Public relations

Public relations (PR) is the practice of managing the spread of information between an individual or an organization (such as a business, government agency, or a nonprofit organization) and the public.[1] Public relations may include an organization or individual gaining exposure to their audiences using topics of public interest and news items that do not require direct payment.[2] This differentiates it from advertising as a form of marketing communications. Public relations is the idea of creating coverage for clients for free, rather than marketing or advertising. An example of good public relations would be generating an article featuring a client, rather than paying for the client to be advertised next to the article.[3] The aim of public relations is to inform the public, prospective customers, investors, partners, employees, and other stakeholders and ultimately persuade them to maintain a certain view about the organization, its leadership, products, or political decisions. Public relations professionals typically work for PR and marketing firms, businesses and companies, government, government agencies and public officials as PIOs and nongovernmental organizations, and nonprofit organizations. Jobs central to public relations include account coordinator, account executive, account supervisor, and media relations manager.[4]

Public relations specialists establish and maintain relationships with an organization's target audience, the media, and other opinion leaders. Common responsibilities include designing communications campaigns, writing news releases and other content for news, working with the press, arranging interviews for company spokespeople, writing speeches for company leaders, acting as an organization's spokesperson, preparing clients for press conferences, media interviews and speeches, writing website and social media content, managing company reputation (crisis management), managing internal communications, and marketing activities like brand awareness and event management.[5] Success in the field of public relations requires a deep understanding of the interests and concerns of each of the client's many publics. The public relations professional must know how to effectively address those concerns using the most powerful tool of the public relations trade, which is publicity.[6]

Definition

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_relations
Ivy Lee, the man who turned around the Rockefeller name and image, and his friend, Edward Louis Bernays, established the first definition of public relations in the early 1900s as follows: "a management function, which tabulates public attitudes, defines the policies, procedures and interests of an organization... followed by executing a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance." However, when Lee was later asked about his role in a hearing with the United Transit Commission, he said "I have never been able to find a satisfactory phrase to describe what I do."[7] In 1948, historian Eric Goldman noted that the definition of public relations in Webster's would be "disputed by both practitioners and critics in the field."[7]

According to Bernays, the public relations counsel is the agent working with both modern media of communications and group formations of society in order to provide ideas to the public’s consciousness. Furthermore, he is also concerned with ideologies and courses of actions as well as material goods and services and public utilities and industrial associations and large trade groups for which it secures popular support.[8]

In August 1978, the World Assembly of Public Relations Associations defined the field as

"the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organizational leaders and implementing planned programs of action, which will serve both the organization and the public interest."[9]

Public Relations Society of America, a professional trade association,[10] defined public relations in 1982 as:

"Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other."[11]

In 2011 and 2012, the PRSA developed a crowd-sourced definition:

"Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics."[12]

Public relations can also be defined as the practice of managing communication between an organization and its publics.[13]

**History**

Most textbooks consider the establishment of the Publicity Bureau in 1900 to be the founding of the public relations profession. However, academics have found early forms of public influence and communications management in ancient civilizations, during the settling of the New World and during the movement to abolish slavery in England. Basil Clark is considered the founder of public relations in the United Kingdom for his establishment of Editorial Services in 1924.

Propaganda was used by the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and others to rally for domestic support and demonize enemies during the World Wars, which led to more sophisticated commercial publicity efforts as public relations talent entered the private sector. Most historians believe public relations became established first in the US by Ivy Lee or Edward Bernays, then spread internationally. Many American companies with PR departments spread the practice to Europe when they created European subsidiaries as a result of the Marshall plan.
The second half of the 1900s is considered the professional development building era of public relations. Trade associations, PR news magazines, international PR agencies, and academic principles for the profession were established. In the early 2000s, press release services began offering social media press releases. The Cluetrain Manifesto, which predicted the effect of social media in 1999, was controversial in its time, but by 2006, the effect of social media and new internet technologies became broadly accepted.

Salaries and growth

The U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 2014, the median annual salary for public relations practitioners was $55,680. The top ten percent in the field made around $105,720 and the bottom ten percent made around $31,190.[14]

For public relations managers, however, the median annual wage in 2011 was $93,310. Workers in the 90th percentile earned around $176,400, and workers in the 10th percentile earned $50,360, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.[15]

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics also projects an employment growth of 12 percent between 2012 and 2022 for the profession, where an additional 27,400 jobs will need to be filled. The public relations profession has claimed the No. 75 spot on the 2014 U.S. News & World Report list of Best Jobs because of its promising direction.[16]

In the United States, public relations professionals earn an average annual salary of $49,800 which compares with £40,000 ($68,880) for a practitioner with a similar job in the UK.[17] Top earners make around $89,220 annually, while entry-level public relations specialists earn around $28,080.[18] Corporate, or in-house communications is generally more profitable, and communications executives can earn salaries in the mid six-figures, though this only applies to a fraction of the sector's workforce.[19]

According to the 2015 PRWeek/Bloom, Gross & Associates Salary Survey, the median salary at PR firms was $90,000, a 5.9% increase from $85,000 in the 2014 survey.[20]

The role of public relations professionals is changing because of the shift from traditional to online media. Many PR professionals are finding it necessary to learn new skills and to understand how social media can affect a brand's reputation.[21]

Tactics

Public relations professionals present the face of an organization or individual, usually to articulate its objectives and official views on issues of relevance, primarily to the media. Public relations contributes to the way an organization is perceived by influencing the media and maintaining relationships with stakeholders. According to Dr. Jacquie L'Etang from Queen Margaret University, public relations professionals can be viewed as "discourse workers specializing in communication and the presentation of argument and employing rhetorical strategies to achieve managerial aims."[22]

Specific public relations disciplines include:

- Financial public relations – communicating financial results and business strategy
- Consumer/lifestyle public relations – gaining publicity for a particular product or service
- Crisis communication – responding in a crisis
- Internal communications – communicating within the company itself
- Government relations – engaging government departments to influence public policy
- Media relations – a public relations function that involves building and maintaining close relationships with the news media so that they can sell and promote a business.
- Celebrity public relations – promotion of a celebrity to various media publications and outlets
- Food-centric relations – communicating specific information centered on foods, beverages and wine.

Building and managing relationships with those who influence an organization or individual’s audiences has a central role in doing public relations.[23][24] After a public relations practitioner has been working in the field, they accumulate a list of relationships that become an asset, especially for those in media relations.

Within each discipline, typical activities include publicity events, speaking opportunities, press releases, newsletters, blogs, social media, press kits, and outbound communication to members of the press. Video and audio news releases (VNRs and ANRs) are often produced and distributed to TV outlets in hopes they will be used as regular program content.

**Audience targeting**

A fundamental technique used in public relations is to identify the target audience and to tailor messages to be relevant to each audience.[25] Sometimes the interests of differing audiences and stakeholders common to a public relations effort necessitate the creation of several distinct but complementary messages. These messages however should be relevant to each other, thus creating a consistency to the overall message and theme. Audience targeting tactics are important for public relations practitioners because they face all kinds of problems: low visibility, lack of public understanding, opposition from critics, and insufficient support from funding sources.[26]

On the other hand, stakeholder theory identifies people who have a stake in a given institution or issue.[27] All audiences are stakeholders (or presumptive stakeholders), but not all stakeholders are audiences. For example, if a charity commissions a public relations agency to create an advertising campaign to raise money to find a cure for a disease, the charity and the people with the disease are stakeholders, but the audience is anyone who is likely to donate money. Public relations experts possess deep skills in media relations, market positioning, and branding. They are powerful agents that help clients deliver clear, unambiguous information to a target audience that matters to them.[28]

**Messaging**

Messaging is the process of creating a consistent story around a product, person, company, or service. Messaging aims to avoid having readers receive contradictory or confusing information that will instill doubt in their purchasing choice or other decisions that affect the company. Brands aim to have the same problem statement, industry viewpoint, or brand perception shared across sources and media.

**Social media marketing**

Digital marketing is the use of Internet tools and technologies such as search engines, Web 2.0 social bookmarking, new media relations, blogging, and social media marketing. Interactive PR allows companies and organizations to disseminate information without relying solely on mainstream publications and communicate directly with the public, customers and prospects.

PR practitioners have always relied on the media such as TV, radio, and magazines, to promote their ideas and messages tailored specifically to a target audience. Social media marketing is not only a new way to achieve that goal, it is also a continuation of a strategy that existed for decades. Lister et al. said that "Digital media can be seen as a continuation and extension of a principal or technique that was already in place".[29]
PR professionals are well aware of the fact that digital technology is used in a practically different way than before. For instance, cellphones are no longer just devices we use to talk to one another. They are also used for online shopping, dating, learning and getting the most up to date news around the world.[30]

As digital technology has evolved, the methods to measure effective online public relations effectiveness have improved. The Public Relations Society of America, which has been developing PR strategies since 1947, identified 5 steps to measure online public relations effectiveness.

1. **Engagement**: Measure the number of people who engaged with an item (social shares, likes and comments).
2. **Impressions**: Measure the number of people who may have viewed an item.
3. **Items**: Measure any content (blog posts, articles, etc.) that originally appeared as digital media.
4. **Mentions**: Measure how many online items mention the brand, organization, or product.
5. **Reach**: Measure how far the PR campaign managed to penetrate overall and in terms of a particular audience.[31]

**Other techniques**

Litigation public relations is the management of the communication process during the course of any legal dispute or adjudicatory processing so as to affect the outcome or its effect on the client’s overall reputation (Haggerty, 2003).

**Ethics**

Public relations professionals both serve the public's interest and private interests of businesses, associations, non-profit organizations, and governments. This dual obligation gave rise to heated debates among scholars of the discipline and practitioners over its fundamental values. This conflict represents the main ethical predicament of public relations.[32] In 2000, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) responded to the controversy by acknowledging in its new code of ethics "advocacy" – for the first time – as a core value of the discipline.[32] There are certain organisational decisions and actions that go hand in hand with both ethics and legal. Consider the handling of customer data, and how actions could fall into four categories:

- **Ethical and legal**: Keeping customer data confidential.
- **Ethical, but not legal**: Calling attention to the improper handling of customer data.
- **Not ethical, but legal**: Sharing disclosures according to legal requirements, but doing so in a way that customers don't understand what they are agreeing to, as far as sharing data with other companies.
- **Not ethical or legal**: Providing customers' information to other companies without their permission.

The field of public relations is generally highly un-regulated, but many professionals voluntarily adhere to the code of conduct of one or more professional bodies to avoid exposure for ethical violations.[33] The Chartered Institute of Public Relations, the Public Relations Society of America, and The Institute of Public Relations are a few organizations that publish an ethical code. Still, Edelman's 2003 semi-annual trust survey found that only 20 percent of survey respondents from the public believed paid communicators within a company were credible.[34] Public relations people are growing increasingly concerned with their company’s marketing practices, questioning whether they agree with the company’s social responsibility. They seek more influence over marketing and more of a counseling and policy-making role. On the other hand, marketing people are increasingly interested in incorporating publicity as a tool within the realm marketing.[35]
According to Scott Cutlip, the social justification for public relations is the right for an organization to have a fair hearing of their point of view in the public forum, but to obtain such a hearing for their ideas requires a skilled advocate.[36]

Spin

Spin has been interpreted historically to mean overt deceit meant to manipulate the public, but since the 1990s has shifted to describing a "polishing of the truth."[37] Today, spin refers to providing a certain interpretation of information meant to sway public opinion.[38] Companies may use spin to create the appearance of the company or other events are going in a slightly different direction than they actually are.[37] Within the field of public relations, spin is seen as a derogatory term, interpreted by professionals as meaning blatant deceit and manipulation.[39][40] Skilled practitioners of spin are sometimes called "spin doctors."

In Stuart Ewen’s PR! A Social History of Spin, he argues that public relations can be a real menace to democracy as it renders the public discourse powerless. Corporations are able to hire public relations professionals and transmit their messages through the media channels and exercise a huge amount of influence upon the individual who is defenseless against such a powerful force. He claims that public relations is a weapon for capitalist deception and the best way to resist is to become media literate and use critical thinking when interpreting the various mediated messages.[41]

The techniques of spin include selectively presenting facts and quotes that support ideal positions (cherry picking), the so-called "non-denial denial," phrasing that in a way presumes unproven truths, euphemisms for drawing attention away from items considered distasteful, and ambiguity in public statements. Another spin technique involves careful choice of timing in the release of certain news so it can take advantage of prominent events in the news.

Negative

Negative public relations, also called dark public relations (DPR) and in some earlier writing "Black PR", is a process of destroying the target's reputation and/or corporate identity. The objective in DPR is to discredit someone else, who may pose a threat to the client's business or be a political rival. DPR may rely on IT security, industrial espionage, social engineering, and competitive intelligence. Common techniques include using dirty secrets from the target, producing misleading facts to fool a competitor.[42][43][44][45] In politics, a decision to use negative PR is also known as negative campaigning.

Politics and civil society

In Propaganda (1928), Bernays argued that the manipulation of public opinion was a necessary part of democracy.[46] In public relations, lobby groups are created to influence government policy, corporate policy or public opinion, typically in a way that benefits the sponsoring organization.

In fact, Bernays stresses that we are in fact dominated in almost every aspect of our lives, by a relatively small number of persons who have mastered the ‘mental processes and social patterns of the masses,’ which include our behavior, political and economic spheres or our morals.[47] In theory, each individual chooses his own opinion on behavior and public issues. However, in practice, it is impossible for one to study all variables and approaches of a particular question and come to a conclusion without any external influence. This is the reason why the society has agreed upon an ‘invisible government’ to interpret on our behalf information and narrow the choice field to a more practical scale.[48]
When a lobby group hides its true purpose and support base, it is known as a front group.[49] Front groups are a form of astroturfing, because they intend to sway the public or the government without disclosing their financial connection to corporate or political interests. They create a fake grass-roots movement by giving the appearance of a trusted organization that serves the public, when they actually serve their sponsors.

Politicians also employ public relations professionals to help project their views, policies, and even personalities to their best advantages.[50]

See also

- Brand management
- Grassroots
- Impression management
- List of press release agencies
- List of public relations journals
- Media intelligence
- Media manipulation
- Promotion (marketing)
- Propaganda
- Public relations in India
- Publicist
- Reputation management

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Further reading

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- Heitmueller, Lars M. (2012), Corporate Communication Map: Outline of an interactive Overview of the fundamental Models and Theories of Public Relations


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