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PUBLIC RELATIONS

A Strategic, Evolving Discipline

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 Define public relations and understand how popular perceptions differ from the reality of the field.
- 1.2 Explore the growth of the PR industry in the United States and globally.
- 1.3 Review roles and functions of PR professionals.
- 1.4 Review career options in the field of PR.

Scenario: Delta Airlines Responds to COVID-19 With “Protected Together” Campaign

Like many employers, Delta Airlines faced many challenges as the COVID-19 pandemic moved around the world. As the global health crisis evolved, businesses faced new variants and surges; shifting government, travel, and health protocols; and complex and sometimes conflicting information from political and government officials, including the White House.

As a global airline, with 75,000 employees interacting with thousands of customers on a daily basis, the epidemic disrupted Delta’s business significantly, as the public proved to be reluctant to return to the air once travel was allowed.

When the COVID-19 vaccine was first approved for public use in the spring of 2021, Delta was anxious to get as many of its employees vaccinated as possible in order to restore operations and reassure customers it was safe to fly Delta again.

Faced with this challenge, Delta’s management set out to accelerate the global recovery process by launching a comprehensive internal communications campaign to increase their employee vaccination level to 75% as quickly as possible. However, unlike many companies dealing with this unprecedented global situation, Delta sought to accomplish this without imposing a vaccine mandate as a condition of continued employment.

To begin, Delta conducted an employee pulse survey to gauge employee attitudes and/or resistance to vaccination. The study revealed the following data:

- 43% of Delta employees were neutral or unfavorable toward getting the vaccine.
- 57% indicated favorability about getting the vaccine.

The research helped management identify the segments of the employee population who might be the most difficult to convince as well as those employees who would participate if Delta established mass vaccination sites conveniently at or near airports and at major company facilities.

The company immediately began work on a plan whose goal was to convince employees to get vaccinated on a voluntary basis—avoiding making it a condition for continued employment—consistent with Delta’s “People First” culture (PRSA, 2022).

As you read through this chapter, consider how you would have used strategic public relations and communications to rally employees and achieve the desired outcome as soon as possible.

1. What strategies and tactics would you have recommended at the time?
2. What would you do now, several years later, to keep employees safe by encouraging them to get the COVID-19 vaccine booster shots that have become available?



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At the end of this chapter (as with all the chapters in this text), you will see how the practitioners in this scenario responded and the outcome(s) their strategic plans produced. Pay special attention to details like how the PR (public relations) pros demonstrated return on investment (ROI) for the resources used to meet the challenge, the use of research throughout the case, and how the outcome served to enhance the company or organization's reputation and business performance.

The authors hope you will find this approach interesting and challenging and that it will help you connect the key takeaways of each chapter to real-life examples of strategic public relations.

Source: Adapted from PRSA. (2022). "Protected together, connected together"—A global employee vaccination campaign. <https://www.prsa.org/conferences-and-awards/awards/search-silver-anvil-case-studies>

The goals of this chapter are to provide a foundation and understanding of the field of PR and its development into a strategic management function as well as to outline how you can pursue a career in this dynamic industry.

The chapter will connect PR to the growing field of corporate social responsibility (CSR)—also referred to as sustainability; environmental, social, and governance (ESG), or corporate philanthropy—and illustrate how one discipline informs and enriches the other.

Later in the chapter, you will read the first of a series of "Profiles in PR." These features will introduce you to a successful PR professional who will share their experience and advice for building a career in PR and/or social responsibility (SR). In subsequent chapters, these profiles will feature professionals and experts relaying their experience with the topics covered in each chapter, such as media relations, crisis management, or research.

PUBLIC RELATIONS: PERCEPTION VERSUS REALITY

LO 1.1 Define public relations and understand how popular perceptions differ from the reality of the field.

In this chapter, you will read about the public perception of PR as well as how it can contribute to an organization or cause. This role of PR has been discussed and debated since the early days of the profession. Historically, PR professionals focused primarily on generating positive publicity, versus today, when the desired outcome is impacting public opinion, influencing behavior, and/or driving business results (see Chapter 2). Research shows that the historical image of PR professionals among the public is that of a **publicist**, or “**flack**,” which has been driven, in part, by the profession’s depiction in movies, the media, and on television.

Public Relations and Pop Culture

According to Joe Saltzman (2011), director of The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture project at The Norman Lear Center at the University of Southern California (USC), “Many public relations practitioners believe that the image of the publicist and the public relations professional (in the media) is one of the most negative in history” (para. 5). In Saltzman’s research, he studied more than 300 films and TV programs from 1901 to 2011. The negative images of PR in popular media often include devious press agents who will do anything—including lie, cheat, steal, and even commit crimes—to save their reputations and protect clients. For example, the character Don Draper on the AMC Network show *Mad Men* is portrayed as a powerful and unethical communications executive.

Olivia Pope, protagonist of the recent show *Scandal*, was involved in high-stakes crisis and political communications work each week. The show, still running in syndication and streaming, is based on the life and career of Judy Smith, a Washington, DC-based crisis manager.

Notably, Smith, who is a George Washington University alum, served as a consultant to the show, providing her input on how PR and crisis management in Washington, DC, works. However, she insists her work, while demanding, is nowhere near as dramatic as the life and career of Olivia Pope. “Moving dead bodies from crime scenes—that doesn’t happen in my office in Washington, DC,” explained Judy Smith in a profile in *The Washington Post* (Burton, 2014).

In a pioneering study, *Public Relations in Film and Fiction, 1930 to 1995*, Karen Miller wrote that today’s “fictitious characters... display very little understanding of PR or what practitioners do” (1999, p. 24). Miller explained, “Sometimes (in the movies) PR is magic,” and other times, “it is almost embarrassingly easy.”



Judy Smith, a Washington, DC-based crisis manager (right), was the inspiration for the character Olivia Pope, played by Kerry Washington (left), on the television show *Scandal*.

Frederick M. Brown/Getty Images Entertainment/via Getty Images

Nowhere in these shows or movies do you see PR people working hard on a serious issue, such as motivating employees to get vaccinated, as outlined in the chapter opening scenario. Perhaps that is because while the work benefits the employees of thousands of large and small businesses as well as the public, it is not as entertaining as the high-stakes drama of PR professionals so common in films and on television today.

These stereotypes should not be taken lightly and must be countered with facts, as with any profession. The best way to do that is by engaging professionally with our clients and colleagues to show the value PR brings to the global marketplace. Leave the cliff-hanging drama to TV and movies.

Defining Public Relations: What's in a Name?

Moving beyond the *perception* of public relations, let's examine the various definitions of PR to see if there is a consensus. Defining PR has been a goal for much of the profession's history. Too often, practitioners have relied on saying what PR was not—for example, *advertising*, which traditionally relies on paid media “ads,” or *sales*, which is a transactional exercise. At its best, PR involves an information exchange between organizations and target “publics” or audiences with the goal of sharing information and influencing behavior.

Other key elements of PR that distinguish it from advertising include the need for specialized skills, such as issues and crisis management, internal communications, and providing strategic communications advice. These and other related elements are unique to PR and are not found in advertising, sales, or other marketing activity.

While strategies, tactics, and vehicles have differed over time, PR professionals are constantly engaged in delivering messages and influencing behavior or public opinion. Whether it is buying a certain brand or product, voting for a candidate, donating to a cause or charity, or investing in a **public company (publicly traded company)**, in PR your role is to build your client's **corporate reputation** and create trust. This must be done in an ethical and transparent manner in order to serve your client or company's interests as well as your own career.

A Crowd-Sourced Definition From the Public Relations Society of America

In response to the need for an agreed-upon definition, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the leading professional organization for public relations professionals, launched an effort to develop a more “current and accurate definition of public relations.”

The project took the form of a “crowd-sourced” effort involving PRSA members, academics, and industry leaders to solicit input for an “official” definition of PR to be used going forward. That months-long process produced the following definition, which was first published in 2012: *Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.*

Chartered in 1947, the PRSA is the world's largest and foremost organization of PR professionals with approximately 22,000 members, according to the PRSA website (prsa.org). In addition, it has a sister organization, the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), which consists of over 370 chapters and more than 9,700 undergraduate students majoring in or considering a career in public relations, according to the PRSSA website. As detailed on the organization's website, PRSA provides professional development, sets standards of excellence, and upholds principles of ethics for its members. It also advocates for greater understanding and adoption of public relations services and acts as one of the industry's leading voices on pivotal business and professional issues (www.prsa.org).

Public Relations Scholars Weigh In

Over the years, academics and authors have developed their own definitions that share many of the same elements. Scott Cutlip, Allen Center, and Glen Broom, in the seminal text *Effective Public Relations* (first published in 2000), defined PR as the “management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip et al., 2000).

This definition has echoes both in the PRSA version as well as the one put forth by leading PR scholars James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt (1984), who suggested that “public relations is the management of communication between an organization and its publics.”

Regardless of which definition you find most relevant, each has elements and concepts in common. Note the use of the terms “mutually beneficial,” “management function,” “strategic,” and “publics.” At its heart, PR is, in fact, a communications process that keeps the interests of all parties—pro and con—in mind. It is strategic, not tactical. It is a relationship, not a one-way street where messages are taken onboard verbatim by your audience. It is an interactive process that occurs over time, not a transaction or isolated event or activity.

These distinctions convey a give-and-take relationship in which the interests of all parties can be addressed and communications goals more likely achieved—all within the context of that “relationship.”

Insights: What Is “Public Relations”?

If you google “public relations,” you will see it is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the professional maintenance of a favorable public image by a company or other organization or a famous person” and “the state of the relationship between the public and a company or other organization or a famous person” (Lexico Oxford Dictionary, n.d.).

Despite the varied definitions for the profession, Paul Holmes, founder and chair of The Holmes Group, notes that he likes the term “public relations” (2017b). Holmes has been writing about public relations for more than 25 years, and he suggests reducing the term to its component parts to develop a viable definition. As he sees it, the words “public” and “relations” are in common usage and appear to be well understood: “public” (of or concerning the people as a whole; done, perceived, or existing in open view; or ordinary people in general; the community) and “relations” (the way in which two or more people or things are connected or the way in which two or more people or groups behave toward each other).

Holmes offers his own definition, rooted in the meaning of the two words: “Public relations is the discipline of managing the relationship between an organization and the people upon whom it depends for success and with whom it interacts, and ensuring that those relationships facilitate the organization’s strategic objectives” (Holmes, 2017b, para. 10).

There are significant reasons why he likes this definition, he notes.

First, it makes it clear that the end product of public relations—and therefore the main focus of every campaign—is a relationship: hopefully, a stronger, more rewarding relationship with employees, consumers, shareholders, regulators, or the communities in which organizations operate.

Second, if you think about how relationships are formed, one thing should be clear: Communication is important, but it is far from the most important factor. Ad agencies, digital firms, and even management consultancies can all claim to be in the communications business. PR is unique in looking beyond the transactional and focusing on long-term, mutually beneficial value of relationships. To remove that key element would be to surrender the critical differentiator between what PR pros bring to the table and what others offer.

Holmes dismisses the current angst around the term “public relations,” suggesting it’s the result of a particular moment in time, of changes in the relationship between marketing and corporate communications, and of increased competition among advertising agencies, digital firms, management consultancies, and others.

At a time when public relations people are anxious to define themselves more broadly than ever before; when senior in-house people are needed at the policy-making table more urgently than ever before; and when public relations firms have embraced integrated campaigns that use paid, shared, and owned channels, Holmes suggests that PR professionals need to double down on the term “public relations.” By jettisoning the term “public relations,” practitioners might be turning their backs on the one thing that differentiates PR from all of those other related disciplines: the focus on relationships.

Source: Holmes, P. (2017b, May 1). “Public relations”: Now more than ever. *The Holmes Report*. <https://www.holmesreport.com/long-reads/article/%27public-relations%27-now-more-than-ever>

Public Relations Versus Advertising: Understanding the Difference

While the lines between PR and advertising/marketing are increasingly blurred, there are distinct differences, even though both work through the public and online media to convey a message. To begin with, as noted earlier, PR involves persuasion, not purchasing. The result the PR pro is seeking (obtaining news coverage, influencing public opinion, enhancing a reputation or rebuilding one, etc.) comes through interaction between the PR professional and a gatekeeper (e.g., a journalist, **blogger**, or **influencer**). This process of outreach and persuasion of a reporter to write, report, or film a story is referred to as “earned” media and is central to the practice of media relations.

On the contrary, advertising is a transaction, thus the term “paid” media. A company that wants public attention for a product or a cause often pays for the print ad space, broadcast airtime, or paid social media posts, and it is usually run as is with no interpretation. This distinction—between earned and paid media—has been captured in a short but accurate quote: “PR is what you *pray* for. Advertising is what you *pay* for” (Wynne, 2014).

GROWTH OF PUBLIC RELATIONS INTO A GLOBAL INDUSTRY

LO 1.2 Explore the growth of the PR industry in the United States and globally.

Looking ahead to Chapter 2, you will learn how the PR industry has roots throughout U.S. history, business, and politics. Within the United States, PR remains an attractive career choice with steady growth in employment opportunities and salaries driven by increased spending by clients and companies on PR-related activity.

The U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimates job growth in the PR field at 6% per year from 2022 to 2032, with a median income of \$66,750 per year (BLS, 2024b). In mid-2023, there were 275,500 people nationwide employed in the PR industry as public relations specialists (BLS, 2024a). The BLS projects that about 18,000 new jobs in PR will be added between 2022 and 2032 (BLS, 2024b).

In addition to its long heritage in the United States, PR has become a global business; several countries in Europe—such as Great Britain—have long traditions of PR as well. According to *Statista*, there were 83,300 people employed in the PR industry in the UK as of 2023 (Clark,

2024). PR is truly a global industry and is practiced in most major countries and increasingly in the developing world. *Statista* reports that the value of the global PR industry was estimated to surpass \$107 billion in 2023, with an estimated compound annual growth rate of 6% through 2027 (Navarro, 2024).

We'll return to discuss the projected growth of the industry in Chapter 15.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability Communications

Many PR campaigns incorporate **corporate social responsibility (CSR)** engagement, defined as the “economic, legal, ethical, and *discretionary* expectations that society has of organizations” (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2014, p. 36) to give back or contribute to society. In 2007, a peer-reviewed study of the top 50 global business schools defined CSR as “the sum of the *voluntary* actions taken by a company to address the economic, social, and environmental impacts of its business operations and the concerns of its principal **stakeholders**” (Christensen et al., 2007, pp. 347–368). The use of the word “voluntary” is key here—no one is making these companies do this activity. CSR is closely linked to the topic of **environmental, social, and governance (ESG)**. As we will discuss in Chapter 3, the terms are often used together, though they are not interchangeable. ESG reporting helps measure or quantify CSR efforts.

Ideally, CSR should function as a built-in, self-regulating mechanism whereby a business monitors and ensures its support of the law, ethical standards, and international norms. Consequently, businesses need to embrace responsibility for the impact of their business activities on the environment, consumers, employees, communities, stakeholders, and all other members of the public sphere.

Carol Cone, generally regarded as the pioneer of CSR as a business and communications strategy, described the evolution of CSR in a seminal study published by Edelman (2010):

Nearly two-thirds of consumers feel that it is not adequate for corporations to simply give money away to charity or good causes, they need to integrate...[sustainability] into their day-to-day business... It is no longer enough to slap a “green” ribbon on a product and call it “CSR.” Americans seek deeper involvement in social issues and expect brands and companies to provide various means of engagement...we call this the rise of the “citizen consumer.” (Edelman, 2010)

Essentially, CSR is the deliberate inclusion of public interest into corporate decision-making, and it honors a triple bottom line: people, planet, and profit. Examples of the close relationship between PR and CSR are found throughout this book, and Chapter 3 offers an in-depth exploration of the practice.



In 2014, CVS pharmacies across the United States stopped selling cigarettes after the company decided that doing so was incompatible with its goal of promoting health.

Andrew Burton/Getty Images News/via Getty Images

Social Media and Digital Communications Key to Growth

A lot of the projected growth in the PR industry can be traced to the demand for skilled communicators who can leverage social media for their employers or clients. For those of you with these skills, the career opportunities are almost unlimited. For the rest of you, this is an area of opportunity once you have these skills mastered. The BLS noted in a 2024 report that “the use of social media also is expected to create opportunities for public relations specialists as they try to appeal to consumers and the general public in new ways. Public relations specialists will be needed to help their clients use social media effectively” (BLS, 2024).

While much of the increase in PR spending in the United States is attributable to an improving economy, its growing recognition by senior management as an effective platform for supporting business and corporate social responsibility activity is a major factor as well.

There is no doubt that social media has accelerated this trend, moving rapidly from a few major platforms for leisure time use to dozens of powerful marketing and communications platforms for organizations all over the globe.

In countries with emerging economies where traditional media is limited or an independent press is not a given, PR’s growth is largely being driven by social media platforms that are easily accessible and largely uncensored. In these economies, private citizens and advocacy groups use social media to spread their message(s), build followers, and conduct business without ever dealing with a newspaper or broadcast media outlet. Pew Research Center reported in 2024 (Poushter et al., 2024) that the majority of adult Internet users in emerging economies they surveyed say that they use social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), and Instagram, for news and information as well as to keep in touch.

Increasingly in the United States and elsewhere, social media has become the primary means of delivering misleading or false information to stir up support for a cause. This phenomenon, known as disinformation, will be explored in more detail in later chapters (see Chapter 8).



Smartphones in emerging economies such as Kenya are essential tools for the spread of information.

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Global Public Relations Spending Trends

Industry data shows that global investments in PR and marketing services are experiencing continuous growth, as noted above. Global spending on PR itself is hard to track because only some firms release financial information publicly and others include related services (such as advertising and marketing spending) in their reports of fee income (Navarro, 2024).

In 2023, *PR Week*, one of the leading PR industry publications, reported continued global growth in PR revenue at 3%, which was down significantly from the strong growth rates posted in the prior two years: 15% in 2022 and 19% in 2021. It should be noted that these historically

high growth rates followed down years in 2019 and 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19 on global spending in public relations services (Barrett, 2023).

A May 2023 estimate by PRovoke, which included smaller and newer firms outside of the top 250, put the size of the global PR agency industry at \$20 billion in 2022, up from \$18 billion in 2021 (Sudhaman, 2023).

Both publications noted particularly strong markets worldwide (besides the United States), including the world's second largest in China in addition to markets in Europe, India, and the Middle East.

ROLES AND FUNCTIONS FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS PROS

LO 1.3	Review roles and functions of PR professionals.
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As noted earlier, some organizations rely on PR professionals solely to “play defense,” to offset bad news or manage a crisis or major issue facing the organization. However, more enlightened organizations see the benefit of using PR staff and resources to “play offense” and enhance the reputation of the company, cause, or candidate.

What are the key roles PR professionals play in an organization? What are the key strategies and tactics they use? How do you get started and build a career in PR?

Roles

Let's first examine the various roles that PR professionals may take on to set the stage for a more in-depth discussion of strategies and tactics in subsequent chapters.

Writer

First and foremost, to be effective as a PR professional, you *must* be an accomplished writer, and you must continue working throughout your career to maintain the quality of your writing. To excel, you will need to be able to take complex or controversial subject matter and prepare news releases, statements, opinion pieces, and, occasionally, formal speeches and white papers for your clients or senior management team. In addition, your writing must not only be succinct and complete, but it must be persuasive. After all, your goal is to influence the audience and stimulate behavior (e.g., making a purchase, supporting a cause or candidate, or raising funds for a charity), so being persuasive, accurate, and honest is key.

Strategic Advisor

Good PR professionals become strategic resources to their company or client. They keep them abreast of current issues, monitor public opinion, and advise on marketplace developments. No communications plan occurs in a vacuum. Knowing what competitors are doing, how the public is feeling, and what government officials might do or say that impacts your organization is critical to developing your strategic plans and selecting tactics. To do this well, you will need to stay current on your company, industry, and overall business trends, with an eye on government and political leaders as well. You will also need to be comfortable with current PR strategies and tactics in order to advise your company on the best path to follow given the situation.

Marketing Communications Expert

Occasionally, the role of PR is to support product introductions or ongoing sales and marketing programs. This is most often the case with consumer product companies—sometimes referred to as **business-to-consumer (B-to-C) communications**. However, PR is increasingly being leveraged to boost sales and launch new products across many types of industries, including **business-to-business (B-to-B)** and **business-to-government (B-to-G)** situations.

This can take the form of news conferences or events to introduce new products, preparing testimonials and case studies, as well as posting content on social media platforms (e.g., TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, X [formerly known as Twitter], and LinkedIn) to create interest and conversation about the product or service. This has evolved to a practice referred to as **integrated marketing communications (IMC)**.

Crisis Manager

This is one of the most well-known and often glamorized roles for PR (e.g., *Scandal* and *The West Wing*), and most PR pros see it as the ultimate test of their abilities. In a crisis, something *big* has gone wrong: A disaster has occurred; negligence or discrimination has been discovered; a product is being recalled; or financial wrongdoing by management is uncovered. Your company is in the spotlight. The so-called “court of public opinion” is in session, and its judgments can be harsh and swift—especially in a 24/7 digital media world. Working under these circumstances

is challenging and exciting, but be aware that this work is very stressful, and the stakes are high. It is not for the inexperienced, unprepared, or timid.

Also, keep in mind that what people remember the most about a crisis is usually not the specific details but how well the company (and the PR team) handled the situation and responded to the issues. One need only look at the Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill, which occurred back in April 2010, to see what happens when a crisis is poorly managed. More people recall the dramatic underwater footage of oil pouring into the Gulf of Mexico, the damaged coastline, and stricken wildlife than remember what happened to cause the damage. But they have not forgotten the name of the company responsible, even 10 years later: BP. The same is true with recent banking industry scandals (Wells Fargo, 2016), airline accidents (Boeing Max 767 crashes, 2019) and cryptocurrency bankruptcies (FTX, 2022).



Images like this one, of a pelican slicked with oil after the Deepwater Horizon disaster, stick with people, as does the company responsible – in this case, BP.

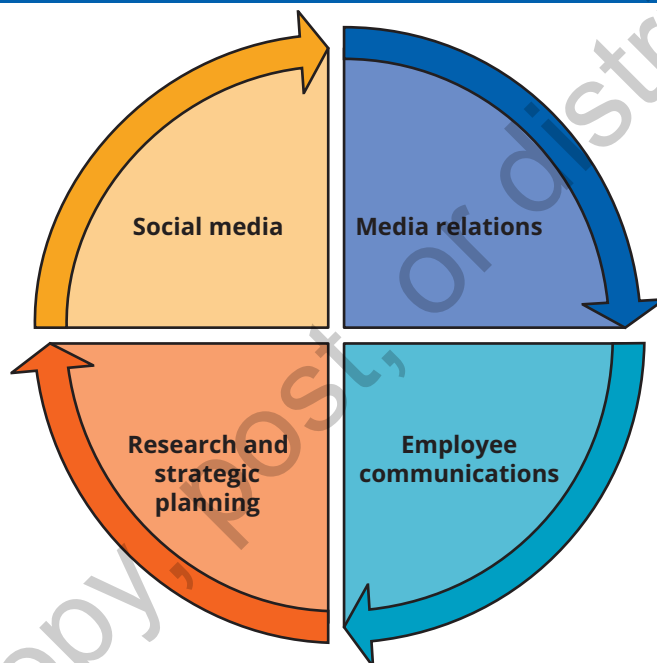
Daniel Beltra/MCT/Tribune News Service/via Getty Images

The Public Relations Tool Kit

As a PR professional, you will learn to deploy tools and tactics to accomplish your communications goals. While there are many skills you will develop in your career, there are basic ones you must master early on to be successful. Later in this text, in the chapters on key practice areas, there will be a more in-depth discussion of each of these. For now, we will summarize a critical few: media relations, employee communications, research and strategic planning, and social media (see Figure 1.1).

Let's examine each one separately.

FIGURE 1.1 ■ The Public Relations Tool Kit



Media Relations

Media relations and PR are often used interchangeably, especially by nonpractitioners. However, while they are related, they are not the same thing. Generally, media relations strategies are designed to accomplish one specific goal—to create or manage publicity.

Media relations can be described as a company's interactions (directly or through intermediaries) with editors, reporters, and journalists from national, local, specialty, and trade publications or online and broadcast outlets. The goal is to communicate a message, story, or information by convincing the journalist(s) it is newsworthy and deserves mention or focus in their publication or broadcast outlet.

On occasion, media relations can mean working with the media to avoid a "bad" story or "balance" one to minimize the damage. For example, a reporter may approach you with a story idea or tip that you know is based on a rumor or misleading information. Your role is to provide sufficient data and details to convince them that the story idea is flawed or incomplete and provide the information needed to support that conclusion. Sometimes, this means they will abandon the story; at other times, they will just include your company's point of view more

prominently and thereby minimize the “blame game.” Unfortunately, they may also ignore your efforts and push out a flawed story to meet a pressing deadline or compensate for staff reductions that have limited their ability to cover the news. In that case, you may need to find another outlet to get “your” story out into the marketplace.

Another component of media relations that is critical to your success is to be a liaison between your company or client and the media. Dana Perino, who served as White House Press Secretary to President George W. Bush (September 2007–January 2009) and is now a commentator on Fox News, explains it this way: “Your job (*in the White House*) is to represent the President to the media, as most people expect, but it is also to represent the media to the President—both roles are crucial to your success in the job” (D. Perino, personal communication, 2017). This sentiment speaks to the role as an advocate you will play between your client or company and the media as a media relations professional.

Employee Communications

Those of you whose career path leads you to work for a company or inside a large organization may find yourselves managing communications to your fellow employees. This can concern routine matters such as employee benefits and updates to company policy or involve more complex matters like communicating before, during, and after a merger, a crisis, or another major corporate event. Generally, employee communications involve creating newsletters, websites, videos, special purpose intranets, or frequently asked questions (FAQs) and preparing remarks for senior management to convey their vision or a new policy to employees.

However, communications can be a crucial factor in whether the benefits of a major organizational change (e.g., a merger) are achieved or not, research shows. It is estimated by Gagen Macdonald, a top management consulting firm, that up to 75% of mergers fail to deliver on the promises made the day the deal is announced. Often, one of the reasons cited for falling short is poor communication to the employees impacted by the transaction and lack of clarity among employees on the vision and goals going forward (Gagen MacDonald, 2015).

More recently, activism among employees who are encouraging their employers to take public stands on controversial issues (e.g., immigration, gender equality, discrimination) is on the rise. The firm Weber Shandwick, a popular thought leader on the topic of CEO activism, published a report titled “CEO, Corporate and Employee Activism” that documents this trend. The firm reports that “Nearly four in 10 employees (38%) report that they have spoken up to support or criticize their employers’ actions over a controversial issue that affects society” (Weber Shandwick, 2019, para. 2).

Research and Strategic Planning

In a time when documenting your results and proving business impact matters more and more, PR professionals need to develop their strategic planning and research capabilities. As such, a full chapter will be spent reviewing this topic in detail (see Chapter 5). Whether you conduct the research yourself or delegate it to a colleague or an outside firm, your plans will be much more likely to succeed if they are based on solid research. This can take the form of **secondary research** (reviewing already available materials) or **primary research** (e.g., conducting new surveys and/or focus groups).

In an ideal situation, your communications plan will benefit from both of these forms of research. Ironically, secondary research often precedes primary research in that the material/data to review already exists (secondary) and does not need to be designed, fielded, and the results evaluated (primary) before any insights are available.

Your research plan should include testing your message(s), identifying your target audience, and measuring progress toward the goals you have set. The up-front investment of time and resources on research will provide a strong foundation and greatly enhance the outcome of your plan (Stacks & Michaelson, 2010). The importance of the research and planning element was outlined well in the case presented at the beginning of the chapter. As we saw, the research undertaken by *Delta Airlines* included both secondary and primary research on employee and customer attitudes about vaccination. Both were key to developing their recommendations to respond.

As noted, there will be a more in-depth discussion of research and strategic planning in Chapters 5 and 6.

Social Media

The explosive growth in digital or social media as an alternative information source—particularly in the developing world—has dramatically increased the need for social media skills as a prerequisite for a career in public relations (Elliott, 2011; Perrin, 2015). Deirdre Breakenridge, a noted author and social media expert, suggests that “people in the PR industry need to become hybrid professionals” (Cision, 2012), combining traditional PR and cutting-edge social media skills.

Breakenridge recommends the following goals for young PR pros:

- Integrate traditional PR practices with digital and social communications while moving the best of both practices forward.
- Work outside of the PR “silo” and cross-functionally with marketing, including learning and applying marketing tactics.
- Collaborate with other departments, such as web/IT, sales, customer service, human resources, and so on.
- Be flexible and adaptable in an ever-changing global communications environment (Cision, 2012).



PR crises can quickly go viral online, as FIFA and the Spanish Football Association (RFEF) learned after Spain’s win in the 2023 FIFA World Cup. As news spread that Luis Rubiales, then president of RFEF, had kissed Spanish star player Jennifer Hermoso without her consent at a team celebration, people around the world protested in support of Hermoso.

Javier Vasquez/Europa Press News/via Getty Images

Given this trend, employers will be looking for professionals who are comfortable in this space and competent in leveraging this resource to accomplish business and communications goals. It is no longer sufficient to know how to use Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or LinkedIn for personal outreach. Employers are looking for staff who know how to work with social media to reach new customers, engage with them, drive sales and marketing programs, or impact public opinion.

In the corporate arena, this can include managing the corporate social media footprint, monitoring relevant online conversations, and developing and posting content on company-owned sites to enhance reputation and support business objectives.

In the nonprofit arena, social media is a very cost-efficient way to build followers and raise money for

operations and charitable activities, as well as activate and engage people to support a cause or issue.

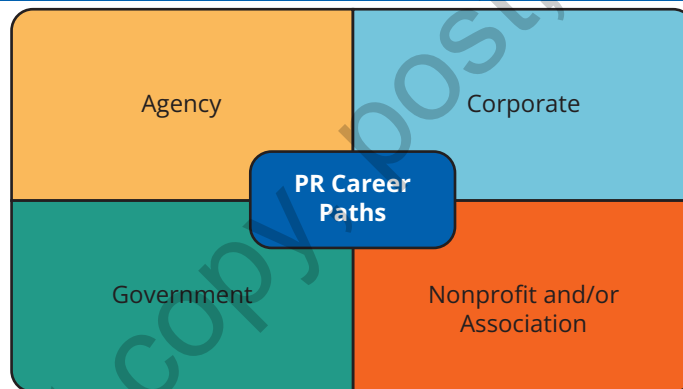
Finally, in government and politics, social media represents a direct communications channel to reach citizens and voters to inform and educate them about government services, policy, candidates, and—in the case of elections—serve as a get-out-the-vote weapon.

CAREER PATHS FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS: WHICH WAY IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

LO 1.4 Review career options in the field of PR.

While there are many variables and options, there are generally four paths your PR career might take: agency (such as a PR or consulting firm); corporate, in a communications staff role; government (e.g., local, state, or federal); or nonprofit organization (e.g., the Red Cross) or association (such as the National Retail Federation) staff work. Let's review each one individually and put them into perspective (see Figure 1.2).

FIGURE 1.2 ■ PR Career Paths



Agency

The path of working in an agency setting is one many PR professionals take, especially early in their careers when first learning their craft. Joining a PR agency as a young professional has many advantages. First and foremost is that the focus of the business is on public relations—that is what they do for clients every day. As such, you are in an environment where nearly everyone you work with is a PR professional. The opportunity to learn new tactics and strategies, benefit from a colleague's previous work, or bounce an idea off someone with more experience is actively encouraged. Some people make an entire career of working for an agency, rising to become practice leaders, office managing partners, or even part of the senior management team of a firm.

PR Profile: Erin Munley DeWaters—How I Started and Built My Career

Research shows millennials change jobs four times before the age of 32—I beat that average.

By the age of 32, I had held six jobs with titles ranging from “assistant” to “strategist” to “vice president.” I’ve done many types of communications—from digital to crisis—and helped launch an award-winning CSR program. I have had an interesting, challenging, and rewarding career so far. I joke that I must have good career karma, but I also know my success has been achieved by leveraging two things: education and opportunities.

Careers start with decisions about education. When you select a college, you start to create your network. Professors, counselors, and peers will be avenues to career opportunities. People you know from childhood, like friends of your parents, are also your initial network. That’s how my career started.

My mom had a friend whose daughter worked on Capitol Hill. Through that connection, I got an internship in a congressional office. When I graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I wanted to go back to DC, so I scoured the job boards online and applied for entry-level roles. I was open to all opportunities, and I encourage you to be, too.

My first job was in a nonprofit membership organization. It wasn’t a PR agency or well-known company, yet today, I do PR for a company that is part of a global retail group. So, when you’re evaluating roles, please know there is no “typical” career path.

Another major step in my career was graduate school. Two years after college, I got my master’s in Strategic PR at The George Washington University. I learned a ton, broadened my network, and built confidence. Based on that confidence, I’ve volunteered many times to take on new professional responsibilities so I could learn and gain experience.

Raising my hand helped me get the chance to launch a new CSR program for Food Lion, the southeastern U.S. regional grocery chain. There was a vacant position, and I stepped into a lead role on the project. Food Lion was looking to integrate PR and CSR, and that’s exactly what we did through “Food Lion Feeds.” It was the most rewarding experience of my career.

After that, I joined MetLife, where I managed PR for two of its U.S. divisions. MetLife’s reputation as a good corporate citizen is one of the things that drew me to the company.

Today, I’m the director of communications for the services company of Ahold Delhaize USA, the largest grocery retail group on the East Coast. In this role—among other things—I’ve helped Retail Business Services establish and grow our associate and community engagement program, RBS Cares. Today, it’s a foundational part of our culture and a key aspect of our business that keeps our associates here and draws new talent in.

I firmly believe that CSR isn’t a nice-to-do; it’s a must-do, and smart companies get that. An integrated associate engagement/PR/CSR strategy creates opportunities to tell stories, reach associates and consumers, and build a solid reputation. If you’re entering PR today, you’ll be at a significant advantage by understanding the intersection of these areas.

As you think about the road ahead, lean into your education and value the relationships it helps you create. Be open to opportunities. Raise your hand and learn. You’ll build competency and credibility, and they will be the foundation for your career path—wherever it takes you.



Photo courtesy of Erin Munley DeWaters.

Erin DeWaters is an “older millennial,” working wife and mom, and a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and The George Washington University. She serves as director of communications for Retail Business Services, the services company of leading grocery retail group, Ahold Delhaize USA.

Source: E. DeWaters, personal communication, 2017.

Barri Rafferty, CEO, Americas of Morrow Sodali, a global management and ESG consulting firm, got her start in the PR industry working at Cone Communications while in graduate school in Boston. She then moved to New York and experimented with a big agency (Burson-Marsteller), the corporate side (SlimFast), and at a small beauty boutique PR agency (Lippe Taylor). Rafferty decided that a big agency would provide her with a supportive environment as she started her family, so she joined Ketchum as a vice president and account supervisor in New York.

Working her way up over the years to her present position, Rafferty held several key roles at Ketchum, including group manager for the New York brand practice, associate director of the New York office, and director of the global brand marketing practice. She previously relocated to Atlanta to be director of that office and later became director of the Ketchum's South region. She came back to New York to serve as its office director. In 2012, Rafferty became CEO of North America, and in 2016, she was named worldwide president. Since her appointment in 2017 as the first woman to lead a global firm, several other major firms have followed suit and named female leaders. Rafferty went on to lead communications and public affairs for Wells Fargo and held the top job at Morrow Sodali (Americas).

After working in an agency for a few years, you might decide to move to an internal (or client-side) position in a government, corporate, or nonprofit setting. Others decide to start their own firms or set up shop as independent counselors to leverage the skills gained while working for a larger firm. Still others move into the academic arena to share their knowledge and experience with the next generation.

Corporate

For those PR professionals who pursue a career in a corporate setting, there are challenges and opportunities not found in other work settings. As a corporate PR professional, you would generally work in an organization's communications department, although it may have many different names depending on the nomenclature and culture of the company. Some companies place the function in the public relations office; others will use variations such as corporate communications, external affairs, corporate affairs, public affairs, and/or just communications or marketing.

Often the name of the department is dependent on the reporting relationship of the function. According to a study by USC Annenberg Center (Holmes, 2017a), in most companies, PR reports to marketing or the CEO, but in a few cases, it reports to others, including legal or human resources (HR). Reporting to the CEO is viewed as desirable because it positions the function as a key corporate department with direct access and interaction with top management (see Figure 1.3).

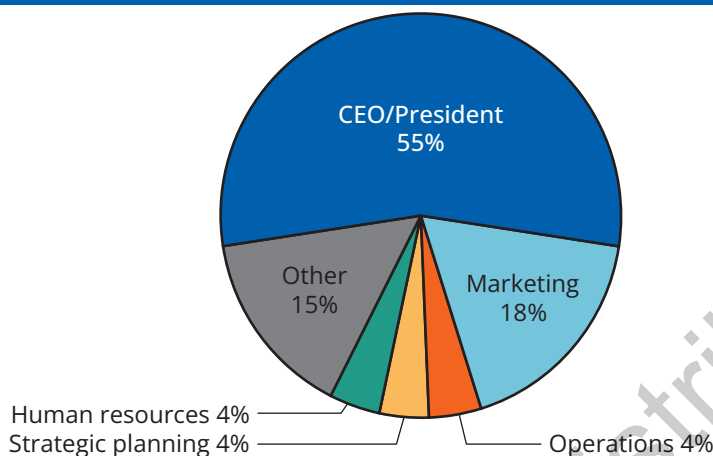
These individuals often have responsibility for writing the company's annual report to stockholders, news releases on quarterly financial results, announcements on mergers and acquisitions, and senior management changes. These are known as **material events**, and publicly traded companies are required to report them to the public in a timely manner.

A career in corporate PR can be challenging and rewarding, and the compensation and benefits are often quite good. As well, corporate PR positions can be more stable and less susceptible to client budget shifts or staffing changes that often impact agency work.



Barri Rafferty was the first woman to lead a global PR firm.

Photo courtesy of Barri Rafferty

FIGURE 1.3 ■ In-House Reporting Lines

Regardless of the reporting relationship, staff members in a corporate communications department are usually responsible for media relations, executive, internal (sometimes shared with HRO), and financial communications if the company has public shareholders and is listed on a stock exchange (e.g., the New York Stock Exchange or NASDAQ).

Credit: 2017 Global Communications Report Predicts Convergence of Marketing And PR, Paul Holmes, March 30, 2017. Reprinted with permission.

Research suggests that succeeding in a corporate role requires communications executives “to be knowledgeable about the business—from strategy to operations—so they are able to provide strategic input on issues that span business functions” (Arthur W. Page Society, 2017). The Page report quotes one anonymous CEO as suggesting, “I don’t think a healthy organization can do much without (communications) being involved in every part of the strategy and every part of the operation” (p. 2).

A cautionary note about this path: Unlike the agency world, PR teams are relatively small in most companies, and most likely, you will be one of only a few people who work on PR for your company. This can limit your internal network and be challenging because your fellow employees may not understand what you do and how it supports the company’s business objectives. As such, building and maintaining a good personal network of mentors and colleagues outside of your corporate employer is strongly recommended.

Government

Many professionals have long careers in a government communication role, working at the federal, state, or local level. In the federal government, the function is commonly referred to as **public affairs**. Most every cabinet department—from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—has a public affairs office. In larger departments with a national or international focus (like the U.S. State Department), there are often regional offices outside the United States where communications professionals interact with the global and local media and serve constituents (e.g., U.S. citizens and companies) locally.

Similarly, at the state, county, or city level, providing public information and public service are the driving forces and primary focus. Most locally elected officials (e.g., governor, county commissioner, or mayor) have a dedicated press secretary, who serves at the pleasure of the elected official. In most major city or state government departments, there is also a public information office. Staff in these offices is focused on responding to the media and the public, providing information about essential services, and responding in crisis or disaster situations. As with some of the other career paths noted here, the government PR professional (or public affairs officer) is usually part of a small group of dedicated professionals. As such, there are few others in the office who understand your role and can offer suggestions or advice, making your external network all the more important. Here again, having an outside network of colleagues—or participating in organizations such as the National Association of Government Communicators (NAGC)—is strongly advised.

Nonprofit and/or Association Public Relations

Nonprofit and association work is an increasingly popular path for young PR professionals, especially in the Washington, DC, area and in other major cities, where many national and global organizations are headquartered. However, success in this setting is also measured in membership growth and fundraising success, as well as traditional PR activities. Nonprofits such as the United Way, the Red Cross, and the World Wildlife Federation are focused on a key cause or issue, such as community service, disaster relief, or protecting endangered species or the environment. The PR professionals in this setting handle media relations and provide executive counsel as well as support ongoing fundraising efforts and membership communications and development.

Nonprofit company members frequently look to their association to monitor events and activity of the local, state, and federal government as well as advance the profession through research, training, and overall visibility. Often, these organizations take on the additional role of managing industrywide issues and crises on behalf of their members or assist member companies as they work their way through the situation.

Jeff Joseph was formerly senior vice president of communications and strategic relationships at the Consumer Technology Association (CTA), based in northern Virginia. According to the CTA website, the group “advocates for the entrepreneurs, technologists, and innovators who mold the future of the consumer technology industry” (J. Joseph, personal communication, 2017). The CTA (formerly the CEA—the Consumer Electronics Association) is best known as the host of the huge Consumer Electronics Show (CES) each year in Las Vegas, which draws thousands of tech suppliers and customers to see what’s new in technology and popular entertainment. “Association PR allows you to engage in a variety of PR disciplines. One moment you’re focused on public affairs. The next, media relations, or crisis communications. All while supporting a singular mission—to help grow the industry,” Joseph said. Currently, he serves as executive vice president at BCW’s (a global PR firm) Washington, DC, office.



PR professionals working for nonprofit firms such as United Way, which organizes charitable events like the annual Thanksgiving Project, handle media relations and support membership communications and development.

Jonathan Wiggs/The Boston Globe/via Getty Images

WRAP UP

In this chapter, you were introduced to the basic functions of PR: media relations, research, strategic planning and crisis management, and other foundations of strategic public relations. Now, it is time to apply that knowledge to a “real-world” business challenge.

Scenario Outcome

At the start of the chapter, when the “Protected Together, Connected Together” case was outlined, you were asked to think about how Delta should respond to an unprecedented global pandemic that disrupted daily lives and business for the airline and mostly every other industry. COVID-19 challenged employers, like Delta, on how to resume operations safely by convincing employees to get the new vaccine. This was made more difficult due to the prevalence of vaccine misinformation and a reluctance by many employees to get the initial shot and subsequent boosters.

At the outset, we noted that Delta’s goal was to get 75% of its employees to receive the vaccine by year-end 2021. This percentage was selected because it represented a threshold level for “herd immunity” of Delta employees, according to Delta’s health partners/advisors at the Mayo Clinic, Emory University Clinic, and others. Adding to the challenge, Delta determined at the outset that it would not mandate vaccination as a condition for continued employment, consistent with its culture.

EXECUTION

Let’s see how the company responded and what results it achieved. Delta’s communication team and advisors put together a comprehensive plan with three strategic approaches:

1. *Storytelling.* Delta aimed to win “Hearts” with compelling storytelling featuring peer employees who had gotten the vaccine in order to inspire others to do so as well.
2. *Education.* The company aimed to win “Minds” with print and visual content to leverage Delta’s medical experts and advisors and show high profile company leaders and internal stakeholders getting the vaccine.
3. *Analytics.* Throughout the program, Delta conducted surveys, focus groups, message testing, leadership training, and ongoing measurement and adjustment as needed to fine tune delivery of its key messages.

Specifically, the award winning (2022 PRSA Silver Anvil) campaign was rolled out in three phases: the Prepare, Educate, and Activate phases:

1. *Prepare.* Delta created and prepared multiple videos, FAQs, home mailers, and news updates on internal and external major developments (e.g., vaccine approvals).
2. *Educate.* Delta captured employee testimonials on vaccine trials and the post-vaccine experience and circulated them online and in print. The company conceived and implemented the “Protected Together, Connected Together” branding and campaign materials, hired a chief health officer (CHO) (a first for a U.S. airline), and held “office hours” and town hall meetings to provide employee access to the CHO and Delta’s medical staff.
3. *Activate.* The company shared media coverage of Delta’s CEO and other company leaders, created video testimonials (and kept them fresh and updated) of employees to share their vaccination experience, and leveraged home mailers, targeted emails, and meetings to share/update employees on vaccine availability and the creation of and schedule for Delta-based sites across the global enterprise.

RESULTS

As of March 2022, more than 95% of Delta’s 75,000 employees were vaccinated without a vaccine mandate in place. No other major employer had a similar record during this critical time (March 2020 to March 2022) for COVID-19 prevention.

The “Protected Together, Connected Together” campaign was essential in this achieving this overwhelming response. The communications team—and senior management of Delta—learned some valuable lessons in how to educate and motivate employees through listening, providing an open two-way dialogue and constant and transparent communication. As well, the importance of staying true to your corporate culture, mission, and values—especially in a crisis situation—was reinforced throughout the campaign.

Source: Adapted from PRSA. (2022). “Protected together, connected together”—A global employee vaccination campaign. <https://www.prsa.org/conferences-and-awards/awards/search-silver-anvil-case-studies>

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This initial chapter discussed the definitions of PR throughout history and the “official” definition from the PRSA, first developed in 2012. The chapter also examined the difference between PR and advertising, noting the credibility gap between what people read and see on the news versus paid advertisements. The impact of social media was addressed, with a focus on “sponsored” and “owned” content used to bridge the gap between “paid” and “earned” media.

In addition, the basic skills that PR professionals use in their work—including media relations, employee communications, research, and strategic planning—were reviewed. Finally, the chapter looked at the career paths a PR professional might follow.

As you move through the remainder of the text, there will be detailed chapters on these concepts as well as the areas of specialization for a career in this dynamic and exciting industry.

Think About It

Early in the chapter, you read about the perceptions of PR and people who work in the industry based on the research from USC and others on how popular culture (movies, television, etc.) have portrayed PR over the years. For this activity, watch an episode of *Scandal*, *Emily in Paris*, or some other film or TV show that prominently features the public relations industry. Consider forming a small work group and watch your selected media together.

Here is your task:

1. View the TV episode or film of your choice.
2. Discuss your thoughts and reactions to how it portrays PR.
3. Capture your notes from the discussion and share them with the class.
4. Brainstorm ideas to change the perception (if necessary).
5. Determine if you can (or feel you need to) improve the public’s understanding of PR.

Write Like a Pro

Assume you are on the PR team for a regional bank nearing its 150th anniversary. The bank serves both its economically challenged headquarters city and an affluent state in the northeastern United States. As such, the bank’s customers have a variety of challenges, including home

affordability, paying for college and health care, and caring for family members, such as senior citizens. Remember, as a bank your company's expertise in financial services lends itself more to certain challenges than others. How do you decide which ones to take on and which to leave for others? How do you leverage and engage your employees and customers?

1. Develop an outline of a plan (250 words) to celebrate the bank's anniversary, based on these suggestions.
2. Make sure to include tactics from PR (media relations and community events) and social responsibility initiatives (employee volunteers, contributions, or fundraising) into one comprehensive outline.

CASE STUDY: ALLSTATE FOUNDATION: RAISING AWARENESS AND FUNDS FOR VICTIMS

The issue of domestic violence has become a national phenomenon. Research indicates that one in four women will be a victim of domestic violence in her lifetime and that financial abuse occurs in 96% of those cases. Financial abuse (withholding funds, destroying credit, jeopardizing jobs) provides abusers with another way to control and punish their victims.

The Allstate Foundation first created the Purple Purse in 2010 to ignite a national conversation about domestic violence and financial abuse. It committed to an expanded "Purple Purse" program in 2014, including a fashion statement around the Purple Purse imagery, a social statement on a serious issue, and better financial support for the local organizations that victims depend on to rebuild their lives. The actress Kerry Washington served as the national spokesperson for the campaign from its inception.

According to the program's website, as of early 2024, the Allstate Foundation had invested over \$90 million in programming for domestic abuse survivors (Allstate Corporation, 2024).

Since its launch in 2010, Purple Purse, now the arm of the Allstate Foundation that focuses on relationship abuse, has expanded and added new services. Recently, the program has supported the development of an educational and training resource to help survivors of abuse improve their financial literacy.

Research and Strategy

The Allstate Foundation commissioned a 2014 national survey (*Silent Weapon: Domestic Violence and Financial Abuse*), which showed that two thirds of Americans believe domestic violence is a serious problem, while revealing that just over one in three has ever talked about it. Further, nearly eight in 10 said they were not familiar with financial abuse and considered it the least likely form of abuse to be recognized by others. In fact, 65% believed their own family or friends would not know if they were in a financially abusive relationship, and 70% said family or friends would not know how to help them. Strategies included media relations, social media, celebrity involvement, and fundraising challenges (Allstate Foundation Purple Purse, 2014).

Execution

The centerpiece of the program was a launch event held in New York City, timed to coincide with Fashion Week and featuring a purple purse designed by Kerry Washington. An Associated

Press exclusive interview with her was placed to break the story the morning of the announcement of the event, creating a cascade of media coverage. Washington also appeared in a public service announcement (PSA) about the “Purple Purse” program, conducted interviews with national media, engaged fans through her social media feeds, and introduced new audiences to the cause by showcasing her personally designed purple purse at numerous high-profile events during Fashion Week.

At the local level, the Allstate Foundation issued the Purple Purse Challenge to 140 nonprofits across the country. The goal was to raise money for domestic-violence survivors and the organizations that serve them. The challenge was launched through www.purplepurse.com, with \$650,000 in incentives from the Allstate Foundation. Each program partner company received a package of purple purses, purple purse charms, and other collateral to generate awareness and promote fundraising.

The Allstate Foundation delivered program kits internally to help company employees and allied Allstate agents involve their local communities in the campaign, thereby expanding the program’s impact.

To engage the Hispanic audience fully, the Allstate Foundation placed an exclusive on the Hispanic survey statistics with the international news agency Agencia EFE. A Spanish-language satellite media tour, audio news release, and a new Spanish-language site completed this outreach initiative and provided key information to an essential program audience.

Evaluation

In only one month in its first year, the Purple Purse Challenge raised nearly \$2.5 million to benefit financial empowerment services for survivors, a 614% increase from the revenues raised in 2013. More than half of all donations were at \$25 and under, demonstrating that this was truly a successful grassroots fundraising campaign. The progress in fundraising and assisting victims has steadily increased since then. The program resulted in more than 23,000 media placements through earned media and social platforms as well as through paid amplification, a 447% increase in program media results from 2013.

Earned broadcast placements included ABC’s *Good Morning America*, MSNBC’s *Morning Joe*, CNN, and E! *Extra* and *Access Hollywood*. Top print and online placements included stories in the Associated Press, WSJ.com, Huffington Post, CBSNews.com, Yahoo! Celebrity, TIME.com, and many more. Other print placements appeared in *People*, *Living*, *Ebony*, *ESPN The Magazine*, *Money*, *Martha Stewart Living*, *TIME*, and *Working Mother*.

Online, the Allstate Foundation Purple Purse became a continuing topic of conversation, with more than 13,500 #PurplePurse social posts across Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. On September 17, 2014, a few days after the Purple Purse Challenge program launch, Kerry Washington was trending on Facebook due to her involvement in the “Purple Purse” campaign.

Engage

- Explore the National Domestic Violence Hotline (<https://www.thehotline.org>) and Allstate Foundation (<https://www.allstatecorporation.com/the-allstate-foundation/relationship-abuse.aspx>) websites to see how they communicate with their various stakeholders.
- Do a google search for “controversial celebrity endorsements” and learn what can go wrong and what can be done.

Discuss

- The “Purple Purse” campaign dealt with a very sensitive and controversial topic. Do you think it is wise for the Allstate company to connect itself so visibly to this topic? What are the downsides of this approach for customers, employees, and the public?
- How do the issues of domestic violence and financial abuse connect or relate to the business of the Allstate insurance company?
- Is there a risk of tying your CSR campaign to a celebrity so closely? What if the celebrity gets into difficulty or has their own crisis? How does Allstate protect itself from any backlash?
- The case mentions special outreach to the Hispanic community. Why do you think this was a key part of the program?

Source: Adapted from PRSA. (2015). *Allstate foundation purple purse*. <https://apps.prsa.org/Awards/SilverAnvil/Search?pg=1&saYear=All&sakeyword=Purple+Purse&saCategory=&saIndustry=&saOutcome=>

KEY TERMS

Blogger	Influencer
Business-to-Business (B-to-B) Communications	Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC)
Business-to-Consumer (B-to-C) Communications	Material Events
Business-to-Government (B-to-G) Communications	Primary Research
Corporate reputation	Public Affairs
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	Public Company (Publicly Traded Company)
Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)	Publicist (also “Flack”)
	Reputation
	Secondary Research
	Stakeholders



THE BOSTON TEA PARTY.

Popperfoto/Popperfoto/via Getty Images

2

THE HISTORY OF MODERN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Do not copy, post, or distribute

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 Identify key developments in the modern history of PR.
- 2.2 Explain the growth of the PR agency business.
- 2.3 Summarize the challenges and opportunities for PR in the years to come.

Scenario: Belle Moskowitz: Pioneer and Innovator in Advocacy and Issues Management

Anyone who has ever visited New York City—or viewed its skyline—recognizes the Empire State Building.

The 102-story, art-deco style building in Midtown Manhattan features a world-famous Observatory, which has been featured in movies (e.g., *Sleepless in Seattle*, *Annie Hall*, and *King Kong*) and on television often since it opened on April 11, 1931, 12 days ahead of schedule. Without question, it is an iconic building with a rich history and serves as a lasting symbol of one of the world's great cities.

However, few people know the story of the landmark building's construction during the Great Depression (1929–1939) or the many challenges creating “the world's tallest building” posed for city leaders and developers. During the construction phase, when several other tall buildings were also going up in New York, residents were reportedly concerned about traffic and congestion, worker safety, and the long-term impact of a skyscraper on the city's quality of life.

Fewer still know the critical role played by Belle Moskowitz—an innovative public relations and advocacy professional—who advised the developer and helped to reassure the public during the building's construction. Her work helped pave the way for an international landmark and popular tourist attraction that attracts over 4 million visitors a year, according to the Empire State Building's website (esbnyc.com).

According to research by the Museum of Public Relations (2018), Moskowitz was a communications practitioner during the PR industry's Progressive Era (1890–1920). She began her career in the early 20th century as a social worker—not as a PR practitioner—focusing on social and education reform for young women.

However, in 1928, Moskowitz changed her career and became the first woman to serve as a political consultant and the first to open a PR firm (Publicity Associates) in New York. Soon, Moskowitz was highly visible in New York, working as campaign manager for Al Smith, a successful gubernatorial candidate who served four terms as governor beginning in 1918.

One of her first clients at Publicity Associates was the developer behind the Empire State Building. She helped manage communications during the planning and construction of the building, up to and including the grand opening on May 1, 1931 (Perry, 2009).

Her challenge was to manage public and community relations and address some misperceptions about the new building. For example, some citizens saw the new building as a symbol of hope and evidence of the United States' construction and engineering prowess. Others were concerned about the risks to workers and citizens during construction and the impact of a new skyscraper on life in the city after it was completed and open.

Put yourself in Belle Moskowitz's shoes. Think about what you would have recommended to offset New Yorkers' concerns and instead celebrate this project as a sign of hope and promise for the future of New York and the United States.

Develop your answers to the questions below as you read the chapter. Also, please remember the time period of this scenario is the early 20th century, so adjust your answers to the technology and media available at the time:

1. What tactics would you use to manage the issues and prevent a crisis?
2. How could the company be more open and responsive?
3. How would you minimize public concerns about safety and disruption?
4. How would this case be different today versus in the 1930s?



Constructed during the Great Depression, the Empire State Building was one of the first clients of PR pioneer Belle Moskowitz.

Science & Society Picture Library/SSPL/via Getty Images

This chapter will take the reader through a brief history of the public relations (PR) industry—with an emphasis on the “modern era” since it is most relevant to the profession as we know it today. In the pages that follow, you will learn about well-known industry pioneers like Ivy Lee, Edward Bernays, and Arthur W. Page, and some of the colorful figures in history—such as P. T. Barnum—all of whom who practiced early forms of PR to generate awareness for their businesses.

You will also read about other industry pioneers whose contributions are not as well-known. Reading about the contributions of these “hidden figures” in PR history will provide you with a more representative picture of the history and development of the profession. They may also provide you with role models you can relate to as you build your own career.

Later in the chapter, you will learn about the history of the PR agency business and how it has become a force in the industry and offers a rewarding career path for many practitioners. Many of the innovations and creative strategies commonly deployed by PR professionals (e.g., media tours, thought leadership, competitive intelligence) originated in PR agencies. Further, as we will outline later, the agency business is an excellent training ground for young professionals regardless of their ultimate career path in PR.

Finally, this chapter looks at some key trends—digital transformation, global PR, and social responsibility (SR)—that are impacting the future of the industry.

A HISTORY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE MODERN ERA

LO 2.1 Identify key developments in the modern history of PR.

The biggest challenge in providing a complete history of PR is this: Where does one start?

Do we begin with the storytelling of Plato and the ancient Greeks to teach philosophy? Or examine the communication tactics used by the Catholic Church to spread Christianity, beginning as early as the 1500s? Or should we begin with leadership communications by rulers in the Middle Ages and Renaissance to expand empires, build followers, and stabilize their positions?

After all, when viewed through the lens of influencing public opinion or driving change, we can see public relations elements at work in the Norman Conquest, the Crusades, and both the French and American Revolutions (Bates, 2006).

For example, when America was a British colony in the late 1700s, “media events” like the Boston Tea Party led by Sam Adams helped build support for the American Revolution, encouraging dissent and disagreement with British rule and taxes and other regulations.

As well, Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, an influential pamphlet on American independence, was an early example of PR designed to support activism. Finally, the *Federalist Papers*, authored by Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, were written to support ratification of the U.S. Constitution, much like the opinion pieces (“op-eds”) written and published today to influence public opinion.

Public Relations and Press Agency in the 1800s

As America expanded in the 18th century, PR moved from building support for American independence to more commercially focused activity. Driven by the dramatic expansion of daily newspapers and with entrepreneurs launching new businesses and/or promoting authors and celebrities, PR moved into what is referred to as the “Golden Age of Press Agency.”

The period saw the rise of the press agent, whose job it was to “hype” companies, products, entertainment, and “celebrities”—by almost any means necessary. The tactics were sometimes short on ethics and focused solely on achieving publicity. Exaggeration, lies, and outright fabrication became common practice among many of these “publicists,” along with free tickets, gifts, or other compensation to get reporters to write positively about their clients. Characters such as Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone, Annie Oakley, and Buffalo Bill were created, or their exploits exaggerated, to sell tickets, win votes, or get news coverage. Unfortunately, this approach to PR remains a common perception of the profession even today.

One of the best-known figures of these freewheeling times was P. T. Barnum—considered the Great American Showman—whose namesake circus and museum continued to operate long after his death. Many believe Barnum, who was reportedly the second millionaire in the United States, was the originator of the **publicity stunt**, which is a **press event** or activity created solely to get news coverage. Former Librarian of Congress Daniel Boorstin described these as “pseudo-events” (1992, p. 9) and suggested Barnum was the acknowledged master of this tactic.

As evidence of this, consider what P. T. Barnum once said: “Whatever your occupation, whatever your purpose, if you need the support of the public then take the steps necessary to let them know about it” (Quoteswise, n.d.).

Two of many examples of Barnum’s controversial “creativity” include Joice Heth, a woman enslaved by Barnum whom he promoted as the 161-year-old former nurse to George Washington, and the Feejee Mermaid, a stuffed half-monkey/half-fish creature. Both of these were exhibited at his American Museum in New York and drew big crowds, though activists of the time denounced some of his tactics, particularly his exploitation of Heth, on



P. T. Barnum is credited by some as the originator of the “press event” or “publicity stunt.” Posters advertised the sensational acts attendees would see at Barnum & Bailey’s “Greatest Show on Earth.”

The Strobridge Lith. Co.; archived in the Library of Congress Web Archives at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2002735827>

humanitarian grounds (Cervone, n.d.). Barnum knew that both controversy and curiosity sell, and he used that knowledge to draw people in to see if the hype was accurate. Once they were in the door, other exhibits and shows were there to entertain and educate, and the veracity of the original claims became less important (Barnum Museum, n.d.).

Kathy Maher, executive director of the Barnum Museum in Bridgeport, Connecticut (Barnum's adopted hometown where he once served as mayor), has studied his legacy and suggests that Barnum's contributions go beyond eccentric exhibits and bombast. His worldwide tours for General Tom Thumb, a singer, dancer, and actor with dwarfism, and his promotion of Jenny Lind, the "Swedish Nightingale," may be considered precursors to today's reality television and musical contest shows. As well, Barnum would often donate a portion of the proceeds of his shows and provide free passes to local charities to generate positive publicity—an early example of strategic philanthropy (SR). Maher writes:

Whether fact or fiction, the conclusion was less relevant than the experience or opportunity. Barnum was ingenious in presenting speculation within a world of curiosity. He offered a chance to explore the irrational, examine imaginative possibilities, and derive new opinions and truths. His pioneering spirit of promotion and his acumen for business transformed popular conceptions of the era, in turn defining many ideals of today. (K. Maher, personal communication, 2017)

A colorful character to be sure, Barnum deserves further study—and perhaps some reevaluation—for his significant contributions to the development of marketing and promotional PR and strategic philanthropy.

Railroads Drive Public Relations' Development

The railroad industry was a major factor in the growth and development of the United States. In the latter stages of the 19th century, the railroad industry initiated and used many PR tactics now seen as commonplace. These include distribution of pamphlets and materials promoting migration to the western United States; creating publicity and information offices in new market areas; and staging promotional "road shows" that traveled the country on railroad cars (naturally) and featured murals, artwork, and artifacts promoting the quality of life in the western United States. The more passengers and freight shipped west, the more revenue for the railroad companies that provided the transportation.

By all accounts, these tactics contributed to the swell of westward migration—with 5 million people resettling in the Midwest and more than 2 million farms being established. Andy Piasecki (2000), a lecturer at Queen Margaret College in Edinburgh, Scotland, and a PR historian, suggests that "none of this could have been achieved without complex communications strategies closely linked to business objectives." As the 1800s wound down, PR had begun yet another transformation, moving away from publicity for its own sake (e.g., Barnum and others) to more complex communications strategies designed to achieve specific business objectives. Looking back on this period, we can see that this focus on business objectives did not benefit everyone equally. The rights and status of Indigenous peoples in the West and the railroad workforce largely composed of people of color were not taken into consideration as would be expected of a responsible business in the present day.

Public Relations Confronts Social Issues

PR professionals also began to take on more serious social issues as the 20th century approached. Building on the work of late 19th-century activists like Ida B. Wells and John Muir, activists made significant contributions that paved the way for the **modern era of PR**.



The movement of public relations into social issues in the 20th century was built upon the work of 19th-century activists like Ida B. Wells (*left*) and John Muir (*right*).

Left: Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy Stock Photo; right: Underwood & Underwood; archived in the Library of Congress Web Archives at <https://tccn.loc.gov/2003663747>

Ida Wells was born into slavery and rose to adulthood to fight discrimination as a speaker, editor, and founder of an anti-segregation newspaper in Memphis. She was also a cofounder and early leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Lesser known is that in 1884, at the age of 22, Wells refused to move to the “colored section” when ordered to do so by a railroad conductor, many years before Rosa Parks became famous for a similar act on a bus in Alabama in 1955 (Hannah-Jones, 2017). Her story, and others like hers, are featured in the Smithsonian Institute’s Museum of African American History and Culture (<https://nmaahc.si.edu/>) on the Mall in Washington, DC, and online at The Museum of Public Relations (<https://www.prmuseum.org/>).

Like Wells, John Muir was an activist, though his focus was on preserving and protecting nature instead of civil rights and equality. John Muir was most active in the 1860s. During that time, he wrote books and magazine articles, gave speeches to engage U.S. citizens on conservation efforts, and led the creation of national parks across the country (National Park Service, n.d.). Muir helped found the Sierra Club, and his environmental activism helped preserve the Yosemite Valley, Sequoia National Park, and other wilderness areas for future generations. He was an early proponent of sustainability, and because of his efforts, the government and the business community came to exercise restraint in dealing with America’s natural resources. However, he is not without his detractors, some of whom have identified strains of racism in his remarks and writings about Indigenous and enslaved people in the United States (Associated Press, 2020).

Pioneers of Modern Public Relations

Most scholars agree that the pioneers of the modern style of PR were Ivy Lee, regarded as the originator of the *public relations counsel* concept; Edward Bernays, often referred to as the *father of modern public relations*; and Arthur Page, revered for his groundbreaking work as the *first corporate PR officer* at AT&T. These leaders took PR into the corporate boardroom, politics, and government. Through the work of these and other trailblazers, PR professionals began to take on major social issues and critical business challenges, moving well beyond the bombast of P. T. Barnum and the late 19th-century publicists.

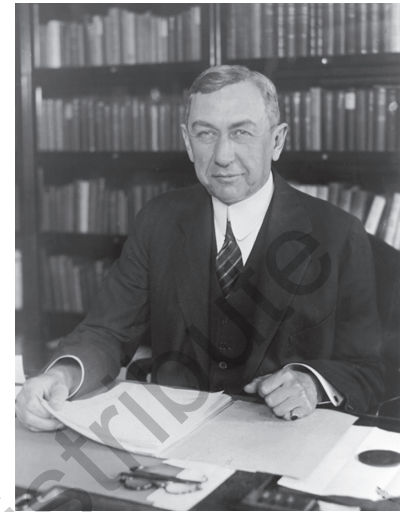
Ivy Lee

With the opening of one of the first PR consulting firms in 1904 in New York, Ivy Lee and his partner George Parker raised the bar for the PR industry, declaring themselves as “public relations counselors.” The firm was called Parker & Lee, and its major clients were the Pennsylvania Railroad, the Rockefeller family, and the American Tobacco Company, as well as some Hollywood studios and the New York subway system.

One of the firm’s first clients, the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, hired them to build support for a 5% rate hike. Ivy Lee developed a comprehensive PR campaign, reaching out

to the company's key stakeholders—the media, railroad employees, passengers, customers, and state and federal elected officials—as well as to college presidents, religious leaders, and other opinion leaders to help make the company's case and convince the government regulators to approve the increase (St. John, 2006). These efforts paid off. Public opposition declined, multiple outside groups supported the rate hike, and the federal government ultimately approved the 5% rate hike. This campaign is heralded as “a landmark in the history of advocacy public relations” (St. John, 2006, p. 225).

However, Lee was not without his detractors. While he is generally lauded for his pioneering role as a PR counsel, he was also accused of not being transparent regarding some clients. He was criticized for working for the American Russian Chamber of Commerce during the Stalin era and for promoting the German Dye Organization, later discovered to be an organization owned by the Nazi Party in Germany. Notwithstanding these issues, Lee clearly made major contributions to the practice of modern PR. Commenting on Lee's contributions, Fraser P. Seitel (2013) concluded that Lee, more than any other, brought the practice of PR into the 21st century.



Ivy Lee opened one of the first PR firms in New York in 1904. His successful campaign in support of a rate hike for the Pennsylvania Railroad is considered a landmark in the history of PR.

ullstein bild Dtl./ullstein bild/via Getty Images

Edward L. Bernays

Edward L. Bernays was another pivotal figure in the development of modern PR. He believed PR was most effective when social science and behavioral psychology were leveraged in campaigns to change behavior or shape public opinion (Bernays, 2015). Reflecting his family heritage as the nephew of Sigmund Freud, his PR model was based on using scientific persuasion techniques to advocate for a position or product. He was one of the first to emphasize identifying the target audience, conducting research to understand their views, and tailoring a message accordingly.

He detailed this view in his seminal book *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (2015), first published in 1923 and still read today by students and scholars of the discipline. Later in his career, Bernays was invited to join the faculty of New York University and taught one of the first courses on PR in the United States. He wrote,

The public relations counsel is the pleader to the public of a point of view. He acts in this capacity as a consultant both in interpreting the public to his client and in helping to interpret his client to the public. He helps to mold the action of his client as well as to mold public opinion. (Bernays, 2015, p. 57)

As his many campaigns demonstrate, Bernays was an innovator and a creative genius. Whether it was his work for the Ivory soap brand, when he created a children's soap carving contest that sold millions of bars of soap; the famous “Torches of Freedom” campaign for American Tobacco in 1929, in which he hired fashion models to smoke in public (then considered taboo for women) during New York's Easter parade; or his campaign for a “Hearty American Breakfast,” which included eggs and bacon (Hormel was his client), he was all about the “big idea” to accomplish your PR objectives (The Museum of Public Relations, n.d.).

According to Larry Tye (2002), the author of *Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Birth of Public Relations*, Bernays was “the first to demonstrate for future generations of PR people how powerful their profession could be in shaping America's economic, political, and cultural life.”



Doris Fleischman (left) played a key role in the career of her husband, Edward Bernays (right), who was one of the first PR professionals to use social science and behavioral psychology.

Bettmann/Bettmann/via Getty Images

Bernays's wife Doris E. Fleischman, a writer, feminist, and former editor of the *New York Tribune*, played a pivotal role in his work. She was his partner in life and in business and took on many responsibilities behind the scenes for clients, as well as writing and editing books and articles independently (Tye, 2002).

Among her other duties, Fleischman wrote the firm's newsletter for clients, which was called *Contact*. This publication explained the value of public relations and was vital to the firm's growth and success. Bernays often described his wife as his most valuable asset and characterized their relationship as a "twenty-four-hour-a-day-partnership" (Schroeder, 2015).

Bernays and Fleischman were also active in promoting causes and charities, pioneering the concept of **pro bono work** in PR, a still common form of social responsibility (SR).

Arthur W. Page

The philosophy and approach of Arthur W. Page, a career executive at AT&T and a pioneer in the development of corporate PR, is summed up in this statement:

All business in a democratic country begins with public permission and exists by public approval. If that is true, it follows that business should be cheerfully willing to tell the public what its policies are, what it is doing, and what it hopes to do. This seems practically a duty. (Arthur W. Page Center, 1932)

AT&T had a long history of pioneering the use of publicity to build its business, and Page was a pivotal figure in that effort (Block, n.d.).

In the early 1900s, AT&T hired the Publicity Bureau of Boston, one of the first PR agencies in the United States, to promote its products and services. One of the staff members on their account was James Ellsworth, whom the company later enticed to join them and create their first PR department at AT&T.

One day early in his career at the publishing company owned by his family, Page received a telephone call from Walter Gifford, the chief executive of AT&T. When the two met a few days later, Gifford asked Page if he would write a book about AT&T. Page declined, explaining that while it might be a nice ego boost for management, it wouldn't do the company any good. This advice reflected Page's belief that reputation was earned by actions, not just through publicity. As their conversation drew to a close, Gifford asked Page if he would like to put his ideas about communication and reputation management into practice at AT&T. Page agreed, but only if it would be in a policy-making position (Block, n.d.).

Arthur Page was hired in 1927 and served as the company's first vice president of PR and was appointed as a corporate officer. He remained with the company until his retirement in 1948. During his career, he was elected to the AT&T Board of Directors and later served on other corporate boards and was an advisor to several presidents of the United States. Years later, communications leaders from major companies, including AT&T, and global PR firms formed the Arthur W. Page Society (now called simply "Page") to further the study and practice of public relations as a management function (<https://page.org/>).

Other Innovators of Modern Public Relations

While Ivy Lee, Edward Bernays, and Arthur Page were towering figures in the development of modern PR practice, others who made significant contributions to the profession are not as widely known or celebrated. For example, innovators in the political and governmental communications arena include George Creel, Amos Kendall, Leone Baxter, and Elmer Davis (see Table 2.1).

NAME	PROFESSION	CONTRIBUTION
George Creel	Headed U.S. Committee on Public Information during WWI	Used PR to sell liberty bonds and build the Red Cross
Amos Kendall	First White House press secretary	Worked for President Andrew Jackson in the 1830s
Leone Baxter	Founded the first political consulting firm in the United States	Founded the firm in 1933 with partner Clem Whitaker and developed strategies for Republican candidates that are still used today
Elmer Davis	Conceived and promoted WWII victory gardens	Worked for President Franklin D. Roosevelt to encourage citizens to grow their own vegetables to help the war effort

George Creel's work on behalf of the World War I effort under President Woodrow Wilson was groundbreaking for several reasons. Among Creel's many accomplishments was the creation of the "Four Minute Men" group, who traveled the country speaking to the public about the war and supporting the president's positions and views (Creel, 1920). They worked under the supervision of the U.S. Committee on Public Information, which Creel led.

In those days, the local movie theater was a primary gathering spot for communities across the country—especially on the weekends. However, the projectors in these older theaters were manually operated, and the film canisters often had to be changed midmovie. During this downtime—usually about four minutes—speakers from the Committee would update moviegoers on current events and the progress of the war, thus the name "Four Minute Men." This effort is regarded as one of the first instances of a *speaking tour* to support a communications objective (Creel, 1920).

Notable PR pioneers in other sectors of the industry include Warren Cowan, whose firm Rogers and Cowan remains one of the leaders in *entertainment PR* today with a stable of global celebrities as clients, and Eleanor Lambert, a major figure in *fashion PR* who first introduced designers like Bill Blass and Calvin Klein and created the "Best Dressed List." Ofield Dukes, highlighted in this chapter's PR Profile box, was a key figure in political PR in the latter half of the 20th century.

PR Profile: Ofield Dukes

There were many firsts in the life of Ofield Dukes.

Dukes was described by Robert Johnson, founder of Black Entertainment Television (BET) and publisher of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines, as a "brilliant PR strategist." A former journalist, Dukes' milestone accomplishments include:

- His first job in Washington, DC, was at the U.S. Department of Labor, serving as the deputy director



Tom Allen/The Washington Post/via Getty Images

of Public Affairs of the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity (appointed by President Kennedy in 1961).

- He was the first African American PR professional to open an office at the National Press Building, located two blocks from the White House, in April of 1969. His early clients included Motown Records, Lever Brothers (now Unilever), and Anheuser-Busch.
- In 1971, he helped establish the Congressional Black Caucus, which today remains a leading voice on Capitol Hill for civil rights and equality.
- He was one of the first PR professionals to teach a course at Howard University's School of Communications on Public Relations (1971).
- In July of 2001, he was the first person of color to win the coveted Gold Anvil Award from the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) for his lifetime of achievement.

Yet for someone who advised presidents, including both Lyndon Johnson and Bill Clinton, and civil rights leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, John Lewis, and A. Phillip Randolph, Dukes was by all accounts a modest practitioner for whom "public relations was his passion and truth his guiding force," suggests his daughter, Roxi Trapp-Dukes Victorian in his autobiography (Dukes, 2017, p. 9).

Born in August 1932 in Rutledge, Alabama, a small community between Mobile and Montgomery, Dukes' parents were sharecroppers, making their living picking cotton on land owned by White landholders. In 1940, when he was six, his family joined the migration of southern Black Americans to the big cities of the North. His father found work at a Ford Motor Company factory in Detroit, and he and his mother and sisters moved there to be with him soon after.

After serving in the Army in Korea, he returned home to Michigan and entered Wayne State University to study journalism, graduating in 1958. As a freelance journalist and later editor at the *Michigan Chronicle*, a Black weekly newspaper, and in between as news director at WCHB, a Black-owned radio station, Dukes had a front-row seat for many of the major news stories of the day.

During his time as a reporter, he won several awards from the National Newspapers Publishers Association for his writing and caught the eye of senior advisors to President Lyndon B. Johnson. Soon after, he was invited to come to Washington to work in the Johnson-Humphrey administration. Dukes describes this experience in his autobiography, *Ofield: The Autobiography of Public Relations Man Ofield Dukes*, as a "significant change in my life and my professional identity" (Dukes, 2017). "Washington, DC, is the public relations capital of the world. Nothing happens in the city without a mixture of public relations and politics," he wrote.

Summing up his remarkable career, Ofield Dukes wrote this in the opening chapter of his autobiography:

During my 32 years in public relations, I had struggled, worked extra hard, with a passion to be excellent and the best I could be. I wanted to prove that a Colored man, a Negro, a Black, an African American professional could successfully operate in the mainstream of the public relations industry. (Dukes, 2017)

By all accounts, Dukes proved he could "operate" with the best of them in Washington, DC, and nationally. He was a pioneer among 20th-century PR practitioners and a mentor and role model to countless young African American scholars and PR professionals.

Source: Adapted from *Ofield: The Autobiography of Public Relations Man Ofield Dukes*, Rochelle L. Ford, PhD, and Rev. Unnia L. Pettus, PhD, PRMuseum Press, 2017.

GROWTH OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS AGENCY SECTOR

LO 2.2

Explain the growth of the PR agency business.

No review of the evolution of modern PR would be complete without a discussion of the PR agency business and the contributions of its early pioneers, including Harold Burson, Daniel J. Edelman, and John W. Hill. While many outstanding businesspeople have founded or now head up small and large PR firms or agencies, Burson, Edelman, and Hill are widely regarded as three innovators of the PR agency business.

Harold Burson

Regarded by his peers, clients, and current and former employees as a legend in the agency business, Harold Burson began his career in the 1940s as a journalist working for the Armed Forces Radio Network. In this capacity, he was assigned to cover the post–World War II International War Crimes Trial of Nazi officers and sympathizers in Nuremberg, Germany.

He founded his firm in 1953 with Bill Marsteller when they began working on the Rockwell Manufacturing account. In the early 1960s, they saw the potential of PR as a worldwide business and opened Burson-Marsteller's (B-M) first overseas office in Geneva, Switzerland. In 2018, the firm merged with Cohn & Wolfe and became known as BCW (McCormack, 2018).

PRWeek, citing a recent survey of industry leaders, described Harold Burson as one of “the 21st century’s most influential PR figures” (*PRWeek*, 2016). Throughout its history, B-M has been viewed as a great place to work and as a leader in crisis communications and reputation management. Most famous among its work in this arena was the Johnson & Johnson Tylenol poisoning case in 1982 (see the Case Study at the end of this chapter).

As with many major figures in the industry, B-M and Harold Burson are not without their critics. In the case of B-M, this was due to some controversial clients and assignments over the years. These include controversial government regimes in Nigeria, Argentina, and Indonesia; corporate clients facing crises like U.S. chemical company Union Carbide, after the Bhopal plant gas leak crisis in 1998; and the big tobacco companies during the long-running litigation over the harmful effects of second-hand smoke (Benady, 2014).

Burson’s thoughts on professional ethics and the firm’s work for controversial clients were noted in an obituary in *The Washington Post* following his death in 2020 at the age of 98:

We are in the business of changing and molding attitudes, and we aren’t successful unless we move the needle, get people to do something. But we are also a client’s conscience, and we have to do what is in the public interest. (Smith, 2020, para. 3)

His easygoing manner, years of experience, and extensive global contacts made Burson a beloved figure in the industry, and as such, his views on client service, staffing, and agency management were closely followed. Burson passed away in early 2020 at the age of 98. He was still going in to work a few days a week right up until the end of his life. Befitting his industry status, his memorial service in New York drew attendees from across the global PR industry.

Daniel J. Edelman

Dan Edelman founded his eponymous PR firm, Daniel J. Edelman, Inc., in 1952 and led its growth to become the world’s largest PR firm as ranked by fee income (PRovoke Media, 2021).

He began his career as a sports reporter in Poughkeepsie, New York, after World War II and became a news writer for CBS. Later, he served as PR director for the Toni Company (hair and beauty products) before founding his own firm in Chicago.

His initial focus was on marketing communications or PR to support sales and new production introductions. “He is credited by many as the father of marketing PR; he understood the potential of earned media to enhance the marketing message,” his son, Richard Edelman, noted in a memorial speech to the Arthur Page Society in 2014.

Indeed, Dan Edelman is credited with creating the idea of a **media tour**, during which company spokespeople travel to meet with local media and promote a product or service through events, interviews, and public appearances. One of the earliest versions of this tactic was for Toni. Edelman devised a plan to send six pairs of identical twins—one with a Toni home hair treatment and one with a salon treatment—on a tour of 72 cities to publicize the “Which Twin Has the Toni?” ad campaign (Wisner, 2012). The concept was very successful, earning extensive media coverage for the client, and media tours soon became commonplace across the PR industry. It is now a staple tactic used by PR pros to promote products and services.

As the firm grew, Edelman (as it is now known) expanded into all forms and disciplines of PR—corporate, public affairs, sustainability, employee communications, financial communications, social media, and, of course, marketing communications. As have the other global firms, Edelman has encountered criticism for some of its client work as it has grown. For example, in 2015 the firm faced controversy over advocating for climate change at the same time it represented several so-called “climate change deniers,” such as the American Petroleum Institute (API). Soon after, the firm resigned from its work for the API, which was a multimillion-dollar account (Edelman, 2015; Goldenberg, 2015).

Although Edelman is gone now, his son Richard, who is now chairman of the firm, and staffers worldwide believe that the spirit and philosophy of their founder is evident in their work with clients every day.

John W. Hill

John Hill, who established Hill & Knowlton (H&K) in 1933, began his career as a newspaper reporter, editor, and financial columnist. He established his first firm in 1927 in Cleveland, Ohio, and developed a clientele of banks, steel companies, and industrial companies operating in the midwestern United States. The firm became known as Hill & Knowlton in 1933, when Donald Knowlton, a former client, joined the firm as a partner. One year later, the partnership moved to New York to serve a major new client (the American Iron and Steel Institute [AISI]), and the beginnings of a major global firm were in place.

H&K was the first American PR firm to establish an office in Europe and, at its high point, was said to have “hung out its shingle” in hundreds of countries around the world. In building his firm with Knowlton, Hill was known for a simple business philosophy guided by “the essential requirements for PR: integrity and truth; soundness of policies, decisions, and acts, viewed in the light of the public interest and use of facts that are understandable, believable, and presented to the public with imagination” (PRSA New York, 2016).

The firm is now known as H+K Strategies, following its merger in 2011 with Public Strategies, and is led by Global Chair and Chief Executive Officer AnnaMaria DeSalva.

As with other major firms, H&K has represented controversial clients (e.g., Church of Scientology, the government of Kuwait, the tobacco industry). However, the firm has also been recognized for its outstanding work for clients, promoting diversity, and being one of the best places to work.

Insights: Hidden Figures and Pioneers in the Agency Field

Although not as widely known as Burson, Edelman, or Hill, other key figures in the PR agency field should also be recognized as pioneers. These include Joseph V. Baker, Lynne Choi Uyeda, Barbara Hunter, Muriel Fox, Moss Kendrix, Inez Kaiser, and Donald Padilla.

Joseph V. Baker

After working for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* as the first African American journalist (and also its city editor), in 1934 Baker opened the first Black-owned PR firm in the United States. He went on to acquire significant accounts from large corporations and became the first Black president of the Philadelphia PRSA chapter.

Lynne Choi Uyeda

Choi Uyeda was the first Asian American woman to open a PR firm in 1984, with offices in Los Angeles and San Francisco. The firm focused on helping brands reach the Asian American/Pacific Islander community. Her market approach was described in a recent *PR Daily* article as a three-step process: “1) find a “hole” in the market and fill it; 2) look beyond the words; and 3) be the change you want to see.” She recommended supporting this by “educating everyone” about your community and how to reach them in order to be successful (Lindberg, 2023).

Barbara Hunter

Hunter purchased the PR firm Dudley-Anderson-Yutzy (known as DAY) in the early 1960s along with her sister Jeanne Schoonover, becoming the first female owners/proprietors of a major PR firm. Over the years, the sisters made DAY into a force in consumer PR and marketing communications. Hunter founded a new firm, Hunter PR, when she was 65 years old. It’s still in operation today.

Muriel Fox

Fox was the first female PR executive at Carl Byoir & Associates. In 1966, she cofounded the National Organization for Women (NOW) with Betty Friedan. Fox also served for many years as NOW’s communications director, responsible for both media and government relations. In 1974, she founded NOW’s Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Moss Kendrix

An African American, Kendrix founded his own PR firm in Washington, DC, in 1944 to advise Coca-Cola and other major brands. He was instrumental in advising several large consumer product companies to stop using stereotypical images of African Americans like Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Little Black Sambo in their advertising and promotions.



MOSS HYLES KENDRIX
Educational Supervisor, N. Y. A.

Moss Kendrix

Moss H. Kendrix, November 1940 via
Wikimedia Commons

Inez Kaiser

In 1957, Kaiser opened a public relations firm in Kansas City, the first African American woman in the United States to do so. Her firm, whose clients included 7 Up, Lever Brothers (now Unilever), and Sears Roebuck, was also the first African American-owned business in Kansas City, Missouri. In the 1970s, Kaiser counseled the Nixon and Ford administrations on issues related to businesses owned by people of color.

Don Padilla

Don Padilla was a journalist prior to creating his own PR firm in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In 1961, he joined forces with David Speer to form what was to become one of the largest PR firms in the Midwest, Padilla and Speer (today known as Padilla). As a leader in the Latino community, Padilla was active throughout his life in supporting civic, education, and arts organizations in his Minneapolis hometown. In 1996 following his death, the PRSA Minneapolis chapter created the Padilla Community Excellence Award in his honor.

Source: Compiled with the assistance of Museum of PR, personal communications, 2019.

Public Relations Comes of Age: 1960–Present

Following the path set by these and other leaders, PR came of age in the 1960s and moved into an era of growth—both in the United States and around the world. Many experts attribute this to the booming economy in the post–World War II era, rapid advances in technology, and growth of the media—particularly television—as well as more active and more politically aware citizens.

Another key factor was the recognition by leaders in business, government, and nonprofit communities of the potential that PR offered to help their businesses or organizations prosper. They had witnessed firsthand the positive impact PR had in building support for the war effort and how Bernays, Lee, Page, and other leaders had helped businesses build awareness and market share.



The Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 inspired the creation of street murals across the United States, including this one in Seattle.

Chris Boswell/Alamy Stock Photo

The 1960s was also a period of social unrest and change, including the civil rights, anti-Vietnam War, gay rights, and women's liberation movements—all of which featured high-profile activists who were adept in working with the media and shaping public opinion.

More recent examples of activism that garnered significant media attention include the Women's March on Washington in January 2017, protests at the U.S. Supreme Court regarding abortion rights and marriage equality, and nationwide outrage and demonstrations after the death of George Floyd and others that sparked the Black Lives Matter movement.

Another stakeholder group that has made crucial contributions to the development of modern public relations is the LGBTQ+ community. Bob Witeck, a leading corporate counselor on the issues and interests of the LGTBQ+ community (see Chapter 11), suggests that this

group has made major contributions to advance diversity and inclusion in marketing and public relations practices:

LGBTQ+ leaders have long played a seminal role in public relations and media relations. While queer activists take to the streets, writers, publishers, and publicists take to the media to change attitudes and promote LGBTQ+ visibility. Pioneers like Frank Kameny, who organized the first protests in front of the White House to support gay rights and employment security in 1965; and Stonewall pioneer Mark Segal turned activism into publicity and journalism by founding and leading Philadelphia Gay News for decades. Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, America's leading LGBTQ+ civil rights groups also recruited some of the community's ablest and brightest communicators to unite their PR strategies to support civil rights priorities. These PR pros include David Smith, Cathy Renna, Mike Rogers, Gregory King, Rich Ferraro, and Cindi Creager. During these same decades, LGBTQ+ PR leaders and firms began to rise up, including the successful firms of Howard Bragman; Bob Witeck and Wes Combs; Scott Widmeyer; Ben Finzel; David Landis; and David Imre. These firms, and others like them, demonstrated that this community had much to offer and teach the PR industry. (R. Witeck, personal communication, 2024)

Focus of Public Relations Differs by Organization

PR takes on many forms and can have different focuses depending on the organization and its strategic priorities. For the global business community, media relations, research, planning, and digital transformation are crucial in understanding public opinion and identifying market opportunities. As the world's media has grown and shifted, the need for media relations specialists to accomplish corporate goals has also grown. Whether it is the mainstream business media (e.g., *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, or *Fortune* magazine); the major television networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) and/or cable news (e.g., CNN, MSNBC, etc.); or the publications covering every major trade from accounting to zoology, getting a firm's story told and defending its reputation are paramount.

For government agencies and elected officials, PR strategies and tactics are now critical tools in delivering information and government services to people more effectively. For elected officials, mounting election or reelection campaigns requires effective media and community outreach, deep research to understand public opinion, and efficient message delivery to reach voters.

Nonprofit organizations have benefited as well from strategic PR. Fundraising is more successful, and campaigns have more impact if they are guided or supported by PR. Working with the public and generating awareness via media coverage have become fundamental to a positive outcome. Currently, digital media and social media have "democratized" the process of reaching the public, reduced costs, and increased efficiency. As a result, most nonprofit organizations have an active social media presence and understand it must be constantly updated.

Issue-based activist organizations like Greenpeace or Occupy Wall Street and political causes like Rock the Vote or the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) also have made effective use of PR strategies to advance their agendas. These groups have leveraged social media to develop coalitions, attract donations, and put pressure on government leaders.

Social media drove the January 2017 Women's March on Washington, DC. The event drew close to a million protesters to the nation's capital and to cities and towns on all seven continents. The protest movement began simply with a Facebook post by a concerned woman in Hawaii and grew through "shares" and "likes" by others who felt disappointed by the results of the 2016 presidential election. After the event, all four of the women who led the effort were selected by *Time* magazine as among the 100 most influential people of 2016 (see Chapter 13).

In addition to social media, activist groups have made effective use of traditional PR tactics that include media relations, thought leadership, staged events, and original research to promote their causes and create awareness and conversation. These will be explored in greater detail in subsequent chapters (see Chapter 9 and Chapter 14).

THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

LO 2.3 Summarize the challenges and opportunities for PR in the years to come.

Looking ahead, what are the key trends to watch and understand to become valued as a strategic advisor to your clients, companies, and candidates? For the PR industry specifically, there are a few key issues worth examining: the dominance of digital media; an increased emphasis on measurement and return on investment (ROI); the integration of PR and marketing; the growth of CSR and a renewed focus on stakeholder communications; as well as the need to improve diversity and inclusion and embrace globalization.

Growth and Impact of Digital Media

Without question, digital media has changed the way traditional PR is performed and, in the process, raised management and clients' expectations for results. Recent research indicates that managing this trend is not an easy challenge. More people are online more often and consuming news and information, and fewer are getting their news from newspapers and cable and broadcast TV stations. Embracing digital media requires a whole new set of skills for today's (and tomorrow's) PR professionals.

According to the Pew Research Center (Gottfried, 2024), 83% of U.S. adults use at least one social media site (e.g., YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, X). This number has been relatively consistent over the past five years and is more than a tenfold increase in usage in the past 15 years (Perrin, 2015). Roughly half of American adults (49%) use social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, X), to get their news at least sometimes (Liedke & Wang, 2023).

Increased Emphasis on Measurement and Return on Investment (ROI)

With the advent of social media and the sophisticated measurement techniques that are now available, detailed measurement of PR campaigns has become more commonplace. For years, the PR industry relied on unscientific and barely defensible measurement tools, such as advertising value equivalency (AVE; e.g., what it would cost to purchase equivalent airtime or ad space in the news outlet covering your client) and/or tracking media impressions (calculations based on the circulation or viewership ratings of a media outlet). Management and clients have become sophisticated and are demanding measurement of specific outcomes (as opposed to outputs) and evidence of ROI for company resources allocated to PR activity.

Forrest Anderson, a leading PR research expert and founding member of the Institute for PR's Measurement Commission, explained, "The single most important thing people need to remember when measuring the impact of a communications program is their definition of impact, which should come from the initial, measurable objectives of the program" (2014, para. 1).

However, as Jo Ann Sweeney noted, "Often, clients want to dive in and measure before we are all clear what we are measuring and why" (Anderson, 2014, para. 2). Anderson agreed,

saying, “I believe this is why many PR efforts fail—they don’t have objectives to guide the strategies and tactics” (2014, para. 3).

In Chapter 5, this topic will be reviewed and discussed in greater detail.

Integration of Public Relations and Marketing

One of the more significant trends in recent years is the integration of marketing and product-related publicity into a field called integrated marketing communications (IMC). In this concept, PR, advertising, product development, and research professionals all work together to identify a need for a product, assess competitive activity or presence, identify and understand the target audience, and reach out to them via traditional and social media platforms.

The concept of IMC, as described by Phillip Kotler, a noted professor and author of several foundational books on marketing, involves coordinating the promotional elements to deliver a “clear, consistent, and compelling message about the organization and its products” (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). It calls for more than just developing a product, pricing it, and making it available to customers, he notes, “Companies must also communicate with current and prospective customers, and what they communicate should not be left to chance. All their communications efforts must be blended into a consistent and coordinated communications program” (Kotler & Gertner, 2002).

Growth of Corporate Social Responsibility and Stakeholder and Reputation Management

While the practice of CSR has come a long way since its inception in the 1970s, some companies are just now beginning to capitalize on the bottom-line benefits and reputation enhancement potential that strategic CSR can produce. John Browne (former CEO of BP) and Robin Nutall (Partner, McKinsey) suggest that companies may be failing to deliver on their CSR efforts due to poorly “integrated external engagement” (Browne & Nuttall, 2013).

“In practice, most companies have relied on three tools for external engagement: a full-time CSR team in the head office, some high-profile (but relatively cheap) initiatives, and a glossy annual review of progress,” write Browne and Nuttall (2013). In their view, more effort and resources are merited, given the positive returns of strategic CSR.

This is an area for focus and emphasis in the coming years, especially as stakeholders (publics with a “stake” in your company or client’s performance) demand attention. Many stakeholders (including employees, customers, shareholders, and competitors) are expecting leadership in CSR activities and social initiatives from business leaders. These expectations have grown along with the CSR field, and the role of PR professionals going forward will be paramount. See Chapter 9 for a more in-depth discussion of this emerging field of communications activity.

Need to Improve Diversity and Inclusion

PR professionals need to understand and reflect today’s diverse, multicultural society in both the workplace and the marketplace. The PR industry is well past the point where its lack of diversity can be excused. Today’s companies and PR firms should be actively seeking diversity in their employee base to more accurately reflect the marketplace.

According to research from Zippia.com on the demographics of the PR industry, 67% of employees are White; 11.9% are Hispanic; 10.0% are African American; 5.3% are Asian; and 0.7% are American Indian and Alaska Native (Zippia.com, 2023). This compares to the U.S. population, as reported in the 2020 U.S. Census, that is 13.6% Black, 19.1% Latino or Hispanic,

6.3% Asian American, and 1.3% American Indian and Alaska Native (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

Many PR industry groups—including PRSA, the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), the Page Society, and the PR Council—have recognized that to be successful the industry must have more employees who reflect all elements of society. As such, they are actively working on diversity, equity, and inclusion programs to address this critical issue.



A native of Colombia, Maria Cardona leads the multicultural and public affairs practices for the Dewey Square Group based in Washington, DC.

Alexander Tamargo/Getty Images Entertainment/via Getty Images

To be effective at delivering messages, motivating behavior, and influencing public opinion, PR professionals (at agencies and companies) must be more representative of the audiences they are trying to reach. Translating copy or messages into different languages or using different models or celebrities to endorse products is not sufficient. More work needs to be done in this important area.

Kimberley Goode, chief communications and social impact officer at BMO Financial, suggests: “The future of work in our profession will call for PR professionals to represent the diversity of the audiences we are trying to reach. Without diversity in every aspect of the profession, we won’t have the perspectives needed to activate all stakeholders and drive the results we want” (PRWeek, 2022, p. 47).

Some progress is being made in the global PR agency business to improve diversity. According to PRovoke Media, five of the top 15 global agencies (ranked by 2020 annual revenue) are led by women (PRovoke Media, 2021). The Omnicom PR Group, which is the parent company for Ketchum, Fleishman Hillard, Porter Novelli, and several other global and local PR/PA brands, is led by Chris Foster, a Black man.

However, progress in the C-suite and board rooms of major corporations is slow, and more work remains to be done. Corporate leaders are recognizing the value of diverse leadership teams. Says Sundar Pichai, CEO of Google, “A diverse mix of voices leads to better discussions, decisions, and outcomes for everyone” (Pichai, 2015).

Globalization

Given the rate of change globally and the ever-present nature of social media, the world is now a very small, interconnected place. Events—good or bad—in one part of the world become known, discussed, and debated around the globe in a matter of minutes. Each day brings another example of this new reality. There are no unique, “local” markets anymore, and PR professionals must be aware and capable of managing this reality. Cision, a media monitoring service and source of industry thought leadership, said in a recent post, “PR is facing challenges. But they’re NOT insurmountable,” and suggests that *glocalization*—thinking globally and acting locally—is the new normal (Mireles, 2014).

Stakeholders all over the world, and especially in key markets, expect a meaningful relationship with companies with whom they do business and/or who operate in their country. The media and public in these areas expect a culturally aware attitude and a level of transparency and accountability from corporations that was not the case a few years ago. The penalty for not meeting these requirements can be harsh—both in terms of sales and profits as well as reputation,

government support, or market acceptance. Strategic CSR, as we will learn later, is a key tool to meet this new global reality.

WRAP UP

In this chapter, you learned about the history of modern public relations. Now, it is time to apply that knowledge to the “real-world” business challenge laid out at the beginning of the chapter.

Scenario Outcome

At the beginning of this chapter, you were presented with a scenario and a challenge. We asked you to put yourself in the place of Belle Moskowitz and make recommendations to the developer of the Empire State Building on how to manage public relations for the building while it was being built in Midtown Manhattan.

Specifically, you were asked to think of how to (a) reassure the public and demonstrate that the project was moving ahead smoothly and safely and (b) alleviate public fears about accidents or disruption of city life once it was finished.

Several questions were suggested to guide your thinking as you read through the chapter:

1. What tactics would you use to manage the issues and prevent a crisis?
2. How could the company be more open and responsive?
3. How would you minimize public concerns about safety and disruption?
4. How would this case be different today versus in the 1930s?

As you discuss these questions with your classmates, consider how Moskowitz responded. What did she recommend?

In a breakthrough strategy for the time, Moskowitz convinced company management to be open to the media and the public throughout the construction phase of the project.

Specifically, she recommended the company provide frequent, scheduled access for the news media—news photographers in particular—to the construction site so they could take photographs to show the steady progress and highlight the skilled tradesmen doing the complex and challenging work.

One iconic photo from the time featured a group of construction workers casually seated on a steel beam high above the city, taking a lunch break. This photo has been published and featured in the media, on souvenirs, posters, and any number of promotional items since it was first published.

This groundbreaking tactic of providing access and transparency served to reassure the public that the workers were capable and safe, demonstrated the project was progressing nicely, and



This photo of workers taking a lunch break has become so iconic thanks in part to the work of Belle Moskowitz.

CBW/Alamy Stock Photo

helped build excitement (rather than concern) about the project's progress. Reportedly, the positive publicity and goodwill this strategy created lasted right up until the grand opening.

By being open and transparent, Moskowitz provided an early example of *strategic issues management* and how it can minimize—or even prevent—a crisis. We will delve deeper into this key topic in Chapter 12. For now, it is important to recognize the strategic thinking displayed by an early PR pioneer to facilitate the construction and development of an international landmark.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter covered a lot of topics, introduced some key figures, and summarized many years of history. You learned how communications has been a part of civilization as long as there have been different groups of people—rulers and subjects, activists and citizens, politicians and voters, and businesses and customers—trying to understand and influence each other.

You read short profiles of some of the well-known leaders of the modern era of PR, including Bernays, Lee, and Page, and you read about other PR professionals who have made major contributions. You then took an in-depth look at the PR agency business and its pioneers as well as others who made significant contributions to its growth.

The chapter closed with a look at the issues impacting PR in the future and the social issues that will challenge PR professionals throughout the rest of the 21st century.

Think About It

The issue of diversity and inclusion continues to be a challenge for the PR profession. Since the early 1900s, people of color and women have been underrepresented or underappreciated for their contributions. The problem is evident by the disconnect between the demographics of the U.S. population and the employment trends in the PR industry, as you read in an earlier section of the chapter.

Your challenge is to discuss this issue with others and develop proposals on how the PR industry can improve its diversity and inclusion performance. This might take the form of CSR initiatives between companies catering to people of color or women and/or affiliations with nonprofits such as the United Negro College Fund, La Raza, or the National Organization for Women to recruit and train young PR professionals.

Prepare a short memo listing your ideas and an outline of a plan of action to discuss in class to address this challenge.

Write Like a Pro

In this chapter, you read a lot about the history of PR, notably the modern era and some industry leaders whose contributions helped create the PR practices of today.

You were also introduced to The Museum of Public Relations, an organization in New York City that highlights the leaders of the early days of PR. The Museum of PR has an amazing collection of artifacts exhibited there from PR professionals—many of them people of color or women. It can be accessed online (www.prmuseum.org) and is a must visit for PR students, scholars, and practitioners when you are in New York.

Visit the site and prepare a short “backgrounder” that summarizes the work of a featured pioneer that appeals to you. The document should be suitable in style and format to one that could

be submitted to a reporter seeking coverage or a potential donor to encourage their interest in the museum and its mission.

A backgrounder is a short overview that provides information to encourage the reader to learn more about a given topic. In this case, you could describe the purpose and history of the Museum, as well as your chosen personality in detail, and then summarize the information and materials available to learn more. You should start by visiting the museum's website at www.prmuseum.org.

CASE STUDY: JOHNSON & JOHNSON'S TYLENOL CRISIS

As noted earlier in this chapter, Burson-Marsteller advised Johnson & Johnson during the now-famous Tylenol crisis—a case regarded as one of the classic historical examples of managing a crisis properly.

In the fall of 1982, an unidentified party opened random packages of Tylenol Extra-Strength already on store shelves and placed cyanide-laced capsules inside. The perpetrator(s) then resealed the containers and put them back on the shelves of several pharmacies and food stores in the Chicago area, where they were sold.

Seven people died after ingesting the poison capsules they thought were Tylenol. Johnson & Johnson, which makes Tylenol, had to explain why one of its most trusted products was killing people (Ten Berge, 1990).

Research and Strategy

Robert Andrews, assistant director for PR at Johnson & Johnson at the time, described early days of the crisis:

We got a call from a Chicago news reporter. He told us that the medical examiner there had just given a press conference—people were dying from poisoned Tylenol. He wanted our comment. As it was the first knowledge we had here in this department, we told him we knew nothing about it. In that first call, we learned more from the reporter than he did from us. (Ten Berge, 1990)

Johnson & Johnson Chair James Burke reacted to the media coverage by forming a seven-member strategy team, and he engaged their PR agency, Burson-Marsteller. The guidance from the CEO was, primary focus: “How do we protect the people?” and secondary focus: “How do we save this product?”

Execution

Johnson & Johnson, acting on the advice of its agency and internal team, moved ahead by stopping the production and advertising of Tylenol and withdrawing all Tylenol capsules from the store shelves in Chicago and the surrounding area. After finding two more contaminated bottles elsewhere, Johnson & Johnson ordered a national withdrawal of every capsule (Cutlip et al., 1994).

By withdrawing all Tylenol, Johnson & Johnson put the focus on public safety, even if it cost the company millions. The result of this brave decision was the view that the company was the victim and not responsible for the injuries that the crime created (Cutlip et al., 1994).

Subsequently, Johnson & Johnson announced the creation of new triple-safety-seal packaging with a press conference at the manufacturer's headquarters. In the process, Tylenol became the first in its industry to use tamper-resistant packaging (Ten Berge, 1990).

Evaluation

During and after the crisis, over 100,000 separate news stories ran on TV and in the press. A study by Johnson & Johnson afterwards found that "more than 90% of the American population had heard of the Chicago deaths due to cyanide-laced Tylenol within the first week of the crisis" (Kaplan, 2005).

Scholars and PR practitioners have come to recognize Johnson & Johnson's handling of the Tylenol crisis as one of the best examples of how a company should react to an organizational crisis. Ten Berge (1990) commented about the case in the following manner:

The Tylenol crisis is without a doubt the most exemplary case ever known in the history of crisis communications. Any business executive, who has ever stumbled into a public relations ambush, ought to appreciate the way Johnson & Johnson responded to the Tylenol poisonings. They have effectively demonstrated how major business has to handle a disaster. (p. 19)

Engage

- Explore Johnson & Johnson's CSR website at www.jnj.com/caring/citizenship-sustainability to see how it communicates what it's achieved.
- Drawing from its website, put together a list of the internal and external stakeholders touched by its current CSR activity. How are employees involved?

Discuss

- In the Tylenol poisoning case, there is no discussion of how the news and the company's response were communicated to Johnson & Johnson's employees. While this no doubt happened then, how would you recommend a company faced with a similar crisis now manage its internal messaging?
- Should the company have considered reworking the packaging and handling of all its over-the-counter medications? Or was this just a random incident?
- If you worked for a competitor of Johnson & Johnson, how might you have recommended your company respond? What, if anything, should your company have done to make sure it was not the next victim of this criminal behavior?

Source: Adapted from Crisis Communications Strategies. (n.d.). DoD joint course in communications. *University of Oklahoma*. <http://www.ou.edu.deptcomm/dodjss/groups/02C2>

KEY TERMS

Media Tour
Modern Era of PR

Press Event/Publicity Stunt
Pro Bono Work