Introduction to Mass Media/Public Relations

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WHAT IS PUBLIC RELATIONS?

Public relations, the management and delivery of communication between an organization or individual and the public, according to some historians dates back to 1800 BC. The primary objective of public relations is to create a deliberate, planned communication strategy designed to enhance the image of a client, be it product, person, destination etc., and generate a positive public image while keeping the interest of the public at the forefront (4). This would include strategic management of competition and conflict management functions. With an evolving definition that changes with the changing roles of the profession, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) in 2011 lead an international effort to create a definition for public relations that was current and precise enough to replace the definition that was adopted in 1982 by the PRSA National Assembly. The definition that was produced defines public relations as “a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (20). Publics refer to the group of people who follow the issues related to the organization, the term is preferred over stakeholders. (20). Public relations professionals craft messages and create campaigns designed to positively impact their publics or the group of people who follow their clients closely. The field is often compared to other communication related occupations such as journalism, advertising and marketing however public relations has its own objectives. Although writing is a critical aspect of both journalism and PR, the channels and scope differs for both and although mass media is used to disseminate messages the format and context differ for public relations and advertising. When a message is paid for it vastly differs from when a media gatekeeper decides to include information in news or editorial content. Unlike putting emphasis on pushing content, product and services to consumers or customers PR differs to marketing by focusing on building relationships and trust with a variety of publics (1). \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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THE EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS:

Public relations, with a mission to influence the opinion of the public, dates back to the early days of Babylonian times when a tablet that told farmers how to harvest crops was created. Ancient craftsman used logos and gospel and political promotions were used in Rome during ancient times. Public relations tactics were noted during American settlement when the colonies implemented techniques of publicity to attract settlers. In 1758, what is now known as Columbia University, issued their first press release announcing their graduation exercises. The practice of public relations became more popular during times of conflict in the country, such as the American Revolution, when the support of the public was in need (7). African Americans also played a critical role in the history of public relations. In the 1890’s, Ida B. Wells surfaced as a leading voice influencing the public against the cruelty of race relations in the country by holding public meetings, organizing an international campaign, and writing editorials. The social activist, educator, and journalist who worked tirelessly to promote women’s suffrage and the abolition of lynching was affectionately called the Princess of the Press for using carefully crafted rhetorical appeals to change public opinion (12). Press agents, the first public relations practitioners, were hired by business executives, performers, public personalities and politicians who were seeking exposure through the media to win favor in the court of public opinion and to elevate entertainment-centered culture to an international level. These agents staged stunts for newspapers that were designed to clean-up their client’s image. Referred to as spin doctors due to their ability to put a good spin on any situation, press agents popularity grew in the 1800’s and became notorious as theatrical agents for clients such as P.T. Barnum, Buffalo Bill and railroad companies (9). In the early 20th century when the United States started shifting to a consumer-oriented society that was influenced by the rapid spread of advertising and publicity for services and products, public relations began to emerge as a profession. The profession’s popularity grew when the society’s shift from farm to factory was taking place and pressure from labor unions and journalists were increasing. Muckraking journalist looking for scandal were on the rise and drove the need for ethical public relations standards were increasing. The transition from agentry to public relations as a profession was influenced by many pioneers including President Theodore Roosevelt, the first president to exercise large scale and vast use of public relations techniques. He was known for holding news conferences and interviews designed to persuade the viewing audience and was quoted as referring to the White House with its potential for publicity and advocacy as a “bully pulpit”. The emergence of contemporary public relations dates back to 1906 with Ivy Lee, a journalist, publicist, and the first public relations counselor. Most known for his famous client John D. Rockefeller, Lee called for honesty with the press and public in his “Declaration of Principles”. Along with Lee, Edward Bernays is considered one of the founding fathers of the public relations profession, leading the transition from press agentry to the public information model. A public relations consultant to clients including President Woodrow Wilson, the American Tabacco Company, Dodge Motors and many more he wrote Crystallizing Public Relations in 1923. The book provided principles and practices for the profession developing it as an applied science that implements psychology to public relations campaigns. (14). During the 1960’s Civil Rights Era, African Americans played a critical role in communications and public relations strategies such as speeches, marches and sit-ins that changed the direction of the country. Bayard Rustin, considered a master strategist, is best known for organizing the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the largest nonviolent protests in the United States. That march was best known for the speech, I Have A Dream, delivered by Dr. Martin Luther King, another great public relations communicator. Rustin was also credited with helping King with speech writing, briefing him prior to meetings and handling his press relations, assisting to mold him into a world symbol of peace (3). Along with Ida Wells, other African American females have been credited with playing a critical role in the history of public relations. That includes Inez Kaiser, who founded Kaiser & Associates in 1957, the oldest African-American, and female-owned public relations firm in the country. She was the first African American female to head an agency with national clients and to join PRSA. She led the way for women like Pat Tobin, founder and past president of the National Black Public Relations Society in 1987, providing mentorship, networking, job opportunities, peer-to peer support, internships and much more for minorities (12).

ETHICS AND BEST PRACTICES:

The growth of public relations as a profession and the formal education of public relations grew rapidly and by the 1960’s - 1970’s there was a call for higher standards and ethics in the field. Protecting the integrity of the client while gaining the trust of the public became the fundamental role of the profession. Keeping the reputation of the practitioner intact by executing best practices became a primary focus. Colleges and universities not only concentrated on the writing skills of their PR students but on teaching the importance of maintaining the highest standards of reliability for their clients and trust from the publics. In 1963 the acronym RACE became popular when communications professor John Marston used it multiple times in his book, The Nature of Public Relations. Although it was first used as an acronym for public relations in the textbook Effective Public Relations by Scott Cutlip and Alan Center, the term that defines the field as having four specific functions or as a four-step process has been most credited to Marston. RACE is an effective summary of how public relations should be executed. The process involves research, action, communication and evaluation, creating the acronym RACE. Research is required to find out how a public relations practitioner can benefit and/or minimize the harm from potential situations facing an organization, how those situations came about, who was involved in them and how they relate to the goals of the organization. The action comes from utilizing the research to determine a plan of action and then implementing them, referring to this step as “assessment”. Communication takes advantage of all available media to deliver carefully-focused messages through the most appropriate channels while evaluation refers to analyzing the first three steps and what has affected your publics as well as the perception of your organization (2). Unlike advertising that gets the message out through paid means, public relations cannot be bought or paid for, it must be earned and the credibility of the work of the public relations practitioner exceeds the coverage garnered by paid means. With that, it is critical for PR professionals to adhere to strict standards of ethics and represent the highest levels of integrity. If public relations professionals are to serve their organizations effectively they must report to top management and be a channel of honest communication delivering unfiltered and uncensored advice to the highest management, like a CEO, unimpeded by other groups. Unlike marketing and advertising, public relations promotes the entire institution and is only as effective as the actual organization. No matter how persuasive and compelling the communication can be, there is no communication that can convince the public of a great company when the service is inadequate and substandard. Adequate performance must proceed publicity and effective public relations cannot take place without action. Public relations writers have a moral responsibility to communicate in a truthful way and ethics are vital for the profession. PR professionals must The Public Relations Society of America adopted articles to maintain public service and ethical standards of conduct. The Code of Professional Standards for the Practice of Public Relations include 17 articles that discuss many ethical issues including accuracy and truth, dealing fairly with the public, honesty and integrity, corruption, representation conflicts, personal interest and more (1). As issues of ethical conduct surface in the field, public relations professionals must have credibility, be respected by the publics they interact with, and most of all be ethical, always knowing that it is a professional responsibility to serve the best interest of not only the organization but the public as well.

MODELS, THEORIES, APPROACHES, AND TACTICS:

There was no thought on communication planning, tactics and strategies in the earlier days of the profession as there were no theories or theoretical foundations resulting in harmful communication with consequences of tarnished images, profit loss and ended careers. As the profession developed so were models, approaches and tactics to the field. James E. Grunig, a public relations theorist, is credited with improving the profession by adding new theories including the four models of public relations and the excellence theory. The one-way communication models, primarily involving publicity and dissemination of information, lacked research and were not management-based models which led the way to two-way communication models involving strategic management of public relations tactics based on research. The one-way type of communication, defined into three model names, all share the basic foundation of one person/organization presenting the information without any feedback from stakeholders. The press agentry/publicity model uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audiences to behave as the organization desires, while the public information model distributes organizational information using one-way communication techniques such as press releases. The one- way asymmetrical model uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audience behavior as the organization desires and does not use research to get feedback on how the public feels about the organization. Two-way model of communication differs in it requires feedback from the audience, stakeholders or the public. Pioneered by Edward Bernays between the 1920’s and 1950’s, the asymmetrical model was based on the principles of behavioral psychology. Public relations professionals use polling and other means of research to do research to determine if the publics understand or know about the client. Two-way asymmetrical model, is an imbalanced model that uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audiences to behave as the organization desires but differs from the one-way asymmetrical model as it does use research that includes feedback to discover the most effective strategies to persuade the public. The two-way symmetrical model, pioneered by Bernays and other public relations professionals and educators between 1960 and 1980, uses communication to negotiate, promote understanding, resolve conflict, and build mutual respect with the public and stakeholders (8). When analyzing the most effective approaches and tactics to implement in public relations one must first access which theory would be most effective. As the field matured so did the theories of communication. Understanding theories of communication assists in conveying ideas and getting the message out and most importantly accepted by the receiver or publics. The PR practionner, the sender, crafts a message that is designed to impact and resonate with the receiver or the target audience. The media is the channel in which the message is sent and include newspapers, magazines, radio, television, telephone, brochures, letters, speeches, the internet and more. In the two-step flow theory there is a definite group of “opinion leaders” who get information from the media to the public, they have influence, and where the multistep flow theory differs in there are multiple opinion leaders with varying degrees of influence. Opinion group theory recognizes opinion leaders but does not assume that they are the sole influence on the formation of public opinion. Diffusion theory, developed in the 1930’s, holds that there are five steps in the process of acquiring new ideas. They are awareness, interest, trial, evaluation and adoption with the public relations writer being the most influential at the awareness and interest stages of the process. The Excellence theory, also developed by Grunig, is defined as a general theory that “specifies how public relations makes organizations more effective, how it is organized and managed when it contributes most to organizational effectiveness, and how the monetary value of public relations can be determined” (5). In the age of instant satisfaction, fast moving searches and social Web, real time news reporting, and smart phone mobile devices, it is important for companies to combine their marketing, advertising and public relations efforts in order to optimize the performance of their content. The integrated approach focuses on the overall goals and objectives of the company and integrates the activities of the advertising, marketing and public relations to create a consistent message, saturating the necessary or targeted market. In order for the integrated approach to be effective, there must be teamwork from each discipline and an understanding that each field has strengths that compliment and reinforce one another. This approach to public relations enables companies to effectively build relationships with multiple media outlets, many of them influential, resulting in positive brand recognition (1).

PR Know How: The Know-How for Effective Public Relations

A public relations professional is a communication manager that wears many hats and must be skilled in multiple forms of communication both oral and well as written. PR work may also include counseling, media relations, community relations, governmental affairs, employee relations, marketing communications, fund-raising, special events planning and more. Internal communication skills must be mastered as well in order to effectively be the liaison between the public and clients. PR professionals are the point persons between the public and management, effectively interpreting management objectives to the public and the sentiment of the public to the management team. Another must-have expertise is the ability to relate to people and the public and have the know-how to build and maintain relationships, as suggested in its name “public relations”. External communication responsibilities such as being a spokesperson for a product, talking to audiences of TV, newspaper or the radio, or conducting interviews with experts in areas of interest may be a frequent responsibility of a public relations professional. Strength in marketing and sales, such as selling the organization and its mission to interest of the public, is a must-have skill as well. The basic purpose of public relations is to create favorable public opinion about an organization and the objective of the writing is to persuade and influence therefore writing is an integral part of the public relations process and the ability to write well is a necessity. Writing plays a big role in communicating to the public and public relations professionals should master the standard rules in writing, have a strong understanding of rules of AP writing and the basic guidelines for effective writing. Basic guidelines for effective writing include using short sentences with paragraphs that express one central idea, using simple and familiar words while staying to the point and being as effective as possible, incorporating action verbs and imagery and personalizing your message to create effective communication. Avoiding spelling errors, jargon, poor sentence structure, mixed metaphors, too many words, redundancy, bias and stereotypes and politically incorrect words are a sure way to keep the message to the point and effective. Although PR professionals are not journalists in that the objectives, audiences and channels differ to those of a journalist, public relations professionals should utilize journalistic styled writing as much of what they write is directed to the media. Aside from outstanding writing skills, public relations professionals must have the knowledge to know what to write about, creative ideas and an understanding of what is happening in the world around them. Keeping current and up-to-speed on the trends in the market is a must in the field. A public relations standard tool kit that assists with the tasks of the occupation include stand-alone material that are broadcast or print-ready and promote the organization they represent. They usually include templates for news releases, letters to editors, advisories, newsletters and crisis information ready to be amend and digitally distributed within a few minutes. The kit also includes eye-catching high resolution images, website links and short videos all well packaged to get the desired message disseminated.

Public Relations as a Profession: THE MANY CAREERS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS:

The outlook for careers in public relations is good, with an expectation of 21% growth through 2020 which is faster than the average for all occupations, according the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics. The Bureau reports that the median annual wage for a PR specialist was $52,090 and for a manager was $91,810 in May 2010 (16). Jobs in public relations range from working in the private sector including corporate or non-profit to working for the highest and most influential government officials and departments. Specific public relations disciplines include internal communications, government relations, consumer or lifestyle public relations, litigation and financial public relations (10). There are hundreds of valuable non-profit organizations that do remarkable work in their respective communities or around the world. These organizations depend on outreach efforts of public relations professionals that garner the support of the community. Individuals with a PR career in the non-profit sector are usually fulfilled by improving the world rather than by huge salaries. Religious institutions are more and more depending on the counsel of public relations professionals to get the word out of the good deeds of the church while dealing with the many scandals that seem to plague these institutions. Colleges and universities need the assistance of public relations professionals to assist with the task of lifting the public image of the institution and attract student applicants. Working as a director of public relations for an institution of higher learning is a critical job that works in unison with the department of admissions to get the right messages out to the public. A PR professional working at a university may also work as a professor, with the recognition that the need for a college education in order to obtain a good job increases. Public relations firms require individuals who are willing to work long hours, be constantly glued to their smart phones and be ready to shift gears at a blink of an eye. There are opportunities for growth in firms and for most the pay is solid but the commitment must be 100 + percent. There are thousands of public relations professionals working either in agencies or independently that represent private corporations, organizations and individuals. The health care industry is another area where public relations professionals are in demand. With competition among health care providers there is a need to get the right messages out to an indecisive public that is slowly getting more and more choices. Hospitals are also seeking the services of PR professionals with the rise in medical errors they are depending on these individuals to quickly resolve the issue with the internal team, unsatisfied patients and the community. Government public relations jobs are numbered in the thousands for the federal government as well as on the state and local levels. Although in 1913 Congress enacted the Gillett amendment barring the practice of public relations in government the system has countless communications specialists, public affairs experts, information offers, and press secretaries. These practitioners communicate the activities of the various agencies, commissions, and bureaus to the public (11).

THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS:

As of 2009 there were 18,669 PR firms in the world with 115,522 public relations professionals staffing them, this does not including thousands of organizations and companies with in-house PR departments or functions. In that year the industry reported over $8.8 billion in revenues (9). Companies and clients hire PR professionals and firms to assist them in presenting a positive image as well as to publicize new products, services, expansions, etc. The nature of a PR professional’s job has changed drastically throughout the years and has grown from writing press releases, speeches and newsletters to performing planning, consulting and advising duties. As the growth rate is expected to increase by 21% in the next 8 years, it will be driven by a need for organizations to keep a superior image in a high-tech, high-information age and the rabid growth of social media. In the 21st century the role of public relations is affected by social media and the future of public relations involves blogs, mobile media, pod casts and social media. There is tremendous opportunity with the use of social media but there is also the danger of constant scrutiny with an opportunity for the public to have an eye on an organization 24/7. Through the development of social media platforms, the Pandora’s box of publishing, sharing, and information access has been opened. Public relations professionals must be sharper than ever before and familiar with current methods of communication and modern tools to assist in getting the job done. Social media is quickly advancing from another tactic professionals use to becoming synonymous with the profession. Content needs to be developed at a faster rate and be effective enough to influence the growth in media by attracting, engaging, and converting customers in a 2-way communication driven world. Companies and organizations are seeking optimized performance from PR professionals and in order to be functional and effective in this fast paced field an understanding of future trends in online marketing and public relations is a must. The future of the profession of public relations is great with a bright outlook on job opportunities for graduates with degrees in the field. The field is yearning their expertise and with an omnipresent media business are seeking the expertise of these communication professionals. A rich and diverse occupation, public relations has grown in prominence and there is a world of profitable and interesting careers with opportunities for advancement.

Terms:

The terms for the Public Relations chapter are as follows:

1. Earned Media: this is not paid advertising, it is coverage that is gained by building relationships with the media and pitching stories that they would be interested in covering.

2. Lead Time: reporters and producers need time to get their stories put together; prior to publishing the story they need to ample time to prepare the story for publication

3. News Wire: this is a service that is used for transmitting breaking news

4. Social Media: a medium if communication that is done in the virtual sphere; social media would fall under the non-traditional form of public relations communication

5. Traditional Public Relations: tactics of public relations that involve writing press releases, building relationships with the media and creating press kits

6. Press Kits: Material put together that are designed to promote a client such as products, politicians etc.

7. Press Release: a document that is distributed to the media that announces information relevant to a client such as new products, information on materials, etc and is sometimes included in a press kit.

8. Op-Ed : a piece that opposes the opinion or belief of the an author in the issue. It stands for opinion editorial

9. PR Tactics: the steps outlined by a public relations professional that lays out the action steps used to achieve an objective

10. Publics: who public relations professionals design messages to talk to; the audience who all have similar characteristics that are important to the client.

11: Spin: the biased, non-objective, point of view created for a story

12: Court of Public Opinion: how the community/ public fells about a topic due to the message that is presented to them by the media; expressing how powerful the media is

13. Public Relations: ultimately it is the relationship that is developed through communication between and organization and its publics that is managed by a public relations practitioner who manages the spread of information and messaging

14: MAST Head: a publications list of senior reporters, editors and publishers as well as contact information for the publication; typically the pubs address

15: Media Placement: coverage in a publication that can be earned or paid.

16: Edward Bernays: Father of Public Relations

17: British Petroleum: PR Scandal

18: Ivy Lee: Also named the father of public relations

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