

The Sources *Hot*Link

Tips and Practical Ideas to Get Positive News Coverage

Number Thirty

www.hotlink.ca

June 2004

New Legal Landscape Affecting PR

BY MARK LAVIGNE, APR



Now, more than ever, a good relationship with in-house or outside legal counsel is imperative for every PR practitioner.

Three new or amended Federal laws, and a relatively new development on the litigation front in Ontario, have all impacted greatly on the practice of public relations in Canada.

The amended Federal Competition Act makes it necessary to ensure all publicized product or service claims have legitimate back up. For example, claims such as “best”, “newest” or “fastest” must be carefully substantiated.

“The landscape is changing and even if a marketing claim does not result in criminal charges pursuant to the Competition Act, it may now and probably will be the subject matter of private complaints which clearly would increase the possibility for a great deal of new ‘enforcement’ activity under the Competition Act,” says business lawyer Richard D. Harlow. “The difference is that the ‘enforcement’ may be of a private civil nature and not of a criminal nature.”

The new Federal Copyright Law has also made the use of clippings and broadcast tapes, particularly the electronic versions thereof, tricky. There has always been an issue regarding where clips can be used for “internal purposes” and where they become used “for external/sales purposes” which can get PR, both in-

house and agency, in big trouble.

“Media rights holders have been very clear – no internal redistribution without a license and definitively no external distribution,” says John Weinseis, President, Bowdens Media Monitoring Limited. “This is now reflected in many of Bowdens copyright licenses. It’s going to get more complicated as rights holders become more aggressive in policing and enforcing their rights.”

And there is the Federal Privacy Act, fully implemented in 2004 that could impact the use of news media lists. My practice has always been to remove a journalist from my own database when they complain about receiving news releases inappropriately. I always apologize, remove them immediately and offer to notify the list services such as Bowdens or CCNMatthews. But if a freelance journalist uses a private e-mail to receive information, could that journalist claim that the act of receiving unsolicited news releases is SPAM and therefore violates their rights?

“Our distribution lists are carefully tailored to match the subject interests of each recipient to mitigate any spamming concerns,” says Neil Baird, Vice President of Marketing at CCNMatthews. “But certainly, if anyone complains, they are immediately removed from that list and asked if there is any other types of news they’d like to receive.”

And finally there is the removal of restrictions against using contingency fees in Ontario, one of the last jurisdictions in North America to demand that retainers must be paid in litiga-

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From the pages of
Sources meet...



Self-Counsel Press Ltd. (page 280, Winter 2004) is Canada’s pioneering publisher of business and legal self-help books, all of which are written in layman’s terms by leading experts. What is of particular interest to *Sources* listees in their third edition of *Getting Publicity* by Tana Fletcher and Julia Rockler. It’s a valuable, concise resource guide that covers everything you need to know about getting publicity from writing and distributing press releases to preparing yourself for a television interview.

Other marketing communications titles published by Self-Counsel Press include *Marketing Your Product* (with CD-ROM), *Marketing Your Service* (with CD-ROM), *Market Research Made Easy*, *Writing for the Web* and *Low-Budget Online Marketing for Small Business*. For more information, or to shop online, go to their web site www.self-counsel.com.



If you panic at the sight of a live microphone or lose sleep over the prospect of speaking publicly, then **Cathleen Fillmore** (Page 227, Winter 2004) is someone to call on for professional guidance. As an accomplished public speaker and Director of *Speaker’s Gold* Speakers Bureau, Cathleen can provide customized coaching sessions to groom even the most reticent spokesperson. Cathleen offers free consultations and estimates on how she can be of specific help to anyone wanting to become

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Letters to the Editor

BY BARBARA FLORIO GRAHAM



The Letters page is one of the most popular sections of any newspaper, and is therefore an ideal way to keep your name and your core message in front of the public.

Use every possibility that arises to write a letter to the editor, and urge your supporters to do the same. The general rule is that one letter on a subject is usually ignored unless the Letters' Editor feels it is especially significant. Two or three letters on the same subject cause the Editor to put them aside and consider running the best one, and five or more letters amount to a mandate to publish at least one.

Letters must be personally written, as form letters with different signatures are quickly recognized and discarded. Letters should be brief, typed and signed, with the full name, address, and telephone number of the writer typed beneath the signature. Addresses and telephone numbers are not published but are essential so that the Editor can verify that the letter is authentic. If

you're especially concerned about including this information, put it in parentheses and indicate clearly "Not for Publication".

Give each of your supporters your identifying statement, along with a descriptive paragraph containing a few more significant details (such as the date of the organization's founding, some recent accomplishments, a high-profile sponsor or honorary Board member). These should be used in every letter, although the rest of the letter should be in the writer's own words.

Begin each letter with a reference to the news or feature article which provoked the comment, along with its date of publication, and try to make a positive comment, even if you follow it with reservations.

A good letter to the editor:

begins with a positive or neutral statement is fair and moderate in its criticism of the paper or reporter avoids strong pejorative language concerning the issue on the opposite side of the paper or the reporter uses simple sentence structure and active verbs employs laymen's language offers some new information of interest to the readers keeps to one major point is not longer than 250 words

closes politely, perhaps suggesting a possible course of action for the paper or its readers is typed with full name and title below signature along with complete address and telephone number

Barbara Florio Graham is the author of "Five Fast Steps to Better Writing", "Five Fast Steps to Low-Cost Publicity" and "Mewsings/Musings". Her web site is www.SimonTeakettle.com.

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SOURCES **HotLink**

June 2004

ISSN: 1480-2821

489 College St., Suite 305
Toronto, Ontario M6G 1A5

Phone: (416) 964-7799

Fax: (416) 964-8763

E-mail: hotlink@hotlink.ca

World Wide Web: <http://www.hotlink.ca>

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Subscription orders must be prepaid. Visa or MasterCard accepted.

Editor: Lynn Fenske
Typesetting and Design:
Elaine Farragher/AlterLinks

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Publications Mail Agreement #1715615

New Legal Landscape Affecting PR

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tion suits. The Law Society of Upper Canada in 2002 removed this barrier, and litigation can generally now be conducted on a percentage of winnings basis.

PR contracts with clients now often stipulate that one million dollars in general liability insurance is required – which is harder and harder to get these days without an equal amount in professional liability (or errors and omissions insurance), an expensive necessity. Such coverage can cost several thousand dollars a year – rather difficult for independents or small agencies to swallow.

"Our firm has been receiving an ever increasing number of calls from people requesting professional liability," says Bill Kirkwood of Erb and Erb

Insurance. "This is unusual in that these people for the most part have not had this kind of coverage before. We are seeing the trend from both the government as well as private sectors."

With these new developments in the Canadian legal landscape, it is imperative that legal counsel be involved in the PR process – not just to rubber stamp external communications – but also involved in planning and protocol steps to ensure the PR process does not run afoul of any of the new legislation.

Mark LaVigne, APR, is Past 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.

The Sources **HotLink** – June 2004 Phone: 416-964-7799

3 Keys to Keeping Your Marketing and PR Writing on Strategy

BY STEVE SLAUNWHITE

There are countless marketing and PR professionals who are terrific writers. Their grammar is impeccable. Their phrases are inventive. Their words sing. But does that mean their press release, brochure, backgrounder, feature article or web page will meet objectives?

The answer is no.

Good writing alone is not enough to engage the hearts and minds of your targeted audience. Media editors, especially, frown on submissions that fail to be relevant.

So how do you ensure that your marketing and PR piece isn't just pretty prose? Here are three questions that can help keep your writing on strategy:

Ask: "What is the goal?"

Exactly what is it that you want to accomplish? Do you want your press release to get ink in publications read by cookbook enthusiasts? Do you want your backgrounder to help explain new product features? Be as specific as you can.

It's amazing how many press releases, brochures and web pages seem to have no clear *raison d'être*. Don't risk producing something that merely contributes to the clutter. Have a goal, and keep it front-and-center as you write. You might even want to sticky-note the goal to your computer (as I sometimes do.)

Ask: "What's in it for the reader?"

Perhaps the biggest mistake that marketing and PR writers make is

focusing too heavily on the product. This admonition may come as a surprise to those who write press releases, brochures and other materials featuring products. After all, isn't the product the subject?

Actually no. The subject is the *targeted audience*. Or more specifically, the target's needs, desires and interests. That means your marketing or PR piece must clearly answer the question every reader asks: "What's in it for me?"

If you focus purely on the product – no matter how revolutionary or newsworthy it is – you risk producing nothing more than a "brag and boast" document, ignored by editors and customers alike.

Ask: "What do I want the reader to do?"

Do you want editors to feature your boss in an upcoming feature? Do you want customers to call a toll-free number and order your product? Do you want readers to gain a greater awareness of your brand?

Marketing and PR writing is essentially an exercise in persuasion. Whether it's an obvious "Call Now!" or a message conveyed in the sub-text, you must communicate what it is you want the reader to do. If you don't, your writing will be like a ship without a rudder. It may look good, but it's going nowhere.

Steve Slaunwhite speaks, writes and consults on strategic copywriting for marketing communications. He can be reached at www.steveslaunwhite.com

From the Pages of Sources Meet Self-Counsel Press

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a more confident and accomplished public speaker.

In addition to coaching sessions, Cathleen makes available her books, *Going for Gold* and *Speaking for Money, A Guide to Getting Paid for*

Public Speaking. To learn more about Cathleen's services, buy her books or hire one of the professional speakers she represents, go to www.speakersgold.com.



Eli Bay



Dave Redinger

Lorraine Weygman



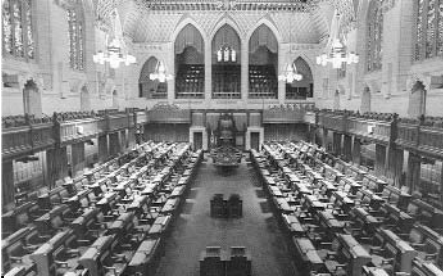
Sources listees collaborate

Late night radio is a lot more lively now that three *Sources* listees have hit the airwaves. Eli Bay (page 223, Winter 2004) and Lorraine Weygman (page 295, Winter 2004) have joined forces with Dave Redinger (page 275, Winter 2004) as hosts of their own talk shows. The programs are part of *All Night Live*, a new talk/music format broadcast in southern Ontario on AM740. Launched in January 2004, *All Night Live* is the brainchild of Dave Redinger who, for the past three years, has hosted the extremely successful *Neighbourhood Mechanic* program Saturday mornings on AM740.

You can listen to Eli on Sundays talking about relaxation and stress management. Lorraine is host of *Health Connections* on Mondays, while Dave continues the automotive theme on Tuesdays with *The Midnight Mechanic* program. Listen in. Better yet, call in.

If you have a corresponding topic you'd like to discuss, a key message to share or would like to be considered as a guest on any of these *All Night Live* programs, feel free to contact the hosts directly. You'll find their contact information in *Sources*...of course.

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REVIEWED BY LYNN FENSKE

Media Relations The Bonner Communications Series By Allan Bonner

**Briston House, 2003, 176 pp.,
\$24.95 Cdn.
ISBN 1-894921-00-3**

Eight seconds.

It's the average length of time devoted to a spokesperson's remarks during a television news item. Are you prepared to make the best of it? Do you know where to begin?

Start by accepting the fact that the media moves faster than you do, so be prepared. Always.

This is the message of Allan Bonner's brilliant new book, *Media Relations*. In it he coaches the reader on attaining utmost media preparedness or, as he describes it, having SOCKOs.

SOCKO is an acronym for Strategic Overriding Communications and Knowledge Objective. It's a Bonner invention and fundamental to the media training he offers in this book, in his numerous published articles and at his Centre for Risk and Crisis Management in Toronto. SOCKO starts with strategic thinking and through "simplicity, brevity, clarity and repetition," can lead anyone to becoming media savvy.

By Bonner's definition, a SOCKO is "a short, positive, sharp, memorable, honed, polished, true, unassailable statement." According to Bonner it is always "20 seconds or less, quotable, full of impact and often showing caring, knowledge and/or action." Think of Pierre Elliot Trudeau's infamous "Just watch me," and you've got the idea.

In *Media Relations*, Bonner uses his SOCKO mentality to conquer the challenges of dealing effectively with the media. His writing is clean and concise. His lessons are no-nonsense and to the point. His key advice — "make your message powerful and clear and get it

out early and often and you will always be ahead of your adversaries."

Every component of SOCKO is clearly articulated and its power demonstrated. Bonner reminds us that while reporters and editors are forced to make choices, we, as PR practitioners, can affect those choices. Central to Bonner's training model is the reality that "your message and demeanour can influence whether you are depicted as peripheral or central to the (news) story."

Once the SOCKO framework is introduced and explained, Bonner proceeds to describe (in greater and more relevant detail than I have previously encountered) the mechanics of media relations — how to organize and manage a media conference, how to structure and write a media release, the contents of a professional media kit, how to test your story idea for newsworthiness, and, most importantly, how to handle reporters face-to-face.

In under 200 pages (complete with illustrative photographs, a glossary, real-life examples and generous appendices of charts, worksheets and checklists) Allan Bonner packs an impressive one-two punch in media relations training — not just how, but why. There's method and motive to his message.

My recommendation is for you to buy this book and swiftly absorb the contents. Be confident that with Allan Bonner's expert instruction you can become more proficient and less intimidated when facing a media inquiry. His knowledge is your power. And power is having SOCKOs. Get ready. Aim. Fire.

Allan Bonner is currently working on four more books in The Bonner Communications Series. Speaking and Presentation Skills in the Digital Age and Risk and Crisis Management are scheduled for an autumn 2004 release. Watch for Writing: An Oral Approach and The Wounded Leader in spring of 2005.

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