

## **Goodbye to all that**

**31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 – Last Day at Reach**

Today brings to an end something which began on a far-off Monday back in November 1995 when a nervous twenty-one year old, with an enviable salary of £8995, arrived for their first day's employment as an Administrator on the Compaq account. I remember thinking that this was a fortune - until I realised you had to pay tax!

Trying to condense 16 years into a few minutes is a little like trying to fit Niagara Falls into a milk jug.

I could talk for ages about people from the past that hardly anyone would ever have heard about. I could speak of former managers - the good, the bad and the ugly, (but Jonathon Beever isn't here!) but it would mean nothing to you. I could hark back to the halcyon days of Aspen Field Marketing and talk of Major Dick Festorazzi and the day email arrived in 1997. But I won't. Let's come a little more up to date...

I moved onto the Vodafone account in May 1999, some four months before I was due to be married. My final day in the office before my wedding also happened to be the day of the yearly Aspen Conference which was taking place up the road at the Runnymede Hotel.

Picture the scene, if you will, probably 200 people, including clients, seated in a room listening to various presentations. With the close proximity of my wedding to the conference date, someone had seen fit to add a slot into the agenda, presumably to break up the dull presentations, with a bit of light relief and present me with a wedding gift - a lovely gesture.

Accordingly, someone pressed a button to bring up on the big screen a photo of me and my bride-to-be trying to look natural while positioned, fully-clothed, I should add, in a field of oilseed rape! Much mirth and hilarity ensued. I was announced and asked to come up on stage, the applause broke out and...I never heard any of it because I was 10 miles up the road at the office carefully putting the finishing touches to 'The Phil Bray Honeymoon Survival Guide'. I'd like to publically apologise for any embarrassment caused.

I've had an amazing time on the VMS account: I've stood in tights outside the Hilton in Warwick and had my photo taken there by Japanese tourists, I've spent 8 hours in a car travelling back from Crick to Maidenhead in a blizzard, I've watched Ramon Santos apply grease paint and emerge from the gents dressed as David Dickinson, I've phoned my boss to tell him that I might be a little late to our national meeting as I'd just put unleaded petrol into my diesel pool car, I've watched a firework in the shape of a Vodafone SIM card logo burn through in 15 seconds that cost £1500 to produce! I've driven go-karts, I've built sledges and raced them down a slope, I've shot clays, I've shot arrows and driven blindfolded, I've eaten medieval banquets and listened to performing minstrels, I've performed karaoke, I've helped solve murder mysteries and stayed in haunted hotels. Occasionally I found time to do some work too!

It's not all been plain sailing of course, on Vodafone we had more than our share of restructures over the years. When I first started, we had almost 60 people in the field and at one point had 10 people working on the Vodafone account at Head Office. They were fun times. Now, as we reach the end of our time with Reach, we're down to a team of 10 field reps.

The past few weeks have been tough in many ways as well. I've had to say goodbye to some amazing people who I've worked with for many years. Those of us going over to Newbury now move on to another new chapter in the Vodafone adventure. The people who know me well realise that I don't enjoy change. Recently, I've had to come to terms with lots of changes, firstly in my personal life and latterly in my work life as well. I'm learning all the time. Sometimes, change can be a good thing in the long run.

What will I miss most about my time with Reach? That's an easy one to answer - the people! I have worked with some fantastic people over the years and they've made my time here simply the most fun imaginable. There are not many jobs where you look forward to coming to work each day, but this has been my experience here. I'd like to thank Reach, and particularly Gary, Katie and Colin for their loyalty and trust in me over the years too.

Just five individuals I'd like to pick out - Ben Duffy - Ben has been a great friend of mine since he joined the Vodafone account a few years back and we've been through a lot together. His knowledge of capital cities of the world as well as his unique hairstyle and fondness for male grooming products will linger long in my memory after I leave. I'll miss you mate.

Laura Peters - When she first joined, she immediately had to accept the nickname 'Henders' purely because she happened to occupy the desk previously used by Richard Henderson. We've had our differences over the years but there is no more loyal a friend you could ask for and sitting opposite her has been a privilege and a joy. Keep those tears back now!

The Ginger Boy - Stuart Herrington. What can I say? An absolute diamond. Stuart was one of the pioneers of the Woking Circuit - my daily walk around the shopping centres of Woking - and we've spent many happy hours plodding along just chatting - he never realised I only did it to try and help him shift some of those spare pounds! Joking aside, he's a very 'genuine' and funny person who has been a great mate over the years and I'm ever grateful for his wise counsel. Cheers matey!

Sam Underhill - I've got to know Sam well over the last couple of years and we're actually very similar in many ways - we both have a similar eye for detail and at one point talked of setting up the Reach Design Department to oversee and standardise all of Reach's presentations and documentation - over to you now, mate. He's a top man who will go far and I'm privileged to count him as a mate - just don't talk about his hair!

Finally Tiffany Rudd - what a fantastic and loyal friend to have - Sam, you keep hold of her! We've had such fun and so many laughs over the years and I'll miss you loads. Your often saucy humour struck a chord with my own and made each day memorable for the silliest things. Thanks for all the memories and for just being you - a true friend. Keep smiling!

These five, along with the wider supporting cast of you all, others that have gone before you and the VMS team in all its guises have made my job the most fun I could ever have wished for and I'm going to miss you all hugely. I may now have a job with Vodafone but I'll never forget my time with Reach and what got me there in the first place.

So my time is almost up, and I promised myself I wouldn't cry today. I'm still the reigning Reach 'Joker of the Year' so it would be a shame to go out with anything other than a smile.

Perhaps I'll close with a final link to Vodafone: in 1985, Ernie Wise made the first mobile phone call in the UK - on the Vodafone network. He also sang this:

*Bring me sunshine  
In your smile  
Bring me laughter  
All the while  
In this world where we live  
There should be more happiness  
So much joy you can give to each brand new bright tomorrow  
Make me happy  
Through the years  
Never bring me  
any tears  
Let your arms be as warm  
as the sun from up above  
Bring me fun, bring me sunshine, bring me love, sweet love  
Bring me fun, bring me sunshine, bring me lo-ove! Yeah!*

Thank you very much!