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PR experts warn against exploiting royal links

Julia Day
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Mark Bolland's decision to quit as one of Prince Charles's most trusted aides could be fraught with danger, according to top PR experts.



Charles: losing another key members of press team

Mr Bolland's uniquely close relationship with the Prince of Wales will attract plenty of potential clients but could equally land him in hot water, claim the experts.

His work will be the subject of intense media scrutiny as journalists seek to uncover any hint of undue royal favour being bestowed upon his clients.

And the fact Mr Bolland has become the subject of national news stories breaks the first rule of PR: do not become the story.

Ian Monk, a former Daily Mail news editor and now a director of the public and media relations agency, MacLaurin, said Mr Bolland's high profile could deter as many potential clients as it attracts.

"Obviously Mark's first - and principal - client will remain Prince Charles. The prince will now be able to retain him as an independent consultant, free of the restraints of the politicking that was instigated by the courtiers who were jealous of Mark's influence," said Mr Monk.

"At the moment, the perception is that Mark walks on water.

"He has achieved a phenomenal result in converting Charles and Camilla from figures of hate in the months following Diana's death to their current status.

"This - plus the cachet of having Prince Charles's PR working for you - will bring in potential clients from all sectors."



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But Mr Monk added: "The danger is Mark is rapidly becoming the story.

"His own profile is becoming too high through the relationships he has assiduously courted with editors and the deals he does with them.

"No client wants a PR who gets more headlines than they do."

As a former director of the press complaints commission and Prince Charles's key aide for the past six years, Mr Bolland has built up a formidable network of contacts - and can get through to editors when it counts.

James Herring, the founder of the media and celebrity PR firm, Taylor Herring, advised Mr Bolland to pick his clients carefully because many would only be interested in using him to get close to the royal family.

In last year's "Sophiegate" scandal, the Countess of Wessex was accused of abusing her position in order secure royal endorsements for the clients of her PR company, R-JH.

"He should be cautious of those clients who want to get bit of royal kudos by osmosis - and he will need to beware of those wolves in sheikhs clothing," said Mr Herring, referring to the News of the World journalist who posed as a wealthy Arab to expose the countess's PR practices.

"When most people launch their own company, they are lucky to get a couple of lines in the trade press. But this has been a major national news story. It will be a miracle if his phone stops ringing," Mr Herring added.

According to Will Paget, the founder of Paget Baker Associates, Mr Bolland's client list is likely to comprise high-profile celebrities, whose damaged reputations need fixing.

"Celebrities with husband or wife problems, people who want to be presented to the public as a wonderful person, like Charles, will gravitate towards him," said Mr Paget.

Blue-chip corporations that rely on royal patronage and international business will also be interested in securing Mr Bolland's services, Mr Paget added.

Ann Mealor, the assistant director of the Institute of Public Relations, sounded a note of caution.

Her organisation expelled Murray Harkin, the Countess of Wessex's partner in R-JH, in the wake of the Sophiegate revelations.

"Mr Bolland's weakness is that he has worked in a narrow field. Bearing in mind the Countess of Wessex, there will always be people seeking out the appearance of favouritism or playing on connections even when they don't exist," Ms Mealor warned.

"He would be best advised to take a relatively low profile, as

the best public relations people do," she added.

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