

Ben Page

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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of extended one-to-one interviews with people at the very top of their game. I'm delighted to welcome Ben Page, CEO of Ipsos MORI, the leading research company, currently with 1,100 staff here in the UK and 15,000 around the world. He joined MORI straight from university, aged just 22, rose up the ranks and led the management buyout in 2000. He is a member of the advisory board of the King's Fund, the IPPR and the Social Market Foundation, and is a frequent speaker and writer on society, consumer trends, politics and public services. As well as many global corporate clients, he has worked with presidents and prime ministers around the world. Named one of the 100 most influential people in the public sector, Ben is a frequent guest on the BBC and Sky News, and often pops up on such shows as the Today Programme and Newsnight.

Ben, thank you for coming in.

Good evening.

I've got massive impostor syndrome reading that! I feel like a complete loser already.

I think everything's relative, to be honest! I look at that and think, "Blimey – why aren't I CEO of a bigger company?"

Is that next?

Who knows? No, I like what I do and I think I'm enormously privileged to lead a big team of people who are really interested about what makes people tick and humanity tick, and although human beings are prone to post-hoc rationalisation, it's one of our brain's gentle little flaws... I studied history at university, and I think it's great to be in charge of an organisation that looks at virtually every aspect of why we do what we do, and why people are like they are. I think it's endlessly fascinating. My motto is that the proper study of mankind is man, and that's what I do.

And it sounds incredibly fascinating. Give us a few eyebrow-raisers.

Gosh, there are so many, and some of them I can't talk about! One of the most interesting, or strange, things I ever did was to fly down to the Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic on behalf of the Argentinian government with a number of colleagues, and go around knocking on doors – this is about 20 years ago – knocking door to door in the Falkland Islands to survey them about how much it would take for them to renounce their sovereignty and become Argentinian!

In terms of cash?

The Argentinians were offering £1m each per head to sign up to Argentinian sovereignty.

Wow. I would have done that, I mean, I've got incredibly strong principles, but I will set them aside the minute someone opens a chequebook!

It was an interesting trip, and they were pretty certain they didn't want to become Argentinian.

Even for a million?

Even for a million. Although, subsequently, some of them told me back here, because afterwards they hired me to look at their reputation in Britain and how the British people felt about the Falklands sovereignty and self-determination, but actually a million quid a head wasn't bad, but they weren't sure the Argies would actually pay up, that was how they put it.

Oh, I see.

Anyway, they're fiercely patriotic, and when you're down there it does to me, anyway, coming from Devon, it felt like being in the middle of Dartmoor, with slightly strange accents.

I can imagine! Well, with our appetites whetted, let me try and regain some structure to this! I just wanted to start right at the beginning, if I could. You left university aged 22 and then went straight in there as a trainee?

No – I studied history, and it was the early 1980s, and there was a lot of unemployment, and our surveys showed how worried people were about it, and I remember when I got into Oxford, just being delighted, knowing that I'd got into Oxford, not because I thought I was going to have any glittering career, but because I'd probably be able to get a job – because youth unemployment and unemployment generally was so bad at that point. And then during university I was fairly rebellious, I didn't do any of the conventional Oxford things, I overlapped with various politicians

like the Milibands and Boris Johnson and people like that, and I didn't join the Oxford Union. I ran a nightclub, and...

Was that a way to meet women?

That sort of thing. I had a great time doing that, and reading lots of interesting books, and doing history, which I have never regretted doing – but when I finished, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I knew I didn't want to be a lawyer, I didn't want to be a CEO – I didn't particularly – I didn't want to be an accountant, there were just lots of things I knew I didn't want to do, and I think I thought I would go into broadcasting, the media or write a great novel. Anyway, I got to London... I also thought I would run a nightclub in London and make lots of money and have fun. Anyway, I got to London and found out there was more competition for nightclubs than there was in Oxford, and it was pretty difficult to sign on. It was pretty difficult to sign on. Someone had attacked the Brixton benefit office with an axe – and this was before computers were widely used in benefits administration – so they were re-routing the claims by post to the Elephant and Castle benefit office, and at this point I figured I'd better get a job, because there was clearly no way I was getting any unemployment benefit, or anything else. So I looked in the back pages of Time Out and took the first job I could find, which was interviewing people on the telephone for a market research company in Oxford Street, and they were something that subsequently became part of the largest ones now, which is called GFK, and I did this, I worked at this place for about six or seven months or so, and I still didn't know what I wanted to do, but I thought I had better join a graduate training scheme, so I applied to the MORI, as it then was, graduate training scheme, and I joined in June 1987. I thought I would stay a couple of years and then do something else.

As we all do!

Well, I stayed there, and I obviously learnt about it, and it's an interesting company, and it's endlessly fascinating, you know, dealing with senior politicians, major companies, government, gradually seeing how the world works, and I carried on doing that, I did that all through my 20s and I got promoted, but it was really only when I was about 30 and I'd had my son, Horace, who I hope is listening...

He will be forced to!

... and at that point I thought, "God, I'm really not going to write a great novel. I need to do something." And I was sort of casting around... so I'd done sort of eight years of survey research...

How old were you at this point?

I was about 30. I started when I was 22, so this was eight years in. But I suddenly realised that unless I did something dramatic, I'm going to have to stick at this – because any change in career would mean earning less money, and we were pretty skint, had a young son and a big mortgage, and I think at that point I made a mental decision not just to be a good market researcher, or a good survey researcher, which is what I probably was, but to be an excellent one – and I also thought about what I was good at, which isn't necessarily administration and bureaucracy – in fact, I'm useless at that.

Me too.

So I found... I gradually got a team of people around me who were good at things like that, and I focused on what I am good at, which is communicating about what things mean, and thinking about what things mean. And after I focused, then we got involved in the management buy-out, and we... you know, I developed a profile in the public sector and various other things, and then my career sort of took off, I suppose. And I suppose it's an interesting point about really deciding to be very good at something. Because there's a survey that we do of the chief execs of FTSE100 companies every year, and a few years ago we asked them, "What would be your advice to a young executive starting out in business?"

That's one of the questions I have here for you.

Well, I'll talk about my advice, but what was interesting with them was, there's lots of stuff about getting plenty of international experience, speak a foreign language, learn to listen to people, empathy, experience all parts of the business, but they give one piece of advice, which is more common from them than any other by a country mile, and that is to work hard, go the extra mile – and it was only after I became really focused and determined – and I had been working hard, all right, but being really focused –

You've got to be a grafter.

Well, yes – but it's not about grafting without purpose. So it's grafting with purpose. If you just sit there digging holes you're not going to go very far. But it was then that I became promoted, and you know, success breeds success, you know. Napoleon said he wanted all generals to march with a battle in their pocket, or whatever it was, but it was after... you know, you can make your own luck. And when I did that, things sort of turned out reasonably well.

Congratulations on your success!

Well, I don't know about that... but it's an interesting... I think it's this point about focus, and everybody says it, but it's interesting that it's the bleeding obvious, but we don't always do the bleeding obvious for lots of reasons.

I'm reasonably successful in my trade as well, but I've often found that standards are so low in anything these days, you can actually get ahead by not being poor, not being crap, as it were – and that differentiates you in the market place straight away. But I think you can tell, if someone has that spark of hard work of determination and focus, those are the people that you need to snap up. How do you do that in your organisation? How do you find and retain that talent, given how many staff you've got? It must be difficult.

Well, we're focused, obviously, on trying to recruit clever people to start with, and hard-working people, so we've got an assessment process where we're looking at people's aptitude... our industry is slightly difficult because you need attention to detail – if you produce a whole load of numbers and you've made some mistakes, and the numbers are all wrong, it's not very helpful to anybody who is paying for a survey or a study. So you do need attention to detail, but you also need imagination and effective communication skills, because if the answer's 42 and you just keep saying, "The answer's 42," it's not very engaging. So you need to understand how to edit information and how to find the nuggets out of masses of stuff, and actually that's one thing for me, from studying history, you have to read dozens and dozens of books and then work out what the argument is, what's the evidence – that has stood me in good stead. So we're looking for people who are good academically, able to handle stress, and then it's about training people so they learn the skills of survey research and about statistics and survey design and qualitative research and analysis, and then a lot of it to be honest seems to come down a bit to personality; the people who want to lead relationships with clients, who want to get out there and sell work – we're a private sector company, if we don't sell work we haven't got any money – so we need people who are good communicators. And we can cultivate some of those skills, but I think some of them are, to a certain extent, innate.

What do clients come to you for? Are they looking for you to tell them things they don't already know, or are they looking to have their insight confirmed?

They want reliable information about how many people read a particular newspaper or listen to a radio show. They want reliable information about how consumers might react to a new pack design for some cosmetics or some new products – one of my businesses looks at new product development. They want to know... if you're the government, you want to know, if we do this policy and offer people money up front on top of their pensions if they pay in extra early, will they take it? So it's a huge range of things about human attitudes and behaviours, all of those things – but essentially, if they already know the answer, then most of the time they are not likely

to want to do the research unless it's perhaps for PR purposes, where they want to demonstrate that public opinion is on their side.

They say there are two things you should never see being made – laws and sausages. And I wonder when you deal with legislators and politicians, do they have an idea of a policy and they want you to test it with the public, or do they go in the Tony Blair way and say, “Let’s listen to the public first and then do what they want us to do.”

Well, it's both – and to be honest, a lot of policies are created with relatively little input from research or anything else, because it's what people believe is the right thing to do. But no, sometimes it will be, “We'd really like to do this,” or, in fact, “We are determined to do this, because we believe it's the right thing to do, but we want to just check on presentation, or what's the best way to communicate it to the public?” In other times, there are some different policy options, which of these are most attractive or acceptable to the public? So it really will depend on the situation.

How does it work in terms of do you have any conflicts of interest? Does Boris come to you and test a message on the Wednesday and then Ed Miliband on the Thursday, and then you think, “Well, I can't quite say to either of you what the other said.”

We do work for a range of organisations who aren't always on the same side – and I think the point here is about being completely professional, and also ensuring you've got separate teams who aren't sharing information with each other about those projects. So if you're a doctor, you can work for both sides, in a sense, in a war – it's about making them well. I think if it's very bitter, you probably wouldn't want to, in some sort of debate or competition, you wouldn't necessarily want to do it – but most of the time, it's actually beneficial because the more you know about, say, a category, the more helpful you can be to all of the people in that – but you're obviously not going to be sharing information between clients, or having the same people working on competing accounts. I mean, if nothing else, that's hard to do.

It's common sense really.

So we have very strict protocols about that sort of thing, and about client confidentiality, and to be honest, it's very, very rarely a problem.

Could you tell me about the business as it is today?

Well, MORI, which is the business that I originally joined, and we did a management buyout in 2000, we then went on to sell it to a French PLC founded by a man called Didier Truchot, who is now my boss in Paris, which is one of the biggest survey research organisations in the world, and that is... we're in 86 countries, I'm now

responsible for Britain and Ireland, so I've stayed on after the (earn out? 13:24) phase of our management buyout etc. And we've got six divisions, so we've got a business that works for government and is all about politics and policy, although political opinion polling is a tiny part of what we do, we've got a business looking at media, so we collect the data for Britain on radio listening, TV watching, newspaper readership, as well as looking at how do people use computer games and tablets and new technology; we've got a business that's all about advertising testing, and then tracking, so what's the best execution if you've got this idea for an ad, and then does it actually work when it's out there, being used, and what impact does it have on people's purchases, we've got another business that looks at product development and innovation, segmentation, I've got a pharmaceutical business that looks at people's attitudes, pharmacists' attitudes and doctors' attitudes to drugs and new treatments, patients' attitudes to them... there's more, do you want more?!

Yes, please! It's fascinating.

There's a business that looks at customer loyalty, so we'll work for airlines and banks, how is customer experience for them, what's it like to... employee business, we work for airlines, banks, all sorts of companies, service companies on what's it like to be employed there, how attractive are we as an employer, what can we do to make employees more motivated etc.... I've got a business that looks at the corporate reputation of big brands as a whole, so overall how does company x compare, when legislators around the world are looking at it, with company y.

Is there any customer loyalty these days? I mean, if I need to fly somewhere I might go Ryanair, I might go EasyJet, it all depends on the price, really.

It depends, but yes, there is. Customer loyalty isn't dead, and people will repeatedly choose one airline over another, or one hotel group over another, so yes, often... it may be that they are choosing it because it's consistently the cheapest, but they are still loyal to it on one dimension or another. I choose Ocado to do my shopping, partly because it's because I'm lazy and can't be bothered to try lots of others, and because the website works really well and it's very easy, so I'm pretty loyal to Ocado. So there's all sorts of reasons for it, and I think that's the point; understanding what makes your different customers tick, and also a key point, if you're talking about loyalty very briefly, there's also this point about profitable loyalty – there's no point in having all these customers who are very loyal to you but cost a fortune to service, which you can end up with in banking – you've got to try and make the people who are profitable for both you and hopefully to them in terms of their relationship with you, and get them to be loyal.

We mentioned one of the eyebrow-raisers that you mentioned in the beginning, but in terms of... is your day-to-day job constantly looking and raising eyebrows and thinking, "Wow, that's new, I didn't realise that."

Well, we're publishing information all the time – every month we will publish 30 or 40 different surveys, some more unusual than others. We've just done our first global trend study looking at about 200 questions in 20 different countries, so who are the most sexist people in the world? Well, certainly out of the 20 countries who we have surveyed, it appears to be the Russians, which was interesting. I don't know, it's fascinating. I mean, what do the Japanese, the French and the South Koreans have in common? They are the people who are least likely to agree that humanity has more in common than divides it. Everybody else all over the world agrees that we do, except the French and the Japanese! They're different in different ways – the Japanese are quite isolated, and maybe the French are still slightly chauvinistic, and think they are very special – maybe they are. I mean, the point is, there are interesting findings all the time, you know, and what's fascinating to one person is not to another – but no, there's endlessly interesting stuff. Politics is something that we get a lot of media coverage on; it's about 90% of the media coverage we get, but it's only actually about 0.1% or even 0.01% of our business – it's tiny.

So do you almost do it as a loss leader?

It's a bit like Formula 1 cars. I don't think Ferrari make any money out of Formula 1 cars, but they do it because they learn things...

Brand recognition.

... and it's partly sort of history and heritage – we want to... there's a sort of competition to see who's most accurate; every general election, and it's pie, we've always done it, it's interesting, it's of interest to our clients anyway, the people who are actually paying for other things, and we're interested in it, you know, who is running the country, so we carry on doing it. But rationally, there are plenty of very large market research companies you'll never have heard of if you study opinion polls, they don't bother doing it, but it's part of our heritage, it's how we established ourselves 30 years ago or more, and we carry on doing it.

Like you say, it's a small part of your business, but it is endlessly fascinating. So to that end, who is going to be the next prime minister?

Well, it's one of those elections that, a year out, the precedents, this time, are pointing in every single direction, so there is no pat answer. However, let me show you... I mean, I can give you evidence to suggest that it's virtually impossible for David Cameron to win a majority, and equally how it's impossible for Ed Miliband to win.

Yes, if you read Ashcroft's polling, for example, he thinks Miliband is going to get in with a majority of four at the moment.

Four is... that sort of thing, basically, talking about that eight or nine months before, and with the margin of error in most telephone or any other poll, is basically a bit risky. I mean, the evidence is that only twice has a government been in power for more than two years and actually increased its share of the vote, and that's only happened a couple of times in the 1950s, so the idea that David Cameron is going to get more than he got last time, particularly in the face of UKIP in some of his key seats, sounds really, really difficult. Secondly, he had a seven-point lead in the polls last time and he did not achieve a majority. Now, maybe that was because of the Lib Dems, but by some estimates, some of my colleagues are saying he might need a 10-point lead, because of UKIP and everything else, to be certain of getting a majority. And also the other thing to say about the Conservatives is they remain the most disliked party, he never managed to detoxify them, so 57% of people in Britain say they don't like the Conservative Party.

Does he perform above?

He does. David Cameron does better as a leader than his own party, but Labour is only disliked by about 43% of the population, so that's the first thing. Now, Ed Miliband, of course, not very popular as a person, and only 22% of people say he'll make a good prime minister.

He's actually quite a nice guy in real life, as many people would admit.

Yes, I've met the man – he is a nice guy in real life, but...

He doesn't come across well on the telly.

Well, he's got real problems there. But he only needs about a 2.8% lead to get a majority – now this is of course one of the strategies of the Labour Party, the Conservatives are disliked enough, and sort of despite Ed, we'll come through because people don't like the government – and it's not necessarily implausible. However, on only three occasions has a government done into opposition as Labour have, and then come back and perform the majority after a single parliament – it usually takes a bit longer.

In terms of the front bench of both parties – well, all three parties – who is performing well in the public mindset, and who... for example, I think Ed Balls doesn't poll particularly well, but that's just my own view; I don't know anyone who likes him, but what does the data show?

Not particularly good, when he is compared to George Osborne, and I think the other thing you've got to remember is when you're looking at members of the cabinet or the shadow cabinet, most of these people are still relatively unknown to the British public. I mean, Theresa May will get some cut-through, Boris Johnson's name, of course, floats around, maybe he will, maybe he won't, but just to give you an example of this, for a long time, for decades, we included in a question that we asked the British public, "Which of these members of the cabinet do you know, and how satisfied are you with their performance?" And we included the name of a colleague who has now retired, Stuart Lewis, and typically, a quarter of the British public believed that our colleague, Stuart Lewis, was a member of the cabinet, whether it was a Conservative or Labour government at the time! So when you get these figures saying that x per cent think Fred is doing very well as Minister for Water or whatever it is, you've got to remember that a lot of them really aren't sure.

Are we back to the old adage that Winston Churchill said that the greatest argument against democracy is a two-minute conversation with the average voter?

Well, you say that, and the public, of course, are cynical about politicians, although they always have been, and one of the great tropes is, of course, that trust has evaporated and nobody trusts anybody any more and there's a crisis of trust, but actually people... we've been tracking how many people say they trust politicians to tell the truth since 1983, and the figure have barely varied. They fell a bit in 2009, but it's never been much more than 20% or so. So this idea that somehow people have stopped trusting politicians is rubbish – there was even a Gallop survey during the Second World War in August 1944, when a coalition government was fighting the Nazis in northern France, and even then only about 35% of the British public believed that parliament was acting in the interests of the country, as opposed to their own interests, or their political party's interests. So I think it's grossly overblown that trust has evaporated, but I do think there is less deference, and there is less trust in big institutions, not necessarily individuals.

I'm incredibly fascinated by politics, which is one of the reasons I've asked a few questions about it, but given that we're a media podcast, I think I should ask something else! What do you think is happening with the current state of the media? Do you think in a few years from now we're going to have two newspapers left, and BuzzFeed?

To be honest, although the media constantly talks about its own demise and all the rest of it, what we are seeing really is fragmentation in many ways, and things like TV are remarkably persistent, and if you want to reach large numbers of people, TV is still there. But at the same time, of course, you want to reach the under-20s and YouTube is a good place to be. So I just think we'll go on seeing more fragmentation, it's going to be harder and harder to find people in one place, it means that people

who are in the communications business, of whatever kind, need to get more and more savvy about using the right channel for the right group of people they're trying to reach, and that old adage that content is king still applies, but how you get it across different platforms is going to be really, really important – and we can see really brilliant examples of campaigns that do that – don't ask me what they are, but we can see them – and it's the same in my industry; when I started we used to knock on doors and send out questionnaires by post and do telephone surveys as well as focus groups and everything else, and now we're still doing all those things – I can't believe I'm doing tens of millions of postal surveys a year, but I am – as well as surveying people on their mobile phones and tracking the as they move around from radio signals, just looking, analysing what they are writing on the web or on different websites, so I think this is the point – we're not seeing things just immediately stop, but we are seeing just a plethora of different channels, and I think this sort of fragmentation is part of the challenge – how do you find your audience? Because they're not in one place, they are consuming at times to suit them... they are still there but you've got to get savvier and savvier in reaching them.

In terms of a representative sample of the population, do you have a retained group of 1,500 people?

We have panels of thousands of people, so we do... we do everything. It's ironic, you might say, but at the moment we are equipping our field force of 1,000 interviewers with hand-held tablets, with GPS tracking, so that they... and they are still knocking on doors, because ultimately, there are 15% of people who are not in the internet, so you can't reach them in any shape of form, a lot of them are older and tend to vote, and they're still alive, so if you want to understand a lot of issues with people, you know, migrant communities who don't speak English very well, they are not going to take part in an internet survey. So for a lot of commercial research we're using the internet, it's the bulk of how we collect data these days, is via the internet and internet panels, and particularly if you are interested in people in their 30s, 40s and 50s who are buying all the stuff for households, who still tend to be that age, then the internet is a good way to reach them. If you want to reach the population as a whole, as many of our government clients do, and want to be absolutely sure, we are still knocking on doors, and that's still a very... literally, waiting outside people's homes for them to come home. It's the only way to ultimately guarantee that you know exactly who you've interviewed where etc. However, most of our clients...

Incredible – I didn't realise it as so face-to-face, so old school.

It is old school, but it's sometimes... old methods are the best, if you want a really great piece of cheese, you probably don't want it from the new super-modern cheese-maker, you'll probably want to visit some old farmer is making it the way he's always made it.

Absolutely.

That method is there for people who want to pay for top quality, telephone research is how we are collecting voting intention figures, we are also collecting them online, but the telephone at the moment is giving us the most reliable data. Because the issue with online is, and this is this difference in our industry, whereas if you start with a representative survey found by face to face or by telephone, you start with a representative survey, you know you've got the right number of men, women, people in Daventry, people in Cornwall, people in East Anglia etc., black people, young people, old people, and you can control for all of those things, and then you do relatively little to the data – you know it's "as right as you can make it". With the internet, you start off with the people who are willing to join an internet panel and who are online. Now, a lot of people don't want really want to have to join an internet panel, because actually you might get asked a lot of boring questions.

Do you incentivise them financially?

We do. So they get prizes, they get vouchers etc. And then of course, you've got to get them to take the surveys after they've joined. So you're filtering down your samples. So you're starting off with a sample that might be more unrepresentative, you've then got to adjust it in various clever ways. But the issue is that if you're adjusting it in different ways every single time to what you think is right, you're really not doing representative research any more, you're doing something else.

One of the final questions I wanted to ask you was about your role as chief executive. Because clearly the modern chief exec now not only has to run the company, but as you mentioned earlier, has to grow the business, you're very active on Twitter, you have your own media profile... what's a typical day for you, and what are the challenges?

I think all chief executives do their jobs differently. I'm hardly by inclination, and some of the things I was doing before I became CEO five years ago, I am quite comfortable going out there, and I think it's important to have a figurehead for the company, we're an important company here in the sense that we have a strong profile, we've got a strong pedigree in history, and it actually makes the staff feel good when they can see the CEO on TV, talking about something. So one of our corporate goals used to be to enrich the wider world with the knowledge of what people think and feel – it's also quite good for business, to make people know who you are, so all of those things matter. So my typical day will often involve meeting a journalist or perhaps a client for breakfast, some internal meetings, perhaps doing a speech, spend a lot of time communicating about what, you know, latest findings to different audiences, perhaps another internal meeting, go and discuss a new idea with some people, look at some survey results with some teams, and lots of boring

things like we've just found a new office – we're moving from SE1, one of our offices, or two of our offices, over to St Catherine's Dock – and all of those little things that come with running a large company. I've got some great people who do a lot of it, but you've still ultimately got to make sure that you're happy with some of those decisions – and keep looking at the numbers, you know, our wages bill is over 40 million a year, you've got to find 40 million to pay the wages, and you've got to make sure you've got the cash coming in, or you've got some problems. But no, it's a fascinating mixture, and I spend a lot of time in seminars or going to receptions of launches of various things you get invited to, so yes, it's interesting.

How do you think it works in terms of social media driving traditional media? Do you get asked on Newsnight because you've tweeted something earlier, or because you've got a generally high Twitter profile that you are then more likely to be in Newsnight in a more general sense?

I think it's a mixture of both – some people will just know that you're somebody who can reasonably, reliably, be relied on to come and say something intelligent about it, and you are a reasonably coherent performer – you're not going to ramble or something else, or be so nervous you can't do it. So I think it's that, and the fact you might be available, you're in central London, it's not like they're going to have to wait for you to travel five hours to get there! But no, it's true, I have certainly had instances where people have seen something I've posted on Facebook or on Twitter that is relevant to a story that's breaking, it's like, "Ah, okay, Ben, could you come in and talk about that?" So being on social media certainly helps. I don't think it's the be all and end all, I don't think you have to be on social media if you're a CEO, but it certainly keeps it real, and when we had a story about us dealing with mobile phone data, which is something that we have been doing for the last three or four years, and it was wilfully misinterpreted by a Sunday newspaper to imply that we were flogging everyone's personal mobile phone data... I made a point about... I go tin on the front foot, before the story was printed, I was tweeting that this story is coming out, it's not true, then of course I got loads of people who read it in the paper, found me on Twitter and told me what a devilish individual I was, and I was trying to say that actually, it's not true.

Did you have a standard reply?

Sort of, yes. And actually, people appreciate a CEO who isn't hiding behind a spin-doctor, or somebody who says, "I don't know," and will come and tell the truth.

Well, Ben, I think we've run out of metaphorical tape. How do people stalk you on Twitter and so on? What's your website address?

So you can find me on Twitter at @benatipsosmori, or just Google me and you'll find me at lots of places. www.ipsosmori.com is another one, but just Google me, I'm there.

Ben, it's been a great pleasure. Thank you for coming in.

No problem!