



Jo Weaver

PRESENTATION FOR
UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

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OVERVIEW

- One of the leading PR and marketing agencies in the Czech and Slovak Republics
- Founded in 1991 by Jo Weaver
- Experienced with both multinational corporations and smaller local companies
- Specialists in business-to-business, travel, hospitality, financial, sport and environmental PR

TEAM

- The team is headed by Jo Weaver, who has run numerous major PR and marketing campaigns for many of the Czech and Slovak Republics' biggest foreign investors over the past twenty one years.
- Today JWA has a team of 10: six Czechs, two Slovaks, one Canadian and a British Managing Director. Between them they offer fluent language skills in Czech, Slovak, English, French and Spanish, which results in the agency being in demand from companies from all over Europe.

MARKETING EXPERTISE

JWA combines extensive knowledge of the Central European market with western experience and marketing expertise

EXCELLENT CONTACTS

JWA has excellent contacts in the media, political sport, music and TV worlds

LANGUAGE SKILLS

Superior English, Czech, Slovak, French, German and Spanish speaking and writing skills

ENORMOUS ATTENTION TO DETAIL

JWA staff is extremely 'hands-on' and is trained to ensure that every detail is covered

REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

JWA Prague enjoys an unparalleled reputation for excellence throughout the Czech and Slovak Republics



Demonstrated PR & Marketing Expertise

Why Prague and why am I here?

- * I arrived in Prague in the winter of 1990, just shortly after the country had its 'Velvet Revolution' –changing from communism to a market economy. At that time it was known as Czechoslovakia
- * I was (am still) sports mad and the only reason I agreed to come here was because I had watched the Velka Pardubicka horse race and knew of the great Czech tennis champions – Ivan Lendl, Martina Navratilova and others
- * After six months I made my first friend, and decided to stay for another six months.
- * By the end of that first year, I had decided to stay put and set up on my own – mostly due to my friends encouraging me and my then boss pretty much telling me that he wouldn't allow me to stay.
- * I started the process of setting up the company JWA Prague s.r.o. (the equivalent of a private limited company in the UK) in January, 1991. It took two years to register it, so until then I operated as myself, a sole trader, with one employee.
- * My first office was in my then flat, and my first employee was a former model, seventeen years old, and a bit crazy. That made two of us. She is now the director of a major international company here.
- * We started life saying that we were a PR agency, but soon changed that to a full service marketing agency due to the perception of PR at that time.

Prague and the Czech Republic in 1991

- * When I arrived in Prague, there were just 50 international phone lines.
- * Choice of apartment or office was incredibly limited – no-one was able to own property in the bad old days, so until some of the state-owned property was sold off and developed, or deals were done underground, there was nothing really available. And what there was, was not really what we were used to!
- * In addition to the problem with finding somewhere to live and/or work, whatever was chosen needed to have an external phone line as the waiting list for one was more than 2 years.
- * Computers appeared many years later. We corresponded with the outside world by phone (limited) and/or fax machine – which I had to bring from the UK – both working from the same phone line.
- * Few people spoke anything except Czech – if they knew another language at all, it was mostly Russian, and a few of the older Czechs spoke some German.
- * Anyone that had worked under the old regime was, to a western company, more or less unemployable. We employed kids.
- * General, normal life was difficult!

Prague and the Czech Republic in 2015

- * We rarely use landlines any more. Has anyone met anyone that doesn't have a mobile phone now?
- * Over the past 25 years, properties have been restituted, sold off, re-developed, etc. There are more new office buildings and residential apartments than there is demand, with many more being built.
- * Majority of the expats that have been here for any length of time have been able to buy their own property – particularly in the early days, apartments, in particular, cost a fraction of what they would cost in any other European city.
- * The Czech Republic has the highest per capita ownership of home computers in Europe!
- * Nearly everyone under the age of 25, particularly in Prague, speaks English well, if not fluently, and many speak more than one other language – German, Spanish, French – all are widely spoken.
- * We still employ much younger people than we probably would at home, but those young people – let's say up to the age of 30 – are as skilled and experienced as anyone of their age elsewhere.
- * Generally, most expats have a significantly higher quality of life than they would living back in their own countries.

The Early Days – the Good Things

- * We specialized in marketing and PR – mostly for incoming foreign investors – which were plentiful, and no-one else knew a thing about either of these disciplines!
- * We ourselves didn't do any marketing! We got our clients purely from word of mouth and despite the fact that neither I nor my first assistant (and others in time) knew that much about marketing and PR (we did learn!) we were in huge demand because we spoke and understood the language of the international businesses entering the market.
- * Our first big client gave me my biggest experience and taught me a lot – good things (how to do the job) and bad things (not to put all the eggs in one basket!).
- * Prague is a little village, and we all knew each other - and because of the nature of the beast we tried to give each other work and support as much as we could
- * The cost of setting up a business and running it was a fraction of what it would cost elsewhere – rent, staff, transport, etc.
- * There was so little competition, that even something done not that well was better than something that wasn't done at all!
- * We lived life to the full, at a very low cost!

The Early Days – the Bad Things

- * We didn't know that much about marketing and PR, but we knew more than most people here. Despite that, most of the people we dealt with thought they knew more!
- * Building a business by word-of-mouth can only last so long. We soon learned to practice what we preached!
- * Being chosen to work for a company because we speak the same language only lasted as long as the person that chose us stayed in the job! And whilst Czechs are obsessed with contracts, they also don't mind cancelling them at a drop of a hat since there is nothing much that we can do about it!
- * Expats are transient creatures and great friendships are difficult to maintain when the person is no longer living in the same country. More so great working relationships!
- * Because everyone knew that the cost of setting up a business and running it was a fraction of what it would cost elsewhere, they also believe that fees should be a fraction of what they would be elsewhere – even though the work was way more complicated.
- * Competition, I soon learned, is not necessarily a bad thing. When there are more companies putting out the messages that you want to put out, the message becomes easier understood. But relying on word-of-mouth didn't last too long, and we had to learn to market ourselves!
- * We all lived a great social life. But for a woman in a man's world, life was not always as much fun as we liked to say it was.

How has the business environment changed – in general?

- * As mentioned before, the whole method of working and life in general here in the CR is completely different to how it was 25 years ago, due, if nothing else, to the new technology.
- * Bureaucracy still exists, but basic business things have improved – setting up a company can take less than a day, the accounting system is easier; for EU members, in particular, we can come and go as we please – no more residence permits and visas
- * Most international companies that were interested in the Czech market have been and stayed or been and gone, and only now, after about 7 years, are we seeing new companies entering the market. In certain areas (the service industry, in particular) there are still fantastic opportunities
- * Corruption is still rife – rarely a day goes by without us hearing either in the media, or in person, yet another story of high level or even just day-to-day corruption
- * The change in mentality and ways of working that we expected to change within a few years after the fall of Communism era are still a long way off – we believe that it will be another generation before we really see a complete turnaround
- * The ongoing power of the 'five families' can sometimes make one feel slightly uneasy at the direction that the country might take
- * Other

How has the business environment changed – for us?

- * Most of us that started business in the early 90s saw an ongoing upward curve to our businesses – until the financial crisis of 2008. At that point, lots of ‘bad’ companies went under and I believe that, in the service industry in particular, only the ‘strong survived’.
- * Our quality of life is exceptional, particularly compared with the early 90s.
- * Our business life is not as straightforward. Most international companies (our potential clients) that were interested in the Czech market have been and stayed or been and gone, and only now, after about 7 years, are we seeing new companies entering the market. To keep building the business (any business) we need to focus more on the locals, and that is difficult
- * Whilst we had managed to persuade some local companies that marketing and PR were important, these were the first things that most companies slashed when the financial crisis hit. Now companies want to start doing it. But for minimum fees.
- * As mentioned before, the whole method of working and life in general is completely different to how it was 25 years ago, due, if nothing else, to the new technology. Imagine how it is for a marketing PR agency?!

THANK YOU!



Thank you for your attention

Any questions?

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