

newperspective

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Create a Media-Friendly Media Section on Your Website

By Mark LaVigne, APR



Website media sections are an opportunity for an organization to provide the news media with an easy-to-use, multimedia platform to disseminate information about that organization and its news.

A website 'newsroom', a term that seems to be gaining acceptance in mainstream usage, should contain this information in at least two easy-to-download formats, Word and PDF. News media do not have the time to spend digging for information, cutting and pasting or reformatting information that they intend to use in a story.

"Often when we are on deadline, we have space to fill and need these materials faster than public relations contacts can deliver," says Gordon Brockhouse, editor-in-chief of *Here's How* magazine. "This often happens after normal business hours. The company that makes it easiest for us, by having information and images available online, is the one that gets the space."

The website newsroom should at the very least also contain high-resolution (8 x 10, 200 dpi) photography. MP3s are another information source, primarily for radio news consumption, which is easy to capture and inexpensive to park in the website newsroom. As the web quickly evolves into a broadcast medium, parking MPEG4 video should make sense as well. Eventually, providing short, broadcast-quality video clips for download will be logistically operational and affordable.

Don't forget that web video is also a good educational tool. "I wouldn't be likely to use video myself, but I often go to a website to find out about things, using the video archive," says food writer and editor, Liz Campbell. "I find I learn more quickly with auditory and visual input than by reading."

Campbell also notes the media section should be easy to find on the website. The newsroom link button should be prominently displayed, such as to the far left where journalists are accustomed to searching for the most important information on a printed page.

Content on newsrooms – including multimedia, text, fact sheets and quotes – should be brief in nature.

Lots of time and money are spent on website design, but a survey of website media sections shows that the media section is not given enough attention. "As part of our continued efforts to make our organization media friendly, we are looking at enhancing our website's media section in an overhaul in the near future," says Richard Truscott, Director of Communications, CGA Alberta.

Journalists need 24/7 access to website newsrooms so putting a password on the section can be problematic unless that function works very quickly and seamlessly. While understanding this tactic helps with media monitoring, many journalists surveyed do not like it, finding the process obtrusive and time consuming. Nothing but public information should be parked in a website newsroom anyway, so using a password entry may be counterproductive.

Media Training



By Sharon Navarro



The Queen's Park press gallery is a rabid bunch. So when ministers meet for cabinet outside Premier Dalton McGuinty's office they need to be ready to face the wolves. The reporters are hungry for their next big story.

"We are always eager to scrum," said Paul Bliss, Queen's Park reporter for CTV-Toronto, who has many stories of public relations-related gaffes. "During a couple of interviews, the chief executive officers of major organizations literally ran from me. So as soon as their organizations got into hot water again, I replayed the 'running man' video over and over. Don't run. It implies guilt as if there is something to hide."

While it may seem obvious to public relations consultants, media training is still something many executives take too lightly or do not consider at all. "Facing the media is no easy task," said Jeff Lake, APR, managing partner, Punch Communications. "Too many executives are ill prepared. They spend hours on client presentations and sometimes only spend 15 minutes preparing for media interviews that will be read, watched or heard by thousands."

According to a recent article in the *National Post*, Canadian companies view 'shoddy products' and 'bad PR' as bigger risks than threats of terrorism or natural disasters. Obviously, media relations and media training are serious considerations.

When facing the media, public relations consultants should ensure their spokespeople and executives are pro-active, prepared and professional. "We want to prepare spokespeople so they can be at their best during interviews," said Kimberly Cohen, chief executive officer, Brown & Cohen Communications and Public Affairs Inc. "Just because these executives lead companies, we can't assume that they can speak succinctly [to media]. We want to give them tools to communicate effectively and comfortably to stakeholders and to the public."

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Ten Tips for Website Newsrooms

1. Enable text to be easily copied and provide text in Word and PDF formats
2. Photography should be high resolution (8X10, 200 dpi)
3. MP3 audio clips should be captured and parked there
4. Web video can be a great educative tool
5. Park short broadcast quality video clips if you have server space and budget
6. Other materials such as advertisements can be included
7. Create short, informative backgrounders and fact sheets including price lists and store availability
8. Also park longer documents such as annual reports, speeches and white papers
9. Placing a password on the website newsroom can alienate journalists and hinder their ability to gather information outside of regular office hours
10. Prominently display the 'newsroom' button, ideally far left, top corner.

Mark LaVigne, APR, is the elected vice president/secretary for the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS) National, and past president of CPRS (Toronto). His media relations and media coaching operation is based in Aurora, Ontario. He can be reached at (905) 841-2017 or mark.lavigne@sympatico.ca.

President's Message:

Starting the New Year off with a BANG!

By Ian Ross



CPRS (Toronto) has kicked off 2007 on a very positive note.

To start, I'm proud to announce that seven CPRS (Toronto) members successfully received their APR this year. Congratulations to Andrew Berthoff, APR, Robert Cooper, APR, Jeff Lake, APR, Albert Lee, APR, Krys Potapczyk, APR, Vincent Power, APR and Brenda Sweeney, APR. The standards for accreditation are very high so each of these members should be applauded for their hard work and dedication to the review process.

Once again, our annual CEO of the Year luncheon in January was a smashing success. A sold out crowd of more than 300 people heard the Canadian Opera Company's Richard Bradshaw, this year's recipient, address how Canada can better promote and support award winning arts and culture.

One week later, CPRS (Toronto) held its first professional development event of the year – a panel of public relations experts and journalists debated who controls the message. The event could not have been timelier with Ira Basen's current radio series Spin Cycle creating buzz in public relations' circles. All tickets disappeared within six days. And our 10 free student tickets, courtesy of Toronto Hydro, were snatched up by phone and email in 90 seconds.

We've also been keeping the public relations community busy with ACE Award submissions. The number of entries received this year was 102 – a 57 per cent increase compared to 2006! A strong promotion campaign and a new set of categories appear to have struck the right chord with many aspiring award winners.

The new year also brings us a strong lineup of sponsors. CCNMatthews returns as our committed platinum sponsor. We have built a strong relationship with them over many years and I greatly appreciate their continuing support of our public relations community. We are also fortunate to have CNW Group join us this year as a gold level sponsor. And we are pleased to have The Canadian Press back at the silver level, and FPinfomart.ca, News Canada, Toronto Hydro and AVW-TELAV as bronze sponsors. Their support makes it possible for the society to increase value to members while balancing the books.

There are two new features for 2007 that I wish to highlight. On our relaunched member's forum (www.cprstoronto.com/pd/forum.aspx) we have a new Ask An Expert section and a book review project. My thanks to Mark Lavigne, APR, for being our first expert of the year on media relations, and Jeff Roach for providing his comments on the book *How Successful Companies Build Winning Reputations*. I encourage members to fire questions at our upcoming experts Tracey Bochner, APR, on measurement in February and Blair Peberdy, APR, on corporate responsibility in March, or contribute your own book review. The more members contributing thoughts and ideas to the member's forum, the stronger our virtual community will become.

All of this good news builds off of a successful fall season for CPRS (Toronto). During the final months of 2006, we welcomed 36 new professionals and 74 students. And we had 330 members and guests join us for six different professional development and networking events. These included a session with the prime minister's issues management coordinator, a panel discussion with Canadian Press senior editors, a members' mix and mingle, and an afternoon student tour of public relations departments and firms.

And there is certainly more to come. We have exciting professional development and networking events coming up, as well as our annual ACE awards, newsletters, changes to the website and much more. 2007 is certainly shaping up to be another exciting year.

Ian Ross is president of CPRS (Toronto) and a senior information officer for the Ontario Ministry of Education. He can be reached at ian.ross@ontario.ca or 416-325-2947

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Presenting Your New APRs

By Martin Waxman



December 2006: Seven CPRS Toronto members received the kind of news that would have warmed their spirits even if it had it been -20 degrees Celsius outside. They had all successfully passed the rigorous written and oral exams and had earned our professional industry accreditation, APR (accredited in public relations).

We asked each of them to provide their thoughts on the process and the importance of the designation:

Jeff Lake, APR, managing partner, senior vice-president, PUNCH Communications

"Despite the busy demands of public relations consulting, I was motivated to apply myself to do whatever it took to get my APR. We owe it to the employees who report to us and to our clients who entrust us with their business to be accredited. We're often asked to manage six-figure budgets and provide the best counsel possible to our clients. Attaining accreditation is the most responsible and professional thing we can do to demonstrate our public relations skills."

Albert T. Lee, APR, currently a masters of business administration (MBA) candidate at the Schulich School of Business and formerly the national marketing communications manager at the Childhood Cancer Foundation Canada

"Having only received my public relations training through real-world experience and a Ryerson certification, I felt that accreditation would lend further credibility to my abilities and skills as a public relations practitioner. The APR can only strengthen our industry and prove to other people that we have taken the next step to be recognized by our peers and other public relations professionals as qualified and skilled in public relations."

Andrew Berthoff, APR, senior vice-president, Environics Communications

"An APR is one of few standards in the unregulated industry of public relations. The public relations industry suffers from an image problem, mainly due to practitioners who have little or no training, who do not adhere to a code of ethical conduct. While public relations 'excellence' is often subjective, the APR pulls things as much as possible into objectivity. I wish that I had gone through the accreditation process sooner."

Robert Cooper, APR, instructor, Seneca College

"Accreditation matters to the person who earns it, but it also matters greatly to the broader practice of public relations. We still have a lot of missionary work to do amongst practitioners and among those whom we serve. If we ever hope to be taken seriously as a profession, we have to substantially increase the number of CPRS members who are accredited. Earning my APR sets a good example to my students and makes me a more effective and convincing teacher. I heartily recommend doing it."

Krys Potapczyk, APR, manager of Stakeholder Relations, Ministry of Environment, Drinking Water Management Division, Government of Ontario

"Accreditation is something I've been thinking about for years. I had just finished a project that tested my public relations skills to the maximum. The timing, my confidence and the support from my family and my boss were aligned - it was time to test myself and pursue an APR. As professionals, we need to test ourselves against a common body of theory and practice. Earning an APR signifies one's excellence



All Smiles for New Toronto APRs

Left to Right: Jeff Lake, Albert Lee, Krys Potapczyk, Vincent Power and Robert Cooper. Missing: Andrew Berthoff, Brenda Sweeney

in knowledge, skill and practice. My study group was sensational. I have enriched my network and have made four new friends. We intend to keep in touch and inform each other of industry developments. Becoming an APR is priceless!"

Vincent Power, APR, director, Corporate Communications, Sears Canada

"I felt a real sense of accomplishment knowing that the hard work and determination involved in obtaining accreditation came through at the end. Additionally, as I heard about each of my study partners' news of success, I was thrilled because all of us who studied together throughout the summer and fall were going to be able to celebrate together! In any profession, it's important to keep up with the current trends, understand the practical application of skills and knowledge, and gain insight into the history and most influential theoretical works, all of which is part of the accreditation process. This makes for a solid foundation on which to build a practice."

Brenda Sweeney, APR, partner, Kennedy Jones & Sweeney Inc. and formerly professor and program coordinator for Sheridan College's Graduate Certificate Program in Corporate Communications

"The three primary reasons that I decided to pursue my APR were: professional recognition of excellence in my chosen field, the desire to see if I could do it (I liked the challenge of doing professional development), and the designation is recognized by my government and senior corporate clients. They see it as valuable, particularly when choosing a consultant. When I heard the news, I was elated and relieved. I didn't want to have to write the exam again. I highly recommend the process for anyone who is committed to building on their personal commitment to communications excellence."

Let's extend hearty congratulations to our new APRs for their commitment to excellence and well-earned achievement and acknowledge their dedication to bettering the profession.

Martin Waxman, APR, is co-founder and president of Palette PR and is the CPRS (Toronto) accreditation chair. He's always happy to talk about the benefits of accreditation and can be reached at mwaxman@palettepr.com.

Strategy, a Big Part of Effective Public Relations

By Carol Gravelle



Effective communications are developed through effective strategies. This year, the CPRS (Toronto) Achieving Communications Excellence (ACE) Awards will unveil Toronto public relations strategists at their best. This masquerade-inspired event will take place on April 25, 2007 at the Arcadian Court.

According to Judy Lewis, partner & executive vice-president at Strategic Objectives, an effective communication strategy played a large role in the company's ACE Award win last year for the Cadbury Chocolate Couture Collection Fashion Show, which took home the Best of Show (which has been renamed Best Public Relations Campaign of the Year). The fashion show won the award through its innovative strategies of combining two things women love most - chocolate and fashion - to obtain considerable media attention.

"It all starts with strategy and working with the client to develop the messages that will resonate with the public and the media," said Lewis. "Media came to the event because they knew it was going to be innovative. They knew it was going to be a public relations event that they had never seen before. It

made such an impact last year that this year, Cadbury doubled the number of guests and we had media calling in advance to attend the event."

"Winning an ACE Award is highly motivational for a team," continued Lewis. "It's a way for a team to be celebrated by clients, colleagues and by their peers. Through awards we are judged on results and this is important because it allows us to highlight and quantify results. Awards allow us to showcase projects to prove the power of public relations."

Karla Briones, who works with Temple Scott Associates, won the ACE PR Professional Under 30 Award last year. She also believes in the power of strategic media relations. As the leader of a media relations team, she was involved in developing a brand for Leap Frog Canada, then position this brand with the media and public as a leading developer of technology-based educational products.

Through strategic media relations, the team was able to increase media impressions by 300 per cent the first year that Temple Scott Associates received the account. Briones reported that through other strategic initiatives, media impressions have further increased by 94 per cent.

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The Technical Side of Social Media

By Lisa Vanderlip



You have been asked by either your boss or client to set up a social media campaign within 24 hours, using a blog. Yikes! While you have read about social media, the process of setting up a blog may intimidate you. Initiating this type of campaign involves not only developing a fresh public relations strategy, but also learning the technical aspects of blogging. Double Yikes! The M-A-I-L approach (monitor, analyze, interact and lead), introduced by David Jones, senior vice president, Fleishman-Hillard Canada, in a previous article on social media, will assist public relations professionals with mastering both the technology and social media relations skills needed to launch a successful campaign.

"First, buy some much-needed time from either the client or boss before initiating the campaign and start monitoring the blogosphere," advises Michael O'Connor Clarke, vice president, Thornley Fallis. According to this social media expert and long-time blogger, public relations practitioners should follow the same common-sense approach to initiating a social media relations campaign that they would use to pitch a campaign to traditional media outlets. He advises public relations practitioners to do their homework first, before they dive in and start writing a blog.

"Monitor, monitor, monitor," recommends O'Connor Clarke. "Find out who in the blogosphere is speaking to whom to learn the topics being discussed about your client or organization." Technorati, a free search engine similar to Google, but focused primarily on blogs, provides useful tools to identify those blogs and bloggers relevant to the campaign's focus.

Then, begin analyzing the researched information to formulate objectives for the campaign. Blogging before establishing clearly-defined public relations objectives is simply blogging in vain. Determining objectives at the start of a social media relations campaign will assist with creating targets for the campaign to achieve.

Next, start interacting with identified key bloggers to establish credibility by actively engaging in two-way communication. Remember that a blog entry, like all Internet entries, leaves a permanent record of communication. Therefore, nothing shared in the blogosphere is off the record.

"Don't blog things that you wouldn't say to a journalist," cautions O'Connor Clarke. "Blog smart." Because public relations practitioners act as conduits of communication between an organization and its publics, they should respect the campaign's objectives by remembering to stay on message at all times.

Now, it is time to set up the blog and lead a social media campaign. Acquiring a domain name for the blog will allow

for enhanced blog customization and the ability to host the blog on the server of choice. "The tools to create and host a blog are simple," explains O'Connor Clarke. Public relations professionals can choose from a number of easy-to-use software programs, such as WordPress, Blogger, Typepad, Moveable Type, and even the Canadian homegrown Blogware. These types of blog software provide users with an intelligible blog interface to guide them through a systematic blog-setup process.

While the WordPress and the Google-backed Blogger products can be accessed free from the Internet, Six Apart, the developer of Moveable Type, charges a licensing fee for using its proprietary product. However, the Moveable Type license, unlike WordPress and Blogger, provides an extra level of technical support for the fee charged. The cost for a Moveable Type program licence ranges from \$50 to \$2,000 per year, depending on the number of add-on features and user licenses purchased. The primary appeal of the Moveable Type software is the ready availability of a broad selection of third-party add-on features.

One such add-on, of particular interest to corporate communicators, enhances Moveable Type with an approval routing/work flow feature. This gives communicators the ability to monitor and review employee blog entries before they become public. "This feature provides some insurance for organizations,"

comments O'Connor Clarke. With approval routing, blog entries can be monitored and, if necessary, edited for content that could potentially jeopardize an organization's reputation.

Most blogging products today also offer some form of comment moderation feature, allowing organizations to monitor and review comments left by visitors on their blogs. Filtering spam and offensive comments from a blog will help protect the company against the brand erosion of having offensive comments appear alongside blog posts.

When it comes to evaluating the success of a social media campaign, traditional metrics measurement methods may not be sufficient. Site traffic analytics monitoring and measurement packages, such as Google's free Analytics product, allow blog creators to track who is visiting and linking to their blog and can provide one form of quantitative measurement.

If qualitative measurement is the benchmark for success, then an assessment of the tone of responses to the company's blog-based campaign should be included to help evaluate the goodwill generated from relationships created through the blogosphere.

Overall, this M-A-I-L approach to setting up a social media relations campaign will guide public relations practitioners through the brave new world of blogging to become proficient at two-way communication. Blog on and blog smart.

Lisa Vanderlip is the communications coordinator for the Canadian Women in Communications organization. She can be reached at lisaservlip@aol.com.

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Crisis Communications:

Helping your organization communicate to key stakeholders in a time of crisis

By Pam White

Crisis communications can encompass major leadership change, merger and acquisition activity, issues management, or any significant announcement that can impact an organization. A real crisis is not anticipated and is out of an organization's control.

In a crisis situation, senior leaders in the organization look to public relations, whether internal or external, to offer pragmatic and useful advice that helps them deal with the difficult situation strategically and immediately, while mitigating damage. Most public relations professionals thrive on this pressure. After all, it is a great opportunity to demonstrate the value that effective communications can provide an organization.

At a recent CPRS (Toronto) event, two senior public relations professionals shared some insights into crisis communications and the importance of effectively communicating to all key audiences including employees, media and other stakeholders.

One common theme throughout the evening was the impact of public disclosure requirements on communications. When representing a public company, understanding 'what' needs to be disclosed and 'when' is critical. All public relations professionals working for publicly-traded companies should have a clear understanding of the applicable disclosure requirements and how to work effectively within those regulations.

David Wills, vice president and partner, Media Profile, discussed the importance of communicating effectively with employees in a crisis situation. Wills said, "When dealing with a crisis situation, employees appreciate being dealt with quickly, honestly and upfront. Employees buy into the overall strategy when they are treated that way." Further, he explained, "Employees need to feel engaged with communications or angst will be felt and could permeate throughout the organization."

When communicating organizational change, the type of language used in the communications is also critical. Wills said, "When a company uses buzz phrases such as 'realize synergies' and 'strategic fit' employees hear job losses, restructuring and change."

Wills provided some overall tips for communicating to employees in a crisis:

1. Communicate to employees as quickly as possible
2. Provide employees with regular updates
3. Be the employee's source of new information – don't just let them read it in the papers
4. Ensure management is informed, visible, available and accessible to employees
5. Anticipate all questions and have answers ready

When considering other key stakeholders, Wills also addressed that it is essential to realize that any stakeholders can become a source of information to the media, suppliers, customers or employees. Senior business leaders of the organization in crisis need to be involved and available to deliver the message to key customers and suppliers. He said, "Having a CEO place a call to an important customer and supplier goes a long way."

Particularly when dealing with media, Wills explained, "Public relations practitioners need to fill the void or someone else will. Even if the spokesperson cannot provide a comment, it is important to provide the context to the media on why the company cannot comment."

Wills recommended that an effective way to handle a crisis is to take a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) approach and to bring together key areas such as public relations, investor relations, legal, government relations and senior executives to develop the crisis communications plan. He said, "Plan for every circumstance so you are ready to go and not scrambling."

Marion MacKenzie, president, GCI Group Canada, spoke about how blogging has changed the nature of crisis communications. She explained that with blogging, time is shorter. It takes only minutes for a story to appear on a blog.

"Now that blogs are mainstream, it is important to realize that everybody is a stakeholder," said MacKenzie.

"Everyone can have a blog and even blogs with low traffic can gather momentum and quickly drive news to mainstream or traditional media. What this means is that individuals without power previously, can potentially have huge influence with blogs."

She also provided some valuable advice on what all public relations practitioners need to ask themselves in preparation for a crisis situation.

1. Is there a culture of quick response in your company?

It is important to be able to get the attention of your chief financial officer or chief executive officer quickly when necessary.

2. Could you put up a blog or podcast within hours if required?

Not all companies may need to do this, but it may be wise to talk to your organization's information technology team in advance so you understand what is involved.

3. Can you reach everyone required at any time?

If there was an emergency, could you get in touch with your chief executive officer or investor relations contact at 2:00 a.m.?

MacKenzie also spoke of the importance of understanding the new expectations for transparency. With new technologies like blogs and podcasting, stakeholders have the expectation that companies will respond quickly and with more transparency than they are perceived to have done in the past. She said, "Senior executives need to demonstrate integrity and admit when they're wrong. Expectations regarding transparency are significantly different than they have been in the past. Also, the complexity of business today means that companies will sometimes stumble. That's a given. What is more important is that the quicker a company says it is sorry or provides context, the better off it will be."

These insights should give public relations practitioners the incentive to re-evaluate their company's current crisis plan, or develop a plan if one does not exist. We all understand a crisis could happen to any company, at any time and without warning. When the right processes and tools are in place, public relations practitioners should be able to confidently provide strategic counsel to senior executives and guide the organization down the right path.

Pam White is the manager of external communications at Celestica and the editor of New Perspective. She may be reached at pam-white@hotmail.com.

Strategy, a Big Part

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"Winning the award has given me more confidence," said Briones. "I am not a person who is used to being in the spotlight. I came to Canada as a new immigrant, having been born and raised in Mexico. When I was learning English, I was not as confident. Now, I use English as a communications professional every day. This award has provided me with recognition within the industry."

In preparation for the awards event, the prestigious panel of judges have been busy reviewing project submissions. There was a 50 per cent increase in entries this year over those submitted last year.

Come to this year's CPRS (Toronto) ACE Awards to meet the best and brightest public relations strategists in Toronto. It will be a one-of-a-kind event to inspire creativity and showcase success within the public relations industry. To learn more about this year's ACE Awards, visit www.cprstoronto.com.

Carol Gravelle works as a public relations officer with the Office of the Fire Marshal with the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. She can be reached at gravellecarol@yahoo.ca or 416-325-3138.

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Among the confirmed speakers for the event is Torie Clarke, currently a senior advisor to Comcast and a CNN analyst. As a US government official, Clarke led the program of embedding media correspondents with military units in Iraq. She will take you through the increasingly complex challenges of communicating effectively to your key audiences. She will present insight into which strategies will meet the challenge and which ones are doomed to fail.

Book your calendar to hear Clarke and other speakers including author and futurist Robert J. Sawyer, health researcher Linda Duxbury and Dell's Dave Vanden Bosch.

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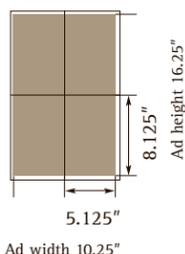
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Who Is the Real 'Spin Doctor'?

By Kate Willingham



Members were treated to a lively debate about the relationship between reporters and public relations professionals at a CPRS (Toronto) event in late January.

The media were well represented by Paul Ferris, managing editor of Marketing Magazine; Rita DeMontis, lifestyle and food editor for the Toronto Sun Newspaper; and Ira Basen, producer of Current Affairs on CBC Radio. Attendees also heard from Jim Cronin, APR, senior manager of public affairs for the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation and Jennifer Nebesky, account director at Thornley Fallis, who provided the public relations perspective. The discussion was mediated by Mark Lavigne, APR, president of Hunter Lavigne Communications and past president of CPRS (Toronto).

The big question of the evening, Who Is the Real Spin Doctor - The Media or the Public Relations Practitioner?, provided some very insightful and diplomatic responses from the panel. Interestingly, everyone seemed to generally agree that both sides are equally guilty, or innocent, depending how you spin it. Jennifer Nebesky started off the debate by suggesting that the term 'Spin Doctor' promotes and perpetuates a negative stereotype of the public relations profession. She argued that both the media and public relations practitioners are all messengers and that we both craft, deliver and position messages - but it need not be negative or duplicitous. Rather, as Cronin pointed out, most professionals within the field have a healthy respect for the fact that both are oftentimes selling a product.

Ira Basen also admitted that many journalists are in denial about the extent to which they rely on public relations. This denial relates directly to the stigma that exists around the profession. People tend to think that if you need a public relations person then it means you have something to hide.

Most public relations professionals learn quickly how to dodge bullets, deflect hype and develop thick skins which is especially necessary in large companies. Cronin pointed out that, "You have to recognize that you are an easy target and people are going to pick on you. At the same time, sometimes it is your job to throw yourself in front of the bullet, and take a hit for the corporation. That is in essence one of the toughest aspects of public relations; it is your job to take the abuse!"

Ethics also came up during the debate but all panelists agreed that lying is rare. Basen said, "It really doesn't go on much anymore, the business has probably in fact become a lot more ethical as it has grown up over the years. This is especially true in fields such as finance, where the consequences are so severe that getting caught lying can land you in jail."

There was also discussion around the proliferation of new communications technology, from blogging to podcasts, which most of the panelists agreed is more of a blessing than a threat. Websites that provide a great deal of background information can help the media with their preliminary research and can save a lot of time.

In general, blogs and podcasts have allowed communications to reach new and wider audiences, and Nebesky revealed that she often advises her clients to make more use of these new media.

To wrap up the discussion, Rita DeMontis provided some useful tips on how to stand out, get past the gatekeeper, and develop mutually beneficial relationships with the media. "Above all, do your research!" implored DeMontis. "There is nothing more frustrating for a journalist fielding hundreds of calls, than publicists who do not even know who they are speaking to. By doing your homework you will stand out."

Media Training

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The Power of Three

When creating your media training tool box, Lake suggests throwing in three powerful key messages. "Time typically only allows for three messages," said Lake.

"Have quotable soundbites no longer than 15 to 20 seconds long - especially for broadcast media," said Cohen.

Ensure your executive or spokesperson knows the media outlet and reporter. For example, make sure they understand the difference between an interview with CBC's *The Fifth Estate* and *Canadian Business magazine*.

"Be aware of the technology and the editing process," said Cohen. "When designing key messages, keep the most important points at the top of each so they are less likely to be lost in the editing process and make sure your spokesperson peppers each answer with frequent sprinklings of the corporate name, program or product."

While we must coach our spokespeople to understand the media, they must also be aware of the audience. "Tailor the tone and wording of messages to the particular outlet but try to steer clear of jargon and industry speak," said Cohen.

The Biggest Pitfall

"One of the major pitfalls interviewees face is falling into the temptation of trying to answer every question, especially if it falls out of the realm of their expertise," said Lake. "For example, some executives feel compelled to answer finance or legal questions they do not know the answer to."

Spokespeople need to understand that they do not have to be embarrassed if they do not know the answer. "It's okay to say 'I don't know' and refer the reporter to an expert who can provide the appropriate information," said Lake. "This will preserve your spokesperson's credibility and also helps the reporter to get the best information."

After all, interviews are about building relationships with the reporter and the public.

Prepare to be Cornered

There is a truth that is universally acknowledged: the reporter has his or her own agenda and will attempt to get the information they want, even if it is not in your spokesperson's best interest

to give it out. They will, at times, try to derail your spokesperson's train of thought. Prepare your spokesperson so that they are respectful, not defensive.

Advise against giving out proprietary or confidential information. Should a reporter ask about the financial standing of your spokesperson's company, Lake suggests having them respond with something along the lines of, "I'm sure our competitors would like to know the answer to that question, however I can tell you that we have experienced some financial difficulties this year and we are dealing with these challenges but they are by no means near the troubles you have indicated." It is an honest, open and general answer.

Counsel your spokesperson to stand their ground.

"Don't let the reporter take control of your spokesperson or the interview," said Cohen. "Take control of the key messages and try to weave them into your answers." This will test the power of your well-crafted key messages. Ensure your client masters the art of transitioning back to key messages without sounding like a parrot.

Cohen advises clients to avoid negatives and never knock competitors. Not only does this look petty, but it also knocks at the credibility of the company and spokesperson. He also stresses that above all, when the interview gets tough, be open, candid and answer every question honestly.

But what about dealing with the so-called 'cowboys' or 'cowgirls' or even the lone rangers who want to do things their way and see no value in media training?

Both Lake and Cohen recommend demonstrating the power of pro-active media relations training to the most stubborn executive.

Start with a benchmarking exercise that shows how their company's competitors have enjoyed favourable media coverage because of pro-active media relations. You can also conduct a survey that compares public opinion of your client's company to its competitors.

Regardless of what methods you use, it is important to get your executives and spokespeople on the media training bandwagon or risk becoming vulnerable to a hungry pack of wolves.

Sharon Navarro reported for CTV Toronto and Citytv before making the switch to public relations. She now works as a senior consultant at Porter Novelli Canada.

CEO of the Year

Richard Bradshaw, an outstanding communicator and innovator in the world of opera, is the recipient of this year's CEO of the Year Award in Public Relations as presented by the Canadian Public Relations Society (Toronto).



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