Public Relations
Influencing Beliefs, Attitudes and Actions

Chapter 12
Text: “Understanding Media in the Digital Age”
Comm 336 Mass Media Malaise Course
Defining Public Relations

“Public relations helps an organization and its publics mutually adapt to each other.”

Key parts to this informal definition:
- Publics: individuals and groups important for an organization to have dialogue with, to interact with, that have common interests
- Mutually adapt: the idea of two-way communication, of back and forth give and take; PR is a process

Public relations differs from advertising in that advertising is bought and PR is free in the sense of getting media coverage based on the merits of newsworthiness

PR differs from journalism in its advocacy, persuasion and influence roles to advance a sponsor or sponsor’s position, while journalism strives for objectivity, impartiality and independence (journalism wants to influence but in the sense of informing the public)

Public relations and marketing used to be separate practices but today they are blended more into integrated marketing communications (IMC) to better focus what both areas can do to achieve common goals in a more efficient, economical way

PR and PR people have an array of names: corporate communications, communicators, public affairs, investor relations, community affairs, marketing and communications, media relations, publicity, among others
Rise of Digital Public Relations

- PR is being profoundly affected by the changes in media and society linked to digital communications

- Digital PR strategies involve things like:
  - Search engine optimization (SEO) to get messages on Google and other search sites; and techniques to maximize hits and page views
  - Blogging/blogger relations- getting the message on key blogs
  - Establishing your organization’s social media footprint and providing ongoing content and relevance
  - Connecting and engaging with key publics and “influentials” through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social media
  - Monitoring what is being said about you and your organization on social media- and acting to counter negative and untrue things that are said, often anonymously
  - Being as multimedia as possible in producing useful, interesting content that invites feedback and ongoing two-way communications and dialogue
The Essence of Public Relations

- A more detailed definition of public relations:
  - “Paid professional practitioners design and transmit messages, on behalf of a client, via a variety of media, to relevant and targeted audiences in an attempt to influence their beliefs, attitudes, or even actions regarding some person, organizations, policy, situation, or event.”

- PR practitioners are usually people whose education and perhaps prior employment has been in a field in which writing and producing other forms of messages have been major focuses
  - The best route continues to be a college degree in communication, public relations, journalism or other similar fields (IMC is a hot new degree)
  - Agencies or departments- PR practitioners operate in one or the other
    - PR Agencies/Firms- work with clients that hire these professionals for their expertise, resources, contacts and reac
    - PR Departments- are within companies, corporations, non-profits, etc. where the PR staff works to achieve communication goals and strategies that benefit the organization, contributing to the big picture and bottom line
PR Messages and Tactics
Lots of weapons at a PR pros disposal

- News releases
- Media Advisories
- “Expert Comment”
- Brochures
- Annual Reports
- “Controlled” media
- Position Papers
- News Conferences
- Speeches
- Staged or Pseudoevents
- Photo-ops
- Editorials and Op-Eds
- Letters to the Editor
- Third Party Endorsements
- Audio and Video News Releases
- Press Availabilities
- Satellite Media Tours
- Websites
- Blogs
- Media kits and press packets
- PR efforts can be part of an integrated marketing plan
PR and the News Media

- Traditionally the two have been very co-dependent
  - PR needs the media to cover and share its messages
  - The news media depends on PR for story ideas, sources and assistance

- PR messages that receive news coverage are felt to have greater credibility (than advertising) because of the news media’s “gravitas” and vetting process based on “newsworthiness”

- It helps for PR people to understand how news reporters and editors work, what they look for in coverage ideas, and to understand their deadlines, limitations and possibilities

- In today’s world, it is far easier to bypass traditional news media as the conduit or filter to reach audiences

- PR pros today need to weigh the pros and cons of the various ways to disseminate or get out desired messages

- Strategic planning is essential with larger scale campaigns that require research, planning, systematic action, and evaluation

- The “RACE” acronym summarizes the PR process: Research, Action, Communication and Evaluation

- PR campaigns can be launched for many reasons:
  - To increase awareness
  - To increase attendance, participation, involvement
  - Image enhancement
  - Reputation repair
  - To foster and promote positive feeling and perception
  - Transparency
  - To support and/or supplement marketing/advertising efforts
Publicists (those involved in media relations and promotions) need:

- Excellent written and oral communications skills
- To be at ease socially
- Have a thorough knowledge of the media, management, and business
- Possess the ability to function both as problem-solvers and decision-makers
- Other common qualities are stability, common sense, intellectual curiosity, and a tolerance for frustration

Typical Tasks and Work Assignments

- Writing
- Editing
- Media Relations and Placement
- Speaking
- Production
- Programming and Counseling
- Training and Management
Public Relations Ethics and Professionalism

- In the U.S. there are standards of professional behavior in the public relations field

- Practitioners are expected to respect the “free flow of information” in how, ideally, the news media and other professional journalists select stories and topics for coverage based on newsworthiness and not based on bribes, gifts, false promises, lies, deception and misinformation.

- The Public Relations Society of America is the leading professional communicators group.

- PRSA has a code of ethics that can promotes honest, ethical behavior and is specific on certain dos and don’ts.

- Take advantage of our fine Department of Communication Advisory Council!

- Mentor-Protégé Program is tops too!