

PUBLIC RELATIONS 2011

ISSUES INSIGHTS IDEAS



EDITED BY CRAIG PEARCE
PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MANAGING REPUTATION

CONTENTS

3 Introduction

5 PR education – getting the theory-practice balance right by Professor Jim Macnamara

8 Critical elements public relations strategy should always consider by Paul Roberts

10 Let's talk sense about trust and CSR by Paul Seaman

12 PR is second rate CSR by Craig Pearce

14 Are you ready for the social revolution? by Mandi Bateson

15 Internal journo and SEO expert; new 'trust' calisthenics for the PR pro by Judy Gombita

18 How social media has added value to the PR agency business by Trevor Young

20 Messiah or just socially inept by Dwight Whitney

22 PR primer for (social) networking by Judy Gombita

24 Is social media helping PR become more influential as a business discipline by Craig Pearce

27 Issue management: changing risks, changing expectations by Dr Tony Jaques

29 To CEO or not to CEO? Crisis communication in action by Jane Jordan-Meier

31 What fascinates PR students? by Catherine Sweet

33 Fundamental truths of success in public relations by Craig Pearce

35 The power of PR and what makes it unique by Craig Pearce

PUBLIC RELATIONS 2011: ISSUES, INSIGHTS AND IDEAS

Introduction

By reading the passionate, intellectually creative thinking in this report I anticipate that your knowledge of strategic and tactical approaches to the practice of public relations will be broadened. You will, without doubt, experience thought leadership at a rarely articulated level.

One outcome of thought leadership is that it often challenges. It features ideas that are out of the box, sometimes reflecting either dissatisfaction with the status quo or a refusal to take it at face value. In either case, the outcome can enrich those who choose to tune into its frequency as issues are analysed and new thinking articulated.

I have no doubt that if you choose to read this report, featuring thought leaders from all over the world, your ability to practice PR and harness its power will be deepened.

Content: enrichment

Themes of the report include:

- Social media. Its emergence is presenting PR with a range of challenges and opportunities. We are very much on the cusp – what do we do from here? Can social media help our discipline become more influential as a business discipline?
- The importance of face-2-face communication. This is old school social networking, but one that is still the most effective means of communication and, often, analogous of social media
- Two-way symmetrical communication. There is no avoiding it, especially in a report edited by me. A new pragmatism may be emerging in its discussion and application, even from Jim Grunig himself. But is anyone

offering anything fundamentally different to help us in our approach and give us something meaningful or – light on the hill – aspirational to apply?

- Innovation. A media release buzzword and almost disheartening to use. But in this context, a positive. There is new thinking in this report and fresh perspectives. You will find plenty here to surprise and sustain
- CSR. Sometimes overt, sometimes implicit. I don't think you can practice PR at a strategic level and not be cognisant of the synergy between the two disciplines
- Strategic approaches. Even when discussing tactics, writers are cognisant of their broader remit and resonances
- Professional development and the teaching of, and learning about, PR
- Crisis management. Interesting – is crisis management the means through which public relations can become more valued in organisations on the back of social media's application in this area? By helping to save an organisation's bacon before it's been all crisped up – using, and in, a social media-saturated world – will we build more credibility for ourselves? Maybe, just maybe. But I think if this is the case we have a small window post-crisis to build on this credibility, as business has a short memory and deep wells of impatience.

This is a report that looks to the future based on experience. In some regards its content is speculative. But it is never less than insightful.

Why this report?

Having built up a large international network of PR pros, it has been

emphasised to me what a plethora of erudite, persuasive, amenable peers we have out there in the big wide world. I wanted to put something together that illustrated our global connectivity, taking advantage of our new(ish) social media paradigm, collating bold ideas and new thinking into an easily readable report format.

Thank you to all of you who have made the significant effort to contribute to this report, shared so generously for no financial gain and at considerable effort. Clearly, you want our profession develop and evolve, so it is the best it can possibly be.

Each article in this report is worthy of serious attention.

I also want to recognise the excellent design work undertaken by Pennington & Co. Its principal, Noel Pennington, is a graphic designer I have used for many years now and he continues to offer excellence and amenable service at great value. The illustrations of Guy Downes also enhance this report. Guy's insights and business acumen make his work a worthy addition to any organisation's communication options.

I hope you enjoy Public relations 2011: issues, insights and ideas and see fit to share your knowledge of its existence with your colleagues, peers and friends. Social media, of course, enables us to do this with very little effort and great 'personal brand' building benefit.

I look forward to hearing from you on how I can do better next time and encourage you to network with the report's contributors – make sure you check out their blogs and books! We'd all love to hear from you.

Craig Pearce

www.craigpearce.info

craig@craigpearce.info



ABOUT CRAIG PEARCE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Craig Pearce is an award winning strategic public relations professional (and noted PR blogger) with 16 years business communication experience. He specialises in formulating, then rolling up his sleeves and implementing, communication strategies that deliver business-relevant results. These strategies utilise corporate communication, marketing communication, issues & crisis management, CSR, media relations and digital communication approaches. With Craig, you get proven global agency-level expertise at a low overhead-driven price.

Craig Pearce, Principal
t. 0438 003 430
craig@craigpearce.info
www.craigpearce.info
Twitter [@commaim](https://twitter.com/commaim)
[Craig on LinkedIn](#)



ABOUT PENNINGTON & CO

Noel Pennington is a graphic designer who believes successful design and brand management comes from close collaboration between the client and designer. Pennington & Co produces distinctive communication by asking questions, listening and building outcomes that are fresh, dynamic and memorable. Noel's experience gives him the ability to produce enduring and effective communication working to demanding deadlines.

Noel Pennington, Principal
t. 0412 188 840
noel@pennington.com.au
www.pennington.com.au

PENNINGTON+CO.
creative input—positive outcome



ABOUT GUY DOWNES

Guy Downes is a visual communications specialist who helps companies, organisations and individuals connect with the audiences that matter to them using a range of visual techniques, such as graphic recording, illustration, infographics, journey maps and video scribing. With many people's preference being for visual learning, Guy's visual and communications expertise helps capture an audience's attention.

Guy Downes, Principal
t. 0438 819 294
guy@guydownes.com.au
www.guydownes.com.au

By [Professor Jim Macnamara](#)

PR EDUCATION – GETTING THE THEORY-PRACTICE BALANCE RIGHT

There is widespread if not universal agreement that education and training are important to advancing a field and helping it gain legitimacy and recognition as a profession. But what is not agreed, and often controversial, is the balance between theory and practical skills. Public relations is no different, with theory often being thought of as esoteric, remote from practice and, even, dangerous.

From 30 years working in public communication practice, I am very familiar with frequent calls for educational institutions to produce graduates with relevant practical skills. My ears resonate with the regular lament that young practitioners “can’t write” and don’t understand day-to-day business practices.

As Kate Byrne from the University of Canberra reported in a [review of the value of academia](#), a number of research studies confirm perceptions of a theory-practice gap. For instance, studies by [Cheng and de Gregario](#), [Okay and Okay](#), and several others, suggest that both practitioners and academics believe that what is taught and researched in universities does not adequately reflect and meet the needs of professional practice. In 2010, [Brooke Liu and Abbey Levenshus](#) concluded from a study that public relations academics “should be mindful of closing the gap between theory and practice”.

More theory, not less!

From my years in practice, I am

sympathetic to these demands. But here’s where I am likely to stir up debate and even provoke calls for my public lynching. In a comprehensive 600-page PR text I have just finished writing and which will be published in mid-2011 (*Public Relations Theory, Practices, Critiques*, Pearson Australia), I argue that we need to teach MORE THEORY.

More theory? Macnamara’s lost the plot, sold out – I can hear the disbelieving mumbles.

But let me explain. There are four points that need to be made and considered in relation to the alleged theory-practice gap.

Myths about PR academia

The first is that, to a significant extent, it is just plain wrong – a myth. Here’s why:

1. [Kate Byrne’s 2008 study](#) found that 81% of academics teaching PR in Australia have previously worked as practitioners.
2. At the beginning of 2011, 45 undergraduate and postgraduate courses in public relations at 17 universities in Australia were [accredited](#) by the Public Relations Institute of Australia which requires them to meet standards set by the industry.
3. Most of those PR courses include [internships](#) as part of their subjects and assessment.

4. A [content analysis of 14 widely-used PR texts](#) and reference books conducted in 2010 found that each contained 30-60 pages of case studies – more than the content devoted to theory.
5. [Byrne’s study](#) based on interviews with both practitioners and academics found close alignment between the practices and activities most discussed in academic texts and those that practitioners rated as most important.

So much for academics with their heads in the clouds and no clue about practice.

Anti-intellectualism

The second point about the alleged theory-practice gap in PR education is that – it has to be said – some oppose or express concern about teaching of theory because of ‘anti-intellectualism’.

Anti-intellectualism exists in parts of all industries and fields, and presents a challenge to their professionalisation as has been identified in management (e.g. a study by Porter & McKibbin, 1988), in management research (e.g. a report by Starkey & Madan, 2001) and in public administration (see Bolton & Stolcis, 2003). Significantly, all of these fields – as well as law, accountancy and other recognised professions – have progressively

accepted the importance of developing and teaching theory as well as practical skills and integrating theory with practice.

Tactics is about practice, strategy requires knowledge

Peter Drucker famously identified that “doing the right thing is more important than doing the thing right”. In this and numerous similar aphorisms for management, Drucker was not suggesting that doing things well at a practical level is unimportant – clearly it is essential. But he was pointing to the even more fundamental prerequisite for practitioners to know the right thing to do before they set about doing it.

In a related piece of advice, Drucker noted that “there is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all”.

‘Doing things right’ requires practical skills. But ‘doing the right thing’ requires knowledge beyond practice. The term ‘knowledge’ brings us closer to understanding where education and professional development should head in future.

The Greeks used two words to describe the key ingredients for excellence in human achievement – epistême and technê. Epistême (pronounced epi-steam) is sometimes translated as theory, but it is more generally recognised as knowledge, while technê refers to art and craft including technical skills and processes. From the time of Aristotle, accumulation of knowledge as well as the application of art and craft skills has been recognised as essential for advancement.

This broader association, equating theory to knowledge, opens the door to understanding theory. Frequently, the term theory is misused to refer to an hypothesis – such as ‘I have a theory that corner stores will make



a comeback’. That is not a theory; it is an hypothesis – a hunch, idea or unproven claim.

In contrast with its common misconception as hypothetical, esoteric, and unconnected to practical things, theory is proven documented knowledge. In simple terms, it is what others have learned elsewhere and before us, prompting sociologist Kurt Lewin to comment that, “there is nothing so practical as a good theory”.

Because theories are established through collection of substantial empirical evidence, extensive experimentation, testing and rigorous analysis in many different situations over many years – even decades in many cases – they provide a vast knowledge resource available to practitioners. Being unaware of or ignoring the body of knowledge accumulated by others before us and in other markets and societies is short-sighted and even foolhardy.

Theories don’t always agree and the fact that there are multiple theories even on the same issues is a strength, not a weakness, of theory. Theories allow us to consider alternatives.

While experience is an important form of learning, none of us has experience in all possible situations, or our experience may be atypical. Theories can be used as lenses to extend our minds in the same way that telephoto and macro camera lenses and telescopes extend our eyes.

Just as optical lenses allow us to see things that we cannot see with the naked eye, theories allow us to see things that we cannot see with the naked mind.

Critical thinking and alternatives

In this way, theories introduce critical thinking which is a vital element of advancing a field. While critical thinking is often perceived pejoratively as an exercise in negativity or undermining of the field, critical perspectives and alternatives proposed in various competing theories are important for many reasons including:

- They offer alternative ways of thinking and acting
- They help us think 'outside the square'
- They reduce trial and error which is a downside of practice-based learning
- They help us see things the way others see them, even if we don't agree
- They identify weakness, contradictions, and areas for improvement and advocate praxis – action to change and improve, to do PR differently.

No industry or profession can claim that it does not need to improve, and certainly not public relations, which faces continuing challenges to its legitimacy and a chorus of criticism in media, politics, and among social reformers.

Critical thinking about public relations is essential to build a better body of public relations knowledge and practices for the future. Critical thinking and exploring alternative

ideas are how we challenge ourselves, rethink, reinvent, and re-envision.

Conclusion: Integrating theory and practice

Industry and professional bodies need to be careful that there is not an over-emphasis on practical vocational skills and too little emphasis on producing graduates who know how to think 'outside the square', how to question, how to challenge current practices and envision the future, and how to participate in the wider debates and discussions of society.

A key requirement of universities is enabling productive citizens and leaders for the future, not simply churning out entry-level practitioners to satisfy specific industry needs over the next few years.

Universities are not in the business of producing industrial cannon-fodder.

Veteran US academic David Dozier and Martha Lauzen courageously propose that "the professional agenda should play a declining role in defining and setting the agenda

for the intellectual domain", in public relations. Such a shift is strongly resisted by conservative industry organisations and employers who see universities as existing to produce graduates who will be commercially productive and compliant workers.

But Dozier and a number of other thinkers see a need for public relations to rise above the communication technician role to become communication managers, strategists, advisers, leaders, and reformers and for PR education to come out of its narrow bunkered sub-discipline, where it risks becoming self-referential and self-serving.

Looking ahead, a 2005 study by William Hatherell and Jennifer Bartlett calls for PR academics and practitioners to be "less preoccupied with defensive rhetoric and disciplinary demarcation" and to engage with new ideas and thinking in the social sciences and humanities. That means engaging with a range of theories – let's just call it knowledge that is advancing every day and shaping our futures.

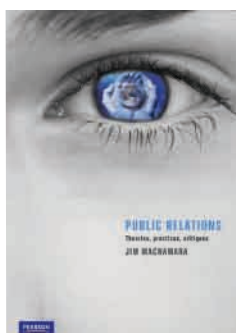


Jim Macnamara, PhD, FPRIA, FAMI, CPM, FAMEC became Professor of Public Communication at the University of Technology Sydney in 2007 after a 30-year career working in journalism, public relations and media research, which culminated in selling the CARMA Asia Pacific media analysis firm which he founded to Media Monitors in 2006. Jim can be networked with on his [LinkedIn profile](#) and on Twitter [@jimmacnamara](#).

Public Relations Theories, Practices, Critiques, by Professor Jim Macnamara, identifies and fills four major gaps in public relations texts. As well as explaining the basics of PR, this book examines:

- Use of social media for public communication
- Theories and models beyond the dominant American paradigm of public relations including European, Asian and other emergent approaches
- Integration of research for planning and evaluation
- Critical thinking about public relations, including discussion of ethical issues and societal implications that are largely ignored in most PR texts.

As well as examining public relations in a multidisciplinary, multicultural and multimodal context and situating public relations in relation to major communication and media theories – including 'new media' theories – this text also expertly integrates theory and practice drawing on the author's 30-years of professional experience. It is anticipated the text will be published in July 2011.



By Paul Roberts

CRITICAL ELEMENTS PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGY SHOULD ALWAYS CONSIDER

Public relations at its very core is about words – sometimes written, sometimes spoken, sometimes with images, but always about words. And it is driven by strategy – essentially comprised of the who, what, when, where, why, how of communication and engagement – which is sometimes made to sound more complex than it actually is.

But let's take a good look at the words in the title of this piece – critical elements public relations strategy should always consider.

Note the emphasis on the word strategy. Quick level-setting, Wikipedia considers strategy, a word of military origin, as a plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal. Now that sounds important. In PR circles, strategy is often used to help explain the use of tactics to people who don't understand public relations.

A little secret – public relations strategy is over-rated.

Let's be clear. Public relations, like any form of communications, is important. But let's not over-complicate the process. At the end of the day, what most people call public relations strategy can be boiled down to some very basic elements.

There are lots of columns, books and blogs about elements that PR strategy should always consider, but anyone



that has ever taken a journalism 101 course knows that the elements of telling a story revolve around the who, the what, the where, the why and the how. Public relations strategy is not much different.

For the sake of this piece, the examples will focus on two very different types of communications – the product launch and the recall. These two examples were chosen because one is a push communication and the other is pull.

- No one is going to care about your new product unless you make them care – push.
- When issuing a product recall your job is to communicate your

company's message in a much more reactive manner – pull.

Start with the messenger – The Who

Selecting the right messenger says a lot about the importance of the message.

Examples:

- New product – unless it is your one and only product or something that is revolutionizing the industry, you are probably not going to use the CEO to sell the new widget.
- Recall – if your customers were hurt or inconvenienced in anyway, having anyone less than a senior executive issue the statement, says that the company doesn't really care.

Fortify the message – The What

The best advice here is not what to do, but what not to do:

- Don't be stupid and don't try to be cute
- Don't think you can hide anything and don't lie
- Don't try to fake sincerity.

Examples:

- New product – while you want to highlight the good of the product, don't think you can get away with calling a slight product upgrade a revolutionary new achievement.
- Recall – while you want to protect your organization's reputation during the time of a crisis – remember that people are turning to you not to hear why it wasn't your fault, but how to get immediate assistance and satisfaction.

Decide on timing – The When

Don't make too much of this one. The announcement needs to be done sometime. Just decide when – no biggie.

Examples:

- New product – in most cases there is no right or wrong time to launch a product as long as there is sufficient time to plan properly. That being said, elements to consider include time of year, competitive announcements and other planned PR activities.
- Recall – in this case timing is all about speed. If your company is recalling a product because of

safety concerns then speed of communications is of the essence.

Select the medium – The Where

Where the message is communicated says as much about its importance of the message as who is doing the communicating.

Examples:

- New product – is Twitter the right place to launch a new product? In most cases it isn't, but maybe providing a sneak preview or a special offer to your followers or Facebook fans is the right thing to do.
- Recall – it is important to acknowledge that during the time of crises the public is going to be quick to criticise any and every decision made. Quick rule of thumb:
 - If your company issues news releases – issue the recall via news release
 - If your company buys print advertising – issue the recall via print advertising
 - If your company has a YouTube channel, you guessed it, make a YouTube video.

Remember, a company can't look like it cares too much!

Articulate why – The Why

There is no other way to express this one than to say –articulate why.

Examples:

- New product - if you are pushing a product announcement the public

better know immediately why the product is being made and why they should buy it.

- Recall – if the public is looking for information regarding a recall, they want to know why it is being made, why the problem wasn't detected earlier and why they should ever trust in your company again. Don't leave any whys unanswered, because some companies never get a second chance to articulate that last one.

Plan the logistics – The How

The how is a microcosm of the entire above process. It pulls together the who, what, when, where and how – nothing more strategic about it. Just remember, not every communications needs to be planned, reviewed, edited and the topic of endless meetings and brainstorm sessions.

The most critical element public relations strategy should always consider

The one most important element is to rely on professional communicators.

Don't take the content in this piece to mean that communications is easy – that isn't the case. While PR doesn't necessarily require great hand eye coordination, like great athletes that make circus plays look easy, communication professionals make the difficult look easy. Communication professionals are smart. Trust them.

PR pros won't get bogged down on drafting a strategy, because for them it is just common sense.



Paul Roberts is a 15-year veteran of the communications industry with experience in journalism, marketing and public relations – in both corporate and agency environments. In 2009 he launched his [Paul Roberts on PR blog](#) to participate in the conversations regarding the evolution within the communications industry. Based on his blogging he was recently named as one of the [Top 25 Social Media Leaders to Watch](#). Paul can be networked with on his blog, his [LinkedIn profile](#) and on Twitter [@PaulRobertsPAR](#).

By Paul Seaman

LET'S TALK SENSE ABOUT TRUST AND CSR



PRs, of all people, should not take things at face value. Supposedly, there's a crisis of trust in society. The way to fix it, we are told, is to advocate more transparency, more corporate responsibility, more fairness and better corporate governance. Let's plaster the whole edifice with apple pie whilst we're at it.

But is there really a crisis of trust? Or are we in danger of making the wrong diagnosis and recommending the wrong remedies?

We are being asked to believe that Western firms, governments and other institutions have lost the trust of the people. We are told, as a consequence, they risk losing their licence to operate.

But the Edelman Trust Barometer reported last year that Russian

business is more trusted than Germany's and France's. It asked us to believe that business in Brazil, China and India (trust levels 60-70%) were way above those in Canada, Japan and the US (50-59%).

Surely, such findings should sound warning signals and inspire us to question the premises of this debate about trust?

If you are not convinced, then just consider so-called political trust. China's government, according to Edelman, is the most trusted on earth at 74%, compared to the US's measly 46% (in the Obama era) and the UK's 38% (pre-David Cameron) which, we are asked to believe, is on a par with Russia.

If these are the answers, someone's been asking the wrong question. Or

there are lots of people in the world who are – as we old Marxists used to say – not being objective.

Or they're in denial.

Or they've got cognitive dissonance.

Transparency: a fault line for PR pros

Commonsense should warn us that placing transparency at the heart of political and business life effectively means promoting the notion that institutions cannot be trusted. How we can ever make a virtue of trust by institutionalising distrust is a question too few PRs ever ask.

Surely, trust means that we allow people and institutions their privacy? In his useful book, 'Trust', Anthony Seldon quotes the US statesman Henry Timson saying: "The only way

to make a man trustworthy is to trust him". (Seldon also argues for lots of transparency, so he's not the most logical guide either, but the quote is spot on.)

Surely, if every statement and action of a politician and diplomat – as WikiLeaks would like – was made transparent, politicians would avoid ever revealing the truth, or what they think, even in private among themselves in anything like formal settings. That would make them untrustworthy at virtually every level. It would drive democratic (read also corporate) accountability underground, or perhaps onto unaccountable sofa governments (kitchen Boards), in the style of Tony Blair.

The problem with the trust discussion is, I maintain, that we have confused healthy scepticism with lack of trust. The former is healthy. It forms part of our democratic heritage. But throwing away trust in the name of transparency is retrograde and corrosive. That's why I say today's misplaced hype about trust risks turning scepticism into soul-destroying cynicism.

Delivering on corporate social responsibility

So how does all this relate to corporate social responsibility and issues such as sustainability? Well, closely, particularly at the level of motivation. Here's how Sandra MacLeod, CEO of Echo Research, explains what's driving the rush to

proclaim corporate responsibility practices:

"Corporate leaders are now being challenged to step up to greater commitments on sustainability, and ensure they have performance measures for behaviour directly linked to responsibility and trust if they are to succeed." (*'A World in Trust'*)

The PR agency Edelman claims, according to 52% of business leaders, that the path to trust lies in treating all stakeholders as equals.

These seem obvious. But they are flawed. There's something very much like 'greenwash' at the heart of it all.

Fact is, for a firm to be trusted in the long term it needs to have publicly committed itself to the maintenance of some wriggle room. Over-commit to motherhood and apple pie and you're stuck being called out as a two-faced turncoat when the going gets rough. The minute profits drop every employee knows that a firm has to look to its economic sustainability.

The public relations of telling the truth

So what do I advocate?

Well, the first thing is that we should start speaking straight. That might mean telling some harsh truths. It certainly means avoiding making misleading statements, such as, "all stakeholders are equals". It means we should stop pretending that 'sustainability and innovation'

are compatible bedfellows: Joseph Schumpeter's theory of creative destruction clearly suggests otherwise. The truth is that innovation, like progress, is ceaseless.

Perhaps, also, PRs should recommend that firms stop pretending – Beyond Petroleum fashion – that their social purpose is something different from what they exist to do.

Perhaps we should restate that firms are financed and owned by shareholders and that governance is about defending their interests first and foremost.

And perhaps, most of all, we should stop pretending that our western societies are sick, dishonest and corrupt.

None of what I've just said, however, should be taken as dismissal of CSR. I'm one of its strongest advocates.

When practiced properly it is vital and healthy. No company should be allowed or want to do massive harm to the environment or to trample on people's rights. Respect and care is part of earning the right to remain trusted.

My point is that right now the debate about sustainability and CSR is headed in the wrong direction and is premised on notions that cannot themselves be trusted.



*In countries as diverse as Switzerland and Nigeria, **Paul Seaman** has worked in environments ranging from multinational boardrooms to environmental disaster zones. He's managed corporate, crisis and product PR and dealt with every kind of media. Today he runs his own international PR consultancy, West PR – Seaman, based in Zurich, Switzerland. He can be networked with on his blog [21st century PR issues](#), his [LinkedIn profile](#) and on Twitter [@paulseaman](#).*

By Craig Pearce

PR IS SECOND RATE CSR



The thought that public relations is really second rate corporate social responsibility, or a home for CSR failures, has been looming very large in my mind of late. If PR is truly fulfilling its potential, then it will nearly always be a manifestation of CSR. But most of the time PR is non-dialogic communication and no amount of social media bible banging proselytising can disguise this.

This is especially the case when you consider that the bulk of social media undertaken on behalf of organisations is done so purely for marketing reasons (i.e. to sell stuff), rather than to adapt an organisation's behaviour/product/services so that it more closely meets the needs of its stakeholders.

PR is 'nearly always a manifestation of CSR' (corporate social responsibility) as even when two-way symmetrical communication is applied for best possible organisation-stakeholder relationships there will be cases when dialogue and organisational-stakeholder change is not needed or simply not possible (Grunig uses the diametrically opposed abortion vs. free choice groups as an example of the latter, whilst public information in regard to a charity raising event hardly calls for symmetrical navel gazing).

There are plenty of views and explanations of two-way symmetrical communication, with one of the most recent and most amazing, being Paul Seaman's thoughtful questioning of the model as a public relations

paradigm we should aspire to achieve. Paul also points out some of the harsh realities of PR and positions the discipline more as one that exists for organisational advocacy, rather than joint organisation-stakeholder mutual change.

PR or CSR for changing society

Maybe CSR hijacked two-way symmetrical communication for its own commercial and positioning benefit? But if so – what's the big deal? It is its responsiveness to stakeholder concerns and social/societal upside that matters (even though it may well be hijacking cost centres and career options for PR pros).

However, stigma that is attached to PR and its brand clearly, for me, profoundly hinders it from achieving its two-way symmetrical communication goal. And I can't see this changing in a hurry, if ever.

So perhaps the CSR brand is one that PR should use as much as possible to effect the changes that best practice PR/CSR is all about (though if you go back to Paul's argument, what Jim Grunig [and up to this point, me] argue is best practice PR, may be looking at the practice through a mist of too much peyote).

CSR, as I see it, is really two-way symmetrical communication in action. Or is it? Is it a wolf in sheep's clothing?

Is PR the right profession in which to work if you want to effect societal change? Should I be switching industries? Is CSR, on the other hand, really effecting societal change?

Talking change to motivate change

Years ago I started CSR reporting at ANSTO, Australia's only nuclear facility, in the belief that it was best to start reporting as part of a strategy to prompt the organisation to start behaving in a more socially responsible manner. Take the mountain to Mohammed, so to speak. Internal PR. Not that ANSTO wasn't or isn't inherently socially responsible. It helps save thousands of lives each year through its production of nuclear medicine, for instance.

But CSR is related to more than what an organisation actually 'does'. The notion of articulating, through a report/presentations/the process of data collection, etc is, I still believe, a valid way of getting change to occur, especially when, tied into this process, is external PR.

Which is where there exists opportunities for PR and CSR to work hand-in-hand for further progress for

their mutual aim – organisational-stakeholder change.

The PR-CSR divide – or nexus?

Is the divide between CSR and PR a false one if you want to effect organisational change? And there are two dimensions to this.

- Do you want to work for an organisation that 'only' does good things for society/world/environment, or an organisation that is willing to change to meet its stakeholders' (including those who aren't shareholders) needs?
- Is there a middle ground anywhere, as I don't think there is any organisation in the world that operates completely in a socially responsible manner or is 100% committed to change.

There are too many shades of grey. And don't even think of putting forward organisations such as Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth. These organisations are some of the most likely to spin a story and obfuscate the truth than any around.

CSR needs PR

CSR really needs to have PR as an embedded part of it. At this juncture, despite it's positioning of itself as possessing stakeholder consultation as a key component of its process, I don't believe communication in its broader stakeholder sense is CSR's strongest suit. Awareness of CSR achievements amongst broader stakeholders than the few it often targets is often low and holds organisational CSR back from further development (including internal comms for internal championing and internal buy-in/support).

There is some false-humble thinking in certain CSR circles that amounts to not thinking it is appropriate to be assertive in promoting aspects and achievements of behaving in a CSR manner. This is dumb. If done in an appropriate (i.e. intelligent/

sensitive) manner then this helps generate broader stakeholder awareness and enthusiasm for deeper implementation across society.

CSR is not all about reporting organisations are more effectively responding to stakeholder needs. It is being proactive to address needs that haven't even been realised. CSR has an opportunity to progress here. Beat stakeholders to the punch. This means having a culture of deeply caring for stakeholders and what they care about (e.g. environment, supply chain).

The societal responsibilities of organisations

In opposition (I think) to Paul Seaman's views, I strongly believe that organisations have a major responsibility to the world we live in. They should go much further than what regulation dictates.

Organisations, not governments, run and define the world.

They need to operate in a manner far more considerate of the world we live in than they currently do. They should please more than just their shareholders. This is not impossible.

Multinational corporates have deep resources and deep pockets. They have deep wells of intellectual prowess and imagination. They can do it if they really want to.

And if both the CSR and PR disciplines are committed to prompting this to occur, all to the better. Add a few more disciplines into the mix, as far as I'm concerned. Because it matters little what your job description is.

The world that exists for our children and our children's children should be our collective priority. And, clearly oh so clearly, operating according to regulation is going to lead to nothing but a black acid hole and an extermination of the world in quicker time than any of us would like.

By [Mandi Bateson](#)

ARE YOU READY FOR THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION?

Social media is reaching its tipping point. The mainstream audience is becoming more comfortable with the mix of personal networking with branded content and social advertising. The early adopters have been rewarded for their 'risk'; their trial and error process has allowed them the time and opportunity to create a presence mostly on their own terms.

For those left dipping their toes into the water with hesitation, don't be surprised if your customer decides to pull you in whether you're ready or not. So what impact does that have on your PR strategy and the rest of your organisation?

The silo killer

Unfortunately your audience doesn't care that your organisation has very separate PR, marketing, sales and customer services departments. And whichever one pops up in the social space first should be ready to manage expectations – the Facebook page you created to extol the virtues of your environmental program will be used for venting frustrations regarding service outages if that's what is on the customer's mind.

What to consider: If you want to start building a social presence, know how your audience uses various platforms and take this into consideration if you anticipate a backlash. For example, while an online audit may show Whirlpool as an active forum for discussion regarding your brand, it may not be the best place to launch a new competition.

Context is king.

The downside of doubling share of voice

If your company has an existing social media customer service team, consider the impact a campaign may have on their role and the standard of their service. The tools to filter keywords are by no means sophisticated enough to know the difference between a request for service assistance and a promotional campaign.

Unless you create a difference, that is.

What to consider: Use specific terminology that will help track the campaign (and allow customer service to filter exclusions of the keywords). Ensure the traffic is directed to a channel that you can manage without interrupting the status quo. Your internal teams and your customers will thank you for it.

WIIFM

PR professionals are used to tapping into the minds of influencers to get media coverage but the social sphere offers a new challenge – how to evoke a response from the target audience and amplify the key messages. Successful campaigns will have discovered the WIIFM trigger – What's In It For Me?

The good news is that this can lead to additional media coverage by demonstrating the swell of interest in the market.

What to consider: What are you asking of your audience to contribute to your campaign? Think of the barriers, motivators and reasons for re-engagement as well as how you can deliver status or social capital to those who contribute. Give them a reason to share your story.

As guardians of the brand or product messaging, PR professionals are well placed to own the social media strategy however integration has never been more crucial.

I've said it before and I'll say it again. Your strategy should be managed by someone who understands and respects every element (of the marketing mix), even if only to brief (and not execute) other components. This will sift your truly strategic marketers from those using a buzzword as an invoice line item.



Mandi Bateson is Hill & Knowlton Australia's Digital Director, offering her knowledge and experience to both the Consumer & Brand and Corporate teams. Mandi can be networked with on her personal blog [Three Nine Seven](#), H&K's [Collective Conversation: Digital Knowledge](#) blog, her [LinkedIn profile](#) and on Twitter [@DigitalMands](#).

By [Judy Gombita](#)

INTERNAL JOURNO AND SEO EXPERT; NEW 'TRUST' CALISTHENICS FOR THE PR PRO



In an 'information obesity'¹ world, what can public relations practitioners do or say to cut through the online corporate corpulence and still add 'meat' with nutritional value? Two answers are that we need to 're-calorie-brate' our focus and activities and add internal journalist and search engine optimization (SEO) expert calisthenics into the working skill set.

Helping to flow stakeholders to relevant and useful pools of information about our companies or clients is definitely a worthwhile investment of resources. When monitoring what stakeholders self-select – particularly when they land on and dive into organizational reservoirs of core offerings or knowledge and expertise – opportunities exist to refine and shape the direction and current of corporate story telling (from both a mediated and disintermediated standpoint).

The sustenance and water analogies aren't a prescriptive diet to abandon traditional PR practices; rather, think of

it as adding new dimensions and value as an internal journalist and SEO pro. It's a natural progression, as the 21st century PR regime really needs to be looking to the internet as a legitimate outlet for 'earned media,' particularly via our own 'media' sites. (See my interview with Ira Basen about [Engineering Search: The story of the algorithm that changed the world.](#))

By examining subject choices and phraseology, the focus of PR pros can move from a 'how' to attract attention, to a 'why' (and about 'what') search perspective. And, in assuming the role of internal chronicler, the organizational narrative can then be framed and shaped accordingly.

Support from research

From a strategic PR and marketing perspective, lending credibility to these supplementary-role suggestions are two recent studies:

- [Pew Internet 'Generations Online' research, succinctly summarized by MarketingProfs](#)

- (In particular) the annual [Edelman Trust Barometer](#) (Executive Findings 2011 PDF page numbers referenced below).

Top-line takeaways

What do both studies tell us? No matter what their age, increasingly people² are using the internet to search for information, verified and/or analyzed by subject experts (both externally and internally) and, to a less significant extent (in terms of generations and numbers), to connect directly with organizations.

They are searching for organizational collateral beyond products and services offered. People want to determine if a business is a 'good' and humanized one, which can be trusted in the way it treats a variety of stakeholders (e.g. its employees – Trust Barometer, page 26).

Although companies continue to funnel resources into social media, results of the 2011 Trust Barometer suggests the self-collecting of

'Trusted authorities' (changes in two years) (Page 19)

2009		2011	
Academic/expert	62%	Academic/expert	70%
Financial/industry analyst	49%	Technical expert in company	64% (new)
Person like yourself	47%	Financial/industry analyst	53%
NGO representative	41%	CEO	50% (up)
Regular employee	32%	NGO representative	47%
CEO	31%	Government official	43%
Government official	29%	Person like yourself	43%
Regular employee 34% (up)			
First source for information (then go to...) Second source (Page 20)			
Online search engine	29%	Online news sources	23%
Online news sources	19%	Print (newspapers/magazines)	17%
Print (newspapers/magazines)	15%	Online search engine	16%
Broadcast (radio/TV)	12%	Broadcast (radio/TV)	14%
Company website	11%	Company website	11%
Friends and family	7%	Friends and family	7%
Social media	5%	Social media	7%

desired information (much of it by way of search engines) remains more prevalent than the 'two-way symmetrical communications' (beloved by many in PR) afforded through new media channels (corporate blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc).

And yet, I see some tremendous opportunities to build on early social media efforts (partly by using search), based on the data provided.

Edelman Trust Barometer 2011 news release (January 25, 2010)

"Trust in business may have stabilized globally, but it is different and conditional, premised on what a company does and how it communicates.... Search engines rank No. 1 as the place people go first for information about a company, followed by online news sources and print/broadcast media. Traditional news, in one form or another, rank as the most trusted sources in major markets... (business magazines, radio, television, and newspapers, respectively)." Richard Edelman

Working with the Trust Barometer data

From an organizational PR



perspective, following are 2011 data extracts that I see as significant in terms of areas for consideration and future focus. (see chart above)

PR-perspective mashup: internal experts

1. From a strategic corporate perspective, what's particularly significant in the 2011 findings is that the highest ranked (and new) trusted internal source is 'Technical expert within the company.' This information is important, as likely internal experts (e.g. engineering, HR or financial staff) were hitherto under-used in ongoing organizational narratives.

Suggestion: don the internal journalist's workout gear and start sourcing internal experts and information that might be of interest to stakeholders. (Use existing 'search'

information gleaned from corporate websites and/or social media channels to influence the nature of the experts and information used.)

2. Given how often PR practitioners make use of the head honcho as the organization's public face, it's encouraging to see that the CEO position has increased in perceived trust (by 19 per cent, globally) over two years, regarding credibility.

Perhaps now is the time to push for implementation of (and real commitment to) a corporate blog and/or Twitter account, with at least some of the postings (or tweets) coming from the CEO. The organization's various 'technical experts' could contribute posts, too....

Corporate blogs allow for both disintermediation (i.e. a nimble platform of wholly owned real estate – versus some third-party social media sites, such as Facebook, where your organization is really a sharecropper³) and the humanizing of the organization (from the top down).

It's prudent to implement disintermediated social media platforms prior to an unforeseen crisis or even before monitoring

efforts unearth information searches from stakeholders that use negative terminology. Both potential circumstances should move the 'do-we-need-a-blog?' debate onto the critical-priority list, with lightening speed.

3. Although trust in the 'Regular employee' rose two per cent, overall the rank-and-file descended to the bottom of the 'trust' (or 'interest') heap. This undercuts declarations by social media gurus who believe the focus of organizational digital channels should be on 'regular' employees.

Rather than rejecting participation in corporate social media channels entirely, involve employees in figuring out what information and stories might be of the greatest interest and through which channels, particularly in regards to age preferences (as per the [Pew Internet 'Generations Online'](#) research).

Being platform-SEO savvy

As discussed, increasingly the success of organizations being heard or seen in the important online sphere, is dependent upon SEO earned media, whether it be through online news sources (i.e. mediated 'pick-up' of your organization's stories or spokespeople, products or events) or via your corporate real estate (i.e. disintermediated corporate information and narratives).

Note that external journalists use search engines to find the same corporate stories perceived to be of interest ('Why should this matter to

me?' and 'How does this impact on our readers/viewers/listeners and what would they find of use and interest?'). Don that same (internal) journalist perspective during the 'research' and 'subject-expert sourcing' stages, in addition to the actual writing (for website, blog or Twitter) or telling (podcast or video) phases.

Original and valued information, whether on your corporate website ('11 per cent trusted'), blog or other social media channels, can serve as resources to a traditional journalist researching a story. Third-party endorsement of corporate information ('earned media') and online (news) links only adds to your SEO clout.

Case studies of digital communication

Check out PR Conversations interviews with:

- [Tom Murphy](#), of Microsoft, who focuses on the company's CSR narrative
- [Mike Spear*](#), of Genome Alberta – learn about the GenOmics site, a highly customized Facebook page that serves as a 24-hour science newsroom, collecting stories from around the world and laying them out like a digital magazine
- [Andrew Arnold*](#), of LEGO, who makes use of social media, both for education purposes and to discover 'brand champion' communities around the world

- [Avril Benoit*](#), of MSF Canada, who branches out the international NGO's work onto a variety of platforms, whilst fiercely protecting a correct and sensitive portrayal of both its medical volunteers and the countries and victims served
- [James Topham](#), of War Child Canada, who partners with musicians and pushes the boundaries of social media 'games' and depictions in the NGO's fight for attention.

Is it a coincidence that three* out of five of these remarkably nutritious, fat-free 'storytelling' PR practitioners are former journalists? All five appear to have 'worked up' a pretty good handle on SEO, too.

¹ Hat tip to [Ben Cotton](#) for coining 'information obesity'.

² Edelman Trust Barometer: 5,075 informed publics in two age groups (25-34 and 35-64) in 23 countries.

³ 'Sharecropper' analogy courtesy of [Valeria Maltoni](#), a prolific and articulate blogger who champions the necessity for 'business transformation.'



*With more than 20 years of experience, primarily in the financial and lifelong learning non-profit sectors (employment, [board member](#) or [committee](#)), Toronto-based **Judy Gombita** is an accomplished, internationally well-networked and creative public relations and communication management specialist. In-depth experience includes initiating, planning, budgeting and maintaining integrated communication programs. Her skill set includes resource development, relationship building and reputation management. She values collaborative working environments, where strategy and ingenuity are valued. Judy can be networked with through the [PR Conversations blog](#) she co-edits, her [LinkedIn profile](#) or on Twitter [@jgombita](#).*

By [Trevor Young](#)

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA HAS ADDED VALUE TO THE PR AGENCY BUSINESS

Over the past decade the practice of in-house PR has grown as management of large companies and organisations better appreciate the value strategic communications can bring to their brand. Despite this, however, it is external PR consultants who are leading the way when it comes to (a) understanding today's hyper-connected marketplace and, (b), actively participating on the social web, thus making them an invaluable commodity in today's cynical and information-overloaded world.

The fact that many in-house communications departments have grown significantly in size means in some ways the need for external consultants has, to a degree, lessened. In reality, though, the fact that agency PR professionals are at the cutting edge of communication knowledge acquisition and implementation means they are a resource that cannot be done without.

Then the media landscape changed.

Not quickly at first, but it soon became pretty apparent the social web was unlike anything the modern-day communications industry has ever experienced:

- Blogging moved from being a geeky pastime practised in a darkened room to a highly visible mainstream activity.

- Backyard podcasters started gaining an audience (and therefore influence).
- YouTube became the world's biggest search engine (after Google).
- Mark Zuckerberg – if you believe the film 'Social Network' – ripped off the Winklevoss twins and guided Facebook to half a billion users in under seven years.
- Twitter went from being a time-wasting novelty to an incredibly powerful, game – changing real-time medium.
- Then, just when you thought you had a handle on everything, Foursquare emerged and grew by an astonishing 3,800 per cent last year alone.
- And now Quora is taking the world by storm, with some observers boldly declaring it the future of journalism.

Shot in the arm or pain in the arse?

To some in our industry the advent of social media is one giant pain in the arse. It has upset the 'communications appletart' and meant we've had to learn a whole lot of new things, not to mention unlearn many old habits.

To others, however, the social web is a 'shot in the arm' for our industry – new technologies have levelled the playing field and changed our profession forever.

As professionals we need a raft of new skills in our vocational kitbag. We need to change the way we write. We need to be able to think and respond in 'real-time'. We need to know our way around digital technology as well as we do a TV newsroom.

Agency PR leads the new world social order

A cursory glance at the [most followed Australian PR people on Twitter](#) reveals an over-representation of agency folk. It's a similar thing with blogs and podcasts, online video, Facebook conversations, and 'shiny new things' like Quora. (LinkedIn I'm not so sure – I think in-house PR pros are well represented here).

But of course it's not just about the technology, but what you do with it that matters.

It's about immersing yourself in the culture of the social web as a way of better understanding its nuances and etiquettes. It's about participating and interacting and learning and sharing. It's about attending offline social media events and building connections that lift one's profile (and that of their business or employer) in

the broader online community.

In my experience, agency pros appear to have adapted pretty well to the changes brought on by social media, while their in-house brethren are still adjusting to the 'new world (social) order'. While my observations for this article are confined to Australia, if I look at what happened several years ago a similar situation occurred in the US and UK (i.e. it was the agencies leading the new media charge).

While in-house PR practitioners were weighing up the risks of putting their names 'out there' on blogs, on Twitter or in YouTube videos or podcast interviews, consultants were taking a chance and experimenting with these new media channels.

Of course, this is understandable given agencies are commercial businesses that rely heavily on reputation and connections and therefore need to be out amongst it.

But by becoming more digitally savvy earlier in the piece, I think you'll find agency pros started to kick away from their in-house peers. They experimented more, learned quicker, built connections and deepened their levels of knowledge in the social space.

So why is this the case and what does it mean for the PR profession?

Here are my thoughts – you might

have alternative views and in the spirit of open dialogue that is the social web, I'd love to hear them. Am I heading in the right direction, or am I on the wrong tram altogether?

Agency people cross more boundaries day-to-day – they tend to be more entrepreneurial and participatory by sheer dint of the type of work they do, so it kinda makes sense they would gravitate towards the social web where connection is king and conversation is everything.

In-house practitioners on the other hand tend to be more narrowly-focused – they concentrate on the one business (their employer's) and often have to answer to a conservative senior management that to this day is still trying (unsuccessfully) to control the message from within the confines of an ivory tower we call the boardroom.

I think it's fair to say many in-house pros probably work in a culture that is inherently conformist and risk-averse. Big organisations hate change, and social media is ALL ABOUT CHANGE. This has to have an influence on in-house communications personnel.

Consultants, however, tend to operate in environments that are more open and dynamic and therefore are freer to experiment and take risks. More often than not they work in smaller companies and aren't weighed down by process, protocol and policy.

Revitalisation of the PR consulting business

The agency business is being rejuvenated in a big way. All of a sudden clients need help not only with strategic communications generally but also in navigating the social web.

They face significant challenges in communicating effectively in a real-time networked environment and web-savvy PR consultants are ideally placed to provide independent and objective advice in this area. To join the dots with traditional communications methods, as it were.

But importantly, because external consultants tend to work across numerous industries and clients (and therefore are exposed to a broader variety of briefs, challenges and cultures), the level of knowledge and intelligence picked up along the way – and experience gained – is invaluable to smart in-house PR pros who can tap such skill and know-how for their own, and their employer's, benefit.

* FOOTNOTE: Oh, I also know some savvy in-house practitioners who really get the social space, and, conversely, a number of agency people who are lagging behind so much I doubt they'll ever really catch up.



Trevor Young is a PR Warrior on the Frontline of the Communications Revolution – he's a popular blogger, speaker and presenter who stands (precariously) at the intersection of public relations, marketing communications and social media...and tries not to get run over! In reality, Trevor works for Edelman Australia as its Director of Strategy + Innovation. He loves challenging the status quo of not only the PR profession, but the broader marketing communications industry. A journalist by profession, he has worked with some of the biggest names in the PR consultancy world before spending 12 years as an entrepreneur establishing three companies in the areas of public relations, experiential marketing, strategic communications and social media consulting. Trevor can be networked with at his [PR Warrior blog](#), his [LinkedIn profile](#) and on Twitter [@trevoryoung](#).

By Dwight Whitney

MESSIAH OR JUST SOCIAALLY INEPT

First and foremost, Facebook is nothing more than a media channel albeit with a range of accompanying problems and issues that are both constructive as well as destructive. It is fun, entertaining and superficially interactive, which is why some people think of it as the new way to communicate versus being a channel for that action. The problem that these abbreviated versions of the 'real deal' are, in fact, creating people who now know of no other means of interaction.

As with any other media, it has its place, but is it THE PLACE? And in the adoration, are we missing some of the more residual effects of this media that are irrevocably changing us as humans?

So, sorry, Goldman Sachs and Russian billionaire investors; sorry, Time Magazine Man of the Year love fest; sorry David Fincher, Jesse Eisenberg, Rooney Mara and Bryan Barter and others behind the flick; sorry even to 'da man' himself, Mark Zuckerberg; but most especially sorry my fellow communicators.

I think it's time we all faced up to Facebook.

The band wagon may seem the place to be at the moment but as a communicator, and before the wheels do fall off, let me take my place on the soap box.

PR pros not facing up to their responsibilities

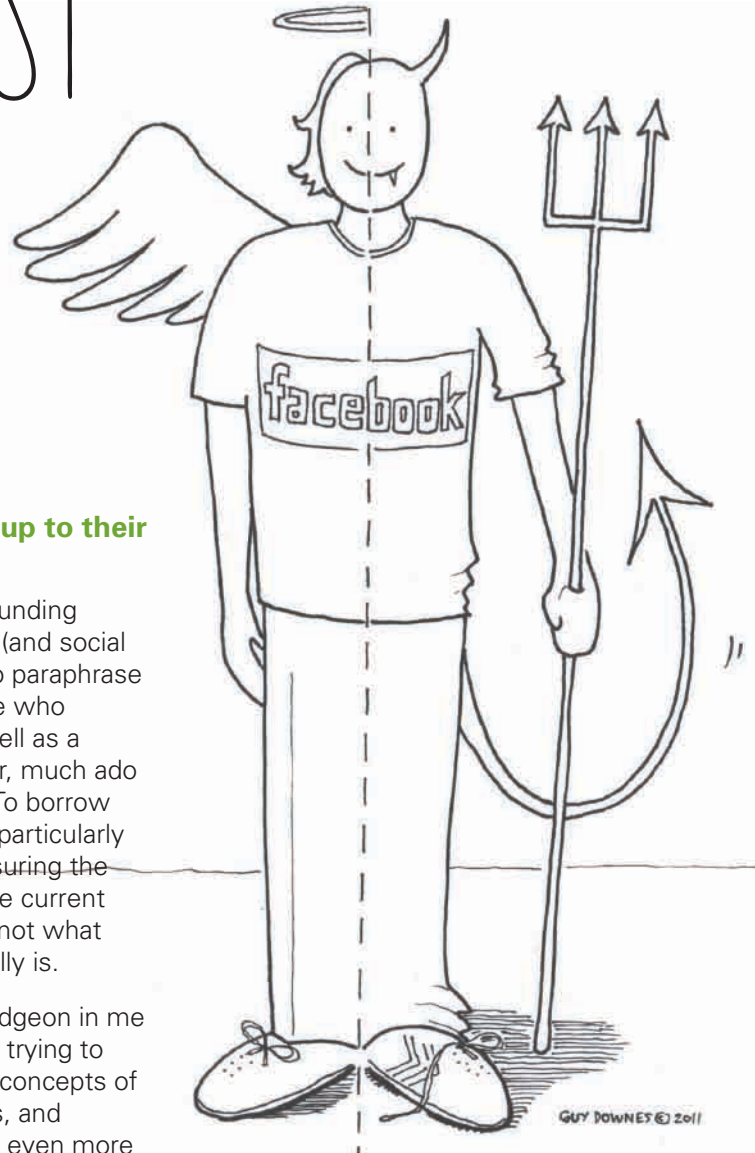
All the brouhaha surrounding Facebook in particular (and social media in general) is, to paraphrase the words of someone who himself fared rather well as a populist communicator, much ado about not that much. To borrow another Bardism, and particularly in the context of measuring the possible 'fall out' of the current fawning, let's explore not what seems but what actually is.

Admittedly, the curmudgeon in me does 'twitfaced' when trying to wrap my brain around concepts of twinfluence, buzziness, and hyper-connected. I get even more concerned about comments from the likes of the Telegraph Group that 'Facebook is bigger than the Internet itself'.

This, however, is not the source of my concern or dismay. As communicators, we have a duty of care and obligation to understand the nature of this social media beast. Rather than being dewy-eyed cargo cultists, it behooves us instead to take a critical look at the pros and cons of this phenomenon.

The right to communicate

At first glance, and as someone who played a small part in the



push to promote the notion behind UNESCO Article 19—the Right to Communicate—I did get a buzz out of the potential that Facebook offered.

The essence of Article 19 is "the right of every individual or community to have its stories and views heard." In that context, communication is both an essential and very important need as well as a basic human right. Starved of the possibility to communicate and talk to other people, no individual, community, group or any other institution would be able to exist, or prosper.

Strictly speaking, the ability to communicate or the general right of communication make it possible to exchange opinions, thoughts and meanings. So it enables people to express themselves and show their own points of view. Consequently, communication makes people who and what they are and particularly strengthens human dignity.

By having the right to communicate and express personal thoughts, ideas, and opinions, people feel themselves treated equally and communication validates human equality. The protection and implementation of communication rights represents an essential part of the general topic of human rights.

In that sense Facebook may seem messianic, but deeper enquiry does raise some genuine alarm bells...at least with me.

Anti-social media

The push for certain inalienable rights is noble, but balance insists there should also be an accompanying sense of responsibility that needs to be factored into any interaction. This is one area where this media becomes definitely antisocial. On a number of levels.

Bringing out the worst.

- We're seeing both anecdotal and empirical evidence that Facebook has become a breeding ground of some of the worst attributes of personal interaction. Namely, bullying.

- Other than toilet walls and tenement halls, where else can you publish outrageous untruths and hurtful invectives and then disappear into the ether of no accountability?
- No wonder more and more users are recognising the trade offs of privacy when being on Facebook when they discover the whole wide world (www) is potentially in your face.

Not human anymore.

- Facebook is also encouraging people to electronically replace the 'human' aspects of communication—as in face-to-face interaction where meta messaging, verbal cues, context and engagement really do matter—with keyboard and mouse click.
- Worse, intimacy and emotions are being replaced with a mega mall concept of friendship where 'more is better' and immaculate consumption replaces genuine connections.
- Plus, in the pursuit of levity and brevity when it comes to important matters we're actually lowering the level of debate and diluting the need for reflection and reaction. Clarity and context are also being left up for grabs.

Might get fooled again?

- Case in point are the plaudits that Obama got in being the most 'switched on' and connected

candidate as evidenced by his campaign's use of social media.

- McLuhan would say that the media was the message—"change you can believe in" – was a promise – as was "Yes, we can"! These were unambiguous promises of uncompromising change.
- A slogan is more than just words – it is a statement of basic values. And if you betray those values or lie, you will not be forgiven.

So, it is little wonder the Compromiser in Chief's supporters are either bewildered or angry. The voters punished the Democrats in the last election – and you can bet that by 2012, they're not going to want to be burned by Obama again.

Then again, maybe they will. As Lenin pointed out, you don't get change until things get really bad! And that measure of reality may well get lost in the photo gallery of Facebook.



*Born in the United States, educated there and in New Zealand, having spent time working and studying in Japan and now living permanently in New Zealand, **Dwight Whitney** is an accomplished international communicator with over 36 years experience. He has held a number of marketing and communications positions in the public and private sectors of all three countries. Since 1986, he has worked as a brand adviser and writer—both in his own business and as a senior consultant for DDB Pinnacle. He currently operates a brand/marcomm agency, *Trinity Communications*. His guiding principle as a communicator is forever to be 'a rootless cosmopolitan and spreader of alien ideas'. Dwight can be networked with on his co-authored (with Peter Heath) PR blog and his LinkedIn profile.*

of others. Doing this effectively enhances your personal reputation, in addition to that of your organization. The opportunity to do both increases by:

1. Meeting and connecting with as many people as possible
2. Really relating to individuals, whether limited to a few minutes or with the possibility of deeper engagement later
3. Listening (and taking mental notes) more than talking
4. Consciously trying to treat each person met with the same attention, interest and enthusiasm
5. Participating in interesting, lively and always respectful conversations and debates about ideas and events, whether related to the organization(s) or not
6. Introducing people previously known (or just met) to others, particularly if their areas of work or interests intersect – pointing out those convergences.

The right PR attitude

Being empathetic to people and welcoming a diversity of perspectives may help persuade people to value your organization and you. At times, that may mean taking an arm's-length approach to your company, looking at it from a different standpoint. One of your roles as a PR pro is that of a boundary spanner, too, so learn what you can and let it enrich your personal knowledge and approach, in addition to that of your organization. The right

PR attitude includes:

1. Refraining from marketing products or services unless asked about them (because other 'events' or channels are more suited to this)
2. Abstaining from engaging in slander/libel or gossip about competitors or individuals; rerouting the conversation to other areas of common interest
3. Working to earn trust that the representation and depiction of the organization is an honest one, including not making grandiose statements or empty promises
4. Having a pleasant (and maybe even a fun!) time.

PR helping to humanize organizations

Optimum public relations and social media (a.k.a. digital PR) revolve around humanizing an organization – with an overarching goal of providing whatever is requested, whether that be information, transactions, contacts or direct engagement – in as comfortable and intuitive a way as possible. This has been part of the remit of public relations for quite some time.

A difference with social media is that the humanizing is in the public sphere and it is very much based 'right now' in time.

Just like networking events, not everyone who 'attends' (i.e. engages in or with) a company's social media platforms is going to want all of these things or this amount of contact.

Recognize that fact. Impress it upon employees who are more extroverted in their social media personas. Some visitors slip in, observe and/or get the information they need and leave. Have as goals that each person feels welcomed within his or her comfort level and that the organization will work to ensure the majority of information needs are fulfilled, now or in future.

Remember, it's not so much about what an organization wants to achieve through social media; rather, it's what various stakeholders want from the channels and how they view the company, now and in future, as a result of the experience.

Monitoring and evaluating the quantitative (i.e. outputs and actions) and qualitative (i.e. perceptions and/or changes in behaviour) outcomes of social media interaction is where the best ROI (i.e. organizational value) can be assessed and future public relations-oriented programs devised.

Think of the organizations you are familiar with that have social media platforms or channels in place. How many of them are using them in a truly 'social' way (i.e., humanized, informative and engaging), as described above?

(Editors footnote: In synergy with Judy's sentiments, a post on Copyblogger recently appeared that talked about, amongst other topics, the advantages for professional communicators of having sophisticated social intelligence skills.)



*With more than 20 years of experience, primarily in the financial and lifelong learning non-profit sectors (employment, board member or committee), Toronto-based **Judy Gombita** is an accomplished, internationally well-networked and creative public relations and communication management specialist. In-depth experience includes initiating, planning, budgeting and maintaining integrated communication programs. Her skill set includes resource development, relationship building and reputation management. She values collaborative working environments, where strategy and ingenuity are valued. Judy can be networked with through the PR Conversations blog she co-edits, her LinkedIn profile or on Twitter @jgombita.*

By [Craig Pearce](#)

IS SOCIAL MEDIA HELPING PR BECOME MORE INFLUENTIAL AS A BUSINESS DISCIPLINE?



For all this talk about how important social media is and how much of our time, as PR professionals, is spent undertaking social media activity, I have grave doubts as to whether our capability in this area is helping PR become more influential as a business discipline. I wonder if this is because the influence of internal public relations is greater than external agencies and, simply put, in-house pros haven't 'mistrusted' social media to the extent that consultants have.

There's good and bad news in this:

- Good: in time, and as in-house pros become more fluent in the mercurial characteristics of social media, public relations will increase its organisational influence

- Bad: it hasn't happened yet and there seems no big rush for in-house pros to get their social media skill set in order.

Evidence that in-house isn't up to agency-level in social media?

Well, it seems there are hardly any in-house PR pros that have their own blogs, one of the easiest social media platforms to master, implying either a lack of interest, a surfeit of perceptions that social media is not part of the future and/or they just don't get it. Also, in Australia at least, speakers at PR-social media conferences are about 90% consultants, implying that in-house lack nous (social media-speaking, that is – of course, if they use external

support when internal expertise is lacking, that's smart thinking!).

I also think that as revolutionary, in many respects, as social media is, I don't think the depth of its importance or business potential has reached upstairs to CEO level yet. Sure, there are exceptions and, sure, there is no doubt awareness of Web 2.0 and what it entails, but I don't think it's been integrated into business model DNA in a profound manner as yet.

No doubt, this is because public relations and marketing haven't sold it in effectively enough up to this point, but I do think the potential exists for social media to help PR become more influential as a business discipline.

I also think it is such an important opportunity that we'd be completely remiss not to go for the jugular. My rationale for this is not so that PR can become a bigger chemist in organisational DNA reformulation for ego, budget or power. It is because effective application of social media can help achieve two-way symmetrical communication.

Two-way symmetrical communication positions public relations as a means for organisational change, based on stakeholder preferences, almost as much as organisational advocacy. A major benefit of this approach is that it helps organisations operate in a manner more likely to contribute to society interests, rather than organisational interests alone, which are often predominated by profit and/or shareholder-driven motives.

CSR is an application of this same mindset.

Communication starts with the business plan

I asked a range of public relations industry leaders what they thought about the question of social media helping PR get more influential and also started a poll on LinkedIn. The poll sample wasn't huge (19 votes), with 58% saying SM is helping PR be more influential as a business discipline, 11% saying no and 31% unsure. But it gave an inkling of a sentiment.

Other comments through LinkedIn discussions also provided some interesting data, but despite the positive views that many had about the increasing, social-media driven influence of PR, I remain profoundly sceptical that this has occurred: I was given no definitive evidence or examples of where this has been the case.

Most of the feedback I received was about the importance or influence

of social media as a communication discipline, but not about it enhancing the power of PR to influence organisations.

Angela Sinickas, a globally well known PR and PR measurement authority, had this to say: "What seems more strategic to management, and leads to greater influence for PR practitioners, is to start with the company's business strategy and the existing communication strategies to support each one.

"If communicators can show how a particular social medium can replace or enhance traditional tools in those strategies with greater impact, faster and at lower cost, THAT will help gain influence with management."

Reputation from social media from public relations = more influence

Daniel Young, GM at Sydney PR agency, Encoder Public Relations, said..."social media enables customers and stakeholders to rapidly create groundswell either in support of, or in opposition to, a specific company, individual or brand. This makes reputation management an even more important commercial consideration...success in this regard would reinforce the PR industry's already strong position as a core business discipline."

Dan's right. Reputation is critically important for business. Social media is playing an increasingly important part in reputation building. When you consider media's reliance on it to identify issues and resource stories, this is especially so. Social media feeding media feeding social media. a feeding frenzy.

But still no evidence.

Crisis communication as PR's social media foot in the door

Graham White, MD of Howorth and an Australian PR agency social media innovator, insinuated that it may well be through crisis communication that the opportunity exists to build up PR's influence through the use of social media.

"If your organisation's reputation is at risk," Graham said. "PR needs to know about it and needs to know what to do next to help mitigate that risk. Every PR person, as a consequence, should be able to provide that counsel and take action.

"If PR can provide that service, then yes, as a business discipline your role in the organisation and the value you bring to the table will climb rapidly.

"The best policy is to create and engage in a two-way conversation, providing people who want to engage with you the information they need. As a discipline, that [social media – Ed.] belongs to PR. But do not try to quash negative conversations. That is feedback and you have to act – in your role as boundary scanner [and spanner – Ed.] for the business, you now have a firm grip on what the external world thinks and bring those feelings into the organisation."

Dialogue and narrative helping PR do its job better...increasing influence

"PR, in its purest sense, has always been about telling stories, building relationships with stakeholders and engaging in two-way dialogue with the people who matter most to a company, brand or organisation," pointed out Michelle Hutton, Chief Executive at Edelman Australia.

"As it happens, social media can be effective in helping organisations tell their stories, build relationships with stakeholders and engage people in two-way dialogue. In other words, PR practitioners can now do their job even more effectively – social media

can help us reach more people, more easily, and add not only scale to our communications efforts, but also greater personalisation.

“There is also the other side of the equation: the media landscape has become so volatile, complex and ever-changing that companies desperately need help in making sense of it all, so there is great upside and opportunity for PR to take the lead in educating and advising senior management as to how best navigate the social web. Because strategic communications has been at the heart of what we do in PR, this is a natural progression for the discipline.”

Michelle summarised by saying...“social media is adding an extra dimension to the PR offer and therefore helping to propel the discipline up the comms food chain.”

I think there are a number of valuable aspects to Michelle’s thoughts:

- Social media is another opportunity for PR to become invaluable to organisations and, hence, more influential
- It is one tool, amongst others. Don’t let it undermine the value other tools can bring if they are more appropriate for the communication/relationship management challenge
- One reason conversations and narratives matter is because they humanise brands and enhance their relevance to, and resonance for, stakeholders – another dimension to two-way symmetrical (and two-way asymmetrical) communication, really.

Statistics case – relevant or long bow – supporting PR for president!

In a [PRIA LinkedIn discussion](#) on this topic, [Adam Joseph](#), Corporate Affairs Director at of [SR7](#), pointed out the following:



- Nielsen’s Trust survey shows a huge erosion in faith in traditional news and marketing, as consumers shift attention to what their peers think: 86% of Australian internet users are looking to their fellow internet users for opinions and information about products, services and brands (Nielsen Social Media Report 2010)
- 25% of Australians have boycotted a company after reading a negative comment on social media about how that organisation treats its customers (StollzNow Research Australia 2009).

Adam, like Graham White, sees an opportunity for PR influence growth on the back of its effective utilisation of social media in a crisis communication situation. He also asserted that, based on his experience, “Those businesses that ‘do’ social media well...generally see an increased influence of the corporate affairs function vis a vis others within an organisation.”

It’s a positive note to end the discussion on. Whether you sit in the more confident camp that Adam resides in regarding the impact effective social media application is

having on enhancing PR’s influence and reputation as a business discipline, or are more my way in the ‘has potential but can’t see it happening right now, the proposition that social media is providing PR with an incredible opportunity holds true:

- An opportunity to be more influential within business
- An opportunity to increase its effectiveness as a communication discipline
- An opportunity to help society become better, happier and more in line with organisational stakeholder wishes and expectations.

By [Dr Tony Jaques](#)

ISSUE MANAGEMENT: CHANGING RISKS, CHANGING EXPECTATIONS

The rise of social media has created untold new tools and channels for all public relations practitioners.

But in the field of issue management it is having a dramatic impact not just on the day-to-day practice of the discipline, but is changing forever an organisation's stakeholder relationships and the expectations of its stakeholders.

The growing expectation gap

Since Issue Management first developed, there have been various different approaches to defining what an issue is. One of the earlier ideas was the so-called Expectation Gap Theme. This very simple approach basically says that an issue arises when there is a gap between the actions of an organisation and the expectations of its stakeholders.

The expectation gap concept lost some popularity because it is very passive and lacks the proactivity that issue management should display. Now the rise of the social media is reviving interest, not because this approach changes the way we think about issues themselves, but because social media have changed



the community's expectation of what is acceptable corporate behaviour, as well as increasing the community's capacity to communicate those expectations.

The rise of social media is commonly described as creating a more level playing field between those with power and those affected by exercise of power. However a less recognised impact of social media is the way in which community expectation

is changing, which has significant implications for the future of issue management.

My online newsletter, Managing Outcomes, and my issue management-themed blog often discuss how organisations have paid a high price for failing to acknowledge this new reality. Two recent cases demonstrate the obvious increasing speed and globalisation of issues and, in addition, highlight the evolving

gap between organisation action and community expectation.

Hyatt Hotels fiasco

When three Hyatt Hotels in the Boston area decided to lay off almost 100 housekeeping staff and replace them with lower cost, out-sourced employees, the Boston Globe alleged that the housekeepers had been tricked into training their replacements by describing them as temporary vacation staff.

Hyatt promptly issued a firm statement denying any trickery, adding that it was helping the housekeepers find work in Hyatt and other local hotels and that they had been provided with transition assistance and full severance benefits.

However the damage was done and through late 2009 the story became an internet and media sensation, focusing mainly on community expectation of how a luxury hotel chain should treat its lowest paid workers. There were calls for a boycott of Hyatt, a public protest in the city of Boston and politicians urged Hyatt to reconsider.

More importantly for a global brand, the story spread around the world through mainstream international news sources and hundreds of blogs and social media sites. Even the normally staid Harvard Business Review blog offered the headline: "Lessons from Hyatt: Simple ways to damage your brand." As HBR

concluded: "There's at least a small lesson here: think about the way your actions will be perceived by all your stakeholders before you take them."

Gap's new logo

Another view of new stakeholder expectations arose in late 2010 when The Gap clothing chain announced a change to its long-time logo, triggering a firestorm of protest around the world. In the face of widespread opposition, the company promptly said it would 'crowd source' a new logo, then within days jettisoned that plan and reverted to the original logo.

Although history is littered with brand fiascos – think New Coke and Vegemite iSnack 2.0 – the Gap logo backflip helped popularise an emerging stakeholder concept: that brands 'belong' to consumers and not manufacturers. Promoting this trend, influential bloggers argued that Gap had no 'right' to change the logo without consumer consultation and support.

Where to for issue management?

Some commentators have argued that Gap management grossly over-reacted to online criticism from a small but very vocal minority, while others claim the entire episode was a marketing stunt.

While the truth about this case may continue to be debated, the detail here is less important than the fact

that for Hyatt and Gap – and for many others – stakeholders now have different expectations about how organisations should behave and about their own role in how issues are managed.

Working from the platform provided by the social media, stakeholders are reconfiguring the traditional 'expectation gap' and issue managers cannot afford to ignore that change.



Dr Tony Jaques consults to corporate and government clients on issue and crisis management and risk communication through his company, Issue Outcomes Pty Ltd. He has been widely published in academic and non-academic journals around the world and writes Managing Outcomes, Australia's only specialist online issue and crisis management newsletter. He can be networked with at his issue management blog and Linkedin profile.

By Jane Jordan-Meier

TO CEO OR NOT TO CEO? CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN ACTION

The CEO is (or should be) the most prized communications asset at a company's disposal. He or she drives corporate strategy and gives voice to performance and progress. The CEO establishes the building blocks of corporate culture and is often the public face of the company. They exemplify all that is good, bad, promising or disheartening about an organisation, so whether or not they are the spokesperson for an organisation in crisis is a question of fundamental importance for corporate communicators.

Choosing a spokesperson in a crisis is very perplexing for many organizations. Many assume that it must be the top dog, the CEO, the managing director or the chairman. Not always so. When a CEO takes ownership of a crisis and is the vehicle for the response the reputation stakes, do not forget, rise dramatically – just ask BP!

The bottom line?

- Is the CEO capable of connecting with stakeholders in a compelling, compassionate manner?

It is a matter of credibility. As Martin Newman said in his report, 'Shaken not Stirred', for The Company Agency (London, 2008), "People are much quicker at spotting inconsistencies when times are tough. CEOs should never underestimate that every twitch of their facial expression is interpreted. When people are looking at leaders, they are constantly trying to interpret them in ways that are often subliminal."



Leaders in crisis communication

Contrast Queensland Premier Anna Bligh and Prime Minister Julia Gillard during the recent devastating floods – both leaders, but clearly one a more effective spokesperson than the other. Gillard made the right moves – being in all the right places, but was often off-key, wooden. Bligh hit the right tone, resonated more with her constituents.

Just as U.S. President Barack Obama spoke in detail about the shooting victims with the right emotional tone at the memorial service of the January 2010 tragedy in Tucson Arizona, so did Anna Bligh. As Anne Davies wrote in the Fairfax Media outlets, "At press conferences, Bligh seems to know every tiny town in every valley, aware of who will face the next threat and how high the rivers will rise ... she has struck the right note of grim determination, tinged with emotion."

Disasters are defining moments. The biggest test of a company's indeed a country's values. Rudy Giuliani became a household hero as New York mayor on September 11, 2001. President George Bush's slide began when he took three days to properly respond to hurricane Katrina.

Leaders in crisis communication scenarios

It would be unthinkable that the Prime Minister or CEO wouldn't speak nor be present when an event

as devastating as the Queensland floods takes place, or there are serious questions about national security, or the safety of employees and consumers – think Alan Joyce, CEO, Qantas during the recent Airbus

troubles. Notably Rolls Royce, the makers of the engine that blew apart on a Qantas A380 Airbus said very little.

Leaders' involvement in a crisis can send many, many messages and some intended, some not. Often, their presence conveys that the situation is serious enough to impact the company's future. In some cases, the CEO can fuel the bushfire rather than dampen the flames. Again think of Tony Hayward's performance during the disastrous oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Questions when determining crisis communication spokespeople

Rushing your CEO to the front lines is easy. They indeed may be the most articulate voice. But my advice is to think very carefully about the issues at hand and their long-term implications before putting the CEO out front.

As a basic rule, go for the person that is most credible, most believable, most authentic and has the genuine interest of the affected community/consumers/constituents at heart.

Will they pass the grace under fire question? Are they believable in that first nanosecond – yes that is all you have today to prove your credibility.

Research shows that it takes just a staggering 115 milliseconds for us to make a judgment based on body language. "Phony expressions usually do not fool us," says Professor

Beatrice de Gelder, a cognitive neuroscientist at Tilburg University in the Netherlands and Harvard Medical School.

Generally, the best spokesperson is local, accountable and likeable. As veteran Australian speechwriter, Don Watson, said of Anna Bligh, "She's a little less modern and a little more Churchillian, and people respond to that." State premier versus (national) Prime Minister.

They also need enough authority to back up their words with actions. And actions speak louder than words – always, but particularly in a crisis.

Organisations in crisis: a PR challenge

But, if your crisis is truly a show-stopping event and the company's reputation is clearly on the line (e.g., there have been multiple deaths, the scale of the crisis is huge – think Exxon Valdez, 9/11, the Qantas Airbus jet explosions and the monumental Gulf of Mexico BP oil spill), then it's imperative that the head of the organisation is at the scene, getting their hands dirty. They may know less, but their physical presence sends two powerful messages: "I care and I am accountable."

So you decide you need the CEO there; the scale and the potential damage to reputation are just too big. Then make sure that they are very well trained and drilled. It should be obvious, but please never ever let the CEO out without serious, professional

and regular training and coaching.

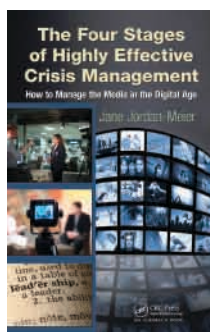
At media conferences:

- Back up with the CEO with relevant operational managers who can supply the more concrete details of the crisis – the boat captains, the engineers, the factory supervisor
- The CEO is there to say they're accountable, they take responsibility to make sure that everything will be done to fix the problem and, above, all to provide empathy and demonstrate genuine concern
- It is the role of the front-line management to provide the finer details of the recovery and response.

CEOs are important but not sufficient voices for their companies, as engagement is created by mid-level employees with serious knowledge of products and less perceived bias to exaggeration.

So test, test and test your spokespeople. Train like your very life depended on it. Scenario-based crisis training is critical. It will bring bad elements to light. Cross-train for multiple roles so that you have maximum flexibility in a crisis and, more importantly, a deeper coverage of responsibilities.

So no need to jump the gun and bring in the top dog immediately. If you play the trump card immediately where are you going next?



Principal of *Jane Jordan & Associates*, a boutique training, coaching and advisory firm, **Jane Jordan-Meier** is a communication and media coach with more than two decades of experience in working with executive management in both the government and the private sectors. Most of Jane's work today is in crisis management training with senior and executive management. Jane has taught at Masters level at UTS and undergraduate communication and PR courses at Charles Sturt as well as numerous *PRIA* workshops and conferences. Her book on crisis media management, *The Four Highly Effective Stages of Crisis Management: How to Manage the Media in the Digital Age*, will be released in March. Jane can be networked with through her [LinkedIn profile](#) and on Twitter [@aussiechic](#).

NB. This article is copyright 2011 to Jane Jordan-Meier and is based on research from her book, 'The Four Highly Effective Stages of Crisis Management: How to manage the media in the digital age', 14 January, 2011.

By Dr Catherine Sweet

WHAT FASCINATES PR STUDENTS?



As a PR practitioner-turned academic, I am often asked how I keep my students interested in the material. The one sure-fire recipe is to bring a theory to life by giving a real-life personal example: Been there, done that, have the scars (or the trophies) to prove it, so let me tell you about the time that I did it....

I am not talking about book-based case studies. Those that inhabit the pages of a text book (like the classic J&J Tylenol recall) are seen as “boring, remote, couldn’t happen to me” stuff.

But, when I tell them about the time in my very first PR job when I was dragged out of the backroom to face 70 journalists and 17 camera crews to explain exactly what technically had gone wrong in the London Stock Exchange of the first 17 minutes of

‘Big Bang’ –when the new systems crashed – well, that tends to get them wide-eyed.

Or maybe it was the time when my boss was arrested at dawn by the Serious Fraud Office; or when I had the chance to sit in at the Bank of England meeting when an investment bank went bust and was sold for £1. A PR role lets you be a participant in history being made – and that’s downright exciting!

PR ‘war stories’ recounted by someone who actually survived them are the best way to reach students, because they are real, experienced by the person who is standing up in front of them. It makes PR immediate and yet accessible. “If I can do it, so can you” is the sub-text.

There is an element of trust, honesty

and respect that gets wrapped into the process. Because they learn to trust my honesty, I can earn their respect. I am not afraid to tell them of the scars, the failures, the mistakes; it’s not all ‘super-hero PR’.

Students realise that professional PR people make mistakes, too – and to know the difference between an honest one, an ethical blunder and illegal stupidity.

I’ve had some career limiting moments. By sharing them, I help them realise that it isn’t always easy to make the right choice, but they need to face them bravely when they come. Maybe in the future, when they find themselves in the firing line, they will remember some of the advice and get through it all so they can tell their own stories.

From public relations storytelling to corporate narratives

My teaching has made me realise the power of ‘story telling’ as being the best form of PR and communication there is. As humans, we are hardwired to listen and learn; it’s how we acquire language in the first place. But as Richard Dawkins points out in his numerous books that followed *The Selfish Gene*, what separates humanity from the rest of earth’s species is our ability to pass on cultural memes (best thought of as little nuggets of insight), along with our genetic inheritance.

Storytelling as part of organisational communication theory has been around for about twenty years, evolving into a large bookshelf of books and articles about corporate narratives, sense giving and sense making, how story telling is used as a change management tool, etc. Recent debates in the field question whether corporate story telling by the dominant coalition is asymmetric communication in its worst form, a kind of corporate fantasy that is far removed from the employee experience at the coal-face.

The pedagogic treatment of story telling as an educational tool is a discipline in its own right; just try a Google search. It’s a matter of irritation that so much of the narrative of the PR profession is over

promoting its own importance, or one agency succeeding at the expense of another, scoring points in the media, or squabbling amongst itself about how little respect is shown to PR in the board rooms. But, that’s another story...

The impact of social media

In a world that is going increasingly online, story telling may be more pervasive and yet less effective. “Where’s the content?”, is all too often my moan at Facebook status updates or the latest YouTube clip of dancing babies, hamsters or whatever.

We may be connected now in ways that allow the exchange of personal information, but a lot of it is too much information, just narcissism put out there for information’s sake, rather than communicating in a meaningful way. In short, where is the narrative power? Some blogs have it, but a whole lot of them don’t.

Face-to-face story telling is more persuasive because more emotional connection is possible – it’s just more personal.

I run a PR blog because I believe you can’t teach what you don’t do yourself (which is why I think every academic teaching in the discipline should have a minimum of ten years of real experience; after all, you wouldn’t let a newly licensed car driver become a driving instructor, would you?). But

it is much, much harder to get my students to comment on my blog than it is to engage them in conversation in the classroom, even when I use Twitter to drive them to the blog.

Eye contact matters –it’s that trust thing and it creates a connection that online just can’t replicate.

Making it real

When it is good, face-to-face is real, symmetric, two way communication. I can challenge my students personally to think of situations in their own lives that raise the same sort of issues as corporate communications professionals face:

- How much of the truth should they tell their parents about their studies
- What are the consequences of being economical with the truth?

That brings home the lesson of crisis management communication. When the proverbial hits the fan, then how you have communicated in the past comes back to haunt you, whether you are a final year undergraduate or a Head of Corp Comms for a major oil company.

Honesty, trust and respect have to be earned over a long period of time – and can be destroyed in a moment. That makes them think – which is what we as communicators are here to do, isn’t it?



Dr Catherine Sweet (DPhil, Oxon; MCIPR) has over 25 years’ practitioner experience in PR, public affairs, corporate communications, crisis and change management and top team coaching. Starting in financial services, she has worked for a wide variety of organisations and clients in the public and private sectors. Now Senior Lecturer and Course Leader at Southampton Solent University, teaching undergraduates and graduates, she is an American by birth, but has lived and worked in the UK for more than half her life. Catherine can be networked with on her PR blog, her LinkedIn profile and on Twitter @CSweetPR.

By Craig Pearce

FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS OF SUCCESS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

The culture of public relations is not only based on a gratifying and inspirational aesthetic, but PR also contributes positively to society. To meet the challenge and leverage the opportunity that contemporary society is providing PR with, PR practitioners need to continually evolve and educate themselves, take a leadership position, collaborate excellently, know their way around social media and, very importantly, be a nice person!

Helping society

One of the most important strategic elements of public relations is identifying organisational stakeholder needs and wants. The PR pro then informs the organisation of stakeholder positions and helps the organisation evolve the way it operates so it is more closely aligned with stakeholders.

Of course, it works the other way around, too. But we all know that. What isn't so widely discussed through public relations forums is the influence that public relations can have on an organisation.

In essence, the public relations professional is the conscience of an organisation.



Leadership

Inherent within strategic public relations is challenging the status quo. That might be a status quo as characterised by an organisation or its stakeholders.

We are seeking change.

Change requires those who are instigating it and representing it to stand up in a considerably large way. That takes fortitude, it takes vision and it takes leadership.

Without exhibiting leadership, you will never be the best possible public relations professional you can be.

Innovation and education

Public relations, just like business and society which it serves, is changing all the time.

More importantly than that, however, is that a constant flow of new, business relevant ideas are needed to help create POD and thought leadership for organisations. Additionally, society and business

are not getting any simpler, so the intellect of public relations as a putative whole needs to continually keep one step ahead to deliver results.

Inherent within this is the need to continually learn and improve. Education is at the heart of this. Without it, you may not be fully dead in the water from a career perspective but, believe me, you ain't going anywhere fast.

Nice people!

PR is a people profession.

We are under the 'people spotlight' all the time.

It is expected of us to be emotionally functional (as opposed to dysfunctional) human beings. Add to this equation that the most effective and persuasive form of public relations is face-to-face communication (i.e. people interacting in real life as opposed to virtual life). It is extremely hard to do this without caring about other people and being able to empathise with them – these are difficult actions to undertake if you really don't care about, and aren't interested in empathising with, people.

If PR pros can't get face-to-face communication pretty spot on again and again (and most of the time we won't if we aren't being nice, a part of which is being considerate to others) then what hope do those who we counsel have?

Public relations, is, at the end of the day, a civilised profession in which to work. And one of its roles is, inherently, to enhance the civility of all those it counsels and works with.

Upshot? Excellent PR by excellent PR people helps create a more civilised society.

Collaboration and teams

This works two ways:

- On a strategic level, public relations encourages various parties (e.g. an organisation and its stakeholders) to collaborate to invent/devise/formulate a win-win outcome for these parties. This will generally mean negotiation (always a challenging and interesting dimension of public relations) and it will probably mean compromise
- On a more day-to-day level, we are all operating in some sort of team environment where we collaborate with colleagues, associates or clients. Even sole practitioners collaborate with clients and, arguably, stakeholders such as journalists.

For me, this is an enjoyable way to work as it helps me learn, it invariably challenges my perspectives and, ultimately, it leads to a better quality communication/relationship management outcome than would otherwise have been the case.

Social media

More than any other single tactic, social media has the potential to help achieve the holy grail of two-way symmetrical communication.

And two-way symmetrical communication is the primary cause of my passion for public relations.

I am well aware that I cannot achieve it in every communication program I design and/or which I am involved, but it provides a deeply satisfying model for me to apply and/or aspire to applying: professionally, personally, socially – a tripartite hybrid which suffuses and characterises my personality.

Social media, as has been well documented, is about:

- conversations
- giving a 'voice' to, in many cases, those who did not have a voice before its advent
- clarifying, and helping form, communities of interest, location and power
- organisations and their stakeholders learning from each other
- sharing 'ownership' of organisations/brands
- creating/enhancing relationships
- providing a bedrock from which change in organisations and their stakeholders can occur and is actually expected to occur.

It is helping create a new society, or at the very least the paradigm for a new society. One where my dreams of greater social equity, greater organisational transparency and sincerity...and greater fulfilment for all of us will occur.

By Craig Pearce

THE POWER OF PR AND WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE

Applying the two-way symmetrical communication model is the best way to build and sustain long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its stakeholders, make a meaningful contribution to society and, most importantly, prompt society to become more satisfying and more equitable to greater numbers of people.

Factors relevant to the application of two-way symmetrical communication (the most important underlying set of principles for the field of public relations) include:

- increasing understanding between groups of people with divergent interests
- organisations evolving to meet stakeholder needs, as much as stakeholders evolving to meet organisational needs
- having more committed employees who are stronger organisational advocates.

There are four models of public relations as conceptualised by their leading architect, James E. Grunig, and colleagues:

- press agency (one way communication; often media

relations and sometimes of the spin/propaganda variety; non-consultative)

- public information (one way communication; generally pretty ethical but normally from the perspective of the organisation only, so it can be one-dimensional; non-consultative)
- two-way asymmetrical (stakeholder views are sought; communication is adapted to potentially change stakeholder behaviours; the organisation does not change its views or behaviour; very much in the mould of modern marketing)
- two-way symmetrical (as per one-way symmetrical, except the organisation does change its views and/or behaviour to meet its stakeholders 'half-way' [or thereabouts, at least].

Grunig has said, "Practitioners and CEOs do think about public relations in these ways, and the four models do describe the way communication programs are conducted for different types of publics." ('Publics' being, pretty much, a synonym for 'stakeholders'.) There is, however, a blurring of the lines between symmetrical and asymmetrical models.

Conceptualising public relations

In fact, Grunig surmises that excellent public relations can be better described in terms of the following underlying themes:

- It is research-based (i.e. not reliant on gut feel or non-tangible means)
- Symmetry (which ultimately means both organisations and their stakeholders evolve their behaviours)
- Whether the communication itself is either mediated (e.g. media, non-organisational aspects of social media, expert 3rd party analysis/advocacy) or interpersonal (e.g. discrete meetings, community forums, speaking at events etc)
- Its ethical dimension.

It is somewhat ironic that Grunig says, "organizations typically turn to a symmetrical approach when activist pressure or a crisis makes an asymmetrical approach too costly". Well, perhaps if the organisation had been talking to their stakeholders and had adapted their organisational processes, products or services to meet their stakeholders' needs (i.e. being symmetrical), the crisis would never have occurred!

Two critical points that Grunig makes are that, "By and large, organizations practice symmetrical public relations when the CEO understands its value and demands it and the senior communicator and his or her communication staff have the knowledge to supply it."

Whilst CEOs are unlikely to think in terms of 'symmetrical' or 'asymmetrical', those leaders that do subscribe to the essential characteristics of symmetrical communication will be ones who:

- are socially conscious
- are aware of their organisation's reliance of the permission of their stakeholders to exist
- see beyond the immediate future
- understand that organisations – especially multi-national corporates – have a profound influence on the societies in which they exist.

The strategic heft of PR

Symmetrical communication presents a very positive, 'can do' approach to public relations. Other than those elements that I have already mentioned, it is also characterised by:

- Dialogue
- Negotiation and accommodation
- Its embracing of a plurality of perspectives
- Collaboration
- In-house activism: the strategic public relations professional will often prompt an organisation to evolve, not just organisational stakeholders
- Empowering the marginalised; giving voice to the voiceless (thus helping develop social equity; one of the most powerful dimensions of public relations).



In reality, it may not be possible to apply all characteristics of two-way symmetrical to all situations (e.g. negotiation). An example of this is in areas where human values are at play. Grunig cites abortion as a topic where it is difficult to reconcile opposing perspectives.

The mixed-motive variation of the model which Grunig came up with is a further recognition of the impracticalities and lack of necessity of trying to apply two-way symmetrical all the time. This combines asymmetrical and symmetrical in manner which still helps all parties from a communication perspective, if not a behavioural one.

"Symmetry in public relations is really about balancing the interests of organizations and publics," says Grunig, "Of balancing advocacy and accommodation." Notably, for potential critics, Grunig says symmetrical communication, "does

not reject the notion of persuasion", as long as it is applied symmetrically. One dimension of this is for practitioners to, "consistently remind themselves and management that they may not be right and, indeed, that their organization may be better off if it listens to others."
