural flair for PR and for creating and generating interest in artists. He works very hard for them and he makes things happen."

These are favourable times for people who do so, Edwards contends. Citing US statistics that demonstrate the rise of PR against the advertising slowdown, he reveals he has seldom been so excited by the possibilities of his profession.

"Times of upheaval and change favour people with ideas; they favour people who take risks," he says. "It's good for the entrepreneur. What it's not good for is people who just work in systems, tick boxes because they always did it this way. That inflexibility is a disaster at times like this. The opportunities are really, really manifold and if you can spot them, it is a really, really exciting time to be in PR."

Edwards casts a long shadow, but it should not be allowed to obscure the operation he controls, and Outside has swelled its senior ranks considerably in the past year.

Diverse and high-profile signings have included former *News Of The World* figures Neil Wallis and Rav Singh, ex-Taylor Herring account director Lesley Land – who heads Outside's consumer division – and roaming brand PR man Sam Bowen, now director of strategy. Music director Chris Goodman, who joined from the *Daily Express* in 2007, also sits on the board.



"Within 10 or 15 minutes, stories are in the public domain – you have got no influence over them. That's why my real vision is a global, 24-hour operation..."

**ALAN EDWARDS**

"That's why I think we are uniquely equipped to do this sort of thing," says Edwards. "It's an orchestra, and I'm the conductor, and all day long that's what I do – put this bit with that bit to create what I hope are original rhythms and special patterns you can't get as a solo performer. As a solo artist, you have limitations. I'd just be the clarinet player or something."

By "this sort of thing", he means bringing the widest possible vision to a remit that now stretches from the *New York Post* to Twitter, quite apart from the British red-tops and broadsheets, the music monthlies and weeklies, websites and blogs.

"Music PR in the traditional sense is in some ways becoming extinct," says Edwards. "Not long ago, you could put an agency together and have 20 or 30 acts all paying a retainer and it was a very straightforward business. Financially, now, it's a nightmare because everyone's cutting back, but if you've got the nerve, this is the best time to be in PR probably in 20 years."

Where a roster that sprawls across fashion, pure celebrity, music and brands might once have seemed an unfocused one, now it seems like a sensible approach for a time when hardly any public figure represents just one thing.

"With Alice Cooper, we are dealing with everything from theme parks to an Eau de Fear fragrance he is going to launch," says Edwards. "Same with Spandau Ballet – we were involved in Gary Kemp's book deal, the DVD, the live shows. P Diddy is another example of a brand that encompasses fashion, fragrances – many,



**LEFT**  
Cover star: the man behind many a covershoot gets his own – Alan Edwards on the front of the *Sunday Times Magazine*. Although the feature was written in 2002, the photo was taken in his office in Covent Garden in the late 1970s

**BELOW**  
Edwards (second left) with TV executive Michael Grade and charity-focused band RD Crusaders (Roger Daltrey and Richard Desmond)

**BELOW LEFT**  
Modern PR: Outside's expertise takes in a raft of disciplines because music stars no longer constrain themselves to music – as P Diddy's Sean John range of fragrances and fashionwear shows

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## Outside interests How Alan Edwards weathered a media storm

Outside is still much in evidence in the music business, where clients range from UK grime entrepreneur Scorcher and psychedelic alchemists Graffiti 6 to Bon Jovi and Amy Winehouse.

Less apparent is its work in the corporate field, where its activities tend to be rather more covert.

"We don't advertise a lot of the things we do," says Edwards, who was called in by the University of East Anglia when Climategate blew up. "That was really interesting. It's very high level, and you're very much in the background on that sort of thing."

The university's Climatic Research Unit wanted Outside to fire back some shots



on the scientists' behalf after leaked emails from the unit gave climate change skeptics ammunition and led to an avalanche of negative press (left) about whether global warming was a real possibility.

"They came to us and said, 'We have a huge problem – we are being completely knocked apart in the press,'" says Sam Bowen. "They needed someone with heavyweight contacts who could come in and sort things out, and next week there was a front-page story telling it from their side."

Outside also handled PR for Northern & Shell's acquisition of TV channel Five this summer. "It is fascinating work," says Edwards. "But it's not necessarily that

visible. It stretches you."

Edwards' relationship with Northern & Shell founder and owner Richard Desmond dates back to 2002, when he introduced amateur drummer Desmond to The Who's Roger Daltrey and the two ended up forming their charitably-focused band RD Crusaders (above).

"Alan has always been, throughout this period, the driving force and a very good friend," says Desmond.

Unusually, he chose Outside in preference to a financial PR company for his purchase of the terrestrial broadcaster from RTL.

"When we bought Five, I asked Alan to handle the PR, which was the first time we had a commercial relationship," Desmond adds. "I have to say, I was delighted in the way that the team at the Outside Organisation handled it."

# Features



# KING OF THE SPICE

From playing football with Bob Marley to getting kicked off a plane mid-tour by one of the world's biggest bands, Alan Edwards has learned from the best and experienced the highs of the PR business

**OUTSIDE**  
organisation

“When I first got hired to do the Stones in 1981, I was flown to New York and Mick [Jagger] sat me down and tested me for nearly an hour on the circulation of various newspapers, who the editors were, who the owners were. It was an exam. I passed it...”

**ALAN EDWARDS**

**RIGHT**  
British buzz: Edwards described being part of the Spice Girls team that took on America as 'gigantic, exciting and wonderful'



## Interview

By Adam Woods

**Music Week: So you met your first future client while you were still at school?**

**Alan Edwards:** Well, there was a boy in my class called William Broad. He grew up to be Billy Idol and later he hired me as his PR. Even at school, I seemed to be destined for this. I left at 15 and travelled all around Asia. By about 17, I was a runner at an advertising agency and then I ended up at Spotlight, which was the publisher of *Music Week* at the time. I sold a bit of advertising space but really I wanted to get into the music side and I started reviewing bands. It was a golden era, when you could go to pretty much any decent pub in London and see a great act: The Stranglers, The Clash, Ian Dury, Dr Feelgood, Dire Straits. Every night of the week for 50p there were bands at The Hope & Anchor, The Nashville, and that's when I really started to learn the business in a practical way.

**The cuttings say legendary PR and journalist Keith Altham offered you a job while you were reviewing a Who gig in Bingley, Staffs...**

He gave me an apprenticeship. He trained me very formally, dragging me up and down Fleet Street, and I have thanked him every day since. When I joined, he was looking after the greatest acts: The Who, T Rex, Ten Years After, Eric Burdon - amazing artists. Daytimes I would be meeting people arriving in helicopters wearing fur coats and in the evening I would be in rough pubs where there were punch-ups and bottles being thrown.

**So you became a punk PR with high connections. Who were your early clients?**

In the first place, I did The Damned, Blondie, Heartbreakers, Buzzcocks. I remember taking Tony Parsons down to interview Johnny Thunders when he was at the *NME* and Johnny was so off his head - very nice guy, very talented, but a real junkie. So we started the interview over breakfast and within seconds, Johnny had thrown up over the breakfast, the tape recorder, everything. To say it was challenging was an understatement.

I probably learned the first of my tabloid skills from The Stranglers because they were in jail every week, and every other week there was a riot. It was exciting. They were banned from playing in London for two years. Can you imagine being banned from London? It was a pretty different time.

**You were there at the intersection of punk and reggae too...**

Those were all intertwined. Richard Griffiths, who was then at Island, hired me to do a band called Inner Circle in 1976 and I went out to Jamaica quite a lot. It had only been independent 14 years and the atmosphere in this place... it was an explosion of creativity. There were hundreds of great artists there and I was privileged to work with a lot of them: Bunny Wailer, Gregory Isaacs, Jimmy Cliff.

**You worked for Island in reggae's boom years - any contact with the "big one"?**

On a Chris Blackwell trip, someone said, "Do you want to come and meet Bob?" This was before he had become a megastar - probably Catch A Fire sort of time. He was big, but not yet huge. Anyway, I went with a couple of writers round

# WINNERS

to Bob's house, 56 Hope Road, wandered in the garden gate and he was playing football in the garden with a bunch of mates. We just joined in. No-one introduced us, but we had a game, and then we sat down, he had an acoustic guitar and he started doing Bobspeak, telling us his philosophy. Then that was that and we went back to the hotel, had a beer and didn't really think anything of it. Now I realise it was like a spiritual experience, something you have to remind yourself actually happened.

## How was Bob on the ball?

He was very good. He had a team. They used to play in Harlesden when he was here. At that point, the Stones had a reggae label. Peter Tosh was signed, and John Lydon and The Clash were very into reggae. It was very obvious that, culturally, it was a crossover. I used to live in Maida Vale, on the edge of Notting Hill. In 1976, I was at Carnival when it really went off. I remember a guy came up to me I knew from school with a tray of Molotov cocktails, asking if I wanted one. But the coming together of young black kids and white kids – it shaped modern Britain. Unwittingly, I was absolutely in the middle of a social thing that went beyond just music.

## Blondie were presumably your biggest act of those days – how did you come into contact with them?

I first saw them at Dingwalls when they didn't have a proper record deal and there were, I don't know, 30 people in there? Half empty on a wet Monday night. And I was a fan, so I went and knocked on the door of the dressing room after the gig. Chris Stein answered and I said, "I'd like to be your PR." And he shouted back in, "Hey Debbie, this kid wants to be our PR, whaddya think?" and she poked her head round and said, "Yeah, okay," and that's how I got the job.

And they went on to become the biggest-selling singles act in America since The Beatles, and Debbie one of the most iconic female artists.

## I gather you give a lot of credit to Mick Jagger and David Bowie for lessons they taught you in the 1980s?

Well, I have to thank certain key people for all that we have done here. Certain people like Harvey Goldsmith really helped me, [Alice Cooper manager] Shep Gordon, Keith Altham, of course, who was like a dad to me, but I am so privileged to have learned from some of the greatest PRs of all time – and the two that I think particularly are Jagger and Bowie.

When I first got hired to do the Stones in 1981, I was flown to New York and Mick sat me down and tested me for nearly an hour on the circulation of various newspapers, who the editors were, who the owners were. It was an exam. I passed it, but I was so impressed by the way he approached business.

## What in particular?

He certainly taught me about the band as a brand. He was always concerned about keeping the Stones' credibility intact, and correctly so, but as with Bowie, they were playing football stadiums, they were selling 100,000 tickets a night. You needed sponsors, you needed Volkswagen, you needed other people involved, and they intrinsically, both of them, knew how to knit it into one.

## And what about Bowie?

An incredible amount comes from him. He is a true genius. If you think about it, he's made nearly 30 movies, he's been a hit on Broadway with *The Elephant Man*, he's designed wallpaper, had a bank, trained in mime. His reach and knowledge are so broad and I learned so much. In a way, we are pretty tech here, but it was Bowie who really indoctrinated me. In the early 1990s, he used to say, "You're a Luddite, you don't get the future. All this structure is going to break..."

## What's he up to these days?

He's very, very quiet, but you never know with David. Because he's an artist, in the proper sense of the word, he works in his own rhythms. I'm sure we'll see him again and it will be an adventure. But what he won't do is deliver an album every nine months because it says so in a contract. I think he finds that way of working very dispiriting. As any proper artist should, of course.

## Didn't you work with Iggy too? Tell us an Iggy story.

I did a few good tours with Iggy. I remember one night, at the time he was doing the *Soldier* album for Arista [in 1980], he took me back to his hotel on Rathbone Place and talked to me all night about politics. He was full-on Republican, when everyone in music was liberal. We stayed up until dawn talking about Ronald Reagan and golf.

## Speaking of which, how important is stamina in all of this?

It is very important. I've seen some good PRs go out on the road and after a couple of weeks they're ill, they've got the flu, they're struggling. I run every day, I've played a lot of football. In fact, for many years, I was in the same team as Rob Stringer. He was centre-forward, I was left-back. He was a bit burly, he could get stuck in. You learn a lot about people at nine o'clock on a Sunday morning in the rain, when you are getting kicked by a load of blokes, and Rob's a really stand-up guy.

## You worked with David Beckham and Lennox Lewis. You work now with Kevin Pietersen and Freddie Ljungberg. When did you first get involved with sport?

I first repped footballers in the late 1970s. I signed Steve Foster – who was England captain – and also Steve Perryman and Gerry Armstrong. It was great for a year or two, then it turned out Foster already had a manager he had forgotten to admit, who was a pretty heavy character. The same week, Steve Perryman got jaundice and Gerry Armstrong broke his leg. The agency was finished within a week and I went back to music. I used to think, "Oh God, why did I waste time doing all those side-turns?" But, of course, years later, we represented Beckham. What I was always finding was I learned from the fashion business, learned from the sports business and brought it all together.

## Operating in various areas, has there ever been a time when PR has been the lesser part of your operation?

Early to mid-Eighties, I was doing the Stones' PR, but between tours I was out on the road with artists I was managing – The Cult, Big Country, Maxi Priest. I would be out there wondering whether The Cult had sold enough tickets to fill out the Long Beach Arena, rather than what was in the *Daily Mirror* that day. But I always pulled back to PR, with David particularly.

Actually, the thing that really kicked me back into PR was a call in 1997 from Paul Conroy, who said, "Alan, could you nip over to the office? Now?" Very unusual. I got to Virgin, there were helicopters, limos, and I realised, "Oh, it's the Spice Girls." I phoned my daughter, got her out of lessons, and asked her, "Which one's Scary, which one's Posh?"

I walked in, I've never seen so many lawyers and business people around a table, and Paul did this introduction: "This is Alan, we think he should be your PR. Over to you girls." And a voice piped up: "What kind of shoes are you wearing?" I looked under the table. "Hush Puppies." And there was this deafening silence and all these high-powered business people looked nervous, and another voice piped up: "Oh, that's alright, we can hire him then."

## What kind of job did that prove to be?

It exploded into a gigantic thing and a really, really exciting, wonderful thing. I was really in my element with



Spice and I loved it because it wasn't just music – it was music, film. It was fashion, it was very broad. And it was exciting. They weren't manufactured and you never knew what was coming next.

And also, you get a pride in it. It was a British act actually conquering America – how amazing is that? To go out to places like Miami, where they played in the open air, to 70,000 people each night for two nights. And the same in Chicago. To be on the road with a British group, the hottest group in the world, you would have to be really miserable not to get a buzz out of that. And actually, they made great pop songs.

## Now that the big structures are smaller and advertising budgets have been cut back so much, does it feel like a return to the old days in PR terms?

It's funny how this era does remind me of an era gone by, and it is great fun. I sat between Alice Cooper and Dizzee Rascal at the GQ Awards the other night, and Dizzee, not one of our clients, is great, a really smart guy, really impressive. He and Alice ended up swapping phone numbers and I love that about PR. I love and respect and admire the creative process, and I have an absolute in-built love of talking about music and creators. I always thought it was a privilege to get into it and I have maintained that sort of feeling.

## You work for Naomi Campbell, which obviously recently took you to Charles Taylor's war crimes trial. That must seem a long way from music PR?

Funnily enough, I was asked what my experience was before I took that on. I thought, well, I've been involved in most courts in London in one way or another, from So Solid Crew on one level to George Michael – we worked on that when he had his big dispute. But I thought, no, I've never done a war-crimes trial, that's a new one. Technically, it's amazingly interesting. I mean, really remarkable. It's not a laugh and it's extremely serious thing, but if you can't relish it, then you shouldn't be doing this work.

## Your own press bio mentions a band who sacked you and gave away your seat on the plane in mid-tour for allegedly favouring the singer over the guitarist. Who was that?

That was the Stones. But I didn't go home. I partly didn't go home because I was determined not to, but then I probably didn't have a home to go to. Without sounding tragic about it, in a way, rock'n'roll was my home. And it still is...

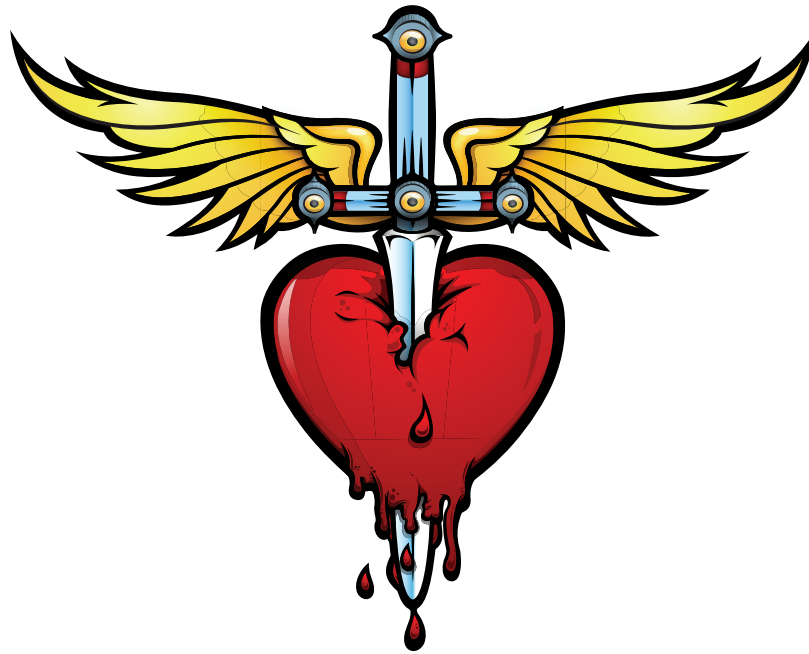
## ABOVE

Starman: David Bowie, a 'true genius' according to Edwards, woke him up to the technology revolution as early as the 1990s

## LEFT

Learning curve: Edwards' early ventures into sports PR may have seemed at the time like a waste of energy... but they later brought him business in the form of David Beckham





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**ALAN EDWARDS**

“Incredible to remember  
**40 years ago**  
you gave up a promising  
**cricketing career** as a  
**professional spin bowler...**

And yet here you are all these years later,  
**still spinning!**”

**SIMON FULLER**

**19**  
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# Features

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many things, as well as music, which, of course, is a core part of it."

Bowen sums up the approach in a different way. "It's about not looking at PR in a silo, but as a means of looking at all other opportunities," he says. "What we are trying to grow is a bunch of entrepreneurs, if you like, or certainly people who have a wider aspect of ways to communicate."

"If the person who is communicating your messages is only thinking from a linear point of view, you are missing a huge trick. What you need now is a multi-faceted team that can look at things from a brand perspective and tell you what else you can do to make any given thing relevant to consumers."

The role of Neil Wallis, formerly editor of *The People*, deputy editor of *The Sun* and, most recently, executive editor of the *News Of The World*, is to lend heavy-hitting tabloid expertise, leading some jobs, following Edwards on others.

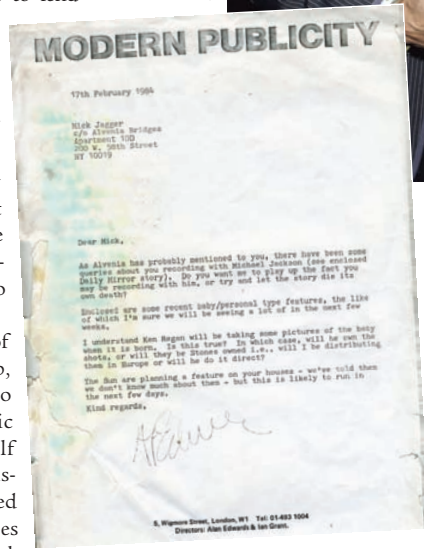
"Most of my career has been spent working at the top end of tabloid newspapers, so I know how they work and how they think," says Wallis. "This is not that different, actually. You have very creative people, you have fast-moving situations, you have to think on your feet."

Wallis led on the University of East Anglia "climategate" job, when *Outside* was drafted in to help the university's Climatic Research Unit defend itself against charges of scientific misconduct. He was heavily involved in the recent Hope For Heroes concert at Twickenham, at which



Robbie Williams and Gary Barlow reunited for wounded servicemen.

The arrival of Wallis nine months ago, in addition to Singh and Goodman, highlights *Outside's* recent taste for journalists who can cross the line into PR. Former employees of Edwards include Julian Henry, Murray Chalmers, Charlie Lycett, Matt Voss and Jonathan Morrish, music specialists all, but Edwards is not convinced



"If you want to do PR in a really meaningful way, it's your life, it's your lifestyle, it's what you do. You can't do it nine to five"

**NEIL WALLIS, OUTSIDE ORGANISATION**

the music business makes them like it used to.

It gives him no particular pleasure to look around and see few PRs emerging from the music industry who he feels are capable of delivering the goods across such a spread of media or clients.

"Everyone thinks they want to do it, but you have to live it to really do it," he says. "If you want to do PR in a really meaningful way, it's your life, it's your lifestyle, it's what you do. You can't do it as a nine to five. Most of my best stuff will be done in a bar or at the end of a gig. That's when you can think and get things done. A lot of PRs would probably learn from chucking the BlackBerry away now and again, certainly for a day or so a week."

Warming to his theme, Edwards finds himself shaping a complete definition of the art of PR. "The real skill of this job is to tell a story, create the interest, control the interest, sometimes to kill a story off. But the techniques are very, very simple: imagination, telling a story, telling it with fun, humour if you can work it out, and keep telling it. Also, don't think you can send out 500 emails with the same thing on each of them."

One problem, he suggests, with a nod to the apprenticeship he served under veteran PR and journalist Keith Altham, is what he perceives as today's lack of training.

"It comes from the business being so compartmentalised," he says. "In the Eighties and Nineties, some of the independents got swallowed up, the money flowed in through CDs and so forth, and the whole thing became so big and business-oriented that all the differ-

**LEFT**  
Written in stone: a letter from Edwards to Mick Jagger in 1984 offering some PR advice and (centre) with Rolling Stones guitarist Ronnie Wood

## Britain's Most Powerful Combination



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Are proud to congratulate Alan on celebrating  
**100 years in the music industry!**



# AEG LIVE CONGRATULATE ALAN EDWARDS ON 30 YEARS OF BEING THE BEST



'I used to believe what I read in the newspapers, until I met you Alan. From Big Country to Spice to David, we had some of the best times, some of which are not repeatable, and thank god YouTube didn't exist at the time....

You have helped me in my career, advised me when I didn't know what to do (which has been quite often) and gone beyond the call of duty for me when asked.

That said, you are a shit golfer, and far too good looking to hang out with on a regular basis, but I still love you!

John, and all at Solo



# Features

ent functions were broken up and started to work in isolation. I think that was a disaster and a bad turning for PR to take because it should all be connected."

As the longest-serving PR in the music business, Edwards is more than entitled to his opinion. Outside has also earned the right to capitalise in an online world as the first of its kind to spot the direction in which the future was heading. Outside Line, now independent, was an Outside offshoot when it launched in 2000, mapped out by Edwards and co-founder Ant Cauchi while the latter was creating a website for Beverley Knight, whom Edwards has long managed.

David Bowie, he says, was the first to hammer home to him the importance of digital media, back in the early Nineties and Edwards views the possibilities with genuine excitement, right down to the adult-estranging world of Twitter. Speaking in the days after cricketer Kevin Pietersen got a slap on the wrist for tweeting out of turn, Edwards does not waver in his enthusiasm for micro-blogging.

"It is a really tricky one because so many clients do it and it makes it hard, but it can be a fantastic opportunity," he says. "There's many examples where what seems like a disaster at the time has actually enhanced and made them more interesting, made them more 3D."

Surely, one suggests, there must be times when even a patient PR of more than 35 years' service gets a call about an errant client and has to suppress an urge to simply bury his head in his hands.

"I suppose sometimes I'll groan," says Edwards, not



very obviously meaning it. "But really I feel a bit like Sherlock Holmes sitting in 221B Baker Street - 'the game's afoot, Watson'. I'd be a liar if I said there wasn't a thrill of the chase. It can be pretty intense."

Never more so than when the relatively straightforward job of PR-ing Michael Jackson's O2 comeback on behalf of AEG Live suddenly became a case of managing the publicity surrounding the singer's untimely demise.

"When I got that call, it was my only early night of the year," says Edwards. "I was just about to get into bed, the phone rang and it was [The Sun's showbiz editor] Gordon [Smart] and he said, 'Michael Jackson has been in this accident, looks like he's dead.'"

"I actually thought at first he was kidding, so I switched on the news, and within seconds, that's it, there's nothing else in your life. I thought, you know what, I'm just going to go and reopen the office. It was 10 or 11 o'clock at night, quite a lot of our team were out around the West End, and that's what we did. The office lights burned through the night on Tottenham Court Road."

Such stories do not wait until the morning, but they do play to Outside's strengths: stamina, level-headedness, the love of a challenge.

Edwards, incidentally, credits long-serving PA Sarah Bedford and her support team as his rock in times of media madness.

"It's all-enveloping, let's face it," he says. "It's fascinating, it challenges you, but you have to accept that nothing's going to be normal. And it might be a day, three days, a week - it depends what crisis it is and how long it



lasts, but while it does, there is actually nothing else in your life. You wake up with it in your mind, you go to sleep with it in your mind."

What is quite clear is that Edwards has surrendered himself entirely to the endless media cut-and-thrust, in all its ever-changing glory. The same man who, as a 20-year-old PR executive, used to hand-draw press-releases "just so they didn't look like all the rest" and has filled dozens of scrapbooks with a career's worth of memorabilia, still relaxes by writing an artist bio. Alan Edwards is in this for life, and he freely admits it.

"I was having dinner with Dylan Jones earlier this year," he says. "It was one of those 11 o'clock-at-night moments when you are on the second bottle of wine, chewing on the meaning of life. And he said to me, 'You know, I love my job, it's just so interesting. People like us, we'll probably do this until we drop off our perch.' And I thought, you know what? Yeah. Why not?"



**ABOVE**  
Lord of the dance: Edwards handled publicity for Spandau Ballet and the band's prime mover Gary Kemp's book

*Alan,*

*Wishing you many more years of continued success.*

*Congratulations and warmest regards.*

*Harvey Goldsmith CBE and all at APM*

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