

The Sources *Hot*Link

Tips and Practical Ideas to Get Positive News Coverage

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What is Public Relations?

By MARK LAVIGNE, APR



Public relations is an often-misunderstood term in modern business.

While most business people are generally quite familiar with advertising (the granddaddy of marketing communications) public relations remains relatively misunderstood.

Therefore, many of those responsible for initiating or procuring public relations services, do not fully understand the power of public relations and what it can accomplish for them.

Public relations is the communication that takes place between an organization and its numerous "publics" or audiences, both internal and external. Hence, it is far more than just publicity as in generating ink or airtime for a celebrity or, in the political arena, the "spin doctoring" that's done to convert bad press into good.

PR is proactive and positive, always trying to avoid a problem before it occurs. Those who do not understand PR, think it is only there to clean up problems.

Public relations uses relationship building as one of its essential tactics.

It builds strong teams, often driving those teams to consensus.

There are several disciplines within public relations; including media relations, investor relations, government relations, community relations and employee (internal) relations to name just a few.

As PR has matured (it's roughly about 75 years old), it has become more integrated with the traditional marketing communications disciplines of advertising and sales promotions. Some profess that it is now becoming the strategic engine for all three disciplines, especially as marketing communications budgets have become more equalized in the past decade.

Although some argue that advertising is dead and PR is rising in its ashes, PR is most effective when it's integrated with many other marketing communications disciplines. Frankly, a PR-friendly organization will apply its strong PR thinking to every level of the organization, from front door reception to back door shipping and receiving.

Media relations is one of PR's main disciplines, and arguably is the most difficult. It is the only marketing com-

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To ensure that the picture is sharp enough for the print edition of *Sources*, the resolution should be 300 dpi. Your logo should be a maximum of one inch high and a maximum of 2¹/₈ inches wide. The version of the logo that appears in the *Sources* Web site can be in full colour but the print version is grey scale or black and white.

If you do not have an electronic version of your logo, just submit a good quality paper copy and we will scan it for you.

What is Public Relations?

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munications discipline that has to go through a gatekeeper to reach the end audience. The media relations strategy that enables key messaging to pass through the gatekeeper intact is easily applied to other marketing communications disciplines. Finding the “newsworthiness” in a message necessarily removes non-essential information. It focuses organizations intellectually to get down to their “brass tacks.”

Media relations can be very effective when key messaging is also adopted by advertising and sales promotions (like point-of-purchase) and rolled-out in an integrated manner. Key messaging can also be adopted by other divisions of a company, from sales to human resources, and once again, from the reception desk to shipping and receiving.

PR should be the guardian of an organization’s brand, and that concept of brand is not just reserved for a private sector, product-oriented company. The concept of brand, what an organization is, what is it about, what it wants to say, is the organization’s being, and PR is often its protector.

PR is also about truth. Journalists, like police officers, develop an instinct for truth. Non-truthful messaging certainly won’t get through the journalistic gatekeeper very often, and if it does and

is found out, an organization is in deep trouble. Truth is an essential tool in the PR’s arsenal. This is why Canada’s PR professional organizations have adopted strict codes of ethics to ensure practitioners continue to guard their organizational brands with integrity.

As the PR profession matures, it increasingly requires a more prominent seat in the organizational engine room. It is emerging as a fundamental profession to help steer organizations through troubled modern waters and is as deserving in respect and placement in that engine room as legal, financial, technology and HR concerns.

PR professional organizations have also doggedly pursued accreditation programs to teach, test and recognize senior practitioners. As the profession matures, so does that process.

PR as a profession is multifaceted, vibrant, and filled with dedicated professionals who are directly involved in many, many facets of our modern society.

Mark LaVigne, APR, is President of the Canadian Public Relations Society (Toronto) and runs a media relations and media coaching firm based in Aurora, Ontario. He can be reached at (905) 841-2017 or mark.lavigne@sympatico.ca.

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*HotLink
Hot Tips*

Want to alert the media? Here’s how.

The Summer 2003 print edition of *Sources* is out there in the hands of the working press, doing its job to connect knowledgeable spokespeople (such as yourself) with busy reporters working on their latest story. The *Sources* Web site is available 24/7 to do the same. Yet you still want more effective tactics for alerting the media. Well, consider what *Sources* has to offer:

Whenever you write a press release about your latest development post it on the *Sources* Web site.

Cultivate your own media contact list using the latest edition of *Sources Media Names and Numbers*.

Write a letter to members of the media extolling the virtues of your company and use *Sources*’ mailing list service to distribute it.

Update your listing anytime the information changes. Remember, *Sources* is available online so you shouldn’t wait until the next print edition to revise important contact information.

Read the *Sources HotLink* for the latest media relations strategies and tactics.

The Sources *HotLink* – September 2003 Phone: 416-964-7799

In Times of Crisis

2003 has been a year of crisis, not the least of which was the major blackout in Ontario.

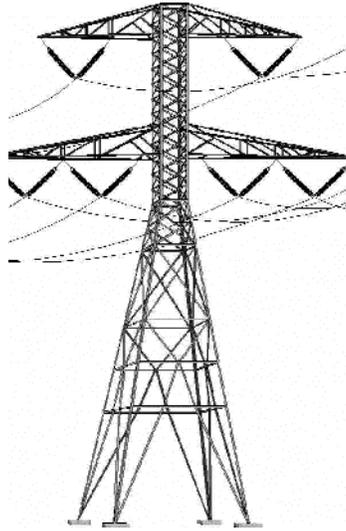
During a press briefing on Thursday, August 21st, Courtney Pratt, C.E.O. of Toronto Hydro perceptively referred to the blackout as an “empowering crisis” in which the public was playing an active role (through energy conservation) in the outcome of the crisis, based on the information provided by the media during the crisis.

As anyone facing a crowded room of reporters during an emergency will tell you, effective crisis communications is paramount in overcoming the predicament. To help us all appreciate the dynamics of a press briefing during a crisis, here is an excerpt from “In the News: The Practice of Media Relations in Canada” by William Wray Carney (published by the University of Alberta Press, 2002):

Being interviewed during a crisis (such as an ice storm, airline crash or forest fire) often comes down to answering four basic questions.

What’s going on? This question can be enormously difficult to answer during a crisis. During the 1987 tornado that devastated Edmonton, reporters demanded a casualty count immediately. However, the situation was so uncertain, and new touch-down sites were still being found, so that it wasn’t until the day after the crisis that a reasonable estimate could be given. While this was enormously frustrating to the media, in fact it was as fast as authorities could respond, particularly at a time when the priority was sorting through collapsed buildings looking for survivors.

What happened? How did it happen? Sometimes the answer to this question is easy (“A tornado”). Sometimes it may take years for the cause of a disaster to be known (for example, the



cause of the crash of Swissair Flight 11 over Peggy’s Cove was still being investigated more than a year after the incident).

What are you doing about it? As a crisis moves from the acute phase to the recovery phase, media attention shifts from what is going on to what the authorities are doing. The longer a situation goes on (e.g., the ice storm of eastern Canada in 1997), the more likely this type of media questioning, and eventually criticism, will be directed at authorities.

One thing to keep in mind is that the same facts do not always add up to the same opinion or outlook, particularly in times of crisis. If you are a subject expert known for a certain point of view, you may be consulted to provide a point-counterpoint perspective; if this is the case, you may need to be judicious in what you say, to avoid unintentionally hurting or provoking people.

How can people help? What can people do? The media often perform public service during a crisis, broadcasting calls for volunteers and equipment, asking people to stay away from the site, directing people to aid centres and so forth. In a crisis, you can ask for media help to get a message out and usually expect full cooperation.

HotLink Resource Shelf

REVIEWED BY LYNN FENSKE

The Art of the Handwritten Note A Guide to Reclaiming Civilized Communication

By Margaret Shepherd
Broadway Books, 2002, 153 pp., \$24.00 Cdn.
ISBN 0-7679-0745-0

How do you say “thank you” to a friend, a colleague, or a client? Ever considered thanking a journalist who has written about you in a favourable fashion?

Leading sales coach Tom Stoyan (www.CanadasSalesCoach.com) recommends “looking for opportunities to send thank yous”, preferably in a hand written letter.

For those of us married to a computer keyboard and out of practice with pen and paper, Margaret Shepherd comes to our rescue with a comprehensive guide to hand writing that special note of appreciation, sympathy and acknowledgement.

As an acclaimed calligrapher, Shepherd has more than a passing interest in a resurgence of hand written communications. “The Art of the Handwritten Note” is her contribution to an art form that “brings out the best in both the person who creates it and the person who looks at it”. She has put together a beautifully appointed, well written book that with prose, poetry, quotes and illustrations, provides everything necessary to inspire and motivate even the “most stymied letter writer”.

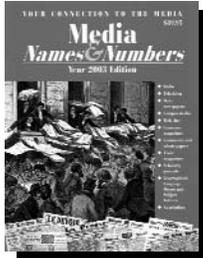
Her message is simple, “you can still use the telephone or the Web for the daily chores of staying in touch, but for the words that matter, it’s courteous, classy, caring and civilized to pick up a pen”. As Shepherd so perceptively proclaims, “Ink on paper is still the classiest way to express the thoughts that really matter, on the occasions that really count”.

Consequently, she provides valuable advice on making the best choices. From thanking a colleague for a job well done to heartfelt sympathy for a grieving friend or relative, Shepherd recommends the best format, language, materials and penmanship for communicating your message.

This book is a must for anyone interested in mastering the art of interpersonal communications. Read it and use it to seize all those opportunities that exist to say thank you.

Lynn Fenske is a copywriter and communications strategist specializing in public and media relations. She can be reached at (416) 232-0652 or lynn-fenske@sympatico.ca

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BY DAVE REDINGER



I've been listed in *Sources* for a couple of years now, ever since I launched my own radio program. I admit I was a little apprehensive at first. I didn't think anyone would contact me, especially since I was becoming a member of the media myself. But on the advice of a friend who works in public relations, I listed, then waited.

In the first couple of months I didn't get any response. But when the media did start to call, well, they just keep calling.

Most of the response has come from television producers. Prior to starting my own radio show I had appeared regularly on CityTV and Pulse24 as an automotive authority, mostly on their call-in program "Auto Shop". Since listing in *Sources*, I've appeared on Global, CTS and Goldhawk Live. When I asked the producers and reporters where they found me, the answer was always the same – "*Sources*"!

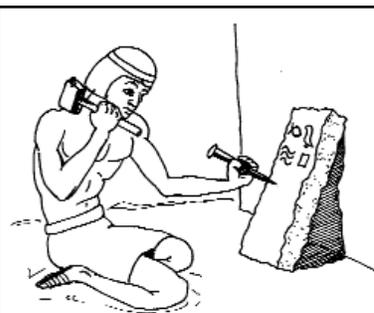
Now I get calls almost every other week to appear on television. I have

even been approached by two major networks to consider producing my own television show. (I'm giving serious consideration to their offers but remain focused on radio for the time being.)

Out of curiosity I recently did a Google search of my name on the Internet. I was amazed to see what came up! Not only did my *Sources* listing appear first on the list, but also I am quoted in a number of online magazine articles and appear on Web sites sponsored by some of the television shows I've been on! I can't believe all the media coverage I've gotten, just from listing in *Sources*.

So I'm here to tell you that listing in *Sources* does work. If response is slow in coming, be patient. You'll get a call just as soon as your area of expertise is of interest to a reporter or broadcaster somewhere in Canada. Your day will come and it may even last a whole week!

Known to many radio and television audiences as the "Neighbourhood Mechanic", Dave Redinger is Canada's authority on most things automotive. He can be reached at (905) 567-5500 or stikky@ca.inter.net.



Tell us your story.

We would love to feature your story of media relations success in a future issue of *The Sources HotLink*. It can be a testimonial about listing in *Sources* or how a specific marketing communications strategy worked for you. Contact

us with the details and we will follow up with a news story of our own.

Send a quick E-mail to the editor at lfenske@sources.com or give her a call at (416) 232-0652.

Just another way that you can trust *Sources* to get your story out.

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