Write Like a Public Relations Pro

WRITE LIKE A PUBLIC RELATIONS PRO

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

No matter your eventual role in the PR industry, there's a truism worth considering: All strategic messaging starts somewhere.

Even in a moment filled with corporate crises, disruptive technological developments like artificial intelligence and a shift from "news" to "content," the original source of an increasing array of messages continues to be Public Relations Professionals.

That's the idea at the core of the material compiled for this pressbook, "Write Like a Public Relations Pro." Whether your next job will be speechwriting for a CEO, leading social strategy for a small business, raising the profile of a nonprofit or tamping down a corporate scandal, there are a series of best practices that can help guide you through the process of creating impactful, focused messaging that yields its intended purpose.

In my years working at a public relations agency, and later in corporate communications, I grew to learn that public relations writers frequently start the conversation. I was often tasked with drafting core messaging documents and news releases that later branched out into interconnected campaigns with dozens of concurrent tactics. As you read the materials contained in this pressbook, it's my hope that you learn how rigorous research that leads to thoughtful messaging can help you develop as a public relations professional. Along the way, you'll add several unique – but highly connected – skills to your PR toolkit.

I hope you're ready to start the conversation. It's likely to be your career, after all!

-Kevin Kinder, editor of "Write Like a Public Relations Pro"

PART II

UNIT 2: THE PR WRITER'S TOOLKIT (TACTICS AND SOLUTIONS)

LESSON FIVE, PART A: AUDIO RELEASE

Joel Lansing Reed, PhD

Radio and Multimedia News Releases

Organizations can and do send traditional news releases to print, electronic, and digital media outlets. Most organizations will send the same version of the release regardless of the format in which the information will eventually be presented, but the traditional news release format was developed with print media in mind. When radio, television, and streaming news outlets receive a traditional release, they must complete additional steps to adapt the information to their medium. As a public relations writer, you can make it easier for news outlets to share your story by adapting your release to the outlet's preferred format (print, radio, television, etc.) and increase the chances the outlet will cover the news about your organization. This reading describes two adapted versions of news releases: the radio news release and multimedia news releases.

Learning Objectives

After completing this reading, you should be able to:

1. Identify the unique elements of a radio news release.
2. Adapt a traditional news release to a radio news release.
3. Describe the multimedia elements of a release.

The Radio Release

As you learned in your core journalism courses, print and broadcast media present information differently. When writing for radio, it is important to consider that the text must eventually be read aloud to the audience. You can write your radio release in ways that will make it much easier for on-air radio hosts to deliver the content to their listeners. Whereas print news outlets are primarily concerned with the number or words or char-

acters in a story, radio producers are primarily focused on the amount of time something takes to say aloud. Radio outlets tend to keep stories brief and avoid overloading those stories with information that is difficult for listeners to remember without writing it down. There are many similarities between radio and print news releases but there are also major formatting differences and additional elements to include.

What is the same? Some elements of the news release are consistent between traditional and radio releases. For information about correctly writing or formatting these elements, please see the previous reading entitled "Writing the News Release." Elements of the radio news release that are consistent with previous guidance:

1. Letterhead
2. Media contact
3. Embargo information
4. Headline
5. Dateline
6. Lead/lede
7. End marks
8. Boilerplate

If you are adapting a traditional release into a radio format, you can usually leave these elements the same.

What is different? There are four key differences between a traditional release and a radio release.

Format – The first major difference between traditional and radio releases is the formatting of the release. Radio releases are written in all capital letters with double spacing between lines. This practice makes it much easier for reporters to read the release aloud.

Length and length statement – A radio release is often shorter than a traditional news release. Whereas traditional news releases are measured in words or characters, the radio news release is measured in the number seconds it takes to slowly read the text of the release. Writers should indicate on the release the length of time it would take for the average individual to read the story while speaking slowly and clearly. Radio releases are almost always either 30 seconds or 60 seconds in length. A length statement will appear at the end of the headline and will read ": 60" or ": 30." The most accurate way to determine the length of your release is to time yourself reading the release aloud slowly and clearly. Radio announcers tend to speak at a rate around 150 to 160 words per minute, so a typical radio release should be either 75-80 words for a 30-second release or 150-160

words for a 60-second release.[1] These word counts may be much shorter than a traditional news release, so you will need to choose words carefully and tell listeners where they can go to find more specific details.

Soundbite, quote, or actuality – Many radio news releases will include a quote from an organizational representative or relevant public. These quotes may either resemble quotes in a traditional news release, where the words are intended to be read aloud by the radio announcer and attributed to an organization, or they may be presented as a soundbite or actuality, in which the radio announcer plays an audio recording of the appropriate individual saying the words. For quotes intended to be read by the radio announcer, attribute the quote within the text but use the signal verb "says" rather than "said." If using a soundbite, attach a high-quality MP3 along with your release. When using a soundbite, it is important to clearly differentiate between the portions of the release to be read by the announcer and those being presented as a recorded soundbite. Separate the release into paragraphs with the soundbite in its own full paragraph. At the beginning of each paragraph, clearly indicate in parentheses whether the announcer or quoted individual is speaking. For example, (Announcer) for paragraphs to be read by the announcer and (CEO Molly Robb) for a soundbite to be read by the organization's CEO. Some releases use a long soundbite or an actuality, in which most of the content is presented by a representative of the organization.

Less formal – The language of a radio news release should be less formal than a traditional release. A radio news release should be written in a verbal communication style. The writing does not require strict AP format or long and complex sentences. The text should be written for the ear rather than the eye. A radio news release may include sentence fragments, colloquialisms, contractions, and other elements of informal communication.

Multimedia Releases

In a digital age, it is exceedingly rare for a news outlet not to have some digital media presence. Even stories designed to appear in print are likely to be shared digitally as well. As mentioned in the reading "Writing a News Release," whenever possible, media releases should include some media assets to be used by journalists. Media assets help make releases more dynamic and give the organization some capacity to direct the visual representations of the organization. While media outlets may choose to use their own assets or purchase assets from stock photography sites, providing assets makes it more likely that they will use the organization's preferred visuals and interactive content. Multimedia releases include traditional text-based copy with the addition of embedded images, videos, and/or audio elements.

Images may include logos, infographics, portraits, drone or aerial photographs, food or product photographs, documentary photographs, and much more. Images should be carefully selected and presented in

1. Dennis Wilcox and Bryan Reber, Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques, 8th edition (Boston: Pearson, 2016), 152-154.

high resolution. Video content may include A-Roll or B-Roll videos, animations, augmented reality, and/or virtual reality content. Audio content could include embedded soundbites, interviews, relevant music, or news-related audio recordings.

Key Terms

A-Roll– Action shots that help directly tell the story. In a news setting, A-Roll footage might include direct visuals of those who are talking or videos that show the news as it happened.

B-Roll– This is supplementary footage that does not directly depict the news but provides context for the story being presented.

Soundbite– A recorded quote or interview excerpt from an organizational representative or stakeholder.

Review Questions

In addition to being able to identify and define the key terms above, be able to answer the following review questions:

1. Why aren't traditional releases as effective for broadcast and digital media?
2. What are the major differences between traditional news releases and radio news releases?
3. What multimedia elements might and why are they valuable?

LESSON FIVE, PART B: ETHICS

Jasmine Roberts-Crews

Putting it into Practice

The issue of ethics is important in the strategic communication profession. Creators of content should heavily rely on a code of ethics when carrying out various tasks. Using ethical reasoning, whether you're designing a campaign or writing a newspaper article, demonstrates basic understanding of the influence of messages on audiences. Ethical communication also helps an organization avoid dilemmas and compromising situations.

Several cases covered in the press highlight the ramifications of failure to use ethical and honest standards in communication efforts. The case study below demonstrates this.

Learning Objectives

After completing this reading, you should be able to:

1. Analyze the role of ethics in strategic communication decision-making.
2. Assess the consequences of unethical communication practices.
3. Apply ethical reasoning to strategic communication scenarios.

Case study: Ryan Holiday, media manipulation, and the rise of the Tucker Max brand

Media strategist Ryan Holiday made a career of controlling the media to achieve public relations goals. A few years ago, he became a PR specialist for Tucker Max, a controversial blogger and author who garnered attention for his lewd writing and explicit discussions of his sexual adventures with countless women. Holiday played an essential role in a campaign for Max's book *I Hope They Serve Beer in Hell.* Pretending to be someone who hated Max's writings, Holiday contacted influencers, bloggers, and television stations about the social

controversy caused by the brand. Soon Max's book received widespread attention from national media outlets and writers all over the blogosphere (Ariely & Melamede, 2015).

Filmmakers later created a movie based on the book. Holiday used some of the same tactics to promote the film. He emailed college organizations across the country, again pretending to be someone who was disgusted with the Tucker Max brand. He included photos of fake advertisements that were offensive to women (which Holiday himself had created), and said that the advertisements were used to promote the film (Ariely & Melamede, 2015). He told campus leaders, bloggers, and other influencers to urge people not to see the film.

Photo of Author, Ryan Holiday

Holiday was intentionally trying to create protests to generate media coverage and public awareness about the film and the Tucker Max brand in general (Ariely & Melamede, 2015). He used deceptive measures and some aspects of controversy—strong opinions on a topic, social backlash, and a hated public figure—as leverage. And he was very successful: organized groups across the country held protests against the film, furthering the widespread attention on Tucker Max. In this situation, the saying "any press is good press" worked to his advantage. Cases such as this raise several concerns related to the field of strategic communication. Most important, the Tucker Max situation calls into question the ethics Holiday used to control the media. How far should one go to promote an organization or brand? The perception exists that strategic communication professionals, specifically those in public relations, are expert spin doctors and media manipulators; because of this, the profession's credibility has been damaged. In order to reclaim the trustworthiness of the field, strategic communication professionals must abide by strong ethics in their decision-making processes.

The majority of strategic communication professionals promote their client or organization in an honest and straightforward manner. One case study that demonstrates this comes from a Columbus-based public relations agency, Geben Communication. In 2014, the agency helped promote a small catering business, Two Caterers. It used a targeted media relations strategy and pitched to several local publications and news stations

(Geben Communication, 2016) in order to enhance brand awareness. The pitches contained factual information, and those working on the account did not use manipulative tactics to achieve their goal.

Geben Communication's promotional effort had positive results. Local publications wrote several articles on Two Caterers, and a television station invited the small business to do a cooking demonstration for a morning segment. Furthermore, Two Caterers received accolades and recognition from small business associations and magazines.

Media Attributions

- RyanHoliday is licensed under a CC BY-SA (Attribution ShareAlike) license

LESSON SIX: SOCIAL MEDIA

Mary Sterenberg

The Different Sides of Social

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Translate client objective into brand-focused social media posts
- Evaluate channel and audience strategies of major social networks
- Develop a response plan to social media activity

Working on social media for a company or brand starts with an understanding that loving Instagram, having 2,000 Facebook friends or scoring a free burrito by tweeting at the local taco place does not make you a professional. Even knowledge of the major social platforms, what they can do and what content should look like on each one is now just one part of the highly evolved – and constantly evolving – world of social media marketing and communication.

There are also situations where the solution simply doesn't lie with social media. A plumbing company looking to increase new customers may not need a new Instagram strategy, or even an Instagram account, when it can get a stronger return on investment by optimizing its search engine results to pop up near the top of the page when local residents look up plumbing-related questions.

But for many companies, social media plays a major role in their communication and relationships with key audiences. Steve Michalovich, digital planning consultant with Nationwide's Enterprise Digital Experience team, has worked in digital strategy and execution for nonprofit and startup companies, agencies and Fortune 100 companies. He emphasizes that from a brand perspective, the strategy for one social media platform or even digital as whole should tie back up into an organization's larger goals. Social should not live in a silo;

rather, it should support a larger marketing, communication, brand or digital strategy. Young brands need brand awareness while icons like Coke or McDonalds need to move consumers to the next step, whether that is getting them to go into a store, visit a website or follow another communication channel.

"Social should not live in a silo"

"Good content is key. Obviously you want to publish something that is captivating and useful to the end user. But take a step back and think about why we're on social," says Michalovich[1]. Ask what conversation you want to spark with your following on social media. Ask how you will speak to followers and what exactly you're going to be saying. Understand what's going on "top of the house" for the brand and the conversation it's trying to instill, Michalovich explains. "It all comes down to the user base you're trying to attract – what do they expect and what do they need from the brand and what are they doing on social."

Deirdre K. Breakenridge[2], author of Social Media and Public Relations, developed the Social Media Strategy Wheel that illustrates how strategy touches every step in the process of developing strong social media strategy and content. The core is audit and discovery, which keeps both the social media strategy and content firmly rooted in the brand's identity. Moving outward, the next ring identifies goals and objectives, applies research findings and incorporates the budget limitations. Spokes then grow from this hub and show how strategy impacts not only the content itself, but the way it is distributed, the engagement with communities and the monitoring and measuring aspect.

1. Michalovich, Steve. (2017, June). Personal interview.

2. Breakenridge, D, (2012). Social Media and Public relations: Eight New Practices for the PR Professional. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.

Figure 6.1 Social Media Strategy Wheel

Michalovich agrees that social media is much more than just good content. It's a larger and intentional process that includes:

1. up front strategy
2. content creation
3. community management
4. analytics and reporting

The following chapters will expand on these four steps and show how the process of strong social media strategy development moves from the center to the outer rings of the Social Media Strategy Wheel above.

Setting an Up Front Social Strategy[3]

PR Pro Advice: Steve Michalovich, Digital Planning, Nationwide Insurance

Advice for Students

There are three key skills that communication students need coming out of school.

1. Collaboration. You're going to be working across a number of different groups and a number of different key stakeholders within company or if you're with an agency, across different companies and brands.

3. Fast Company. (2019). Behind Wendy's Epic Social Strategy. Retrieved from https://www.fastcompany.com/90330377/behind-wendys-epic-social-strategy

2. Adaptability. You need to be able to change on the fly. Especially in communication and marketing where things are changing daily. In social there are new digital platforms out there that you need to embrace and be able to use, and being up on trends is really key.
3. Empathy. You need to truly understand the end user and their goals and then craft communication strategies to best connect with them.

How the Pros Do It: Miracle-Gro Strategy Changes the Social Conversation

Looking toward its busy spring season, Scotts Miracle-Gro Company decided to make a strategic shift from its existing communication platform and activate a social conversation to drive a new brand position that appealed to new gardeners. Miracle-Gro's platform had always been "we grow tomatoes twice as big," but people who don't garden don't care about that explains Michalovich, who worked on the campaign.

There were many people talking about gardening on social, so Miracle-Gro set a strategy to use social as a catalyst to tap into those conversations and spur conversation – activating people to tell their own stories. The larger brand objective was to inspire new gardeners and shift the company's brand image. Inspiring user generated content on social platforms became a strong way to achieve these goals.

Miracle-Gro began mining existing conversations about gardening and being outdoors. They introduced a hashtag and asked people to share their stories. This shifted the brand position from helping gardeners grow larger tomatoes to encouraging gardening as a way to make people feel happier and be healthier. "We created an ecosystem of storytelling, and social was a big catalyst for this," says Michalovich[4].

4. Michalovich, Steve. (2017, June). Personal interview.

How the Pros Do It: Jeni's Generates Buzz About Upcoming Collab

1. Dolly Parton, photo credit: Tori Behnke 2. Ice cream container

Belle Communication[5] worked with Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams to creatively generate widespread excitement and chatter leading up to and through the announcement of the brand's collaboration with Dolly Parton and the launch of her signature Strawberry Pretzel Pie flavor.

The campaign's three objectives were to increase Jeni's share of voice by at least 5% compared to competitors, secure coverage in food, lifestyle and entertainment media outlets, and generate widespread excitement ahead of the collaboration announcement.

With these objectives in mind, the Belle team researched Jeni's most recent collaboration with Tyler, The Creator. They also conducted research on the media and social landscapes. The found increasing popularity of brands and celebrities dropping clues and "Easter eggs" to engage audiences.

With that trend top of mind, Belle recommend a two-prong campaign approach:

1. Execute a four-week teaser campaign announcing an upcoming collaboration but not revealing the partner to generate chatter
2. Generate local and national media coverage of the collaboration

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5. Communication, B. (2024, November 13). Belle Communication Foodservice PR and Influencer Marketing. Belle Communication. https://bellecommunication.com/

The social strategy focused primarily on Instagram, where Jeni's asked fans to post dream collaborators for the brand. Jeni's also dropped clues on social media and embraced the "leaking a secret" concept. Posts included a series of emojis teasing Dolly Parton and the in-feed photos gradually built a grid that ultimately revealed a picture of Dolly.

The campaign ultimately generated two rounds of excitement and media coverage: one when Dolly Parton was announced as the collaborator and a second when the new flavor was announced. The campaign drove record sales, crashing the website from traffic.

PR Pro Advice, Rachel Gaylord, Senior Account Executive, Belle Communication[6]

Advice for Students

Type your key takeaways here.

Photo credit: Tori Behnke

Recipe for a successful social media strategy:

1. Begin with clear and measurable goals[7] for your social campaign that tie back to a larger business goal.
2. Stir in research from various sources including internal audience analytics, competitor analysis and general social landscape trends.
3. Mix the insights from your research with your target audience, priority channels and brand messaging.
4. Combine to form a playbook of actionable next steps.
5. Fold in creative content writing and high-quality visuals.
6. Bake for the campaign timeline, checking periodically to track suc-

6. Gaylord, Rachel. (2023, July). Personal interview.

7. Barnhart, B. (2020, January 2). How to Set (And Achieve) Meaningful Social Media Goals. Sprout Social. Retrieved from https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-goals/

cess against goals.
7. Adjust as needed along the way to find your sweet spot.

Social Content Creation

After establishing an up front strategy, the process moves into the content creation stage. Good digital content sits on a strong foundation of strategy, which requires not only a clear understanding of a brand and its objectives but also research. Research could include what you know about your audiences, your brand's larger industry, current news in your community and the world, and the different digital platforms where messages will be shared. This research allows you to share information and start conversations that inform, interest or entertain your audiences.

Nathan Okuley, digital brand strategist and social media marketing consultant, has worked with a variety of companies from large brands, to agencies to small businesses. He says he develops social content buckets with a brand's strategic goals in mind. For example, buckets might become:

1. Brand story
2. Product
3. Behind the scenes
4. People of the brand

"As a consumer, when you think about the type of content you like to absorb, you can apply that same knowledge to your audience and decide what content will be most relevant," Okuley explains[8]. He emphasizes that creating social content for a brand requires a firm understanding of the audience and what they are seeking from the brand. For example, content meant to serve an existing customer should look different from content aimed at marketing to potential new customers. Content may even shift by campaign or by season.

Authenticity

Okuley emphasizes the importance of using social media to maximize the overall brand experience. "Brands need to create an online and offline experience for the consumer that:

8. Okuley, Nathan. (2017, June). Personal interview.

1. gives them something worth talking about, and
2. makes them feel a part of your brand and feel like they're valued as a consumer of your brand."

PR Pro Advice: Nathan Okuley, Digital Strategist

Advice for Students

The biggest opportunity for students is to own the digital landscape. I think there's a lot of stomping grounds that haven't been touched by traditional marketers or communicators and this generation of students specifically have grown up in this landscape and have used social media since being a child – they grew up with touch screens and all kinds of innovation and growth. They can step into existing environments and apply their perspective on digital. Don't be afraid to work for free.

Go out and ask brands if you can provide consultation or provide a few hours working on their social streams. There are a lot of businesses in your neighborhood that could use your help with just an ounce of the strategy lens. Take risks. It's a playground. You could start in social and end up in a variety of places but you've got to dive in. Also remember that your social media profiles from a personal perspective often have just as much weight as a resume might have.

Content Marketing

Content marketing[9] focuses on providing content that is useful to target audiences and telling strong stories to draw in consumers rather than simply pitching products and services. The Content Marketing Institute explains it as "a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action."

9. Content Marketing Institute (nd). Retrieved from http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/what-is-content-marketing/

This Content Marketing Institute[10] infographic shows the evolution of content marketing and highlights companies that have leveraged strong content into connections with consumers.

History of Content Marketing 2016

Social media channels can be a strong platform for content marketing. They provide a mouthpiece to share the "valuable, relevant and consistent" content to specific audiences. Michalovich gives an analogy from his time at agency Wonder sauce that social can be a place to build equity, and it's like feeding a piggy bank.

"You're periodically feeding consumers good content – something that might make them laugh or just good info. But eventually that piggy bank becomes full and then you're going to cash in by asking them to do something like visiting your website or watching a video on YouTube. If you've built that trust with the user, they will take action."

A hand putting a coin into piggy bank.

The content "buckets" a brand creates for its social media channels should align with the brand's objectives, but they should also consider what intended audiences want and value. This is the content that will feed the piggy bank.

How the Pros Do It: Retailer Jumps on Holiday Hashtags to Increase Engagement

Okuley worked with a major retail brand that used Twitter as a top platform for reaching consumers. His

10. Content Marketing Institute. (2024). CMI: Content Marketing Strategy, Research, "How-To" Advice. Content Marketing Institute. https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/

client noticed that it did well reaching the intended audience but that repeat engagements were low – consumers interacted with the brand only once — and it was looking to increase this engagement. Trending holiday hashtags like National Donut Day and National Bestie Day were on the rise. This was content users liked and wanted, so media and other reputable content publishers began using the holidays as a form of content to reach audiences. Okuley says he and the group he worked with spent time dedicating content to these trending hashtags. "Suddenly brands are showing up on Mashable, Buzzfeed and Fast Company – sites that brands (especially large brands) love the attention for having smart content." If a brand could be one of the five or six that handled a specific holiday the best, it received the boost of recognition from media in addition to generating followers and engagement on social channels. The brand executed the up front strategy as well as strong content creation to increase repeat engagements.

Content Calendars

One tool for blending different types of social media content and focusing on content strategy is a content calendar.[11] A content or editorial calendar provides a broad view of intentional content over time. The calendar might include content for a single channel like Instagram, or content for multiple channels to ensure that an overall digital strategy is in play. It could detail content for a short-term goal or event, or for long-term content creation and tracking.

You can use something as simple as an Excel document or Google sheet to organize upcoming content by date and time. Many organizations pay for access to social media management tools like Hootsuite[12], Sprinkr or Sprout Social[13] with built-in calendar options that allow a review process and easy scheduling and posting[14].

11. Kenan, J. (2023, February 20). A Complete Guide to Creating a Social Media Calendar. Sprout Social. Retrieved from https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-calendar/

12. Cisnero, K. (2017, June 28). A Social Media Audit Template and Guide for Marketers. Hootsuite. Retrieved from https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-audit-template/

13. Osman, M. (2017, July 18). Social Media & Business: Are Your Brand Objectives Aligned? Sprout Social. Retrieved from https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-and-business/

14. Martin, M. (2022, November 2). How to Run the Easiest Social Media Audit. Hootsuite. Retrieved from https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-audit-template/

Benefits of a Content Calendar

- You can apply strategic timing and guard against "dead spots" in activity level.
- You can optimize the type of content and consider how you're representing the different content "buckets."
- You can create consistency in voice and content, especially when multiple people post to one brand account.
- It allows for oversight such as an intern drafting content for a calendar that is edited and approved by a supervisor or an agency drafting content for review by a client.
- You can more clearly measure what works and what doesn't and see what aspect of the strategy or content is resonating or falling flat.

Sprout Social offers A Complete Guide to Creating a Social Media Calendar[15] with more logistical details on content calendars.

Media Attributions

- social media strategy wheel
- Dolly Parton-Jeni's ice-cream
- Rachel Gaylord
- piggy bank

15. Kenan, J. (2023, February 20). A Complete Guide to Creating a Social Media Calendar. Sprout Social. Retrieved from https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-calendar/

LESSON SEVEN, PART A: CRISIS COMMS

Julie Zink, Ph.D

Crisis Communication

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Understand what merits a crisis response and what does not
2. Build a strategic approach to crisis communication
3. Execute communications to help brands/companies recover from crisis moments

A crisis is the ultimate unplanned activity and the ultimate test for managers. In a time of crisis, conventional management practices are inadequate and ways of responding usually insufficient. This author, a communications practitioner with global experience, details a well-managed crisis response

that will leave stakeholders with a favorable impression and renewed confidence in the affected company.[1]

Few circumstances test a company's reputation or competency as severely as a crisis. Whether the impact is immediate or sustained over months and years, a crisis affects stakeholders within and outside of a company. Customers cancel orders. Employees raise questions. Directors are questioned. Shareholders get antsy. Competitors sense opportunity. Governments and regulators come knocking. Interest groups smell blood. Lawyers are not far behind.

As the ultimate unplanned activity, a crisis does not lend itself to conventional "command and control" management practices. In fact, some of the techniques for managing a crisis may fly in the face of conventional notions of planning, testing and execution. Preparation and sound judgment are critical for survival.

Since the Tylenol crisis of the 1980s (unknown parties tampered with bottles of the product), the concept of crisis management has become a specialized activity in the domains of communications and public relations. Companies have come to recognize crisis communications capabilities as a vital part of their risk management and business continuity strategies.

National Public Relations has been on the front lines of some of the highest-profile crises in Canada and beyond, for more than 30 years. We have devoted many more hours to helping companies avoid, manage and recover from a crisis. This information encapsulates our strategy for survival.

Crisis prevention: The case for issues management

The first task is to identify crisis risks or to recognize a crisis when it breaks out.[2]

From a communications standpoint, a crisis is a business or organizational problem that is exposed to public attention, and that threatens a company's reputation and its ability to conduct business.

A crisis can take on many forms, including natural or man-made disasters, environmental spills, product tampering or recalls, labor disruptions or criminal acts, to name a few. What makes them a crisis is the fact that they are the focus of intense media scrutiny.

Although some risks are beyond a company's control, others can be foreseen. Research shows that the vast majority of crises arise when companies fail to identify a potentially contentious issue at an earlier, more benign, stage, and to develop a plan of action to manage the issue before the issue manages them.

An issue can fester for months, maybe years, until events and circumstances intersect and propel it to centre

1. Kim, Y. (2015). Toward an Ethical Model of Effective Crisis Communication. Business & Society Review (00453609), 120(1), 57-81. GSC Library Article http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=101349429&site=eds-live

2. Pauchant, T. C., & Mitroff, I.I. (1992). Transforming the crisis-prone organization: Preventing individual, organizational, and environmental tragedies. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Soeder, J. (1993). Anatomy of an avoidable tragedy. Restaurant Hospitality, 77, 34.

stage on the public agenda. In some cases, an issue may have been badly handled, and as a result, has escalated to the brink of becoming a crisis. Examples include:

- A major pharmaceutical company recalls a product that has proven to have adverse side effects. Relentless media attention reveals that the company had known for years about scientific studies that questioned those side effects.
- A brokerage firm, steeped in its own male macho culture, routinely subjects female employees to embarrassing or degrading working conditions, and ignores the most reasonable of complaints, until an employee launches a lawsuit and gains the support of women's organizations nationwide.
- A company's blue-chip board, having confidence in its high-profile CEO, rubber-stamps his recommendations, until a whistle-blower reveals shenanigans within the company that lead to a special audit and an OSC investigation.

A coordinated approach to issues management can help an organization effectively identify and anticipate potential issues, prevent crises from developing, and influence their evolution and outcome.

The first step is to conduct an issues audit- an inventory of a company's vulnerabilities and the critical issues it is likely to confront. The task for companies in highly regulated sectors, like energy or pharmaceuticals, is more obvious than for other, less visible enterprises.

Within the company, a series of interviews with senior management is conducted. Business plans, processes, relationships and previous experience are analyzed. Key contacts in the industry, media and oversight functions are identified, and existing communications plans inspected for relevance.

Outside the company, media analysis, legislative tracking, industry reports, polls and surveys all help to bring potential threats to the surface.

Once a framework is established, the critical issues should be identified and prioritized in order of magnitude and likelihood of occurrence.

After the communications audit is complete, an issues manual is developed. This document details critical issues, the history and context of company involvement with them, and the company's position on each one. If the issues have seeped into the public domain at any point, the level of visibility should be described, and allies and adversaries identified.

Some examples of issues that faced companies in recent years and escalated into crises include:

- Canadians' penchant for bank-bashing was the context in which the country's major banks unsuccessfully attempted to merge with each other;
- Advocacy groups raised red flags about unknown risks in producing and consuming genetically modified organisms before GMO-based products were sprung on the market;
- Heavy industrial emitters knew of Canada's intention to ratify the ill-conceived Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change years before they expressed their views on its economic impact;

- Labor groups and others had been advocating better working conditions in the Third World before ethical sourcing became a mainstream concern for retailers.

Creating a crisis communications plan

The issues audit becomes the front end of a company's crisis communications plan, and arguably, the most important document in the plan. As a complement to a company's emergency procedures, the crisis plan should contain detailed communications response procedures in the event that any of the potential crises identified in the communications audit, or unforeseen external events, come to pass.

The following is a checklist of the contents of a good crisis communications plan:

- Names and contact information of the crisis team/ spokespeople. People need to know who holds responsibility for leading the organization through the crisis.
- Crisis triage. Understanding what level of "crisis" you're facing. Establishing criteria to decide when a minor incident has the potential to become a national crisis can be a challenge.
- " First response. What information has top priority? How will you initially respond to media?
- Alert/ notification procedures. Who needs to get information, and in what order of priority? By phone, e-mail, pager or fax?
- Situation room. Assess the physical space that will be the nerve centre for managing the crisis, including the required hardware and software, staffing, location and layout.
- Stakeholder communications. How do you plan to communicate with customers, shareholders, employees, government and the media?
- Contact lists. Include the "inputs (which media outlets and Internet message boards should be monitored, which opinion leaders should be kept track of, etc.) and "outputs" (which journalists should be contacted, which newspapers and television programs should be approached, which media outlets need to hear your story).
- Template responses. Standardized format, language and protocol for all communications.

Access to the crisis plan is essential. Many companies now maintain both print and electronic versions for ease of access and remote retrieval.

Testing the plan

In order to ensure that the messages contained in the crisis plan are delivered effectively and with credibility, and that the plan can be carried out, it needs to be tested. This is where crisis training and simulations come in, as well as media training.

Crisis training is best delivered by outside trainers who take participants through crisis theory and its practical applications to their industry or company. The crisis plan is reviewed and implemented in a simulated crisis

to assess the organization's preparedness, and to identify areas that need improvement. Did the crisis response, when played out, escalate or solve the crisis?

Crisis Management: "Plan for the worst; hope for the best"

Despite the best planning and foresight, organizations inevitably find themselves in a crisis from time to time.

- An oil company's head office receives a media call asking for its reaction to the bombing of its pipeline in Central America, before the company itself has even heard the first report from the field.
- A packaged goods company learns it is being sued by disgruntled consumers.
- A delivery truck driver for a hazardous waste company calls his dispatcher to report he's been in an accident and spilled his load of chemicals in a densely populated part of town.

Research has discovered common internal reactions when the issue first breaks.

The first casualty of a crisis is perspective. Characteristically, the pattern is one of escalation, with the initial response being surprise, itself the result of a lack of information.

Before the company knows about the incident, cameras are on the scene. In the absence of real information, an organization cannot respond meaningfully. However, that doesn't stop media from reporting on it live, minute by minute.

As events escalate, management senses a loss of control over the issue. Intense scrutiny by the media, regulators, stakeholders and competitors breeds a siege mentality, tempting a company to batten down the hatches and say nothing at the very time the media is pounding at their door.

Panic sets in. Business planning horizons change from years into hours. Management attention is focused entirely on getting through the next interview.

External reactions mirror these internal dynamics. Initially, an incident may attract the interest of only a small constituency.

- Reports out of a small town indicate residents are concerned about the quality of its water supply.
- An obscure illness begins to affect a marginalized group of citizens.
- A scientific journal questions the safety of technology used in a popular consumer product.

As the hours and days pass, media reports breed a wider concern as other stakeholders become aware of the impact of the situation on them. Curiosity turns into concern and anxiety.

The absence of an adequate response by the players involved breeds anger and fear and invites a desire in others to retaliate for what is seen as wrongdoing. Stakeholders begin demanding answers. They want to strike back, with the view that someone has to "pay" for the consequences. Sooner rather than later, an organization

loses the public trust and goodwill upon which its business has been built. Market share begins to erode. Stock prices drop. Government orders an inquiry.

Assessing a crisis

One of the most vital skills a company can possess is the ability to determine if, when and at what level of importance a crisis has struck:

- Is this a crisis, or is it simply a continuing business problem coming to the surface?
- Is it confined to a local area, or does it have the potential to become a situation of national or international importance?
- Has someone verified the incident or crisis?
- What are the legal implications?
- What level of resources will be required to manage it?

TED TALK: Melissa Agnes: The Secret to Successful Crisis Management in the 21st Century

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/uarkpr/?p=65#oembed-1

So what's to be done? Ten rules for crisis management

1. **Respect the role of the media**. The media are not the enemy; they have direct access to the audiences you need to reach. Rather than avoiding media, use them as a conduit to communicate key messages. Prepare a statement that includes the confirmed facts; communicate what the company is doing and provide background information.
2. **Communicate, communicate, communicate**. The first rule of crisis management is to communicate. Early hours are critical and they set the tone for the duration of the crisis. The media's first questions are likely to be simple and predictable:

    - What happened?
    - Where?
    - When did you know of the problem?
    - What are you doing about it?
    - Who's to blame?

- Were there warning signs?
- How will life or property be protected or compensated?

Be as forthright as possible; tell what you know and when you became aware of it; explain who is involved and what is being done to fix the situation. Be sure to correct misinformation promptly when it emerges.

- In the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy, New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani held a press conference in the ruins of Lower Manhattan that afternoon. In the coming days, he became the reassuring voice of calm for worried residents of the city.
- In the hours, days and months after the 1998 crash of Swissair 111 in Nova Scotia, the Transportation Safety Board of Canada held a series of media updates on the status of the crash investigation, and provided regular safety alerts to the international aviation community.
- When Pepsi-Cola heard first reports of syringes being found in soft drink bottles in 1993 — which turned out to be hoaxes — it launched a broad communications offensive to reassure consumers. Tactics included media relations and interviews, company open houses, video news releases, third-party endorsement and consumer hotlines.

Remaining silent or appearing removed, perhaps on the advice of legal counsel, tends to enrage the public and other stakeholders. A balanced communications strategy must be developed that protects corporate liability while satisfying the demands of today's information and media dynamic.

As demanding as the public may be, they are usually inclined to give an organization the benefit of the doubt in the early hours of a crisis. They judge a company and its leaders not by the incident itself — which they recognize is often beyond the control of those individuals — but by their response.

3. **Take responsibility**. One of the more controversial tenets of crisis management is that someone involved in a crisis must be prepared to empathize, even publicly apologize, for the events that have transpired. This is different from accepting blame. Taking responsibility means communicating what an organization is doing to remedy a situation that the media and the public have determined involve that organization in some way.
4. **Centralize information**. A company needs to move quickly to gain control over information and the resolution of the crisis. Ensure that appropriate levels of management are updated with information from a wide variety of sources (media coverage, analyst comments, competitive intelligence, managers' first-hand reports, etc.).
5. **Establish a crisis team**. Create and train the crisis team before a crisis strikes, and establish a situation room. During a crisis, when everyone goes into action, be sure the team has access to the highest levels of management.
6. **"Plan for the worst; hope for the best."** Assume the worst-case scenario. Develop contingencies for

the hours and days ahead, forecast possible consequences and determine plans of action.

7. **Communicate with employees**. Remember that employees are your front-line "ambassadors" in a crisis. Be sure they are aware of what the company is doing to deal with the situation.
8. **Third parties**. Use third parties to speak on your behalf. Third parties act as character witnesses and often carry more credibility than the organization at the centre of a crisis.
9. **Use research to determine responses**. Polling, market research and focus groups provide essential insight into the magnitude of a crisis and public attitudes about where hidden issues may lie. Monitor the Internet, chat rooms and blogs.
10. **Create a website –** If circumstances warrant, create a website to give quick, up-to-the-minute information and get the company's story out.

Crisis recovery: Regaining trust

As the crisis comes under control, a company should examine the impact the incident has had on its brand(s) and reputation. If the brand has taken a hit, a company may need to give consumers a reason to trust them again.

Companies should consider a broad range of potential communication initiatives to restore trust and loyalty.

- Following a recall of millions of cases of beer that may have contained a few bottles tainted with caustic cleaning material, a major brewery ran ads in newspapers across Canada, assuring consumers the problem was rectified and offering them coupons redeemable for a free beer.
- A major appliance company weathered controversy following the closure of a manufacturing facility that saw hundreds lose their jobs. The company ran a major public relations and advertising campaign to remind customers that it continued to have an active presence in the country, and was here for the long haul.
- An international mining company seeks to restore normalcy to an overseas site that has been occupied by demonstrators and attracted an international backlash. The company begins a real effort at stakeholder communications and engagement, learning to work with its staunchest critics.

An entire arsenal of public relations techniques can be called upon, from media relations, internal communications, and thought-leadership initiatives to comprehensive corporate social responsibility programs.

Public opinion surveys can track changes in attitudes towards a company in the weeks and months after reputation-focused programs are launched.

Weathering a crisis: The last word

Most lectures on crisis management point out that the Chinese expression for crisis, *wei ji*, is a combination of

two words: danger and opportunity. While no company would willingly submit itself to the dangers inherent in a crisis, the company that weathers a crisis well understands that opportunity can come out of adversity. A well-managed crisis response, coupled with an effective recovery program, will leave stakeholders with a favorable impression and renewed confidence in the affected company.

LESSON SEVEN, PART B: PORTFOLIO

Jasmine Roberts-Crews

Portfolios

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Develop a professional writing portfolio that demonstrates communication competencies.
2. Evaluate and apply best practices for portfolio creation and presentation.

In today's job market, recent college graduates or those entering the strategic communication profession need to demonstrate job preparedness beyond academic achievements. Excelling in the classroom is important, but many employers are just as interested in your work experience, expertise, and job-related skills[1].

Demonstrating your writing skills is especially important, and creating a portfolio of samples will help you in your next job interview. Writing portfolios supplement what you've learned in the classroom. They provide an advantage in today's competitive market by illustrating and marketing your brand. Regardless of career level, strategic communication professionals should have a portfolio to showcase their work.

As you work on more projects and articles, remember to include them in your portfolio. Constantly update the portfolio so that employers and professional contacts can see your most recent work. Include a minimum of two to three writing samples, although the quality of the portfolio materials matters more than the quantity (Lovering, 2016).

Some employers may not ask for a portfolio, but will require you to take a writing test. Employers use this

1. Lovering, C. (2016). How to make an impressive writing portfolio. Houston Chronicle. Retrieved from: http://work.chron.com/make-impressive-writing-portfolio-3214.html

assessment to determine your editing skills, understanding of AP style, knowledge of grammar and punctuation, and ability to write under a strict deadline. It might be a timed test or a take-home assessment. The following sentences are examples from the editing section of a writing test.

Exercises

Each of the following sentences contains AP Style errors. As a way to refresh your memory on the style and accuracy required in public relations, you may find it helpful to complete these exercises as a review.

1. To kick off the days event, XX Partners Inc. will be hosting a special guest speaker, Dr. P. Richardson from 8:30 to 9:30 am in lexington Auditorium.
2. Employees that volunteered for the community service event should contact there manager for further instructions.
3. To compete effectively for full-time, entry-level talent in a highly-competitive and shrinking talent pool, we are placing a stronger emphasize on how we define a intern.

Platforms to create your online writing portfolio:

- clippings.me
- WordPress
- Wix

Online portfolios are much more common than hardcopy portfolios because most communication materials are digital. However, you may, although not common, run into a prospective employer who could ask you to bring a hardcopy portfolio to the interview. Create an online portfolio, such as a professional website, so that the general public can see your work. Send the online portfolio to professional contacts in your network or to potential employers before the job interview so they can see your writing samples. As a precautionary measure, also print some of the writing samples and put them in a leather zip-up portfolio or a professional binder when you're preparing for the job interview.

When considering what to include in your writing portfolio, look at relevant class assignments or work produced in a previous or current role. Save everything in a file, especially work from a class that requires you to write common communication materials such as marketing campaigns, newsletters, press releases, social media

content, and news articles. If you do not have internship or work experience, you may want to consider volunteer writing for a nonprofit organization or a small project for a startup company (if you can afford to do this). What matters is that you have writing samples to show.

The first page of a hard-copy portfolio is usually a resume. Online portfolios include a description or summary of your professional background. From there, create clear sections and headings and arrange the content by article or document type. Tailor the portfolio to jobs or industries you're interested in and by chronological order, with the most recent work first or at the top of the online portfolio. For example, if you're applying for a job that requires proficiency in AP style writing, include writing samples that use this style, such as press releases or feature articles. If you're applying for a job that requires social media writing skills, include social media posts that you've created for an organization. Here's a list of some of the materials you could include in the portfolio:

- Press releases
- Website copy
- Feature articles
- Media pitches
- Social media posts that you created for an organization
- A sample RFP (request for proposal) for a campaign or a detailed public relations campaign proposal
- News media clippings of coverage you secured from pitches (it helps if you provide the original pitch that led to the media coverage)

Include brief information about each document, such as the name of the organization it was created for and the date. Be ready to discuss your writing samples during a job interview. You may explain why you created the material and the results that came from it, such as increased website traffic and social media followers from your content. For more examples of writing portfolios, click on the following links:

- Alexis Christie, Social Media Coordinator for the Cleveland Browns
- Gari Cruze, copywriter
- Brandi Uyemura, features writer

OPTIONAL READING: TO TELL THE TRUTH: CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN A POST-TRUTH ERA

Dr. Lynn Pasquerella

The worst global pandemic in more than a century coincided with a profound moment of racial reckoning in the United States, shining a spotlight on the critical importance of effective crisis communication by campus leaders. Amid charges that their public statements on issues of racial and social justice and the health and well-being of their communities had become mere performative acts, propelled by either a liability-driven or corporate ethic, many presidents experienced a reluctance to engage in the level of communication required by normative leadership during crises.

The complexities of effectively communicating about internal and external crises have been enhanced recently by a burgeoning mistrust in higher education and the pervasive influence of social media. Within this post-truth era, in which facts ostensibly matter less than controlling the narrative, controversies often make it into the headlines or go viral during a 24/7 news cycle before ever reaching the president's desk. Various constituencies—students, faculty, staff, alumni, governing boards, and the extramural community—demand immediate and sometimes differing types of responses. Yet presidents who do communicate swiftly, frequently, and authentically in addressing unanticipated urgent matters are consequently accused of undermining avowed commitments to shared governance and collaborative decision-making.

This chapter details action steps college and university presidents should take before making public statements about crises, the values that should inform them, and the crucial role of resilience in ensuring that immediate challenges do not undermine an institution's long-term strategic goals.

How COVID-19 Changed Everything

Messaging to address the needs and concerns of various constituents during a crisis is a central component of successful presidential leadership. Indeed, in their study on pathways to the university presidency and the future of higher education leadership, journalist Jeff Selingo and his research colleagues note that in interviews with 165 public and private college and university presidents, being a strong communicator was identified as the second most important skill needed for the job, after strategic thinking (Selingo, Chheng, and Clark 2017,

2).[1] However, even before the onset of COVID-19, an American Council of Education survey revealed that crisis management and the concomitant communication it requires is one of the top three areas campus leaders have felt least prepared to tackle (Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk, and Taylor 2017).[2]

These findings are understandable given the intricate and multilayered nature of crises that have befallen college campuses over the past decade. Beyond coping with devastating natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, and fires that have precipitated campus closures, college and university presidents have been confronted by high-profile incidents ranging from mass shootings, bomb threats, and White Supremacist marches to admission scandals, hazing deaths, incidents of sexual abuse and harassment, violent clashes over freedom of expression, and resurgent activism around issues of racial and social justice. These scenarios have tested the abilities of college and university presidents around crisis communications in new and extraordinary ways, heightening attention to crisis readiness in higher education.

Even so, no one could have anticipated the monumental challenges posed by the impact of COVID-19 for campus leaders when exercising the key competencies of writing and speaking to diverse audiences during times of crisis. From the moment in March 2020 when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a public health emergency, college and university presidents were met with a series of questions about how to respond, particularly with respect to mask mandates, quarantines, campus closures, and the transition to remote learning. Immediate concerns were raised by faculty, staff, students, parents, and members of the extramural community over whether the measures taken by campus leaders were sufficient to protect the health and safety of everyone involved, or alternatively, an unwarranted infringement on individual liberties. The rapidity with which scientific information and medical advice was evolving created additional layers of complexity regarding the correct course of action, how much should be communicated, and how often. These challenges became even more daunting when vaccines became available, and campus leaders were forced to decide whether to require this public health measure and, for some, whether to stand up to state laws proscribing them.

As crisis teams came together to strategize, it became clear that preventing the transmission of the virus was not the only factor to be considered in safeguarding well-being. Communications foreshadowing closures were met by a surge in petitions from students hoping to stay on campus due to food and shelter insecurities, inadequate access to computers and high-speed internet, or the inability to travel home because of their international status. Presidents who decided to move to online instruction out of "an abundance of caution" were confronted by frustrated, beleaguered faculty who took on additional workloads and felt ill-prepared for delivering their classes in an unfamiliar format. They were joined by angry students, especially seniors who felt cheated

1. Selingo, Jeffrey J., Sonny Chheng, and Cole Clark. 2017. Pathways to the University Presidency: The Future of Higher Education Leadership. New York: Deloitte University Press

2. Gagliardi, Jonathan S., Lorelle Espinosa, Johnathan M. Turk, and Morgan Taylor. 2017. The American College President Study: 2017. American Council on Education, Center for Policy Research and Strategy, TIAA Institute

out of commencement ceremonies and co-curricular activities marking milestones in their educational journeys, and by parents demanding refunds for what they saw as a bait-and-switch approach to charging the same tuition for what they considered to be a lesser quality learning experience. As uncertainty around the future continued, staff, too, became increasingly vocal in calling for clarity around job security throughout campus shutdowns and for continued work flexibility when they reopened. Together, these responses signal the importance of presidents knowing whom they lead, since what constitutes a local crisis is often a function of campus and community culture.

Worsening Culture Wars

The nuances entailed in the nature, scope, and frequency of communications around COVID were magnified by escalating culture wars. By the end of the first semester in which campus leaders were dealing with the pandemic, anti-lockdown and anti-mask rallies were being held in half of the states across the US. Educators, health experts, and other scientists advocating for mask mandates and quarantines were compared to Nazis, fascists, and the Taliban. Roving strangers with targeted agendas used social media to enlist the public in opposing such measures on campuses—some setting up troll accounts to spread disinformation. At the same time, just as data were emerging about the disparately negative impact of COVID-19 on communities of color, and in the aftermath of a series of brutal murders of African Americans at the hands of White police officers, Black Lives Matter protests spread across the country and around the world. These efforts to call out structural racism were met with backlash in the form of a new wave of overt racism, sexism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and anti-Asian sentiment, catalyzing fear and apprehension among college students.

A campaign against books like the *New York Times*'s *1619 Project* and curricula focused on telling a more inclusive story of American history was launched by those who regarded these initiatives as un-American propaganda. Falsely categorized under the heading of Critical Race Theory, the overarching goal of critics was to curtail what they viewed as liberal, progressive indoctrination, or "wokeism." More than seventy-nine bills in twenty-nine states were introduced between January 2021 and January 2022 that sought to prohibit the teaching of "divisive concepts" through discussions of diversity, equity, inclusion, multiculturalism, racism, and gender identity. In many instances, these educational gag orders were accompanied by hotlines created for people to report violators (Friedman and Taber 2022).[3]

Similarly, following the Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs,* which overturned *Roe v. Wade*, an Idaho ban was imposed on faculty and staff that prohibited counseling someone to get an abortion, promoting abortion, or referring someone for the procedure (Flaherty 2022).[4] Moral distress arose for presidents forced to choose

3. Friedman, Jonathan, and James Tager. 2022. "Educational Gag Orders." Pen America. https://pen.org/report/educational-gag-orders/

4. Flaherty, Colleen. 2022. "University Tells Professors to Stay 'Neutral' on Abortion." Inside Higher Ed, September 27, 2022. https://www.insid-

between following state laws or defending the academic freedom and principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion foundational to their institutional missions. Nevertheless, a felt sense of responsibility to address the widening racial and gender inequities in education and health following COVID and *Dobbs* needed to be weighed against their fiduciary responsibilities during a period of existential threat, made worse by legislators who promised to withhold funds from those who violated educational gag orders.

Moreover, in the months that followed the initial campus closures, enrollments declined, student financial needs increased, and sources of revenue from room and board, campus events, and conferences dwindled. There was pressure from state legislators and the public to do more with less and to limit offerings to disciplines seen as leading to immediate employability, as in Alaska where the board of regents voted to cut thirty-nine programs and reduce four others (Mangan 2020).[5] Under the circumstances, college and university presidents were forced to communicate unpopular messages around the allocation of scarce resources outside of their control, detailing reductions in faculty and staff and the elimination of departments and programs.

Lessons Learned

The experience of presidents engaged in crisis communication around COVID-19 reinforces the need for ongoing crisis planning at more in-depth levels. Beyond preemptive decision-making by assessing responses to past crises and analyzing case studies from other campuses, presidents should work with their communities to develop values statements that will guide them in ethical decision-making when the next crisis arises. This includes planning around when, how much, and how often to communicate to various groups. While nearly every college has crisis plans in place to respond to infectious diseases, few if any had planned for the magnitude and duration of COVID's impact. In fact, in a study done between May and October 2020 on crisis communications by thirty-seven campus leaders at thirty institutions, participants unanimously agreed that their plans were inadequate to address the higher uncertainty of COVID and the length of the crisis (Liu, Lim, and Shi, et al. 2021, 462).[6]

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ehighered.com/news/2022/09/27/university-tells-professors-stay-neutral-abortion#:~:text=Employees%20engaging%20in%20their%20course,%2C%E2%80%9D%20the%20university%20also%20said

5. Mangan, Katherine. 2020. "U. of Alaska System to Eliminate Nearly 40 Academic Programs." Chronicle of Higher Education, June 8, 2020. https://www.chronicle.com/article/u-of-alaska-system-to-eliminate-nearly-40-academic-programs

6. Liu, Brooke Fisher, JungKyu Rhys Lim, Duli Shi, America L. Edwards, Khairul Islam, Ronisha Sheppard, and Matthew Seeger. 2021. "Evolving Best Practices in Crisis Communication: Examining US Higher Education's Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic." Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research 4 (3): 451–484. https://stars.library.ucf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1175&context=jicrcr

Engage in Reality Testing

Having diverse teams of faculty, staff, students, and community members in place to advise on prospective crises can help mitigate accusations of unilateral decision-making in an environment that privileges shared governance and collaborative decision-making. It can also aid in the reality testing necessary for effective messaging. In early 2021, amid continuing racial unrest, 77 percent of college presidents said that race relations on their campuses were excellent or good, but 81 percent thought they were only fair or poor on other campuses. A year later, a mere 19 percent believed race relations were good on campuses nationally. Yet they were convinced that race relations on their own campuses were better, with 63 percent maintaining they were either excellent or good (Lederman 2021).[7] The disconnect between the confidence of presidents regarding race relations on their own campuses and on others indicates why it is important for presidents to shape messages based on continuing input from multiple stakeholders. In assessing campus climate, it might be tempting to base the status of race relations on such straightforward factors as the absence of protests or hate crimes. But without incorporating a deeper look into the perceptions of faculty, students, and staff, who may have radically different perspectives, presidents' assessments risk being too narrow. Keeping in mind the impact of individual identity and positionality in judging campus conditions is important to crafting effective communication and building trust, which is a precursor.

Transparency and Inclusion as Foundations for Trust

Bolstering trust also requires a commitment to transparency in the form of open and honest communication. Presidents have a unique vantage point and access to information others on campus do not possess. In the survey of presidents done by *Inside Higher Ed* more than a year after COVID-19 closed campuses, only 57 percent agreed that faculty members at their institutions understood the challenges confronting their colleges and universities and the need to adapt (Lederman 2021).[8] Bridging this divide can be facilitated by presidents taking advantage of faculty research expertise in areas related to the crisis, such as public health, behavior change, structural racism, and communication. Including that expertise, alongside staff, student, and community member input on crisis communications teams can improve transparency, broaden the perspectives of everyone involved, and help foster the necessary trust by involving respected messengers from various groups.

Having a diverse crisis communication planning team is also valuable for gauging how messages are being

7. Lederman, Doug. 2021. "Pandemic-Fueled Confidence for College Presidents." Inside Higher Ed, March 22, 2021. https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/files/2023-08/IHE_2021-Presidents-Survey.pdf.

8. Lederman, Doug. 2021. "Pandemic-Fueled Confidence for College Presidents." Inside Higher Ed, March 22, 2021. https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/files/2023-08/IHE_2021-Presidents-Survey.pdf.

heard and interpreted. Knowing that in the absence of information, people tend to make it up, withholding difficult news to prevent panic or alarm can be problematic. But when there is limited information or the circumstances are changing rapidly, presidents must strike a delicate balance between transparent and timely communication and avoiding over-assurances, which can ultimately lead to a reduction in trust. Most presidents understand this, yet the very skills that led to their appointments—the capacity to create an ascendant narrative when confronting adversity and to instill confidence in the community—may unintentionally undermine their efforts.

Develop Strong Relations with Community Partners

The COVID-19 crisis also reinforced the importance of developing strong relationships with community partners, whose communication can significantly affect the capacity of campus leaders to garner and retain trust during trying times. There was widespread criticism of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention over their confused public health messaging around COVID and the failure to effectively communicate shifting guidelines as new scientific evidence was discovered. The politicization of public health messages, in which individuals and organizations intentionally distorted information, further complicated matters. These realities made it much more difficult for presidents to engage in effective communication around critical safety issues, highlighting the need for leaders to acknowledge uncertainty resulting from a lack of information.

This need was underscored by the fallout from conflicting comments made by police authorities in the aftermath of the brutal murders of four University of Idaho students, who lived off-campus in Moscow, Idaho; they were murdered just before Thanksgiving break in 2022. While the police initially reported that the stabbing deaths were "an isolated, targeted attack" and there was "no imminent threat to the public," a few days later the Moscow police chief backtracked, announcing, "We cannot say there is no threat to the community, and as we have stated, please stay vigilant, report any suspicious activity, and be aware of your surroundings at all times" (Rodrigues 2022).[9]

Adding to the confusion, the county prosecutor handling the case said in a news interview that "investigators believe that whoever is responsible was specifically looking at this particular residence." However, at a press conference the very next day, the police chief reported that there was a miscommunication with the prosecutor and that a motive was still being sought. In the meantime, the parents of the murdered students went public with their anguish over poor direct communication to them, and skyrocketing anxiety among students

9. Rodrigues, Marcela. 2022. "A Week After U. of Idaho Students Were Killed, a Lack of Information Sows Fear and Confusion." Chronicle of Higher Education, November 21, 2022. https://www.chronicle.com/article/a-week-after-u-of-idaho-students-were-killed-a-lack-of-information-sows-fear-and-confusion

and community members fueled skepticism and suspicion that everyone communicating about the issue knew more than they were letting on (Rodrigues 2022).[10]

In response to student and parental fears, the campus instituted safety workshops, stalking awareness seminars, self-defense classes, enhanced counseling, ride shares, and distributed Birdie alarm systems. Still, the erosion of public trust that ensued foregrounds how crucial it is for campus leaders to build relationships with external groups, including the press, and coordinate messaging to the extent possible when crises arise. This strategic relationship building should be immediate and ongoing.

Anchor Institutions and Empowered Communication

Oftentimes the kind of engagement by campus leaders that is necessary for establishing trust follows from an explicit commitment on the part of colleges and universities to serving as anchor institutions, demonstrating that their success is inextricably linked to the psychological, social, health, economic, and educational well-being of those in the communities in which they are located and seek to serve. Visibility in the community is a prerequisite for establishing trust and credibility, particularly in circumstances when there is a dearth of information and deliberate disinformation campaigns are underway.

As with all constituencies, there should be a process in place for acknowledging and responding to concerns, using multiple vectors of communication, from town halls, emails, surveys, and newsletters to videos, livestreams, podcasts, and social media monitoring. Identifying the appropriate methods of communication and crafting messages tailored to specific audiences is essential for addressing the distinctive needs of diverse members of the community and fostering empowerment. Such communication emphasizes compassion and affirmation that the perspectives and experiences of others are understood and valued. It also focuses on empowering individuals to take personal responsibility by contributing to the conversation. For this reason, maintaining mechanisms for bilateral communication and providing feedback in response to specific concerns are basic to crisis communication plans.

This approach to crisis communication runs counter to previous models that called for concise, unidirectional, and prescribed messages that reified hierarchies by not accounting for the lived experience of diverse audiences. Yet recognizing the distinctive perspectives of different identity groups within stakeholders is particularly salient at a moment when persuasion relies more on creating a convincing story than on rational argument or facts. The result has been a paradigm shift away from a focus on logic and reason in messaging about crises in favor of values-based and emotionally driven narratives. The narrative paradigm, first proposed by Wal-

10. Rodrigues, Marcela. 2022. "A Week After U. of Idaho Students Were Killed, a Lack of Information Sows Fear and Confusion." Chronicle of Higher Education, November 21, 2022. https://www.chronicle.com/article/a-week-after-u-of-idaho-students-were-killed-a-lack-of-information-sows-fear-and-confusion

ter Fischer, doesn't discount the value of truth and reason but posits that these alone are insufficient to persuade people (Caldiero 2007).[11]

In the absence of narratives with which people can identify, the emotional bond necessary for the message's acceptance is lacking. However, even when an emotional bond exists, audiences look for coherence and reliability that conform to their lived experience. The story must ring true. Therefore, a narrative approach to crisis communication must be accompanied by an exercise in sympathetic imagination to fully appreciate the range of experiences to which a non-monolithic audience can relate.

Joey King, former president of Lyons College in Arkansas, experienced the consequence of the misalignment between narrative and audience receptivity when he described Lyons and his previous campus, located in Appalachia, as bubbles "of inclusion and diversity surrounded by a sea of angry, disenfranchised populations and a large white-supremacist population." The broader context for King's comments didn't matter to those in the community who considered the kinship that existed between town and gown now severed by what they viewed as a lack of fidelity. King was eventually forced to resign under pressure exerted on the board by the local mayor, judges, and CEOs belonging to the Chamber of Commerce (Kafka 2021).[12]

King's troubles recall the valuable lesson conveyed by Abraham Lincoln that "public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it, nothing can succeed" (Angle 1991, 128).[13] Thus, one of the primary tasks for college presidents is to discern public sentiment as a means of determining what is possible in times of crisis and when to weigh in.

Deciding When to Weigh In

One of the most vexing challenges regarding crisis communication is determining when to make a public comment. A crisis the magnitude of a global pandemic that affects every aspect of college operations clearly warrants frequent and direct communication from the president. But what about the myriad other crisis situations both on and off campus presidents are called upon to address? Presidents should surely communicate around matters of local, national, or world import; in cases where events significantly affect students, faculty, and staff; and when the core mission of the institution is under threat.

Yet presidents should not feel responsible for authoring every communication. Sometimes, it is more appropriate for the Academic Dean or Vice President for Student Affairs to take a lead. Being proactive around

11. Caldiero, Christopher T. 2007. "Crisis Storytelling: Fisher's Narrative Paradigm and News Reporting." American Communication Journal 9 (1). http://ac-journal.org/journal/2007/Spring/articles/storytelling.html

12. Kafka, Alexander. 2021. "Could Political Rhetoric Turn to Campus Violence?" Chronicle of Higher Education, July 26, 2021. https://www.chronicle.com/article/could-political-rhetoric-turn-to-campus-violence

13. Angle, Paul, ed. 1991. The Complete Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

identifying who will speak in response to different types of crises and who will manage the feedback loop is important to avoiding missteps. This should be accompanied by an ongoing assessment of which events are important to speak about, the values driving the statements, and the ways in which the college community is prepared to move beyond words in supporting the affected community. Presidents and planning teams must also consider whether the statement will set up expectations to speak out under all similar circumstances, whether those expectations can be met, and whether the statement will be perceived as discrimination against another group. Having a system in place for when the institution issues a statement, as well as a process and timeline, are imperative. These go hand in hand with identifying how leadership will respond to pushback against a statement.

Messaging When Institutional Values Collide

The firestorm over a series of statements issued by Hamline University around a campus controversy illustrates why this planning is so essential. An adjunct faculty member at the institution, who showed her art history class a fourteenth-century painting of the prophet Muhammad, was the subject of complaints to the dean by a Muslim student. Despite warnings on the syllabus, giving students the option to leave before the piece was displayed, an announcement in class, and an explanation of the pedagogical reasoning behind including the work in the course materials, the student, who was president of the Muslim Student Association, deemed the act Islamophobic. This perception was supported in a message to the community by the associate vice president for diversity, who characterized the incident as "undeniably inconsiderate, disrespectful, and Islamophobic" and announced an open forum on Islamophobia (Patel 2023).[14] When the professor's contract was not renewed for the spring semester, a national debate erupted over the limits of academic freedom in the context of institutional commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Three days after an article appeared in the *New York Times*, outlining outrage by academics and some Muslim groups over reports that the professor had been "fired," the president issued a response defending their position, pointing to inaccuracies in the reporting, and calling for civility in the face of daily death threats to the administrative team and student involved. Within another two days, the Hamline University Board of Trustees announced that it was "actively involved in reviewing the University's policies and responses to recent student concerns and subsequent faculty concerns about academic freedom" (Hamline University 2023).[15] In the process, it reaffirmed that "upholding academic freedom and fostering an inclusive, respectful learning envi-

14. Patel, Vima. 2023. "A Lecturer Showed a Painting of the Prophet Muhammad. She Lost Her Job." New York Times, January 8, 2023. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/08/us/hamline-university-islam-prophet-muhammad.html

15. Hamline University. 2023. "Statements from Hamline University, January 2023 to the Present." https://www.hamline.edu/news/2023/01/statements-hamline-university-january-2023-present#:~:text=To%20suggest%20that%20the%20university,to%20undermine%20our%20foundational%20principles

ronment for our students are both required to fulfill our mission" (Hamline University 2023). Before a week was up, the professor filed a lawsuit against the university, alleging defamation and religious discrimination, prompting the president and board to issue a joint statement admitting that the use of the term "Islamophobic" was flawed (Hamline University 2023). A vote of no confidence in the president, who has since resigned, soon followed.

"We Will Learn from This and Do Better"

The Hamline case magnifies the necessity of anticipating and developing plans for responding to controversial messages. It is also a reminder of the need to understand what to include and avoid in an institutional apology. The historical context was important in this case. The campus is a few miles away from where motorist Philando Castile was killed by police in a routine traffic stop, in a community reeling from the murder of George Floyd, and one which serves a large population of Somalian refugees and an expanding Muslim population. This backdrop offers crucial context that was often excluded from the messaging and responses to it.

However, communications experts point out that it is critical in every case to avoid being defensive, using language more inflammatory than the original message, missing the point, adding insult to injury, and picking a fight. When a lawsuit is pending, admitting mistakes can be a challenge, but messages should convey what has been learned and outline action steps for doing better (Parrot 2023).[16]

The Critical Role of Resilience

As we have learned from the crisis communications experiences of college and university presidents over the past few years, regardless of the message, effective communication requires having a credible voice to deliver a truthful and authentic message that both inspires confidence and furthers meaning making. This, in turn, demands resilience, or the ability to be adaptable and flexible in the face of adversity. Accepting uncertainty is crucial to leading through crises and calls for the fostering of resilience through the development of self-awareness around one's own values and motivations. But this work doesn't need to be done in isolation. Presidents should reach out to other campus leaders who experience similarly high levels of stress around crisis communications.

Day-to-day responsibilities can keep one from connecting with others and rehearsing open mind-sets, so time must be set aside. Equally important is keeping the institutional mission and values at the fore and weav-

16. Parrot, Teresa Valerio. 2023. "Crisis Communications: New Considerations and Expectations for Higher Ed Leaders." TVP Communications, lecture delivered on January 17, 2023.

ing these into crisis communication planning processes and implementation (Liu, Lim, and Shi, et.al, 2021).[17] When this is done, the immediate issues arising from a crisis can be addressed without abandoning long-term strategic thinking and planning necessary to sustain all institutions during these complex times.

17. Liu, Brooke Fisher, JungKyu Rhys Lim, Duli Shi, America L. Edwards, Khairul Islam, Ronisha Sheppard, and Matthew Seeger. 2021. "Evolving Best Practices in Crisis Communication: Examining US Higher Education's Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic." Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research 4 (3): 451–484. https://stars.library.ucf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1175&context=jicrcr

LESSON EIGHT, PART A: WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Jasmine Roberts-Crews

What are Media Relations?

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Develop relationships with members of news organizations
2. Construct a basic contact list
3. Draft a basic pitch to a media organization in the pursuit of earned coverage

A large part of the public relations profession involves working with the media. Public relations seeks to garner publicity that benefits a client. Mass media is the preferred channel for reaching out to the public because audiences view media coverage as more credible than traditional advertising or promotional efforts. Therefore, learning how to develop and manage relationships with reporters and editors is critical to your outreach strategy.

Media relations refer to the mutually beneficial relationship between journalists and public relations professionals. One of the biggest benefits for journalists is the easy access to story ideas and sources. As previously discussed, reporters spend a large amount of time and effort gathering information in order to write a story. Working with public relations professionals cuts down on the time needed to look for sources and other information to validate an article's content. Public relations practitioners benefit from media relations because it secures free publicity and promotion for a client. By using media as a promotional tool, they are able to reach a large audience without high costs.

News Reporters and a TV Cameraman

Working with Journalists

As with any professional relationship, there are do's and don'ts to be aware of when developing relationships with journalists. Take the time to research reporters or content creators to identify those who will help you achieve your organization's publicity goals. Once you've found an appropriate journalist or blogger, think carefully about how you plan to pitch your story to the individual. Avoid gimmicky or hyped-up press releases; they may catch the reporter's attention, but for the wrong reason. Also avoid jarring language such as "urgent," "must read," or "extremely important," even if you need to secure media coverage quickly.

In general, developing a rapport with journalists takes time, strategy, skill, and practice. For more information on what you can do to develop a good working relationship with the media, take a look at this video with Alissa Widman Neese, a journalist at the *Columbus Dispatch*. She discusses her experiences working with public relations professionals and some of the factors that made them positive.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/uarkpr/?p=90#oembed-1

Pitching to the Media

Simply contacting the media will not guarantee coverage for your client. You have to persuade the journalist that your story idea is newsworthy. Public relations professionals typically pitch to reporters, editors, bloggers,

and social media influencers. Pitches can take place via email, phone calls, and increasingly through Twitter. The channel you choose for your pitch depends upon the intended individual's preference.

Pitching is a skill that requires creative thinking, persuasive communication skills, and knowing how your story idea benefits the reporter and the audience. Your pitching skills can improve with time and practice. You will feel more confident reaching out to reporters if you write pitches regularly.

Before pitching

Before you send an email pitch or call a reporter, it is important to have a solid understanding of your key audience. Carefully examine the interests, preferences, media consumption behaviors, and key demographic information associated with that group. Then you can more accurately select which media outlet will help reach the target audience.

Go where your audience is located. For example, as you conduct research about your target audience, you might learn that members read blog posts more than news articles. Therefore, reaching out to bloggers could be more beneficial than targeting news reporters. Place your message or story in media outlets that your intended audience frequently visits or reads.

One of the most common complaints from journalists about public relations pitches involves the use of mass emails. Generic pitches sent out to anyone and everyone come across to reporters and bloggers as careless and can compromise your credibility among media professionals. Remember, reporters are going to look at how your story will appeal to their specific readers; therefore, your pitch needs to be strategic. Failure to keep this in mind may result in a rejected pitch or no response at all.

Before you pitch to a particular media outlet, be sure to research which specific writer within the organization can help you target your audience. Each reporter covers a different topic, or "beat." Reading some of a reporter's previous stories will give you an indication of whether he or she is the right person to cover your story. Let's say your client is a restaurant that wants to publicize the opening of a new location. A reporter who covers food topics and brands, lifestyle topics, or the restaurant industry would be the most logical choice to write your story.

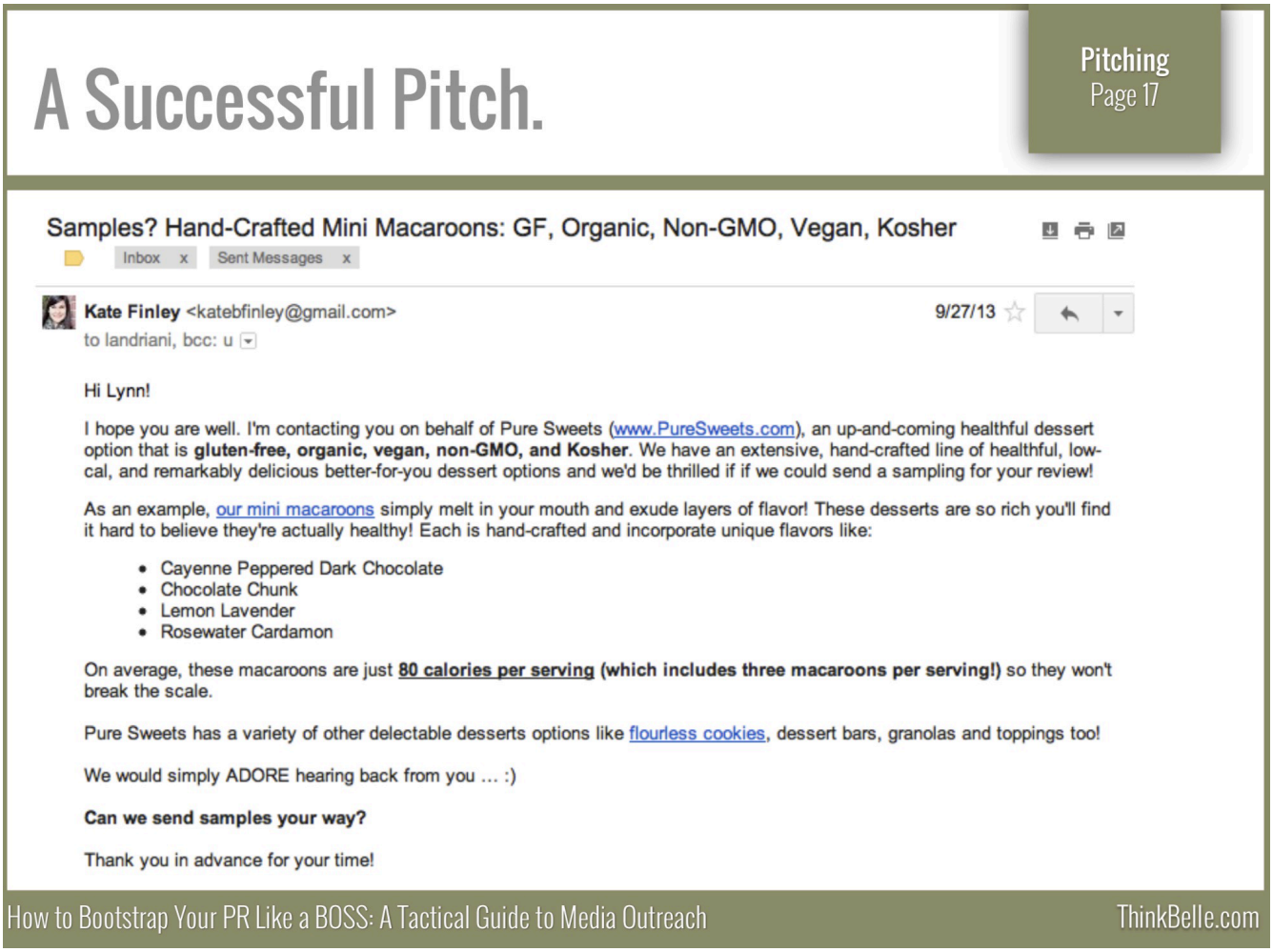
Writing the pitch

Now that you've done your homework on the audience, media outlet, and specific writer, pay close attention to how you craft your pitch message.

The subject line is especially important if you're using email. It needs to be creative enough to catch the attention of the writer; however, avoid exaggerated phrases or visual gimmicks such as all capital letters. Do not use generic headlines such as "Story Idea" or "Cool Upcoming Event." Try to create a headline similar to one the journalist might use in writing the story.

Next, address the reporter or blogger by name and begin the body of the pitch. State why you're writing,

and provide some information about yourself and the company or client you represent. Next, summarize the lead of the story. Writing in this manner resonates with some reporters, as it is the style they are accustomed to. You also can start the email with a catchy line that will hook the journalist, but be careful not to overdo this. Reporters and editors do not like flowery or gimmicky language because it sounds more like a hard sales pitch than a public relations pitch. Continue with the pitch by providing important details about the story and talking about why it would be interesting to the media outlet's audience. Doing this indicates that the story has news value, which is very important in pitching. Toward the end of the email pitch, state when you would like a response, indicate when you plan to follow up if necessary, and offer specific help. Be sure to thank the reporter or blogger for his or her time.



From "How to Bootstrap Your PR Like a Boss" by Kate Finley

Don't feel discouraged if the person does not respond immediately. Journalists are extremely busy, and sometimes they simply overlook emails. If necessary, send a reminder email by the follow-up date you mentioned in the first communication.

This date depends on when the story should hit the press. If you pitched a story that needs to be published

relatively quickly, you may want to follow up no later than two days after sending the initial pitch. If there's more flexibility in the desired publication date, you may indicate that you will follow up within a week. If the person still does not respond to your pitch, move on to another outlet, reporter, or blogger who can help you accomplish your publicity goals. It is important to also consider timing; for example, do not make a follow-up call at 4:55 p.m. on a Friday when the journalist may be getting ready to head home for the weekend.

Grammar, punctuation, tone, and spelling are important when writing email pitches. Some journalists have admitted to not responding to a pitch that contains grammatical and spelling errors. Reread your message several times to check for errors. Here are more articles that discuss media relations, proper etiquette, and tips on gaining media exposure:

- Surprising tips to get the media's attention
- Best practices for pitching

Media Attributions

- News Reporters and a TV Cameraman Interviewing a Mature Man in the City is licensed under a CC BY (Attribution) license

LESSON EIGHT, PART B: MEDIA ADVISORIES

Joel Lansing Reed, PhD

Media Advisories

The *press release* and *media advisory* may seem similar, and some early-career public relations professionals struggle to understand when each tool is appropriate. Public relations writers use both press releases and media advisories to communicate with members of the press, but they are designed to communicate different things. A press release has all the elements of a traditional news story including a newsworthy hook, body paragraphs, a quote, and multimedia content all presented in a traditional journalistic style. By contrast, a media advisory is designed simply to alert members of the press to an upcoming event they may wish to attend and cover for their respective media outlets.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this reading, you should be able to:

1. Identify the central function of a media advisory and differentiate media advisories from press releases.
2. Write and format a media advisory around the questions who, what, when, and where.
3. Describe the importance of media advisories to an organization's media relations strategy.

Media advisories are an invitation for specific journalists to attend and cover events in their professional capacity. Media advisories are often used to alert professional journalists to a forthcoming press conference or press briefing, but they are also used for a wide variety of special events, such as ribbon cuttings, grand openings, plant tours, public forums, rallies, red carpets, and many others. Attracting members of the press to an event amplifies the reach of the event, encourages future attendance, and helps spread the organization's message or brand.

Special events can be a significant expense for organizations, and they may not be attended by enough indi-

viduals to warrant the costs associated with hosting them. One of the reasons organizations invest in events is their significant earned media potential. A successful event requires effective media relations, and a media advisory lays the foundation for journalists' experience at an event.

Format

Some elements of the media advisory are consistent with the press release. A media advisory will still start with a clear headline, usually preceded by the words "Media Advisory." A headline will tend to be clear and direct. For example, "Media Advisory: Press Conference: U.S. Attorney to Provide Update on Wilmington Violent Crime Strategy" or "Media Advisory: NASA Invites Media to 65th Birthday Celebration for Iconic Logo." Media advisories also include letterhead, a press contact, and embargo information consistent with other forms of public relations writing.

Media advisories are much shorter than press releases and aim to share information with journalists as briefly and efficiently as possible. The language of a media advisory does not require strict adherence to AP style or even the use of full sentences. Writers should still use active voice and avoid errors of spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Media advisories are organized around the terms "what," "who," "when," and "where." These labels appear on the left side of the page and provide enough detail for journalists to plan their event attendance and coverage.

What: This section of the media advisory should be one short paragraph and provide a clear description of the event. The "what" portion will range in length depending on the type of event. For a press conference or briefing, briefly describe the major topics to be addressed. For a longer event, list the central or most important elements of the event. Public relations writers often omit the "what" label and format this portion as a lead immediately following the dateline.

Who: List the sponsoring organization(s) as well as the names and titles of important figures who will be present and can speak on behalf of the organization or event. While it is acceptable to list official organizational representatives, be sure to check with high profile guests and donors before announcing their attendance to members of the media. For non-profit events, these high-profile guests will often be willing to speak with members of the media, but those arrangements should be made between the PR team for the sponsoring organization and the prominent individuals in question.

When: Provide clear dates and times for the event and help journalists identify the best times

for them to attend. Journalists working in their professional capacity are not likely to attend the full event, and they will want to arrive at times when they can capture engaging audio and/or video and quickly and easily access organizers, guests, or workers to provide quotes for their eventual reporting. For longer events, such as a conference or festival, provide times for the most important sessions or performances.

Where: Provide the specific street address for the event, but also provide information about how journalists should access the event. Where is free media parking located? What entrance should they use? Where can they find representatives of the PR team when they arrive?

In addition to these core items, there are some important categories that will help reporters and editors prepare for an event and determine what tools and resources to devote to covering the event. Be sure to include information about credentialing, photo and video opportunities, and any interview opportunities.

Key Terms

Credentialing– Members of the press working in their official capacity rarely pay to attend an event. Even for fun or entertaining events such as concerts, festivals, and sporting events, journalists are attending the event as part of their job. In the same way that you would not charge a security guard or vendor to attend an event where they are working, you should not charge journalists to attend. Organizations facilitate journalists' attendance and prevent abuse of the system by issuing credentials or press passes to professional journalists covering an event. A press pass allows journalists to gain access to an event freely and quickly. A media advisory should offer specific instructions for journalists to verify that they are reputable and professional members of the press. You can provide access to a webpage for journalists to apply for press credentials or offer an email address for them to contact to receive these credentials. Many organizations will maintain a permanent list of credentialed media representatives to prevent members of the press from having to apply to attend each event separately.

RSVP– It is often helpful to have journalists RSVP for an event, especially when capacity is limited. Collecting RSVPs allows the media relations team to anticipate and prepare for specific journalists or media crews and better facilitate their access during the event. RSVPs may be part of the same process as credentialing or separate depending on the event.

Photo and video opportunities– Tell journalists about important visual elements that may be of interest for film crews or photographers. For example, is there a tree lighting, an award presentation, or a finish line that would be a compelling subject for photographs? Tell journalists where they can set up audio and video equipment.

Interview opportunities: Identify which, if any, organizational representatives are available for media interviews before, during, or after the event. Provide times and availability in consultation with those who will be interviewed.

Distribution Public relations professionals should carefully target distribution of media advisories to those who are most likely to attend the event and/or those who can help the organization reach their preferred publics. When selecting who to include, consider the major news outlets or publications covering the subject or the region. Avoid shotgun distribution, the practice of sending press releases and media advisories to a wide range of individuals who may or may not have interest in covering the story. Tailor your media list to those who are most likely to cover the event and those who are likely to reach your desired audience.

Media relations– The public relations practice of developing and maintaining relationships with media professionals.

Press conference or **press briefing**– An arranged media event in which representatives of organizations provide information and field questions from a group of journalists and media professionals.

Press passes– Credentials given to members of the press to facilitate their access to an event.

Shotgun distribution– The practice of sending press releases and media advisories to a wide range of individuals without considering their areas of interest or specialization.

For Review

In addition to being able to identify and define the key terms above, be able to answer the following review questions:

1. What is the function of a media advisory and how is an advisory different from a press release?
2. How do you format a media advisory? What are the four central questions, and what additional information should a media advisory provide?
3. How should public relations professionals distribute media advisories?

LESSON NINE: TALKING POINTS

Joel Lansing Reed, PhD

Talking points are a versatile and important public relations tool designed to help organizational representatives stay on message when speaking to a crowd or to members of the press. Talking points encourage individuals to emphasize the most important ideas the organization hopes to communicate. In public relations, talking points might be used to help organizational representatives prepare for media interviews or news briefings, field questions at a professional conference or symposium, attend a high stakes meeting with external stakeholders, or announce significant changes in the organization's structure or operations. Some talking points are shared only with one individual. In other cases, talking points are distributed to everyone within an organization who has direct contact with the public. Whether they are distributed individually or to a variety of stakeholders, talking points are a form of internal communication and are rarely released directly to the public. Instead, the public hears the talking points seamlessly integrated into an organizational representative's remarks or interview responses. In some cases, an interviewer may ask for a guest's talking points in advance to ensure they cover at least some of the topics the guest hopes to address.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this week's readings, you should be able to.

1. Describe the purpose of talking points across contexts.
2. Identify the best available content for talking points.
3. Format talking points according to the rule of threes.

Format

Effective talking points are short and easy for speakers or interview subjects to memorize. You should build talking points around three to five main, bulleted points. These talking points may or may not be divided into subpoints. The amount of information should be appropriate for the length of the interview, meeting,

or presentation. Do not overload interview subjects with too many talking points or talking points that are overly complicated. Too much information can hinder the natural flow of an interview and obscure the main points. Talking points are written on organizational letterhead and follow a bullet point format. Use a pattern of indentation for bullet points that illustrates which points are the main points and which points are sub-points.

For example:

- Main Point
    - Sub point (if needed)
    - Sub point (if needed)
- Main Point
    - Sub point (if needed)
    - Sub point (if needed)
- Main Point
    - Sub point (if needed)
    - Sub point (if needed)

Writing

Talking points should focus on the major ideas the subject needs to communicate in the interview or presentation. Effective talking points provide evidence and examples to support claims. Remember the old writing adage: "show don't tell." Rather than simply making claims, effective talking points should provide warrants or "good reasons" to support those claims.

Claim (weak talking point):

- At Odyssey Engineering, we value our employees.

Claim with evidence (strong talking point):

- At Odyssey Engineering, we offer all employees 20 days of paid leave annually, up to 15% matching on retirement contributions, and one of the strongest health and dental plans on the market.

When writing talking points, consider supporting talking points with examples.

Talking point and examples:

- The Washington Metro transports 136 million riders each year.
    - o Includes many of the 20 million school children who visit DC each year
    - o Over 1 million Washington Nationals fans
    - o 300,000 C. area college students
    - o 150,000 summer interns

As shown above, talking points do not always need to be in full sentences. Speakers and interview subjects should not try to remember the exact language or phrasing but should be able to share the general idea in a natural way.

The other readings for this week provide additional details about writing effective talking points and show how speakers use talking points in different contexts.

Review Questions

1. What are talking points and when are they used in public relations?
2. How should public relations professionals write and format talking points?

3. What are some of the major pitfalls writers encounter when crafting talking points?

PART III

UNIT 3: BUILDING A CAMPAIGN (AND WAYS TO MEASURE AND SUPPORT IT)

LESSON TEN: CAMPAIGN KICKOFF

Joel Lansing Reed, PhD

Most of the readings this semester have emphasized the individual tools in the public relations writer's toolkit, such as press releases, media advisories, op-eds, social media posts, and speeches. These tools are the building blocks for an organization's public relations strategy, but their effects on audiences tend to be short-lived. Unless a message becomes viral and/or generates significant public discussion, audiences tend to forget about mass media messages quickly. While media messages are sometimes effective in the short-term, most audience members fail to recall the message or show any evidence of persuasion within a week of consuming the message.[1] Mass media scholars refer to the declining influence or memory of a message over time as decay.[2] Active media consumers may be exposed to hundreds of messages each day and will retain only a small portion of these messages just hours after being exposed to them.

Public relations professionals use a variety of strategies to combat decay and help their organization's messages stick with audiences. One of the most effective strategies for achieving medium-term and long-term effects is a public relations campaign. A public relations campaign is a multimodal set of organizational messages and activities organized around a shared theme to enhance an organization's reputation or relationship management efforts.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this reading, you should be able to:

1. Hill, Seth J., James Lo, Lynn Vavreck, and John Zaller. "How quickly we forget: The duration of persuasion effects from mass communication." Political Communication 30, no. 4 (2013): 521-547

2. Watt, James H., Mary Mazza, and Leslie Snyder. "Agenda-setting effects of television news coverage and the effects decay curve." Communication research 20, no. 3 (1993): 408-435

1. Describe a public relations campaign and how it fits within an organization's public relations strategy.
2. Explain the importance of a unifying theme for a public relations campaign.
3. Craft various messages to fit within a public relations campaign.

As the definition of a public relations campaign provided above suggests, public relations campaigns are organized around a central theme and rely on multiple media and messages:

Campaign themes – A campaign is separated from the normal, day-to-day messaging of an organization by its reliance on a campaign theme.[3] The theme is the central subject or focus of the campaign. It is most often represented by a defining slogan, motto, hashtag, or phrase. Consider examples of famous campaigns provided on page six. Most of these campaigns involve some type of memorable phrase that defines the campaign: "Loose Lips Sink Ships," "Got Milk," "Don't Mess with Texas." Each of these campaigns had a clear idea and purpose defined by its central slogan. The Texas Department of Transportation coined the phrase "Don't Mess with Texas" in the late 1980s as part of its efforts to reduce littering along Texas highways. The focus of the campaign is anti-littering as reflected in the campaign's slogan. A unique and effective campaign theme will help your campaign stand out and will separate campaign messages from the normal, day-to-day public relations messages of your organization. The campaign's theme should be a central focus of all media associated with the campaign. Try to incorporate the theme into headlines, hashtags, speeches, and interviews.

Multimodal messaging– An effective public relations campaign uses a range of activities and media types to share messages. Campaigns use many of the tools you have already read about this semester, such as op-eds, feature stories, media advisories, social media posts, media kits, and talking points. They also use other tactics, such as advertisements, events, posters, banners, public meetings, and videos. Campaigns expose audiences to multiple messages across different media to emphasize a central idea. For example, consider Smokey Bear, one of the most famous symbols in American media with one central message: "Only you can prevent forest fires." Smokey Bear's likeness has appeared in social media posts, feature stories, television advertisements, comic books, billboards, and brochures on behalf of the U.S. Forest Service.

Campaign Functions

While public relations campaigns and marketing campaigns are similar, public relations campaigns are focused

3. Hendrix, Jerry A., Hayes, Darrell C., Kumar, Pallavi Damani. Public Relations Cases, 9th edition. (2013): 28-30

on different aims. A marketing campaign is focused directly on promoting the sale of products or services, whereas a public relations campaign attempts to improve or preserve the reputation and relationships of a particular organization or brand. A marketing campaign might emphasize the smooth chocolatey goodness of Arby's Jamocha Shake or the expert carpet cleaning of Stanley Steemer. A public relations campaign instead focuses on the reputation of an organization or brand and/or the organization's relationships. While many public relations campaigns include some element of paid media, their primary focus tends to be on generating earned media coverage. Below are four common types of public relations campaigns that organizations use to reach their publics.

Brand Identity/Awareness – Brand awareness or brand identity campaigns are among the most common forms of public relations campaigns. These types of campaigns introduce or reintroduce organizations or brands to their publics. Consider for example, the "Red Bull Stratos" campaign in 2012. This campaign was built around a high-altitude skydiving jump. Red Bull funded the effort of skydiver Felix Baumgartner to break the world record for highest skydive. Red Bull saw the jump as an opportunity to increase brand awareness and foster the perception of their brand as associated with adventurers and risk takers. Even well-known brands benefit from brand identity campaigns. For example, in 2022 Marriott Hotels International released a series of videos and posts to help clarify the pronunciation of its name.

Risk Management & Crisis Management – Most organizations will eventually encounter a crisis that threatens their reputation. Campaigns can help publics prepare for crisis or they can help organizations respond to a crisis after it has already occurred. Risk management campaigns allow organizations to communicate about risks and allow publics to anticipate and prepare for crises before they happen. For example, a large city in Oklahoma organizes an annual campaign to communicate the risk of tornadoes and to help families develop a plan in case disaster strikes. Crisis management campaigns help organizations respond after a crisis. In 2022, Ticketmaster faced a public relations crisis over its botched handling of tickets for Taylor Swift's Era's Tour. Ticketmaster was bombarded with negative media attention and viral social media complaints. Ticketmaster issued an official apology and developed social media campaigns before other artists' world tours to clearly explain the processes and tiers for receiving tickets. While these campaigns may not have saved Ticketmaster's reputation with Swift fans, they did show the organization was making changes following the crisis. See examples of effective crisis management here.

Internal Communication – Recall from previous readings that internal communication refers to messages targeting employees of an organization. Internal communication campaigns may focus on communicating organizational changes, enhancing employee morale and retention, or fostering deeper connections across the organization. Organizations distribute internal communication messages through email listservs, organizational websites, or a company intranet. Internal communication campaigns often include events, contests, or promotions. For example, each year Walmart hosts "Associates Week" to coincide with its annual shareholders meeting in Northwest Arkansas. The event brings Walmart associates from across the country to Arkansas for concerts, meetings, and festivals.

Social Change – Some public relations campaigns advance an organization's perspective on social issues

and/or attempt to change their publics' attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors on those issues. Social change campaigns typically come in one of two forms: corporate social responsibility campaigns or public service campaigns. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the belief that organizations should work to improve the world in which they operate, be effective stewards of the environment, and create a more equitable economy. Many organizations enact CSR through their own organizational practices, such as cutting greenhouse gas emissions or paying a living wage. Some organizations take these efforts a step further by promoting these perspectives in their strategic communication. Famous public relations campaigns have tackled topics such as climate change, sexism, racism, gender-based violence, same-sex marriage, and access to reproductive healthcare, among many others. For example, in 2019, Gillette released a short film entitled "The Best Men Can Be," a play on the classic Gillette slogan "the best a man can get." The campaign challenged bullying and sexual harassment and encouraged men to intervene to stop violence and exploitation. The campaign resulted in both backlash and praise from different audiences in the United States. Public service campaigns are like CSR campaigns but tend to focus on issues of individual behavior, such as smoking or littering, and are frequently produced by government or non-profit organizations. For example, in the 1980s, the National Child Safety Council teamed up with the animated series *G.I. Joe* for a public service campaign called "Knowing is Half the Battle." The campaign was comprised of animated shorts that featured characters from the show and aired immediately after the program. The shorts offered advice on a range of child safety concerns like skating on thin ice, downed power lines, bike reflectors, and medication.

Campaign Events

Public relations campaigns frequently use events to show appreciation to their publics, generate positive media coverage, and increase brand awareness. Events are often the cornerstone of a broader public relations campaign. Events target both internal and external audiences and take on a variety of forms. Hayes, Hendrix, and Kumar identify more than 100 types of events and actions that organizations can use within their public relations campaigns[4]:

- Special days, nights, weeks, months Displays and exhibits
- Trade shows and exhibitions Fairs, festivals, expositions
- Meetings, conferences, conventions, congresses, rallies Anniversaries, memorial events
- Special awards, retirements, salutes Open houses, plant tours
- Town meetings, public debates, parties Coffee hours, teas
- Contests

4. Ibid., 29-30

- Parades, pageants, beauty contests, fashion shows Sponsoring community events
- Sponsoring organizations (community youth organizations, Little League, Junior Achievement Organization)
- Sponsoring scholarships, contributions Creating charitable and educational foundations Receptions
- Concert tours, theatrical tours Performing and graphic arts tours
- Visits, pleasure tours for selected publics and groups Picnics, outings, cookouts, barbecues
- Nature trails, flower shows
- Groundbreaking ceremonies, cornerstone layings, safety programs Product demonstrations
- Traveling demonstrations, home demonstrations
- Visits by dignitaries, celebrities
- Guest lectures, kickoffs, farewells, going-aways, welcome-backs, welcoming ceremonies Elections of officers
- Issuing reports or statistics Announcing results of polls or surveys Grand openings
- Announcing an appointment
- Announcing a new policy or policy change Announcing a new program, product, or service
- Announcing important news about the client or organization
- Public relations personalities (Miss America, celebrity spokespersons/ambassadors) Dedications
- School commencements, assemblies, events, convocations Fetes, galas, proms, dances, balls, disco parties
- Banquets, luncheons, breakfasts, dinners, buffets Art shows, openings, exhibits
- Concerts, plays, ballets
- Film festivals, fashion shows Animal shows (dogs, cats, birds)
- Sporting events, ski trips, ocean cruises, pack trips, hikes, marathons, bike-a- thons, swim-a-thons, miscellaneous-a-thons, races
- Celebrity sporting events, cruises Museum tours, home tours Embassy tours
- Celebrity appearances, autograph-signing ceremonies
- Car washes, neighborhood cleanups, services for the elderly Health screening tests
- Committee hearings Training programs
- Opinion-leader meetings and conferences
- Special education programs: thrift education health education conservation education Leadership programs
- Participation in community events Celebrations of national holidays
- Theme events and celebrations: “Roaring Twenties,” “Old New Orleans”, “Colonial New England,” “Ancient Greece”
- Events honoring other nations or cultures

As with other elements of the campaign, events should fully integrate the campaign theme and contribute directly to promoting the organization’s campaign objective.

Key Terms

Campaign theme– the central subject or focus of a campaign, most often represented by a defining slogan, motto, hashtag, or phrase.

Corporate social responsibility– the belief that organizations should work to improve the world in which they operate, be effective stewards of the environment, and create a more equitable economy.

Crisis– a situation that brings negative attention to an organization threatening the organization's reputation or operations.

Decay– a consumer's declining memory of or persuasion from a message over time.

Intranet– a private network accessible only by members or employees of an organization.

Public relations campaign– a multimodal set of organizational messages and activities organized around a shared theme to enhance an organization's reputation or relationship management efforts.

Public service campaigns– mediated efforts to promote the public's interest on behalf of organizations.

Review Questions

1. What are public relations campaigns and how do they fit within an organization's public relations strategies?
2. What is a campaign theme and how is it integrated into a public relations campaign?
3. What are the four major types of public relations campaigns? Be able to identify examples of each.
4. What are risk management and crisis management campaigns? How are they different?
5. What are the major types of social change campaigns? How are they different?
6. What are campaign events and why are they important?

Famous PR Campaigns

These are some examples of particularly famous or successful public relations campaigns across history.

1. Loose Lips Sink Ships: The War Advertising Council (1942-1945)
2. Don't mess with Texas: Texas Department of Transportation (1985-Present)

3. Dove for Real Beauty: *Unilever* (2004-Present)
4. Small Business Saturday: *American Express* (2010-Present)
5. This is Your Brain on Drugs: Partnership for a Drug Free America (1987; 1997)
6. Doritos' Crash the Super Bowl: *Frito Lay* (2006-2016)
7. Back to the Start/A Future Begins: *Chipotle* (2011; 2021)
8. Man Lives in Ikea: *Ikea* (2007-2008)
9. Computer Engineer Barbie: *Mattel* (2010)
10. Smokey Bear: *U.S. Forest Service* (1944-Present)
11. #Likeagirl- *Proctor & Gamble/Always* (2014-Present)
12. Got Milk?/ Milk Mustache: California Milk Processor Board/MilkPEP (1993-Present)
13. World's Toughest Job: *American Greetings* (2014)
14. Red Bull Stratos- Mission to the Edge of Space: *Red Bull* (2012)
15. Fearless Girl Statue: *State Street Global Advisors* (2017-Present)
16. Breathless Choir: *Philips* (2015)
17. The Best Men Can Be: Gillette/Proctor & Gamble (2019)
18. High School Summer Pass: *Planet Fitness* (2022)
19. Rebuild the World: *Lego* (2019-Present)
20. Thank You for Not Riding: *Uber* (2020)
21. McGruff the Crime Dog: *National Crime Prevention Council* (1979-Present)
22. Shape Your Future: Start Here: *U.S. Census Bureau* (2020)
23. Ivory Soap sculpting contest: *Proctor & Gamble* (1927-1945)
24. Dating these days: *Bumble* (2020-2022)
25. NORAD Santa Tracker (1955-Present)

LESSON ELEVEN: AUDIENCE ASSESSMENT

Mary Sterenberg

The Discovery Process

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Analyze the audiences, publics and stakeholders of a brand
2. Develop channel-specific messaging for the audiences
3. Respond feedback channels via two-way communication

Do the Research

Marty McDonald, president of Fahlgren Mortine, a full-service integrated marketing agency headquartered in Columbus, Ohio, says the discovery phase is where they start with their clients to get back to that question of "why."[1] They look at the past and current state of the company or initiative and consider what's working and what isn't.

"We're given permission to be curious and get back to the questions that matter. It sets the foundation for everything we do from that point forward," McDonald says. And this applies to not just working with new clients, but new campaigns or phases of work with existing clients.

In the video below, McDonald explores what this discovery process looks like at Fahlgren Mortine.

1. Marty McDonald. (2017, June). Personal interview

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/uarkpr/?p=96#oembed-1

All communications, internal and external, should rest on a clear and unified understanding of an organization's brand. So what is a brand? Doug Frazier, former chief strategy officer of Columbus-based public relations agency Frazier Heiby, gave a definition of "brand" in a presentation to students that I liked and adopted. He said it was the emotional response customers have when they hear your name or see your logo.[2]

Understand Your Brand

Consider iconic and established brands like Coke and Apple. Emotions and images come to mind immediately at the mention of those brands. Smaller and younger organizations, like teenagers struggling to "find themselves," must proactively explore who and what they want to be and make calculated decisions to help define their brands. A firm understanding of a brand translates into greater consistency with messaging, images and actions that build trust and understanding with consumers.

With so many ways to share messages – from the language used to the channel where it appears – knowing the intended audience and what these people want, need, and care about is an important area for discovery.

Identify Audiences

When you ask an organization about their target audience or "ideal" customer, many will say "everyone." That may seem like a good answer in terms of sales volume or making many different types of customers feel welcome. But it's a poor answer in terms of strategic public relations (and ultimately an organization's bottom line in many cases).

Identifying a target audience doesn't mean an organization won't provide goods or services to other people. It just allows the organization to be more intentional and effective in reaching or building a relationship with a certain group, whether it's for a shorter-term campaign or as long-term customers.

Audiences can be external or internal, positive or negative, consumers or influencers or media with the ability to sway consumers. The discovery process identifies past, current and potential audiences. It then digs deeper into those audiences identified as a target for the organization or specific initiative.

With a firm understanding of both your brand and your target audiences, you can seek out points of overlap

2. Doug Frazier. (2017, July). Personal correspondence

or ways your organization can integrate into an audience's lifestyle or appeal to specific wants/interests/need (WIN). As the discovery process moves into the planning process, this information will support development of messaging, visuals and platforms tailored to the specific audience.

For example...

A veterinarian who specializes in guinea pigs might also care for many other animals. But if the vet identifies guinea pig owners as a key target audience, there are some strategic things he or she can do to build awareness locally that the practice knows a lot about guinea pigs. The vet clinic still welcomes other pet owners, but its strategic public relations and marketing efforts focus specifically on guinea pig owners. The increase in business from targeting guinea pig owners alone likely would surpass increased business from more general efforts to reach pet owners (especially when they could be lost in the clutter of competing vet clinics spreading similar messages). It's also a win for the target audience. Guinea pig owners likely prefer a vet who specializes in their animal.

How the Pros Do It: Sonoma County Responds to Shifting Traveler Priorities

Fahlgren Mortine worked with Sonoma County Tourism in 2022 to encourage more tourism following the pandemic. Consumer priorities had shifted and research showed an increased consumer focus on personal wellness, authenticity and connecting deeply to culture and community, equity, responsibility and sustainability.[3]

Sonoma County Tourism also needed to refine its core audience and target travelers who were open to wellness that was both personal and collective. Fahlgren Mortine helped SCT identify a specific "responsible traveler" audience and included demographic breakdown, behaviors and motivations of this audience to be considered across all campaign activities.

Targeting this audience, SCT launched a "Life Opens Up" campaign that positioned the destination as a

3. Fahlgren Mortine. (2022). "Life Opens Up" in Sonoma County"

place where life could open up following the pandemic through one-of-a-kind experiences. They showcased Sonoma County's sustainable food and wine offerings, robust mix of outdoor activities, unique and immersive wellness experiences and laid back luxury. The campaign resulted in more visitors and higher spending from visitors in Sonoma County as well as media coverage on SCT's focus on responsible travel and sustainability.

View a Fahlgren Mortine case study to learn more about the campaign's success.

Target Specific Objectives

My family likes to play games. Whether it's a board game or a card game, whenever someone introduces a new game it always works best to state the object of the game. "You want to get rid of all of your cards." "You want to complete the most routes and stockpile the most points." With that object in mind, it's a lot easier to learn other details of the game and maybe even win.

The same goes for strategic message development. With strong objectives – knowing the "point" and what needs to be achieved – the messaging can tie back to tangible results that support business objectives. In addition to analyzing branding and identifying audiences, the discovery process should clarify the short- and long-term objectives of a specific campaign or effort as well as larger company objectives. These could be business objectives such as increasing sales, establishing brand awareness, improving productivity or driving business during slow times of the year. Or they could be relationship-based objectives like creating repeat customers, improving employee retention, changing perceptions or encouraging trials of a product or service.

How the Pros Do It: Overcoming Apathy to Register New Organ Donors

Fahlgren Mortine worked with Donate Life Ohio and the Ohio Department of Health on an award-winning campaign with three specific objectives: increase consumer engagement, drive traffic to a website and add 65,000 new organ donors to the Ohio Donor Registry in six months.[4]

With these objectives in mind, the Fahlgren team embarked on discovery. A survey conducted several years earlier by Donate Life Ohio and the University of Cincinnati identified the top three myths people

4. Fahlgren Mortine. (2015). Turning Apathy Into Action: Second Chance Champions

associate with organ donation. A successful myth-busting campaign addressed these issues but registration numbers had leveled again and the groups needed a new effort to challenge the returning apathy. Fahlgren faced the choice of mining existing data for new insights or spending campaign budget on new research.

The team looked into the existing survey data, paying specific attention to respondents who said they would NOT register as a donor. They noticed that nearly a third of those people didn't have a specific reason for saying no. The data also showed that 86 percent of respondents said real life stories of organ recipients were an important factor when choosing whether to be a donor. Read this Fahlgren Mortine case study to see how clear objectives and a strong discovery phase resulted in a campaign that achieved its goals, won recognition from the Public Relations Society of America and ultimately saved lives.

PR Pro Advice: Marty McDonald, President, Fahlgren Mortine[5]

Stay curious. Have your eyes up. I like to use an analogy from race car driving. Today in communication and marketing we're going so fast. And if you're going that fast and you're looking right at the road in front of you, you're going to crash. But if you have your eyes up and farther down the road, you'll make better decisions and more thoughtful decisions about where you need to go. Pay attention to what's going on in the world around you: What brands do you think are doing well? What are headlines in news and what do you think about them? Show curiosity and a point of view. And look for variety in internships and coursework. Bring an integrated perspective and think differently.

Analyzing Audiences

Effective public relations writing relies on the important steps of:

1. Identifying one or more intended audiences
2. Effectively researching these audiences

5. Marty McDonald. (2017, June). Personal interview

Public relations focuses on building relationships between organizations and different groups of people, and it's difficult to forge or grow a relationship without investing the time to get to know those people.

This may include exploring information from basic demographics to psychographics, lifestyles and a deeper understanding of a target audience's wants, interests and needs.

Many organizations invest in paid research tools that give them access to robust and timely information on different groups of people. There are also plenty of free sources of information. You might choose to target a certain geographic area based on U.S. Census Bureau data showing that a large number of people in a certain age range live in that area. Or you might consider an older target audience based on a Pew Research Center study showing that young adults in the U.S. are reaching key life milestones at a later age. Or you could suggest targeting Gen Z with a product or service based on a McKinsey Health Institute survey showing that their social media engagement can feel negative but also can help with finding mental health support and connectivity.

You can also conduct your own primary research. Talk to people in the target audiences, do an interview or survey, conduct a focus group. If you have a strong need and the budget to gather quantitative and statistically significant data from a larger audience sample, you can also pay to conduct research.

Research shouldn't stop with one significant piece of research. The goal is to build a robust enough consumer profile that you feel you have a strong understanding of where and how to reach the target audience. You have a firm understanding of what they want, have interest in or need (audience WIN: wants, interests, needs). An understanding of how they like to communicate and where they get information. Then you're in a position to pair that with what you know about your brand and objectives and look for the sweet spot where your organization can benefit the target audience in a way that also helps the organization achieve its objectives.

Gayle Saunders is the founder and CEO of The Saunders PR Group, a full-service public relations firm, specializing in strategic communications planning, diversity, inclusion and equity communications, media relations, community engagement, diverse outreach, media buying, stakeholder management, and crisis/reputation management.[6]

In the video below, Saunders talks about the importance of audience segmentation and audience research and some of her best practices.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/uarkpr/?p=96#oembed-2

6. Saunders, G. (2023). Personal correspondence

How the Pros Do It: University of Pittsburgh Forges Ahead

The University of Pittsburgh is a top-ranked institution with award-winning research facilities. Despite fairly high awareness of the university, there wasn't a deep understanding of what Pitt stood for or its tremendous accomplishments – especially outside of its home city.

The university was looking to refresh its brand and move into the upper echelon of nationally-ranked universities while increasing enrollment and boosting its reputation as a leader in innovation and a driver of change.

To reach these goals, Pitt worked with marketing and branding agency Ologie to create the Forge Ahead campaign.[7]

Ologie began with a deep dive into audiences, asking five core questions:

1. Who are they?
2. What do we need them to do?
3. How can we reach them?
4. Where can we place media to reach them?
5. How will we apply messaging?

During the discovery process, Ologie looked at qualitative and quantitative data about the brand and audiences Pitt wanted to reach (prospective students, alumni, donors, Pennsylvanians, current Pitt community of students, staff and faculty).

7. Ologie. (2023). University of Pittsburgh Forges Ahead

They explored things like:

- Geographic and demographic data of audiences
- Competitor media placements across key regions and key cities
- Areas with high usage public transit
- TV and streaming channels with relevant viewership
- Social media platform usage across key audience groups

Train Station

The campaign centered on the idea of "We will always forge ahead." Research drove content, experiences and specific messages specifically for each audience segment (prospective students & influencers, alumni & donors, constituents).

The campaign launched with a range of digital and out-of-home assets released in waves across five Northeastern cities. It included digital ads, digital urban panels and transit shelters, streaming video and broadcast placements and public radio – plus a full three-level takeover of 30th Street Station in Philadelphia.

With 71 million impressions in five urban markets, the campaign raised awareness of Pitt in the surrounding region.

View an Ologie case study to learn more about the University of Pittsburgh campaign.

PR Pro Advice: Gayle Saunders, Founder & CEO, The Saunders PR Group

Gayle Saunders, Founder & CEO, The Saunders PR Group

You must have strong communication skills – not only verbally, but your written communication must be top par. Think about how you craft compelling press releases, pitches, blogs and social media content because at the end of the day, it's about storytelling. How do I tell a story that resonates with the audiences that I am targeting. It helps them have a connection with what we're doing.

Also, adaptability. The way that our communities are changing and the beautiful diversity that is our community across every spectrum. You've got to be able to adapt. The landscape is changing from what's happening in our world today to what's happening right in our backyard. You've got to be able to adapt, you must be open to learning new and emerging trends and we've got to be able to move the needle and move on a dime when that happens.

How the Pros Do It: Travel Nevada Gives Post-COVID Tourists a Transformative Experience

Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA.

As the largest industry in Nevada, tourism generated $42 billion in visitor spending pre-pandemic, so returning to those levels was critical. To encourage travel in 2022, Travel Nevada worked with integrated communication agency Fahlgren Mortine to launch a campaign with the primary objective of getting visitors to spend more and stay longer.[8]

Data from a Travel Nevada study as well as reports from other industry organizations revealed key audience insights that drove the campaign:

- Consumers were seeking spontaneity, new experiences and unique stays. There was a trend of "transformative travel," which was defined as "intentionally traveling to stretch, learn and grow into new ways of being and engaging with the world."
- Travelers wanted authentic local encounters with people and places.
- Consumers were looking for simple, wellness-focused experiences after time spent during COVID resetting goals and priorities.

The planning team saw an opportunity to target audiences with messaging about Nevada's unusual experiences, quirky culture, true wide-open spaces and inspiring connections.

Messaging for the campaign, dubbed "Silver State Reset," spotlighted "transformative" experiences throughout the state and invited potential travelers to hit the "reset" button in Nevada through paid, earned, owned and shared media.

A micro-site showed two "Reset Routes," both starting in one of Nevada's major metro areas. The campaign ran a trip giveaway on the site where two winners receive an all-expense paid trip through Nevada on those routes. The campaign partnered with micro-influencers who traveled the Reset Routes and talked about their experiences. A partnership with iHeart radio in Portland and Chicago let Nevadans along the routes speak with radio personalities about their transformative experiences to drive traffic to the micro-site. Media outreach to national publications also incorporated the "transformative travel" key messages.

The program resulted in nearly 130,000 contest entries and helped generate an increase in travel spending (+$1,850 per household) and more frequent visitation (2.8 trips vs. 2.2).

8. Fahlgren Mortine. (2022). Travel Nevada's Silver State Reset Campaign

Learn more about Fahlgren Mortine's Travel Nevada campaign.

Media Attributions

- Sonoma
- Lifeline
- Pitt_Ad
- Pitt_Station
- Travel Nevada campaign

LESSON TWELVE: MEDIA KITS

Joel Lansing Reed, PhD

Media Kits

Learning Objectives

After completing this reading, you should be able to:

1. Describe the purpose of media kits in the public relations process.
2. Identify and differentiate between the major components of media kits.

A *media kit* or *press kit*, is a collection of readily available media assets that provide members of the press important information and resources about a company, organization, or campaign. The goal of a media kit is to make it easy for journalists, bloggers, influencers, and others to create strong, multimedia stories about your organization. It may be helpful to think of a company's media kit as the colorful, dynamic, and multimodal extension of the boilerplate that normally appears at the bottom of a release. Like boilerplate, a media kit provides an overview and resources about the organization. Unlike boilerplate, the media kit contains media assets such as high-resolution photographs and brand logos, B-Roll footage, sample news stories, fact sheets, infographics, biographies, testimonials, and other resources to facilitate media coverage. The goal of a media kit to make it easy for journalists, editors, and producers to understand and report on the organization's most important messages, products, or services.

A media kit typically contains a variety of resources. Among the most common resources are:

An overview of the organization: A concise description of the company or agency, its history, mission statement, and core values.

The organization's narrative: A compelling narrative about the founding or history of the organization, if appropriate.

Brand logos: High resolution versions of all major logos of the organization or brand.

Executive Biographies: Photos and bios of executives and/or founders of the organization, along with their current roles within the organization.

Fact Sheets: A one-page document summarizing important facts and statistics about the organization, such as the year founded, number of employees, headquarters location, number of clients, etc.

Infographics: Visualization of important data or information about the organization, especially for use in digital media.

Photographs: High-resolution photographs of an organization's facilities, products/services, team members, and/or executives for media use.

B–Roll: Supplementary video footage of the organization that can be used to support or supplement A-Roll across a wide variety of television and digital programming.

Contact Information: Contact details for press inquiries, including a dedicated press contact. **Testimonials**: Video, audio, or infographics sharing the first-hand accounts of customers, clients, or staff.

Additional Resources: Depending on the organization, additional resources like case studies or white papers may be included to provide deeper insights into the organization's offerings.

A successful media kit provides clear, concise, and compelling information that helps journalists understand the organization's story and easily incorporate that story into their own reporting. A media kit should be professionally designed and easy to navigate. Media kits are most often distributed either as a digital PDF or as a dedicated webpage of the company's website.

See examples of media kits on Blackboard.

Creating Fact Sheets

Organizational fact sheets are an important element of any media kit or campaign. A fact sheet provides journalists with an easy and accessible source of information about the organization. A fact sheet should be written on official organizational letterhead and include a press contact. Fact sheets typically use a bullet point format and provide three major types of information: organizational background, achievements, and statistics.

Background: Bullet points that briefly describe the organization, its mission, history, and structure. Background bullet points should also detail the organization's major products, services, and brands.

Achievements: Bullet points that highlight some of the organization's past successes or accomplishments.

Statistics: Bullet points that share important data points about the organization.

Effective bullet points are clear and brief. They should not extend beyond a single page. The fact sheet should have a balance of text and white space. Some fact sheets incorporate the organization's branding, colors, and other design elements. While color and branding can be a helpful addition to fact sheet formatting, authors should be cautious not to detract from the readability and functionality of a fact sheet. For example, it is essential that journalists be able to effectively copy and paste text directly from fact sheets into their stories. See the example fact sheet on the final page of this document.

Key Terms

White space– the empty or unmarked areas between and around elements on a page or screen that are left intentionally blank to create balance, improve readability, and guide the viewer's focus. White space can be any color, not just white.

Review Questions

1. What are media kits and how are they used in organizations' public relations efforts?
2. What are some common elements of a media kit?
3. What are fact sheets and how are they formatted?

MERCER MUSEUM & FONTHILL CASTLE
An Association with the Smithsonian Institution

Mercer Museum Fact Sheet

Purpose

The Mercer Museum is a nonprofit educational institution administered by the Bucks County Historical Society. The Mercer Museum collects, preserves, and interprets historical artifacts that illuminate the history of pre-industrial America to c. 1850.

Facts and Figures

- Henry C. Mercer (1856-1930) began construction of the Museum in 1913 with the help of eight day laborers and "Lucy" the horse. The Museum was completed in June of 1916.
- Rising seven stories high, the Museum is built entirely of concrete reinforced with iron rods and mesh. Concrete was used because of its plasticity and fireproof properties.
- The estimated weight of The Mercer Museum is 6500 tons, and the cost to build it was $38,944.99.
- Henry C. Mercer, architect and builder of the Museum, believed that the story of human progress and accomplishments was told by the tools and objects that people used.
- More than 60% of the Museum's 40,000 artifacts, ranging from clock making tools to a Conestoga wagon, are exhibited.
- More than 60 Early American trades (including cider making, blacksmithing, printing, needlework, shoemaking and farming) are represented.
- Among the oldest artifacts in the Museum collection are a whale oil lamp over 2,000 years old, and Native American implements dating to 6,000-8,000 B.C.
- In 2011, a new wing was built to contain enhanced visitor services, Museum Shop, state-of-the-art Learning Center, and Exhibition Gallery.
- The Mercer Museum was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1985. The Museum was awarded accreditation in 1992 by the American Association of Museums, the national organization that upholds museum standards.
- More than 70,000 people from around the world visit the Museum annually.
- The Mercer Museum offers a variety of programs for all ages, grade-specific school programs, scout programs, birthday parties and more.
- The Martin & Warwick Exhibition Galleries feature a variety of changing exhibitions throughout the year.

12.1 Mercer Museum Fact Sheet

Media Attributions

- Media Kit

This is where you can add appendices or other back matter.