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In this issue

Our Future Looks Bright • Toronto Raptors Market a Game of Global Basketball • Set Sail for Halifax CPRS National Conference • Dear Editor • Canadian Retailers Practise Two-way Communication in Battle for Consumers • Chapter News

The APR Advantage

My Top Five Reasons for PR Accreditation

By Ian Ross, APR



The decision to tackle my APR (accreditation in public relations) last year wasn't made lightly. I knew that it would mean trying to slot in endless hours of studying into my already busy lifestyle. I knew it would mean added stress and require pushing myself beyond my comfort zone. But I also knew it was something that I wanted to do.

Since achieving my APR in December, I've been asked by several people why I chose to take the plunge. For them, the expense seem much more real than the benefits. Initially, I felt the same way. But when I took a deeper look, I saw five clear advantages to pursuing my APR.

ADVANTAGE #1

It would strengthen my education in public relations. Scholarly-based education provides the frameworks and foundations of knowledge that underpin our understanding of the industry. I believe that while informal education through work experience helps advance a career, it can only take you so far if you don't have the formal education to support it.

ADVANTAGE #2

This learning approach was sticky. With the pressure of a written and oral exam, the studying needed to be taken seriously. I spent days embedding information and strategies for each subject area deep into my head. In contrast, I normally forget 90-95 per cent of the information delivered in drive-by, half-day professional development seminars within a day or two.

2007 CEO Award of Excellence In Public Relations



CEO Award Chair and Founder Dr. Gordon McIvor, APR, presents the CPRS (Toronto) 2007 CEO Award of Excellence in Public Relations to Frances Lankin, President and CEO of the United Way of Greater Toronto.

ADVANTAGE #3

The studying schedule was flexible. Trying to fit hours of classes into my calendar may have been impossible. My work and personal hours are often erratic. Preparing for the APR exams, I was able to work my studying around a number of other responsibilities. That meant some weeks were academic heavy and other very light; and there was no concern about missing sessions or deadlines.

ADVANTAGE #4

My new knowledge could be applied immediately. There were several occasions when I brought ideas drawn from an evening reading back to the office the next day. While reading an article, I could see the immediate implications and possibilities. As a full-time student, it is much more difficult to envision how a particular lesson can be applied. The connection between working and learning is much more separated.

ADVANTAGE #5

It would open my eyes to new areas of public relations. The APR curriculum is much broader than my day-to-day job. Before starting to work towards my APR, I knew very little about investor relations, social media, crisis communication and evaluation. Now, I feel I have a deeper understanding of how different areas of the profession can work together to strengthen communication planning.

There are certainly many other advantages to pursuing an APR, but these were my big five. And once I had identified them, it was much easier to focus on the process.

If you are studying for your APR or thinking about applying next fall, talk with Toronto's accreditation chair Martin Waxman, APR at mwaxman@palettepr.com or co-chair Vincent Power, APR at vpower@sears.ca to help identify how the APR can be advantageous for you. Or check out my blog: www.prvoyageur.wordpress.com, for some study tips and other thoughts about the accreditation process.

Ian Ross was one of 17 successful Canadian APR candidates in 2007. He is the immediate past-president of the Canadian Public Relations Society (Toronto) and the public affairs team leader at Ontario's Ministry of Education.

Our Future Looks Bright

By Lawrence Stevenson, APR



Initially, when preparing to write this President's Message, I had a completely different topic in mind. But as I sat at my computer to draft my comments, a FedEx delivery arrived and changed my entire approach. Let me back up a little and give you some context.

CPRS (Toronto) has a very strong mentorship program that has more than 100 participants. In this program, senior level mentors (myself included) are paired with a protégé and given tools and resources to help foster that relationship. By all reports, the program has been a tremendous success and continues to flourish. One of the initiatives that the program organizers developed was the "Take Your Protégé to Work Day" where junior practitioners and students could experience public relations in the real world setting of their mentor's workplace.

I recently hosted my protégé, a bright and enthusiastic Seneca College Corporate Communications student, on a day where I was preparing for and then conducting a special event/press conference for one of my clients. I thought that it would be beneficial to discuss building a media list, pitching and following up with journalists, event coordination, key messaging, all while actively preparing for that day's event. The fact that he was able to attend the press conference that evening and help with media registration was a bonus.

I have also had the pleasure, through my position on the Board, to interact with many other students and young practitioners who are just entering their careers in public relations and actively giving up their spare time to volunteer on various committees. To the last person, they have been articulate, engaged, thoughtful and enthusiastic – just the types of people we need in our line of work. They are dedicated to enhancing the practice of public relations and will be tremendous ambassadors for the organizations that they end up representing.

Being a mentor is not an easy job – ask any parent or teacher. But ask those same people if they would change their situation and you would get a unanimous: "Not on your life!"

This brings me back to my story of the FedEx envelope. Inside, I found a letter from my protégé, elegantly thanking me for the time that I took reviewing his resume and for the opportunity to work on the event with me. As a token of his thanks, he also included two copies of the Arthur W. Page Society's book, *Building Trust: Leading CEOs Speak Out* – a classy gesture and a shining example of the future of public relations in Canada.

The next time you are at a CPRS event, take the time to seek out and speak with the younger practitioners and get their insights. They have great ideas and enthusiasm, and that ALWAYS rubs off. It has for me!

Lawrence Stevenson, APR is President of CPRS (Toronto). He can be reached at lawrence@torchiacom.com.

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Toronto Raptors Market a Game of Global Basketball

Team Scores Points with Diverse Player and Fan Base



By Audley Stephenson



Communicating with diverse audiences from different ethnic backgrounds can be challenging when trying to get your organization's message out.

If you've followed the Toronto Raptors the last few years, you would know the revolving

door at the Air Canada Centre was in perpetual motion as players and coaches were constantly on the move.

The most notable changes has been the collection of international players from diverse backgrounds now wearing Raptor uniforms.

The multicultural dinos' current roster features players from Argentina, Spain, Italy, Slovenia and of course the U.S.

These significant changes also expanded the team's fan base to reach other cultures. It's not uncommon to see Toronto fans come to games draped in their country's flag or wearing that country's colours. At times, it's difficult to distinguish if they're cheering the home team or their home country.

If you think reaching these diverse audiences is as easy as placing ads in ethno-specific media, then think again. Josh Cobden, a vice president at Environics Communications, says "Targeting marketing efforts at specific groups has become the new reality and marketers need to change their approach. It just makes sense... and is a great example for businesses."

In Toronto, there are 2.6 million people representing more than 200 different countries and speaking more than 150 languages.

With their fans becoming more and more diverse, the Raptors organization responded and here's how:

The team had a clear idea of who they wanted to reach. It's pretty simple. If you don't know who you want to talk to, then you won't know the most effective way of communicating with them. If you don't know how to communicate with them, then you stand zero chance of growing your brand.

It was easy for the Raptors because players like Italian-born Andrea Bargnani and Spaniards Jorge Garbajosa and Jose Calderon played on their countries' national teams and were hugely popular. This same popularity has followed them to North America. This year, the Raptors played a portion of their pre-season schedule in front of sell-out crowds in Italy and Spain.

Raptors broadcaster, Chuck Swirsky, said the players "were very well received and it was a great experience for the team." The Italian community seemed to develop a greater interest in basketball after the Raptors made Andrea Bargnani the first European player to be selected as the number one draft. "There wasn't much interest in basketball from the Italian community prior

to Andrea, but he's created a buzz now that he's here," said Pal Di Iulio, president and chief executive officer of Villa Charities.

Understanding your target group's unique cultural characteristics and the issues that matter most to them is important. This helps set the stage for how you lay out your communication strategy and gives it a specific direction.

In 2005, the Raptors Foundation, a charitable arm of the team, partnered with Villa Charities. The non-profit community-based organization is made up of five agencies that coordinate projects in the health, social, cultural and educational fields. These projects enrich and enhance the quality of life and honour the Italian heritage. The Raptors offered support to Villa Charities through ticket donation programs and player appearances. They also donated money to Villa Charities that was used to subsidize children's summer camps.

The Raptors Foundation has assisted Ontario registered charities by raising and dispersing more than \$16 million to date.

The Raptors have creatively developed several strategies to connect with their fans and in the process fostered an environment where cultural differences are celebrated.

They organized culturally themed game days for the Spanish and Italian communities. With the crowds chanting, the atmosphere has the same feel as a European soccer game. Raptors announcer Herbie Kuhn encourages the crowd to count to three in Spanish each time Jose Calderon hits a three-point basket.

The team has annually recognized Baisakhi, a Sikh festival that celebrates the beginning of the harvest season in India. The celebration of cultures was also reflected in special edition jerseys and baseball caps created by the team bearing the colours of the Italian and Spanish flags respectively. The cover of this year's media guide features some of the players on the team and the flags of the countries they represent.

The Raptors capitalized on Toronto's diversity by inviting other European teams to play at the Air Canada Centre. Zalgiris Kaunas (Lithuania), Maccabi Tel Aviv (Israel), Panathinaikos (Greek) and Benetton Treviso (Italy) all made an appearance and in each were shown support from their respective communities.

Despite the overwhelming odds, the Raptors have embraced Toronto's rich diversity and the results have been a slam dunk with several large ethnic groups. They won their division last season for the first time and play an exciting style of basketball that keeps fans on the edge of their seats. In the process, they prove that the sound of a bouncing basketball appeals to people from around the world.

Audley Stephenson is an Employment and Training Consultant with the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities. He can be reached at barrettstephenson@sympatico.ca.

Set Sail for Halifax CPRS National Conference

You won't want to miss the 2008 CPRS National Conference in Halifax from June 8-10. From the unique opening with comedian Ron James to the conference keynote speaker General Rick Hillier, you will learn and laugh on the shores of Halifax Harbour. Other speakers confirmed include youth culture expert Max Valiquette, Andrea Mandel-Campbell, author of *Why Mexicans Don't Drink Molson* and citizen-generated news guru Leonard Brody.

There will be more than a dozen workshops to choose from and great social events including a harbour cruise and supper, a lobster dinner and the National Awards of Excellence Gala.

The 2008 conference provides the best in professional development and networking combined with genuine Maritime hospitality. There's still time to take advantage of the early bird discount which ends April 18. You can register online at: www.cprs.ca/halifax2008.

Dear EDITOR:

Re: The Changing Face of Public Relations, Winter, 2008

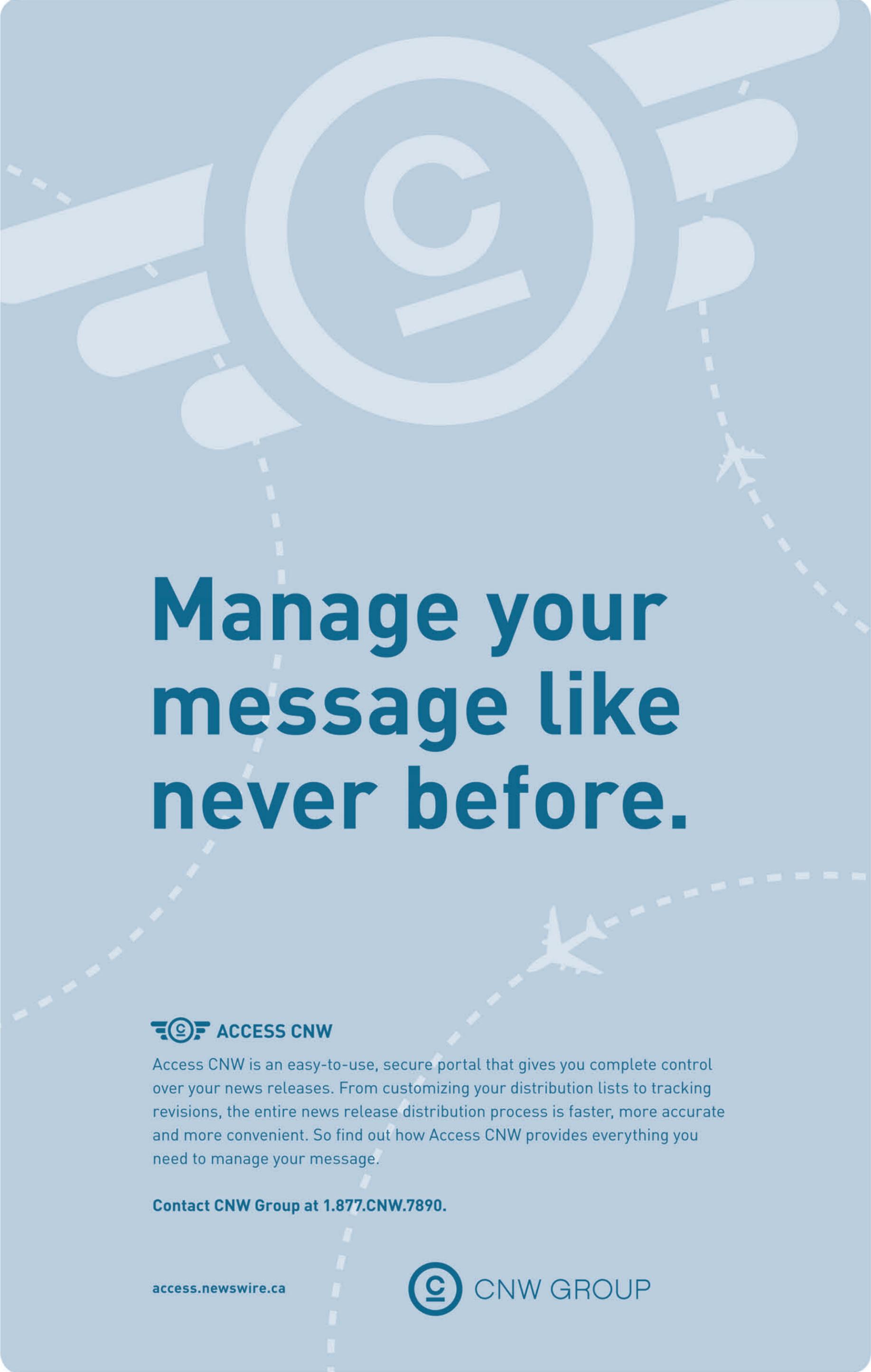
I have to say I take offense at the expressed presumption that multiculturalism is a relatively recent phenomenon in Canada (after all it is 2008) and this was a reality in the Toronto of the '70s. I also take offense at the assumption that the majority of PR practitioners were "rather WASPy" as identified by Tonisha Robinson in her column, *The Changing Face of Public Relations*. While many practitioners may have been W(hite), many of them were other than A(nglo)S(axon) or P(rotestant). Perhaps Ms. Robinson is unaware of that reality or the difference.

I think the real truth of the story is buried in the last paragraph, where Ms. So is quoted on how new immigrant groups tend to identify "what ranks" as a successful and admirable profession. For more than a century in most western societies, "making it" meant encouraging our children to become doctors, lawyers or engineers so they would have a professional career and move up the economic scale. As the profession of PR becomes more well known, and successful practitioners gain more visibility, influence and admiration, more people of every ethnicity and/or religion will aspire to enter the career and will become the de facto role models for others in their communities.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Taggart
Toronto





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Canadian Retailers Practise Two-way Communication in Battle for Consumers

By Vincent Power, APR



Spring is virtually upon us. With our anticipation of warm, sunny weather, the holiday shopping season of 2007 may be too many months ago to recall. Who wants to go back to those days? For people in the public relations field, however, it may be a season to remember as a good example of retailers and the Canadian shopping public engaging in effective two-way communication.

As a quick review, two-way symmetrical public relations is one of four public relations models described by James Grunig where gaining mutual understanding between two parties is the key purpose. "Managing Public Relations" (Grunig and Hunt, 1984) describes this model: "Formative research is used mainly to learn how the public perceives the organization and to determine what consequences the organization has for the public, resulting in the counseling of management about policies. Evaluative research is used to measure whether a public relations effort has improved both the understanding publics have of the organization and that which management has of its publics."

During 2007, the value of the Canadian dollar versus the U.S. dollar had been rising steadily up to that memorable day on Sept. 20 when the loonie reached parity with the greenback. The strength of the dollar continued, as we now know, well into the final months of the year, reaching a high of \$1.09 U.S. on Nov. 7. There were numerous media reports of increased cross-border shopping and consumer frustration.

Canadian consumers questioned why, if the Canadian dollar was at par, were identical items less expensive in the U.S.? Canadians were expecting retailers to lower prices to match U.S. pricing and many of the approximately 90 per cent of Canadians living within two hours of the border were willing to line up for long periods to shop across the border in order to save money.

In turn, retailers reported they were not obtaining reductions from manufacturers to pass on to customers. And while they were feeling pressure from the federal Finance Minister to lower prices, retailers south of the border were taking price cuts to jump-start

their sales, which made the difference in pricing even greater than just the effect of the stronger dollar.

For retailers, the final three months of the year are their most important. Many make or break their year on what they accomplish during the fourth quarter, leading up to Christmas. So, here it was, the month of October and retailers were faced with a competitor that had not been foreseen when their fourth-quarter marketing plans were put into place months before: the United States. Statistics Canada data had shown that both same-day auto visits and overnight stays by Canadians to the U.S. were increasing significantly every month as the dollar grew stronger.

What were retailers to do?

They responded, of course. Retail in Canada is an ultra-competitive industry. Retailers are used to fighting for their business, enticing shoppers to shop their

"Canadian consumers questioned why, if the Canadian dollar was at par, were identical items less expensive in the U.S.?"

stores versus their competition. Now, it seemed retailers had a new business challenge: cross-border shopping.

Under the coordination of the Retail Council of Canada (RCC), an industry association, senior executives from major retailers, and the RCC, visited Ottawa to express their point of view to government officials and various committees. They had five key messages:

- the costs paid by retailers were set several months in advance of merchandise landing on store shelves and thus did not reflect the stronger dollar
- many of these costs are paid for in U.S. dollars, putting current Canadian retail prices at a disadvantage to current U.S. retail prices
- some U.S. suppliers simply charge Canadian-based retailers more for the same goods than U.S. based retailers because they can and were not willing to change

- duties imposed on goods imported from key manufacturing countries into Canada are significantly higher than those charged by the U.S. for the same products and countries
- doing business in Canada costs more than doing business in the U.S., including costs of import duties, benefits, payroll, energy and sales taxes and corporate taxes

The government admitted it had not considered all these facts in its "warning" to retailers to reduce prices, and at least the record was set straight – the main issues around retail pricing were due to the costs which retailers operating in Canada had to pay versus retailers operating in the U.S.

Still, while sympathetic to retailers' plight, Canadians were still not willing to stop cross-border shopping... and saving money. Canadians still were expecting retailers in Canada to lower prices. Canadians, enjoying

the strength of the dollar, continued to pursue cross-border shopping to capitalize on cost savings and expected Canadian retailers to lower prices.

Along with their government relations efforts, major retailers asserted, through media releases and advertising, that they were listening to Canadians and understood their expectations for lower prices. Media releases were issued by retailers throughout this period to demonstrate that they were lowering prices, whether or not their suppliers were also participating.

One of the key categories that came under pressure was a product where both Canadian and U.S. prices were shown, such as on books and cards. Another was home electronics, which is such a large gift-giving category at that time of year, including high-demand items such as TVs, computers and MP3 players. The retail industry was not going to let the U.S. take

away business, and they made it clear to Canadians that they were serious about having Canadians spend their shopping dollars in Canada.

In the days and weeks following these announcements, news reports reflected the actions taken by retailers to lower prices were appreciated by the Canadian public. Major retailers who were reducing prices were frequently mentioned in news reports. Smaller retailers responded with in-store action and special coupons.

Let's get back to two-way symmetrical communication. The cross-border shopping spike following the Canadian dollar's rise in value was a major concern for Canadian retailers. Retailers communicated directly to the public about the conditions that caused pricing to be higher in Canada than in the U.S. This was retailer-to-public messaging which began the communication process of the two-way symmetrical model. The Canadian public understood the retailers' plight, however they still demanded lower pricing or they would continue to shop in the U.S.

Therein lies the mutual understanding.

And the result?

"Generally, the Holiday Season ended up being reasonably solid. Not the same pace as '06, but still moderately steady growth," said Peter Woolford, executive vice president with the Retail Council of Canada in the Toronto Star on January 11, 2008. In the same article, the Forzani Group Ltd. that owns Sport Chek, Sport Mart and Coast Mountain Sports, said sales for November-December rose sharply after it cut prices to attract customers.

The cross-border facts available from StatsCan and retailers' own data provided research on the retailers' side; and evidence of a dollar-at-par and lower prices at U.S. retailers provided research on the public's side.

Getting each other's message across, a respectful listening and feedback mechanism, and the resulting action demonstrates this current example of Grunig and Hunt's two-way symmetrical public relations model.

Vincent Power, APR is National Director of Corporate Communications for Sears Canada



CPRS (Toronto) Launches New PR Directory

CPRS (Toronto) has launched a new directory of Public Relations Agencies and Suppliers that service the Greater Toronto Area. Listings on www.cprstoronto.com will be available for a special introductory price of \$200 for members or \$500 for non-members, while CPRS (Toronto) sponsors can take advantage of this service free of charge as part of annual sponsorship packages.

New features include: Company logo and slogan; unlimited space to describe products and services; two direct points of contact; unlimited subcategories; a standalone directory page with full HTML capability.

If you have questions about this updated service, please contact Matt Drennan-Scace, CPRS (Toronto) Treasurer and acting Internet/Intranet Chair at matt@media-network.org, or if you are interested in becoming a sponsor, please contact John Challinor, CPRS (Toronto) Sponsorship Chair at john.challinor@cohnwolfe.ca.

CPRS (Toronto) Welcomes its Newest Mentors:

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Jaclyn Atwood	Shane Gerard	Jennifer Knox
Sheldon Rose, APR	Carol Levine, APR	Ian Ross, APR
Natalie Bovair	Matt Drennan-Scace	Vincent Power, APR
Jim Cronin, APR	Gabriel Mederos	Stephanie Sorensen

Interested in being a mentor? CPRS (Toronto) continues to look for experienced public relations professionals to donate a few hours of their time per month to share insights with budding practitioners on how to start and develop a rewarding career in public relations. E-mail Victoria Procnier, Chair, Students and Mentoring at: Victoria.Procnier@gmail.com for more information. The Mentorship Program is sponsored by Toronto Hydro.

CPRS (Toronto) Welcomes its Newest Members

Nine communications and public relations professionals and 55 students have made the strategic decision to become a member of the Canadian Public Relations Society. Join us in welcoming them to the Society:

National Members

Ryan Bissonnette – *Advocis*
 Debra Luthe – *Coalition for Persons with Disabilities*
 Amanda Fournier – *Rogers Television*
 Elizabeth Monier-Williams – *York University*
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Rachel Yeager – *The Bishop Strachan School*
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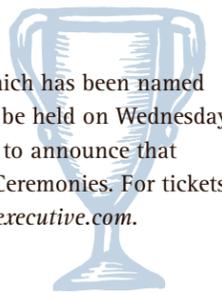
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ACE Awards Gala – April 23

Tickets are on sale for the CPRS (Toronto) 2008 ACE Awards which has been named as one of the top 10 events by BizBash magazine. The gala will be held on Wednesday, April 23, at the Arcadian Court in Toronto. We are very excited to announce that Husein Madhavji – Host, Star! Daily, will be back as Master of Ceremonies. For tickets, please contact Lois Marsh at 416-360-1988 or marshl@marsh-executive.com.



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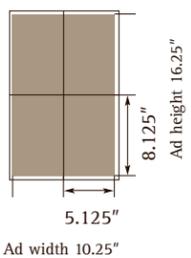
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Jeff Lake, APR, Editor

Your contributions are welcome. Articles or Letters to the Editor can be sent to Jeff Lake, APR at jlake@punch.to.

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