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## Interview with Shefali Khanna on Her Experience in Reputation Management - Astrum

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Gurgaon

**I practice two words, 'Ownership & Accountability': Shefali Khanna, Partner Digital Marketing and Business Growth, Astrum**



Shefali Khanna is the Partner Digital Marketing and Business Growth of Astrum, India's first specialist reputation management advisory that uses science to understand and shape public opinion ethically. Shefali's career span's over a decade and a half, straddling across corporations and consulting firms in sales, CSR and Online Reputation Management.

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Shefali is a member of the founding team of Astrum and previously led business growth and marketing at Penn Schoen Berland (PSB), Asia. Her contribution to the development of the PSB brand earned her the global CEO's medal of merit. Most recently in 2019, she was honoured with 'Most Influential Marketing Leaders Listing' and in 2020 was awarded Excellence in New Business Development.

Shefali holds a Master in Business Administration from SIMS, Pune and a specialization in Digital Marketing from Columbia Business School, USA.

### **It has been 5 years with Astrum, how has the journey been for you?**

Incidentally, we will complete our fifth year only in May 2020 but the journey over the years has been wonderful.

I get to learn something new every day and I love the fact that with Science of Reputation, Astrum is pioneering the use of science to advance the practice of [reputation management](#) and more importantly, I get to work with super bright professionals and some of the nicest people.

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At Astrum, we love solving 'high vale' problems for our clients; when I joined Ashwani in 2015, he wanted Astrum to be the Bain and BCG of the communications world, and today when clients reach out to us, they know that they will get a well-researched and an informed perspective and a team of experienced professionals who will also execute the plan that they recommend.

We have worked with some of the finest Indian and International Companies with a wide range work from [Corporate Affairs](#), Crisis Preparedness, Issues Management Thought Leadership, Executive Development, [Corporate Reputation](#), Online Reputation Management and all driven by insights and data. We have served clients across diverse sectors such as Telecom, Technology, Healthcare, BFSI, Manufacturing, Education, Auto, Fintech amongst others.

The exposure and learning is superb and we get challenged every day. What more can I ask?

### **What is Astrum's speciality?**

We are a 'science-based specialist reputation management' advisory. We work with the C-Suite or Senior Political Leaders to help them resolve complex challenges they face in generating public acceptance. We believe that we are leading the way of weaving science and creativity to understand and shape public opinion.

Our specializations include Corporate Reputation Management, Crisis & Issues Management, Corporate Affairs, Voter & Battleground Targeting, Candidate Positioning, [Campaign Messaging](#) and Voter Sentiment Tracking

### **How has the PR industry evolved over the years?**

Public relations has been principally known to be a 'know who' service but today in the world of disintermediation, the 'know who' is inadequate in engaging important stakeholders. Having said that, the industry continues to remain an important link between the company and its various publics.

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From media relations as its principal 'stock-in-trade,' we saw an expansion into policy advocacy and now we are seeing a greater emphasis on influencer engagement, however, to progress to the next evolution, the industry has to invest in capacity building to gain the 'know-how' needed to understand and shape public opinion ethically.

Astrum was founded with the purpose to make 'know-how' central to the way we practiced public relations.

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### **With growing digital presence have the lines blurred between PR & Marketing?**

This is an interesting question and often asked in several LinkedIn forums I participate.

Having been fortunate to be responsible for all elements of communication: Public Relations, Marketing, and Online Reputation, both at PSB & Astrum, I can't imagine separating the three. They're simply management tools that we have used to advance the reputation of our firm.

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If the purpose of both marketing and public relations is to create preference, then they are one and the same. At Astrum, we integrate earned, paid and owned media into all our advocacy campaigns.

**Who was your first mentor/teacher in the professional space? One thing you have learnt has held you in good stead in your professional life?**

I have two mentors that I hold in great esteem. Soumitra Panda while I was working at NaviSite and Ashwani Singla with whom I have worked with close to a decade both at PSB research and now at Astrum.

What I have learned is to be a life-long learner, to keep learning to refresh and renew my skills to stay relevant and to practice TWO simple words OWNERSHIP & ACCOUNTABILITY in everything I do. Have I cracked this code, perhaps not fully, but that's the journey, keep doing better every day.

**How do you destress?**

I am a neat freak and making sure that everything is neat, clean and well organized destresses me. Besides that, my daily work out and music help energize me.

**Go to activities on the weekend?**

My daughter, Zephora is home from college over the weekend, my life revolves around her. We spend time together over the weekend.

**If not this role professionally, what would you have been?**

I have never thought of this work as a job, I really love what I do and I know I am valued. I am encouraged to try new things, learn new ways to work, sign up for courses that I want to join – what more?



### **2020 – Your goals... Professionally and personally**

Professionally, gain more insights and expertise as a digital marketer. My experiment lab is Astrum, allowing me the freedom to learn and practice while on the job. Personally, I have a sweet tooth, so my focus is on eating right and exercising regularly.

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