

PART 3

Public relations specialisms

This part of the book focuses on the practice of public relations. We have divided it into 12 distinct chapters in recognition of the increasingly specialist knowledge, experience and skills required to achieve an effective programme or campaign on behalf of an organisation or client. Each chapter therefore: examines the broad context of the specialism; discusses the main theories and principles of building effective relationships with key publics; and identifies some of the methods of achieving successful results. Extensive use is made of mini case studies and long case studies to illustrate the theories, principles and methods described.

CHAPTER 16

Media relations



Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- critically evaluate the role of media relations within a democratic society and within public relations practice
- identify the key purpose and principles of media relations activity
- evaluate the factors that cause media relations activities to succeed or fail
- identify the key trends in communications and the media
- identify the ethical issues involved in media relations practice.

Structure

- Role of media relations
- Defining issue: advertising or public relations?
- Media relations principles
- Negotiated news: media relations in practice
- Media partnerships
- Old media, new media and me media
- Media relations techniques

Introduction

Working with the media is what most people think of when they talk about public relations. The image is of a press officer or celebrity public relations consultant trying to get their client – be it a product (Adidas eyewear) or a person (Victoria Beckham) – into the media spotlight through print and broadcast outlets. To some extent this is true. And it is true that one of the first things most of us do when we start working in public relations is to write press releases for media distribution and cross our fingers hoping to get ‘coverage’.

In defining the skills required for a career in public relations, writing and media relations come high up the list of criteria. When employers are asked to list the skills and attributes required of applicants for jobs in public relations, they usually name writing skills and knowledge of the media (Fawkes and Tench 2004). In other words, they are hiring people for a press office or media relations role. Media relations thus tends to be the most public and visible aspect of public relations practice. Yet it is also often condemned as ‘puffery’, ‘flackery’ or ‘spin’. This chapter will explore the role, function and ethics of media relations within public relations practice and within a rapidly changing media landscape.

Role of media relations

In principle, public relations practitioners should be 'media neutral' (to use the jargon of the day). That means they should have the skills and experience to choose the most suitable channels to reach target audiences with appropriate messages. These channels are many and include public meetings, newsletters and web pages, to name a few.

In practice, the channels controlled by an independent media tend in many societies to have significance beyond others available to the public relations practitioner (see Chapter 4). This is explained by the reach and the credibility of the independent media and by the perceived value of editorial endorsement. The significance of media endorsement as a key source of influence has led public relations to become synonymous in many eyes with media relations. This perception is misleading, but it is enduring.

This chapter explores the role of media relations within public relations, in theory and in practice. (See Box 16.1.)

Defining issue: advertising or public relations?

Many students are confused at the start of their studies about the distinction between *advertising* and *public relations*. Identifying the differences between editorial and advertising is an important first step in

understanding the media relations challenges faced by the public relations practitioner.

Advertising and public relations may both seek the same goal: publicity, the process of making something known. Yet they use very different techniques to achieve this end. Lord Bell (chairman of Chime Communications who, as Tim Bell, was an advertising executive with Saatchi & Saatchi) is a British practitioner who has held senior roles in both fields. He describes the difference succinctly by defining advertising as 'the use of paid-for media to inform and persuade' and public relations as 'the use of third-party endorsement to inform and persuade'. In other words, the advertiser controls the message (by paying for it) while the public relations practitioner seeks to persuade other people ('third parties') to convey the message for them in a supportive way ('endorsement'). Typically, these other people will be journalists who have the power to confer editorial endorsement by reporting favourably on a product, a service, a person or an organisation.

Definition: *Advertising* is 'the process of gaining the public's attention through paid media announcements' (Cornelissen 2004: 182).

Definition: *Public relations* is 'about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Public relations practice is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between and organisation and its publics.' (Chartered Institute of Public Relations 2005: www.cipr.co.uk)

box 16.1

What is media relations?

Media relations involves managing relationships with the media – all the writers, editors and producers who contribute to and control what appears in the print, broadcast and online media. As with all relationships, a degree of mutuality is required: the relationship should serve the interests of the media while also serving the interests of those who fund the public relations activity.

This raises two main problems for the public relations practitioner:

- 1 First, is forging good relationships with the media an end in itself or is it a means to better communications with the public on whom the success of the organisation depends? In public relations theory, the media are often seen as one of many channels through which messages can be communicated to the target audience. Yet in practice, those in the media demand (and often merit) special treatment, such as privileged access to senior management.
- 2 The second problem arises from the first. Deciding whether the media are channels or an audience will influence how you evaluate the success of your media relations activity. Is it enough to meet 10 journalists, to send out 20 news releases or to receive 45 press cuttings in a given period? It is if the goal of your media relations activity is to improve your relationships with the media. But if the goal is to improve your communications with the public, then you will need to assess how many people read or saw the story or programme and how many changed their opinions or took action as a result of it. No easy task.

think about 16.1 Journalistic objectivity

What about the motoring writer who has been lent a luxury car (with free fuel) that would be way beyond their personal budget in order to help them prepare their review? What about the travel writer who has enjoyed an all-expenses-paid trip to a luxury resort courtesy of a resort hotel or a tour operator? What about the gifts to journalists?

Feedback For third-party endorsement to work, the public need to trust the journalist's judgement. We do not want to feel that their reviews can be bought like so much advertising space.

There are clearly ethical dilemmas involved in relationships with independent journalists and these will be discussed later in this chapter.

The veteran Californian public relations consultant and part-time public relations lecturer Fred Hoar used memorably to describe advertising as 'pay for play' and public relations as 'pray for play'. The point he was making is similar to Lord Bell's: the advertiser controls the message by paying for it, while the public relations practitioner seeks to influence and persuade by force of argument or creative thinking, but cannot guarantee results.

As a means of informing and persuading, advertising offers more control over the process (although still much uncertainty over the outcome). Yet it is an expensive way of conveying messages to mass audiences so it is in effect restricted to organisations with the largest budgets. And, crucially, advertising lacks one thing that money cannot always buy: credibility.

When we see or hear an advertisement, we know what it is and what it is trying to do. The reader or viewer may tend to tune out (or throw out) the adverts, preferring to concentrate instead on the programme or the editorial content. As media channels and programmes have proliferated, more advertising placements are required to reach the same audience share. Yet the more adverts we are exposed to, the more we tend to tune them out, thus requiring more advertising placements to get the message through. So the paradox facing advertisers, articulated by internet marketing author Godin (1999: 38), is: 'The more they spend the less it works. The less it works, the more they spend.'

Editorial endorsement may be considered more persuasive because it is not in the form of an advertisement. Critics who recommends a book or a film or a restaurant are, we believe, exercising their independent judgement. We may have built up trust in their judgement by reading or listening to them over months or years and may have noted that they are not afraid to express a negative judgement when they feel it is merited. (See Think about 16.1.)

Yet the distinction between advertising and editorial is not always so clear cut. The UK's state-owned broadcaster, the BBC, is untypical among media organisations in receiving its funding from a licence fee and carrying no advertising. This frees its reporters to follow a non-commercial agenda. Yet most TV channels, newspapers and magazines are heavily dependent on advertising revenues, which typically come from a few big spenders. Would the media outlet be prepared to remain independent in the face of pressure from one of its big advertisers? (See Mini case study 16.1.)

There are other ways in which the distinction between editorial and advertising can be blurred. One is in the hybrid form known as an '*advertorial*'. In this case, the space is bought as with conventional advertising, but used for articles and images purporting to be independent editorial coverage, often written by members of the regular editorial team. The articles are an attempt to 'soft sell' a product or service. Best practice guidelines require these to be clearly identified as an 'advertisement' or 'advertising feature' and

mini case study 16.1

Editorial independence

There was some controversy in Britain a decade ago when Microsoft, as part of its lavish publicity campaign for Windows 95 – on a scale never previously seen – negotiated to 'buy' *The Times* newspaper for a day. The then editor defended this decision on the grounds that (a) it benefited readers who would receive the newspa-

per for free on that day and (b) Microsoft had no control over the editorial content of the newspaper. Yet an article on the public scramble to be among the first to receive Windows 95 appeared on the front page of *The Times* that day, a very unusual prominence for a product as technical as a computer operating system.

to use typography and layout that is distinct from the regular editorial pages. But clearly the intention here is for an advertisement to masquerade as editorial and the potential exists for it to mislead the reader.

Definition: An *advertorial* is a bought space in a publication that is used to print an article written in the editorial style of the journal to portray a similar ‘feel’ of objectivity to the editorial pages.

Another hybrid takes the form of a sponsored competition. In this case, the space will usually be given for free, provided that the prize or prizes are considered sufficiently valuable. This hybrid is thus closer to ‘free editorial’, although its text is usually unedited promotional copy supplied by the company behind the competition or its public relations advisors.

Controversy persists over the practices of those publishers who seek to extract payment for editorial coverage. Their request is rarely as crude as a direct charge for inclusion, but rather it follows the formula of asking for payment for ‘colour separation charges’. The defence of this practice is that editorial coverage is still gained on merit, but that the payment helps to offset the additional costs of printing a colour photograph in support of the story. Yet the advice of professional bodies such as the UK’s Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) is to reject this practice. By, in effect, asking for payment for inclusion, the publication is revealing its lack of separation between advertising and editorial. In other words, it is not the sort of publication capable of providing editorial credibility, so the practitioner should move on to more worthwhile targets. Unfortunately, some practitioners feel the need of such ‘soft’ coverage in pursuit of a fat cuttings file to impress the boss or the client and are willing to pay for it.

This brings us to ‘free advertising’, a popular but misleading understanding of the purpose of media relations. Certainly, for it to be credible, editorial coverage will have been gained on merit and without payment for inclusion. To this extent alone it may be considered as ‘free advertising’. Yet the lack of payment for inclusion does not make it a free process. Costs may be low compared to advertising, but they are not insignificant. Good media relations requires a skilled practitioner or team of practitioners to tune into the media’s agenda, to develop relationships with appropriate journalists and editors and to develop and deliver effective ‘stories’, images and comments to the right media at the right time and by the right means. All of this takes time and this has its cost.

But the main condemnation of ‘free publicity’ is that it confuses the role and purpose of editorial as distinct from advertising. It is not the job of a journalist to give ‘free publicity’ to a company, a product or a cause. Their job is to inform and educate their readers, viewers and listeners through news and features they and their editors consider of interest. PR-originated stories have to be included on merit. The journalist’s intention is not to provide free publicity, but if this arises from the feature or story, then so be it.

Although editorial coverage does not equate to advertising space, the practice of evaluating media relations outputs by calculating the ‘*advertising value equivalent*’ (AVE) of press cuttings persists. At its crudest, this is a measure of the column inches devoted to the client or the product and a calculation of the equivalent cost had that space been bought. Yet it is not possible to buy advertising on the BBC, one of the world’s most credible media sources. So how can an advertising value equivalent be calculated in this case? And much major media coverage tends to be negative rather than positive, making a nonsense of the saying that ‘there’s no such thing as bad publicity’.

Definition: ‘*Advertising value equivalent*’ (AVE) is a very crude measure of media relations performance that is still cited and relates to a measurement of the column inches or centimetres devoted to the client or the product and a calculation of the equivalent cost had that space been paid for as advertising.

It is important that this debate does not give the impression that public relations is still struggling to emerge from the shadow of advertising. For instance, some influential voices have championed the benefits of the editorial route. Ries and Ries (2002: xi) argue in their explicitly titled book *The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR*: ‘You can’t build a new brand with advertising because advertising has no credibility. . . You can launch new brands only with publicity or public relations.’

To be credible, the public relations practitioner should seek to use media relations to gain editorial coverage in respected programmes and publications with a reputation for editorial independence. But for a *journalist* to be credible, they should only write or broadcast stories that are of interest to their audiences. These conflicting priorities explain the tension that will always exist between the public relations agenda and the journalist’s. (See Think about 16.2.)

Along with the misunderstanding about free advertising, the other demand frequently made of media relations specialists is to ‘get me on the front page of tomorrow’s paper’. To which there are two possible answers. First, ‘I can do it, but I wouldn’t recommend

think about 16.2 Journalists' antagonism

'Why do they (journalists) hate us?'

This is a question frequently asked of media relations practitioners from those seeking to understand the media's apparent hostility towards their organisations.

Feedback To which the honest answer is: 'They're neither for you nor against you.'

It is, in fact, the journalist's job to be sceptical and independent. Would you rather you lived in a society with media controlled by the state or by big corporations?

And while some journalists find some public relations practitioners courteous and helpful, others find they cannot get answers to urgent (especially negative) questions and blame all public relations staff for these problems.

box 16.2

The importance of media relations

The significance of media relations within corporate communications can be explained by several trends. As White and Mazur (1995) argue, these include the rise of consumer power, the proliferation of the media and a realisation that employees read papers and watch TV too.

There are two problems implicit in this. The first is that you have to attempt to manage the media or the media's agenda may hijack the organisation's purpose. The second is that channels of communication can rarely be neatly segmented. It is no longer possible to say one thing to one audience and a different thing to another in an age when employees may be shareholders, and shareholders may be customers. Media channels of communication reach all stakeholders. To manage or be managed by the media, which is it to be?

it' (there being more bad news stories than good on the news pages of the major newspapers). The other answer is 'No problem; it will cost you £50,000.' Completely controlled, unmediated messages require you to choose the advertising route. (See Box 16.2.)

Media relations principles

Most texts about media relations tend to focus on the 'how' rather than the 'why'. Yet it is important to ask what the objective of media relations activity should be. Is it to get 'good' stories into the news or to keep 'bad' ones out?

David Wragg (Bland et al. 1996: 66–67) argues that: 'The purpose of press relations is not to issue press releases, or handle enquiries from journalists, or even to generate a massive pile of press cuttings. The true purpose of press relations is to enhance the reputation of an organisation and its products, and to influence and inform the target audience.'

US author and communications consultant Shel Holtz (2002: 157) goes further: 'Contrary to the apparent belief of many observers, the role of an organizational media relations department is not to make the company look good in the press, nor is it to keep the company out of the newspapers . . . Ideally, the job of

the media relations department is to help reporters and editors do their jobs. That objective is entirely consistent with the broader goal of public relations, which is to manage the relationship between the organization and its various constituent audiences.'

This ideal contains the same contradiction as with Grunig and Hunt's (1984) model of two-way symmetric public relations. Why should an organisation fund an activity that is not overtly aimed at pursuing its own interests? And the answer will be the same: the organisation's long-term interests should prevail over its desire for short-term publicity.

Since Grunig and Hunt's four models of public relations begin explicitly with media relations (in the form of 'press agency'), Table 16.1 (overleaf) presents two alternative models for media relations practice. (See Activity 16.1, overleaf.)

The media have a significant role in helping citizens to make informed choices within democratic, consumer societies (see Chapter 5). Journalists are often the representatives of the general public – in parliaments, at the EU Commission, in the courts and at other major decision-making occasions where only small numbers of witnesses can be present. They report on matters that affect the wider population and that might otherwise go unrecorded. It is this important role that fuels the urge of the investigative journalist to uncover duplicity and wrongdoing by

TABLE 16.1 Two models of media relations (source: adapted from Grunig and Hunt 1984: 22)

	Publicity model	Relationships model
<i>Purpose</i>	Tomorrow's headlines	Mutual understanding
<i>Characteristic</i>	Short-term goals	Medium- to long-term goals
<i>Nature of communication</i>	One way	Two way
<i>Communication model</i>	Source to receiver	Dialogue of equals
<i>Nature of research</i>	Little; 'counting house'	Formative
<i>Views media as</i>	Channel	Public and channel
<i>Where practised today</i>	Sports, entertainment, product promotion	Corporate communications in regulated businesses and industry regulators
<i>Who practised by</i>	Junior PROs; experienced publicists	Senior public relations consultants; corporate communications advisors

public figures or powerful organisations. It is also this role that enables journalists to believe that they are seekers after truth, in contrast to public relations practitioners whose duty, as they perceive it, is to protect and promote their organisation's interests.

Yet the simplistic view that 'journalism is good, public relations is bad' is hard to sustain. Most media organisations are private sector businesses that must also seek profits and competitive advantage (see Think about 16.3). Much newspaper journalism is highly selective and politically biased (this bias is acceptable where it is widely understood and where a choice of newspapers expressing a range of opinions is available to the citizen). Media organisations need to entertain as well as – or even more than – they need to inform.

Nevertheless, it is worth public relations students and practitioners remembering that journalism has a proud history of uncovering abuses of power that organisations and/or governments wanted to keep secret.

While media channels and publications have continued to proliferate, there has not, in general, been a

corresponding growth in the numbers of people working on the editorial side or in budgets for investigative journalism. This means that fewer journalists are writing and reporting more stories. The time available for investigating and fact-checking stories is shrinking.

It is in this context that the media relations function becomes increasingly important. A journalist may have hours at most to research and write a story (particularly if working for the broadcast media, an online news site or a daily newspaper). Yet a press officer (or equivalent) should have had days to plan and research a news announcement or news release. This means that: the facts of the story should be clear and credible; it should have a strong angle (the reason why it is news); and it should contain interesting quotations from authoritative sources, some of whom may not be normally available to the press to interview. It should, if targeting television or radio, have a strong visual or aural appeal.

Where public relations sources are credible, there should be less suspicion in the relationship with journalists, although there will rarely be a common agenda on both sides. Where public relations sources are used by the media (either because they are credible or because they are entertaining), then the public relations function can be said to be subsidising the newsgathering function of the media. (Outside the untypical worlds of sports and celebrity public relations or the realm of the tabloid 'kiss and tell' story, payment will never be asked or expected from the media for publication of a PR-originated story.) So public relations gives the media stories for free (and free of copyright). If 'free advertising' is an unacceptable description of the purpose of media relations, then perhaps 'free editorial' might be a more useful perspective.

activity 16.1

The publicity or relationship approach?

Using the model presented in Table 16.1, go online and search the 'press office' or 'media centre' on company websites for different styles of news release. Which model do you think the releases fit into?

Feedback

Try looking at different types of company and organisation, perhaps big branded companies such as clothing, fashion or sports brands such as Adidas or Nike. Then try service providers such as local councils or utility companies in your country such as gas, electricity or water.

think about 16.3

Are media organisations independent operations or profit-driven businesses?

Most media organisations are profit-motivated private sector businesses that have to operate within the same 'rules' as the clients of the public relations practitioners that some journalists occasionally berate. Directors of *The Daily Telegraph* newspaper, for example, in early 2005 took hard economic decisions following the takeover by new owners, the Barclay brothers. This resulted in a range of senior public relations roles being lost as well as up to 90 journalists' jobs.

Definition: 'Kiss and tell' is when someone recounts or goes public through the media about a sexual relationship they have had, normally with a politician, celebrity or person in the public eye.

How influential is public relations on the news agenda?

At one extreme, the publicist Max Clifford has claimed to have broken more stories over the last 20 years than any journalist in Britain (interview in *The Guardian*, 13 December 2004). And many trade and technical titles are heavily dependent on public relations sources for their editorial content and accompanying images (see also Chapter 22).

Several US surveys have indicated that around half of the news printed in the newspapers has had some involvement of public relations people (Grunig and Hunt 1984; Cutlip et al. 2000). This is not to say that these stories all come solely from public relations sources, but that official spokespeople have had some hand in the process of researching the story and commenting on it. Hardly a day goes by without some evidence of public relations having some influence on the news agenda, whether it is a sponsored consumer survey, a stage-managed party political media briefing or news of a charity's national awareness day, week or month.

On the other hand, journalists are quick to present public relations practitioners as gatekeepers who seek to withhold information, rather than as good sources of news and comment. Few journalists are willing publicly to admit to their close working relationships with public relations contacts, although they will often acknowledge this in private.

Negotiated news: media relations in practice

Most forms of mass communications are paid for and the messages controlled by the sender. Examples include newsletters, advertising, corporate websites, sponsorships and many others.

One form of mass communications is uncontrolled and not paid for by the sender. It relies on an independent medium choosing to convey the news or message because of its perceived value or interest to the readers, viewers or listeners. This lack of control is the defining characteristic of media relations: it can make the practice infuriatingly imprecise and unscientific – but it means that those stories and messages that are published or broadcast gain value through editorial endorsement (see Figure 16.1).

The media are not essential for third-party endorsement: there are many instances when the critics have condemned a film or a musical only for the public to vote in its favour by flocking to the cinema or theatre – and the other way round. But in a society where most people gain news and views from the newspapers and the broadcast media, this will usually be the most effective route to generating opinions about a product or service. If really successful, a 'buzz' can be created by media coverage leading to word of mouth endorsement.

In recent years, many brands have come to prominence through this word of mouth effect rather than by more traditional advertising. Examples are drawn from: the internet (Google); publishing (*Captain Correlli's Mandolin*, *Bridget Jones's Diary* and the Harry Potter books); toys and games (Tamagotchi, Furby).

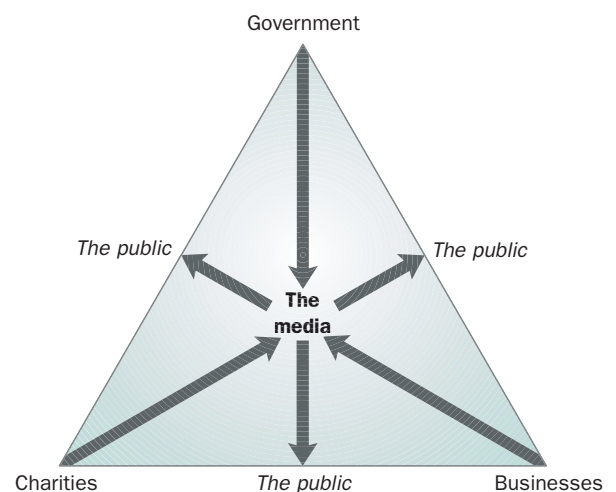


FIGURE 16.1 Communications through the prism of the media (source: Bailey 2005a)

box
16.3
Some rules for effective media relations

- 1 Act as a service to the media: answer questions, return calls before deadline, provide information and context.
- 2 Accept the independence of the media: do not offer payment; do not ask for copy approval.
- 3 Disclose your interest (i.e. let the journalist know who you are representing).
- 4 Be as available to the media when the news is bad as when you have good news to promote.

Another way to view media relations is as a relationship between an organisation and the press. There are journalists who argue (partly for effect) that public relations is, at best, unable to influence them and, at worst, an irritating distraction from their jobs. And there are those public relations practitioners who argue – equally controversially – that media relations works best if its aim is to provide a service to the media (rather than being primarily a promotional channel for their clients or organisations). Somewhere in between, most journalists rely on public relations contacts to open doors, to provide information and pictures – and many are willing to accept hospitality. (See Box 16.3.)

Part of the media's frustration may come from a tacit acknowledgement of the power of public relations. As media channels have proliferated and editorial budgets have been squeezed, the opportunity for investigative journalism has been restricted, leaving reporters more reliant on public relations sources. This is very evident in the national and consumer press where most days PR-sponsored surveys make the news. (See Mini case study 16.2.)

The influence of public relations is also evident in the well-trodden path from a career in journalism to a senior role in public relations (very few make the journey in reverse, although some journalists find

the public relations role less easy than they had imagined and make a quick return). (See Think about 16.4.)

The concept of negotiated news is an important principle for media relations practice. It recognises that the media do not exist to report your client or organisation. Journalists are neither for you nor against you, but neutral intermediaries standing between you and the public. Give them something interesting to report and you have a good chance of making the news; push corporate platitudes in their direction and you will be filtered out of their news agenda. Persist in this and you may be blocked entirely.

Most public relations practitioners, even the most junior, quickly come to understand the realities of dealing with a free and independent media (if only because of the many slights and setbacks they receive when pitching 'good news' stories to a seasoned reporter who is more attuned to digging for bad news). Yet they are caught in the middle, often having to explain these realities to business managers or marketing managers who expect to exert control over the delivery of their messages. Managers who are willing to espouse the virtues of a free market can often seem appalled by the workings of a free press. Yet as former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher used to point out: 'You can't have a free society without a free press' (Ingham 2003).

mini case study 16.2
Consumer survey in the news
J Sainsbury news release dated 4 March 2005

'Brighton is our banana borough, but Glasgow is our melon metropolis' – the headline of release from supermarket J Sainsbury about a consumer survey showing which fruits were preferred in which UK cities (www.j-sainsbury.co.uk/index.asp?PageID=31&subsection=&Year=2005&NewsID=518).

Reported by:

Reuters, 4 March 2005: 'Brighton has healthiest eaters'

Daily Mirror, 4 March 2005: 'Brighton, the fruit capital of Britain'

Daily Mail, 4 March 2005: 'Brighton is the "healthiest" place in the UK'

The Sun, 4 March 2005: 'Brighton loves its fruits'

NB: *The Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror* are the three largest circulation daily newspapers in the UK.

think about 16.4 A world without managed media relations

Is it possible to imagine a world without managed media relations?

Feedback It may be, but it is hard to see how this would serve the interests of the media. There would be no press offices or public relations consultancies to handle their enquiries (or to treat them as Very Important People). There would be no one to argue that an interview with a newspaper reporter should be given priority in the chief executive's diary over some other meeting. There would be no media accreditation or media facilities at large events, making it harder for journalists to attend and do their job. No news releases providing a factual summary of new products, policies or positions. No one to facilitate visits and ensure that meetings are useful to both parties and that questions are answered and facts researched. Organisations, governments and charities would have no mechanisms for releasing information, as part of their accountability to society in general. The doors of people who matter would remain firmly closed to the press. There would be more suspicion of, and hostility to, the media, not less.

Organisations have their own news agendas and their own internal discourse while the media must remain alert to broader news events and agendas. Most of what the one does will never interest the other; the skill in media relations is in spotting the stories or the angles that can turn corporate news into media news or bring a corporate angle into a global news story (see Figure 16.2 and Mini case study 16.3, overleaf).

Negotiated news involves bringing an external perspective to internal news stories (an advantage a public relations consultant may have over an in-house practitioner who may be too close to the organisation or to its management team to offer dispassionate advice) so that only objective and genuinely interesting news stories are issued.

The next negotiation takes place with the media. It may involve a decision on timing – there is a good time and a bad time to issue most news stories, although in a 24/7 (24 hours/seven days a week) media age you can no longer follow the old adage to make announcements 'early in the day, early in the week

and early in the month'. It may involve a decision on exclusivity (recognising that the media market is highly competitive). It will involve an understanding that the negotiations with a TV station and a national newspaper will be very different discussions. The one needs a visual story, the other a strong issue or theme. (It is not enough to announce Product X, but if Product X can credibly promise less housework, lower bills, greater health or happiness, then you may have a story.)

Many media relations programmes are built on the assumption that the flow of information will be one way and based only on the news the organisation wants to see in the public domain. Yet the more you are in the news, the more you should expect to become a media target. Organisations that have been very accessible to the media when they have good news to promote have an obligation to remain accessible when the news is bad (Shell UK is discussed in this context in both the crisis and community involvement chapters (20 and 18 respectively) of this book. Relationships are a two-way thing.



FIGURE 16.2 Overlapping news agendas (source: Bailey 2005b)

Media partnerships

Media relations, as we have discussed, is a highly demanding and competitive area of public relations practice and is constantly changing and evolving with new trends emerging all the time. One of the most prevalent trends in this area of practice, typified by an evermore competitive media environment with more publications and outlets but at the same time more organisations actively vying for their attention, is the rise of media relations by media partnership. This is where organisation and media are contractually bound in joint editorial, advertising and marketing relationships, from which they derive mutual benefit (see Case study 16.1, overleaf).

mini case study 16.3

Barclays Bank

A news release from Barclays, a UK bank, dated 6 March 2005, talks about the pressures on small business owners and calls on the Chancellor to 'give them back their sleep' as part of his spring budget. This refers to the annual statement on government taxation and expenditure from the Chancellor of the Exchequer,

the UK government finance minister. The budget speech was given on 16 March 2005, so the Barclays news release was timed to anticipate pre-budget interest. It was reported by the *Sunday Times* newspaper on 6 March 2005 under the headline 'Revealed: owners who lose most sleep'.

case study 16.1

The evolution of the exclusive: media relations by media partnership

Building media partnerships is a practice that public relations departments and consultancies worldwide are actively engaging in as the relationships often include guaranteed 'quality' editorial coverage in target media for their organisation or brand. This allows them to reach target audiences. As an example, between the summer of 2004 and the spring of 2005, UK public relations firm Connectpoint PR (www.connectpoint.co.uk) negotiated media partnerships for clients ranging

from luxury furniture, clothing and fast moving consumer goods (fmcg) companies to international sporting events with print, television, radio and online media partners. In total, over 25 individual partnerships were negotiated during this period. Over the past few years one of the most successful examples of this that the agency has worked on is that of the Salford Triathlon ITU (International Triathlon Union) World Cup. (See Think about 16.5.)



PICTURE 16.1 Salford Triathlon ITU World Cup 2003 elite women's swim start in the Quays at Salford, UK. (Source: courtesy of Connectpoint PR www.connectpoint.co.uk)



case study 16.1 (continued)

What is the Salford Triathlon, ITU World Cup?

The only ITU triathlon world cup event in the UK, the Salford Triathlon ITU World Cup, is one of the 15 scheduled international World Cup events staged by the ITU. The event attracts 150 elite athletes from around the world who compete for world ranking points. The event is one of a series of flagship events used by Salford City Council to assist in projecting positive images of the city. It is essential that high-volume media coverage projects a positive image of Salford in the international and national press. It is also important that the coverage profiles the event in the regional press to generate interest in the race and deliver value to the local government and other sponsors.

Since its inception in 2003, this event has, on average, generated annual UK press coverage worth over £13,000,000. Of this, the majority has been through the aforementioned media partnerships and carried key messages portraying Salford positively and mentioning event sponsors. This fact has helped to raise the profile of the event, derive value for sponsors and has raised the event's profile beyond its natural place in the UK sporting hierarchy, which is traditionally dominated by sports such as football (soccer), rugby and cricket.

However, this poses the question as to how the event has managed to secure these partnerships. The answer is quite simply that each of these partnerships offers editorial and marketing benefits that they perceive as equal to, or greater than, the costs involved. This can include such rights as exclusivity of broadcast rights. In the case of the BBC this has included the UK and beyond for news coverage. Also, there are features and stories for the various print and online partners for the marketing rights. With these the logos and details are included on local event outdoor advertising

and event branding that is visible on television coverage and partnerships. Furthermore, for the media partners it also delivers the opportunity to borrow from the event its brand attributes of sport, vitality, well-being, endurance and difference that the sport of triathlon possesses.

In return, the event receives guaranteed editorial levels, adverts without charge and competition spaces which deliver quality editorial, communicate key messages usually to a depth much greater than is possible without a partnership.

Specifically for the event, this exchange of value in 2004 comprised benefits to each party with respect to the four main partners, as can be seen in Table 16.2 (see also Think about 16.6, overleaf).

As you can see, this partnership approach provides numerous benefits for both parties. However, this approach to media relations does have several potential pitfalls to watch out for. First, there is a significant chance that in partnering with one media outlet you alienate their competitors, who in turn could choose not to cover the event from even a news perspective. In the case of the triathlon, Key 103's principal competitors in the same regional radio market refused to cover the event, as they felt that all the benefits Key 103 received from the event gave them a potential commercial advantage due to the high-profile outdoor advertising campaign and event branding.

An additional pitfall that needs to be considered is the demand that such media partnerships will have on the resources (financial and time) for organisations or agencies. In the case of the triathlon, Connectpoint PR had a separate account director who managed the media partnerships, ensuring that sufficient exclusive stories were generated to satisfy all parties concerned. Lastly, it is also important to realise that the partnership may be adversely affected if the event is embroiled in scandal and the media partners as objective members



think about 16.5 The motivation for media partnerships

Why do you think the media would be willing to partner such an event and what types of media do you think would partner the event?

Feedback The answer is that media partnerships deliver a benefit to the media partner that is equal to or even exceeds the perceived cost of the relationship. In the case of the Salford Triathlon ITU World Cup, partnerships were struck by the agency and organisers with:

The *Manchester Evening News* (UK regional newspaper: circulation 158,143)

Key 103 (UK regional radio station: listeners 623,000)

220 *Triathlon* (UK national triathlon magazine: circulation 20,000)

BBC Sport, *Grandstand* (UK national television: viewers 3,500,000)

www.triathlon.org and www.trisalford.info (online media partner)

International television distribution done via the ITU.

case study 16.1 (continued)

TABLE 16.2 Salford Triathlon ITU World Cup: benefits to media partners and organisers

Media partners	Benefits to partner	Benefits to the event
<i>Manchester Evening News</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Category exclusivity (i.e. no other newspapers able to partner event) ● Sponsorship package including: free entries, event branding, VIP programme, inclusion on all marketing materials and outdoor advertising ● Dedicated features exclusive to partner ● 24hr advance notification on all non-time-sensitive news stories ● High-value prizes for reader competitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guaranteed media coverage, which in the end resulted in over 30 pieces of coverage, including three front-page pieces and three front pages of sport section stories ● 6 free ¼-page adverts worth over £10,000 ● 2 free reader competitions with event sponsor branding ● Promotion of event on posters on street vendor stands
Key 103 fm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Category exclusivity (i.e. no other radio stations able to partner event) ● Sponsorship package including free entries, event branding, VIP programme, inclusion on all marketing materials and outdoor advertising ● Dedicated features exclusive to partner ● 24hr advance notification on all non-time-sensitive news stories ● High-value prizes for listener competitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cash sponsorship ● 350 30-second on-air read or event advert free of charge over 4 months ● Guaranteed media coverage, which resulted in over 10 feature stories, plus 50+ news pieces broadcast ● Roadshow at event with music provided by a DJ
220 Triathlon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Category exclusivity (i.e. no other Triathlon print media partner) ● Sponsorship package including free entries, event branding, VIP programme and inclusion on all marketing materials ● Dedicated features exclusive to partner ● High-value prizes for reader competitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 4 ¼-page adverts free of charge ● 6 pages of feature editorial, accompanied by free advert ● Preferential news editorial resulting in 10 individual pieces ● 10 free subscriptions for event prizes
<i>BBC Grandstand</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Category exclusivity ● Television rights for programming ● Dedicated features exclusive to partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guaranteed 1hr national television broadcast of the event reaching over 3.5m viewers where sponsors receive high-value recognition and Salford portrayed positively

of the media must cover the story that is adversely affecting the event. Fortunately for the Salford Triathlon this has not been a problem. (See Think about 16.7, overleaf.)

It is undoubtedly true that in the case of the Salford Triathlon ITU World Cup, the media relations by media

partnership approach has been extraordinarily successful, delivering a level of media coverage well beyond that which would be achieved under a traditional media relations model. This approach is one where both the media partner and event benefit significantly and for which careful planning can avoid potential pitfalls.

Manchester Evening News



Monday, July 26, 2004

www.manchestersonline.co.uk

30p



■ Great Britain's Michelle Dillon celebrates as she wins the women's elite race. Picture: SEAN WILTON

Triathlon a triumph - now Salford goes for the world!

See M.E.N. Sport

M&S DOORS LOCKED AS RIVALS CLASH

Shoppers caught in demo fury

BY CARL PALMER

POLICE were forced to lock the front entrance of Manchester's huge Marks & Spencer store after clashes between rival protesters.

A confrontation between pro-Palestinian supporters picketing the Market Street store and defenders of Israel became so volatile that extra officers were drafted in to control the crowd.

One person was arrested in the worst clash since the Saturday pickets started three-and-a-half years ago.

Gordon

Mounted police kept the two sides apart and the front doors of the store were locked to protect customers. Police later closed one end of Market Street to traffic for safety reasons, and cordoned off other parts of the shopping area.

A number of people were warned about their behaviour. The demonstration began quietly at noon, but by 1.45pm when counter-protesters had increased the crowd to more than 80, the mood changed as the two sides chanted slogans at each other.

Shoppers had to walk in the road and squeeze past the crowd, who were block-



■ FACE TO FACE... A counter protester and police

ing the pavement. In a similar incident last week, a man was arrested when the two groups were caught in a heated exchange. This week one person was arrested but was later released without charge.

Hanoah Segal was one of the people led away by police. A furious Mr Segal said: "We have ev-

ery right to protest peacefully, but my partner, who has cancer, was pushed three times by police and treated appallingly. When her son tried to intervene to speak with her, and complained that someone had pushed him in the face, the police didn't want to know." The picket,

Turn to Page 5

INSIDE: DIARY 7; COMMENT 8; WORLD NEWS and WEATHER 10; CHECKOUT 20; POSTBAG 16; STARS, CROSSWORD 22

PICTURE 16.2 The media exclusive resulted in three front-page pieces on the Salford Triathlon ITU World Cup over the three days of the event. (Source: used with kind permission of the Manchester Evening News.)

think about 16.6 Adding new media partners

In future years, are there any additional media partners the event could add without causing conflict?

Feedback The answer is yes, one such example could be a lifestyle/sport magazine for men/women's fitness or health.

think about 16.7

Crises and scandals

How might one use a media partnership to limit the damage of any potential scandals or negative stories while also ensuring the media partner's objectivity is not compromised?

Feedback Damage limitation could be ensured by the organiser providing the partner with a steady stream of the organisation's side of the story and, in turn, the media partner reporting this side to balance its coverage. Additionally, the media partner could highlight the inaccuracies in other media coverage, in contrast to its own balanced approach. However this approach cannot be relied on in a media environment where bad news traditionally sells.

Old media, new media and me media

It is time to declare an end to press relations and all its offshoots – press officers, press releases, press conferences, press packs. Using 'the press' as a collective noun for the media makes it easy to ignore all the radio stations, TV programmes and internet news sites and weblogs that should also be considered in any media relations activity.

Yet many people are reluctant to move on. In part, this can be explained by the heavy emphasis in some sectors on specialist or trade publications (see Chapter 22) that as yet have no equivalent expression in the broadcast media and are often not even published online. In part, it stems from the need to hand a regular (preferably bulging) press cuttings file to the senior management team and to leave a copy in reception. Video and audio broadcasts are harder to capture and display, and monitoring and recording comments on thousands of ephemeral websites poses a considerable challenge. There are, however, companies that aim to provide this service to organisations.

The reality is that we live in a multimedia age – but then this has always been the case. The great age of mass circulation newspapers began in the late nineteenth century, alongside the arrival of mass adult literacy. Yet the phenomenon of the *Daily Mail* – the world's first tabloid newspaper – was preceded by the arrival of an electronic newswire service (Reuters). Radio broadcasts began in the 1920s, followed a decade later by television broadcasts. (See Box 16.4.)

The summary in Box 16.4 demonstrates the recent rapid developments in broadcasting, as well as other forms of communication and yet, despite the more recent arrival of broadband internet access, the demand for television and radio has not diminished. In fact, from a UK perspective it is arguable that it has extended it, to judge from the expatriates who correspond with the BBC following its sports broadcasts or discussion programmes. It is possible to conclude that television did not kill radio off, any more than broadcasting killed off newspapers.

If the trend appears to be towards broadcast and online media, then you should not overlook the resurgence and profitability of local and regional newspapers (for example, in Barcelona readers are

box
16.4

Broadcast and media developments in the UK

In just over 20 years, the UK has gone from having three television channels (BBC1, BBC2 and ITV) to having many hundreds of digital channels as well as two more 'terrestrial' channels. Something similar has happened on the radio, with the arrival of commercial stations being followed by specialist digital channels.

Meanwhile, in the last decade, the internet has become an everyday addition to work and home lives. Most media organisations now have a web presence: for example, *The Guardian's* award-winning site (www.guardian.co.uk) does more than reproduce its print version, as it contains lengthy background reports, regular updates and other web-based features. The BBC site (www.bbc.co.uk) not only offers news and educational material, but also the possibility of listening to last week's radio broadcasts or even downloading programmes to any PC in the world.

'What is clear is that the story of the news media involves a process of evolution, in which old media are not replaced by new media, but modified by them' (Hargreaves 2003: 52).

loyal to *La Vanguardia* rather than the established national Spanish newspaper *El País*). They usually hold a local monopoly and provide the sort of local content that people most want and cannot get elsewhere (what's on listings, local news and events, classified and job adverts). Depending on the title, they also often tend to pursue a more positive (and so PR-friendly) news agenda.

This multi-channel, multimedia landscape – coupled with long working hours and long commuting distances – makes it very difficult for advertising media buyers and public relations practitioners to advise on the most effective means of reaching target audiences.

It was once so much simpler, at least for the advertisers. A commercial on the one TV channel that took advertising, if timed around the popular national *soap opera Coronation Street*, could be expected to reach half of all UK homes. Now, not only has the audience fragmented as it flits between hundreds of competing channels, but we have started to tune out advertisements (both psychologically and, depending on recording equipment, technically) because of their ubiquity and because we do not trust their messages.

Definition: 'Soap opera' is a broadcast drama serialised in many episodes and generally deals with domestic themes (the name originates from the USA where these types of programmes were sponsored by soap powder manufacturers targeting householders).

This is where media relations comes into the equation. Although the public relations practitioner faces the same questions as the media buyer (Who is watching the programme? Are they paying attention to it?), public relations messages have more credibility than advertising messages because they come with an editorial endorsement. As the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (2005) tells us: 'Public relations is about reputation, the result of what you do, what you say, and *what others say about you*' (our italics). Editorial endorsement amounts to word of mouth recommendation ('what others say about you'), but with the power to reach many thousands of ears.

Equally, others may not have good things to say about you. A programme or publication that is not beholden to its advertisers (the licence-fee-funded BBC in the UK, which carries no advertising, is particularly potent here) may be fearless in scrutinising corporate arrogance (*Watchdog*, BBC TV) and be critical of a new luxury car (*Top Gear*, BBC TV).

So the media relations practitioner should not only pursue and facilitate opportunities for positive pub-

licity, but must be alert to the dangers of gaining a bad press. The journalist or reporter may have personal reasons for disliking a company or product or they may be responding to public concerns. The media may be in contact with a 'whistleblowing' employee unhappy for some reason with your organisation's practices.

Now, it seems, we are all media experts. Any 'wannabe' seems to know how to get hold of publicist Max Clifford in order to 'sell their story'; individuals know to take their complaints to the media as well as to their MPs; and pressure groups and campaigning organisations are among the most effective at creating photo opportunities pitching their side of the story (think about Greenpeace's activities worldwide as well as direct action campaigns in the UK such as Fathers4Justice, www.fathers-4-justice.org).

Definition: 'Wannabe' is negative slang for a person who aspires to be well known in the media or to be perceived as successful in a pursuit that is in the public eye (sport, arts, popular music, etc.).

Definition: Media setting the agenda or 'agenda setting' refers to a theory that the media direct public attention to particular issues that fit news priorities and, in doing so, influence public opinion. The theory is unproven, since it can be argued that underlying public concerns can influence issue definition by both political elites and the media. (McQuail 1987). (See also Mini case study 16.4, overleaf.)

Access to the press and the public is no longer limited to the rich and powerful. Anyone with something to promote or criticise can set up a website to get their message across: one disgruntled customer of a bank or a retailer can become a talking point out of all proportion to their size, status or the merits of their arguments. It is the power of public relations being turned on the traditional users of public relations.

But even websites take some time and resources to set up and manage. The true voice of the man or woman on the street is beginning to be expressed through the much more accessible form of the *weblog*. These are at the other end of the spectrum from the mass media: they are micromedia projects usually reflecting the views of just one individual and often read by tiny numbers – but capable of being linked and repeated until the micromedium in turn becomes a mass media phenomenon. (See Think about 16.8, Mini case study 16.5 and Think about 16.9, all overleaf.)

mini case study 16.4

The great GM food debate

In early 1999, genetically-modified (GM) food became a media talking point in the UK, characterised by tabloid newspaper headlines including the emotive phrase 'Frankenstein food' (e.g. *Daily Mirror* 16 February 1999) and by the equally powerful image of environmental activists in white coats digging up GM crops. According to the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology report into this 'media storm', an influential factor in this was that several newspaper editors 'saw a clear opportunity to champion what they took to be the popular cause of resistance to GM crops and GM

foods'. In other words, the media were not only reporting the news, they were also *setting the agenda* and leading public opinion. On this occasion, the 'media storm' led to a move against GM foods by food suppliers and retailers and the tactical retreat of biotechnology company Monsanto. As the parliamentary report concludes: 'The real lesson of the Great GM Food Debate is that in a democracy, any significant interest – science included – ignores the public at its peril.'

Source: www.parliament.uk/post/report138.pdf



PICTURE 16.3 Genetically-modified (GM) food became a media talking point in the UK, characterised by tabloid newspaper headlines including the emotive phrase 'Frankenstein food'. (Source: © Darrell Gulin/Corbis)

think about 16.8 Weblogs

Should public relations practitioners add weblogs to their media lists?

Feedback Yes and no. Yes, because many *webloggers* are influential individuals with detailed industry knowledge (many are themselves professional journalists). No, because you should handle them with particular care. They are writing for their own interest and do not want to feel subject to any outside, commercial interests. By all means engage them in dialogue on their chosen topics, but beware of 'pitching' them with your own stories. You should certainly monitor the more influential weblogs covering your area (you can gauge the influence by a metric such as Google PageRank, a measure of other pages that link to this one in a form of online peer review).

mini case study 16.5

The web in action

Computer networks have been a powerful lobbying force for over a decade. In 1994, a few influential voices on a Usenet internet discussion forum forced microprocessor company Intel to withdraw its new Pentium processor because of a bug in the way it performed certain mathematical calculations. Intel was forced to change its policy because the user dissatisfaction with the processor was picked up by the mainstream media (Gillmor 2004).

Today, discussion and activism on the web is often to be found in weblogs. These 'citizen journalists' can act as fact checkers to the mainstream media

and to corporate public relations. As a result, politicians, the media and corporations risk having their half-truths quickly exposed. This happened when Matt Drudge exposed the Monica Lewinsky affair through his online Drudge Report on 17 January 1998 (Hargreaves 2003). It happened again in the USA in 2004 when webloggers set out to fact check the documents that US TV channel CBS claimed to prove that President Bush had evaded military service in Vietnam in 1973. The documents were shown to be fake ('Dan Rather faces bittersweet sign-off' *USA Today* 9 March 2005).

Definition: A *weblog* is a website in the form of a diary containing time-stamped articles and frequently linking to sources and other sites of interest. Weblogs usually reflect the views of one person or a small group of individuals and are read generally by a limited number of people on the internet but are capable of attracting large readerships through references on other websites. *Webloggers* are the individuals who run weblog journals on the world wide web.

Media relations techniques

Boy meets girl. It is an old story and the fundamentals never change. But the techniques used are subject to the whims of fashion and technology. Each year,

the popular press gets hold of a new 'love rat' who becomes the first celebrity caught 'dumping' his partner by fax, email or text message. It is the same story, only this time using different technology.

Media relations is similarly about relationships. The public relations practitioner needs to find the appropriate ways to identify, meet and woo the media target and the relationship then needs to be *maintained*. Correspondence, phone, email, face to face are all valid forms for such communication, but each has its drawbacks.

The public relations industry used to mass market the media with news releases sent by post. Then the fax took over as the communications device of choice. Now it is email. But each in turn has become discredited though overuse and misuse. Now all forms of mass marketing seem inappropriate and micro-targeting is in.

think about 16.9 Ethics and media relations

Media relations is surrounded by a minefield of ethical issues, such as:

- Should you offer hospitality, a gift or bribery?
- Should you ever offer payment for placement or offer one story to keep another out of the news?
- Just how close should you allow your relationships with journalists to become?
- Is it ever acceptable to lie?

Feedback One guiding principle is to respect the independence of the media. If the hospitality is too lavish, could this be perceived as a form of bribery, one favour that expects another in return? (In the USA, it is usual for media organisations to pay the travel and accommodation expenses of their journalists attending a media event; in Europe, they tend to travel at the expense of the organiser.)

A second guiding principle is to consider what would be best in developing longer term relationships, rather than aiming solely at tomorrow's news headline. If you over-promote this week's news, could you jeopardise your chances of success with the same people in future?

Likewise, if you lie about this week's stories, why should a journalist trust you next week? (See also Chapter 15.)

Some journalists will not open an email unless they recognise the sender; many do not welcome HTML messages complete with fancy fonts, logos and graphics; most do not open file attachments unless they have been specifically requested (they may contain viruses). To understand how they feel about inbox overload, consider how you feel about receiving 'spam' email offering you medication, plastic surgery, mortgages or university diplomas. Do you welcome it?

To understand how journalists feel about being 'cold called' by public relations practitioners 'selling' their stories, consider how you respond to phone calls offering you insurance, double-glazing or a new kitchen when you are at home cooking a meal. Are you interested? Do you prolong the conversation? Or do you consider it kinder to end it as quickly as possible, even if it means being rude to the poor individual who is 'only doing a job'? That's just how many journalists feel about public relations calls.

But the public relations practitioner should be offering something of interest to them as professional journalists. In which case, the practitioner should prove their credentials (by, say, considering offering an 'exclusive' on the news story) and should not ever waste their time. Tabloid editors in the UK will always find time to take a call from Max Clifford because they trust him to have something interesting to say to them (as stated earlier, he is a publicist with a track record of providing sensational revelations about the lives, actions and activities of the powerful, rich and famous).

The media 'ring around' is contentious territory. The boss or client is entitled to expect the practitioner to canvas journalists on the target media list for their interest in a particular story. But the shrewd public relations practitioner will avoid phoning *after* the news release has been distributed. By the time the news has been distributed, it is already too late to phone: the call is most likely to antagonise the journalist. As such, it is bad media relations. The smart practitioner will prefer to call selected journalists *before* issuing the news release. Only at this point, before it has been distributed, is the news of potential interest to most media and the call at this point can prepare reporters to a potentially interesting story, which they may be able to write about early or exclusively – and so get ahead of their competitors.

Public relations practitioners used to entertain lavishly, organising press conferences in foreign cities and drinking fine wines over lunch. Now, journalists have to put in longer hours in their offices and can rarely afford the time for these 'junks'. Working lunches tend to be accompanied by sparkling water, not champagne. The transparency demanded of those in public life is transmitting itself to journalists who are less able to accept gifts, travel and hospitality.

The set-piece press conference is much less common than those watching the evening television news might suppose. As with all good media relations, the decision to call a press conference should be taken by asking if it is in the interests of the media (rather than solely in the interests of corporate priorities). The answer will usually be to rule out press conferences on 'soft' stories such as most product launches, reserving this approach for 'hard' news events (often precipitated by a crisis; see Chapter 20).

Media proliferation may have made it harder for public relations practitioners to keep up with all the channels, programmes, websites and publications available to them, but it also raises new opportunities. While staff journalists may be working harder on a wider range of stories (and for more than one format), there is a growing army of *freelancers* struggling to make a living by supplying news and features to these programmes and publications. These freelancers will be much more receptive to ideas and offers from public relations sources and can often be a more effective channel for pitching ideas to editors.

Definition: *Freelancers* are journalists who work for themselves, independent of particular media groups. They are self-employed and work on short-term contracts or on a temporary basis for different media employers. They are often given one-off assignments or commissions by media organisations or they might develop a story and take it to the media outlet.

So, an effective media list should list not only publications and programmes, but also a number of different editorial contacts along with various ways to communicate (noting where possible the journalist's preferences). To the list should be added non-media influencers (e.g. industry analysts, webloggers, politicians, trade associations) that you also wish to keep informed.

The end of mass marketing in media relations teaches us another lesson. Rather than sending *all* your stories to *all* your media, you will have to select appropriate media for each story. Depending on the type of organisation you work for or represent, very few of your news events will merit national BBC news coverage; only a few will receive national newspaper coverage; most may be suitable for inclusion in a selection of trade, specialist and local publications.

This can bring unexpected benefits. The appearance of your spokesperson on local radio or in the local newspaper or specialist trade magazine will sometimes lead to requests for interviews from national newspapers or broadcasters. There is a 'food chain' that operates in newsgathering and it is in your interests to feed in your news where it is most likely to be consumed. The knock-on effect can often be beneficial, just as it

TABLE 16.3 ‘Old’ and ‘new’ media relations techniques

‘Old’ PR	‘New’ PR
Press Emphasised ‘good news’ One-way channel Mass marketing approach Promotes products and services Focused on print publications Press conferences favoured Addressed only the media	Media Willing to discuss good and bad news Emphasis on relationships Micro-targeting Talks up issues, ideas and trends Skilled in all media types Individual briefings and exclusives favoured Aware of all stakeholders and publics

can from offering one exclusive and then watching the news take on a life of its own.

The news release is the most visible tool used by the public relations practitioner. Most journalists will tell you how little attention each one receives in the newsroom and many senior public relations practitioners will tell you that they no longer use them (pre-

ferring instead to pitch each story personally to a selected journalist or reporter). The traditional printed release is also of less value to a TV newsroom than to a newspaper’s news desk.

Yet the advent of the internet and a more open and inclusive approach to stakeholder communications has given new life to this old tool. While journalists

case study 16.2

Media and the making of Google

How did you first hear of Google? When did you start using Google as your preferred search engine on the web? These questions make a big assumption, but if you use the web it seems a safe assumption that you use Google.

Yet Google is a newcomer. The business was only started, by Stanford University students Larry Page and Sergey Brin, in 1998 and the ‘beta test’ label was only removed from the Google search engine a full year later in September 1999.

Between 1999 and 2004, Google went from nowhere to everywhere (on the web). It is perhaps the most impressive brand marketing campaign of all time, yet scarcely a dollar was spent in advertising. So how did the business achieve this rate of awareness and adoption? What did it use in place of advertising?

Superior technology (the algorithms and computers used to produce faster and more accurate search results) played its part, but internet users still had to become aware of this superior search engine. In effect, Google made use of the only two networks capable of propagating its message so widely. One was to use the ‘viral’ qualities of the internet; the other was the extensive reach (and credibility) of the mass media.

Many users will have followed the recommendation of Jack Schofield, computer editor of *The Guardian* newspaper, who described Google in print in 1999 as ‘the Internet’s best search engine’. Other people will have first used Google following a recommendation from someone

they knew and trusted (a colleague, friend, family member). In this way, the impact of the media and viral recommendation becomes mixed into a general word of mouth effect. In the case of Google, the campaign gained strength from its organic, bottom-up growth (rather than being heavily promoted in a top-down fashion).

Media relations was not the sole factor in the making of Google (but media relations is rarely the sole tactic in a public relations campaign). Yet with the departure of Cindy McCaffrey late in 2004 (she had been, for five years, Google’s vice-president of corporate marketing), the story of the early decisions on how to promote the fledgling company emerged. In effect, a high-profile advertising campaign was rejected in late 1999 in favour of low-key word of mouth marketing (and a continued emphasis on technology). This date is highly significant, coming as it did before the burst of the dot-com boom in early 2000. In other words, this was a time when fortunes were being spent on brand-building promotional campaigns by rivals such as Excite. Google chose to go its own way.

Sources: ‘Revenge of the £3bn computer fruitcakes’, *The Daily Telegraph* 31 July 2004; Google history, www.google.com/corporate/history.html; McCaffrey leaving Google, SiliconBeat, www.siliconbeat.com/entries/2004/12/19/mccaffrey_leaving_google.html

may claim to find them rarely newsworthy, an organisation's stakeholders may be keen to remain informed of its activities through the posting of regular news in its online press office. A company that has posted no news stories this year looks like a dead company; conversely, one that issues regular news updates and delivers consistent messages looks to be dynamic and well managed. In this way, the media relations function can now, in the internet age, contribute to public relations (and not just remain focused on media relations as the only way of reaching the public).

Space does not allow a comprehensive survey of media relations techniques. Instead, an analysis of the key trends should provide a template for understanding best practice (see Table 16.3, Case study 16.2 and Activity 16.2).

activity 16.2

The CIPR Excellence awards provide good examples of current public relations practice. Look at this year's entries or last year's award winners (at www.cipr.co.uk). How do they use new technology? How important was media relations to the campaign's success? Were there any startling new approaches worth remembering?

Feedback

As this chapter has shown, public relations' use of the media is evolving all the time, as are the media channels and content themselves. The successful practitioner keeps an eye on current 'best practice' both to prevent being left behind and to create new ideas for the future.

Summary

This chapter has explored examples of how the media and media relations are used by organisations to achieve communications objectives. Differentiation has been established between the use of media relations and other forms of bought media space such as advertising. A link should also be made at this point to other chapters in the book that look at the broader issues of media context discussed (Chapter 4), the planning and management of campaigns (Chapter 10) as well as the research and evaluation

chapter (Chapter 11), which also considers measuring public relations' (and media relations') effectiveness.

Other factors have also been discussed, such as the role of new media channels – specifically the internet and weblogs. These are emerging areas for the practice; students and practitioners should maintain a close eye on how they are being used in campaigns and how this might affect some of the public relations and communications models discussed in this chapter.

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