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Public Relations and Framing the Message

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Traditionally, public relations (PR) professionals try to influence audiences, often by attempting to gain positive coverage in the news media. Social media like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Tumblr have shortened the path of communication; now PR pros can communicate directly with their audience—as can many of their famous clients. But entertainers, celebrities, and politicians who live by social media may also see their mistakes and foibles go viral on social media. Ashton Kutcher, Alec Baldwin, Amanda Bynes, Justin Bieber, and former congressman Anthony Weiner are among the celebrities who have damaged their images with ill-considered social media posts.

Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, best known by just her first name, is one of the world's most omnipresent media figures. She was the best-selling female artist of the first decade of the twenty-first century and, in 2013 and 2014, was among *Time* magazine's 100 most influential people in the world, listing her occupation as simply "Diva."¹ Since her marriage to Jay-Z, a rapper and one of music's wealthiest producers and entrepreneurs, the couple has achieved almost royalty status in American culture.

Kevin Mazur/WireImage for
Parkwood Entertainment/
Getty Images

Beyoncé's successful career is a testament to her great talent and a public relations strategy that assiduously controls everything about her iconic image. Emblematic of this is the "temperature-controlled digital-storage facility that contains virtually every existing photograph of her" at her midtown Manhattan office suite. Since 2005, she has also employed a "visual director" who has recorded thousands of hours of footage of her private life. All the digital media are being archived in her own special catalog from which she can immediately retrieve any public or private record of herself.²

But Beyoncé's career over the past few years demonstrates the difficulty of completely controlling one's image in a world in which social media puts publicity power in so many other hands. For example, social media were abuzz in early 2013 with rumors that Beyoncé lip-synced her performance at President Obama's second inauguration. In response to the charges, she admitted she did lip-sync, but simply to control the quality of the performance (she said she was a "perfectionist"). In a masterful public relations move, she delivered a powerful a cappella version of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at a Super Bowl press conference a week later, which put any criticism of her singing abilities to rest.³

A few weeks later, Beyoncé's 2013 Super Bowl halftime show was a hit, but then

Web sites like BuzzFeed and Gawker posted unflattering action photos of her performance—some of which her publicist asked BuzzFeed to remove (instead, the site printed the e-mail request and republished the photos).⁴ For her 2013 Mrs. Carter tour, Beyoncé instituted tighter rules, prohibiting professional photographers from covering her concerts and issuing images taken only by her official photographer. The *Guardian* newspaper suggested that this policy was in response to the unflattering Super Bowl photos.⁵

Beyoncé continues to exert tight control over her media exposure; when HBO released the documentary *Beyoncé: Life Is But a Dream*, its subject also served as the writer, director, and executive producer of the autobiographical project. Then, in December 2013, Beyoncé released her fifth album with no promotion except for a message to her eight million Instagram followers that said "Surprise!" along with a fifteen-second video that introduced a "visual album" with seventeen videos and fourteen songs. Buzz about the surprise release immediately took over both traditional and social media, and the album became a million-seller on iTunes in less than a week. In a press release, Beyoncé said, "I didn't want to release my music the way I've done it. I'm bored with that. I feel like I am able to speak directly to my fans."⁶

THE BEYONCÉ STORY ILLUSTRATES A MAJOR DIFFERENCE between advertising and public relations: Advertising is controlled publicity that a company or an individual buys; public relations attempts to secure favorable media publicity (which is more difficult to control) to promote a company or client.

 Visit **LaunchPad for Media & Culture** and use **LearningCurve** to review concepts from this chapter.

Public relations covers a wide array of practices, such as shaping the public image of a politician or celebrity, establishing or repairing communication between consumers and companies, and promoting government agencies and actions, especially during wartime. Broadly defined, **public relations** refers to the total communication strategy conducted by a person, a government, or an organization attempting to reach and persuade an audience to adopt a point of view.⁷ While public relations may sound very similar to advertising, which also seeks to persuade audiences, it is a different skill in a variety of ways. Advertising uses simple and fixed messages (e.g., “our appliance is the most efficient and affordable”) that are transmitted directly to the public through the purchase of ads. Public relations involves more complex messages that may evolve over time (e.g., a political campaign or a long-term strategy to dispel unfavorable reports about “fatty processed foods”) and that may be transmitted to the public indirectly, often through the news media.

The social and cultural impact of public relations has been immense. In its infancy, PR helped convince many American businesses of the value of nurturing the public, who became purchasers rather than producers of their own goods after the Industrial Revolution. PR set the tone for the corporate image-building that characterized the economic environment of the twentieth century and for the battles of organizations taking sides in today’s environmental, energy, and labor issues. Perhaps PR’s most significant effect, however, has been on the political process, in which individuals and organizations—on both the Right and the Left—hire spin doctors to shape their media images.

In this chapter, we will:

- Study the impact of public relations and the historical conditions that affected its development as a modern profession
- Look at nineteenth-century press agents and the role that railroad and utility companies played in developing corporate PR
- Consider the rise of modern PR, particularly the influences of former reporters Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays
- Explore the major practices and specialties of public relations
- Examine the reasons for the long-standing antagonism between journalists and members of the PR profession, and the social responsibilities of public relations in a democracy

As you read through this chapter, think about what knowledge you might already have about what public relations practitioners do, given that PR is an immensely powerful media industry and yet remains largely invisible. Can you think of a company or an organization, either national (like BP) or local (like your university or college), that might have engaged the help of a public relations team to handle a crisis? What did they do to make the public trust the organization more? When you see political campaign coverage, are you sometimes aware of the spin doctors who are responsible for making sure their candidate says or does the “right” thing at the “right” time in order to foster the most favorable public image that will gain the candidate the most votes? For more questions to help you understand the role of public relations in our lives, see “Questioning the Media” in the Chapter Review.

Early Developments in Public Relations

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States shifted to a consumer-oriented, industrial society, which fostered the development of new products and services as people moved to cities to find work. During this transformation from farm to factory, advertising and PR emerged as professions. While advertising drew attention and customers to new products, PR began in part to help businesses fend off increased scrutiny from the muckraking journalists and emerging labor unions of the time.⁸

The first PR practitioners were simply theatrical **press agents**: those who sought to advance a client's image through media exposure, primarily via stunts staged for newspapers. The advantages of these early PR techniques soon became obvious. For instance, press agents were used by people like Daniel Boone, who engineered various land-grab and real estate ventures, and Davy Crockett, who in addition to performing heroic exploits was also involved in the massacre of Native Americans. Such individuals often wanted press agents to repair and reshape their reputations as cherished frontier legends or as respectable candidates for public office.

P.T. Barnum and Buffalo Bill

The most notorious press agent of the nineteenth century was Phineas Taylor (P. T.) Barnum, who used gross exaggeration, fraudulent stories, and staged events to secure newspaper coverage for his clients, his American Museum, and later his circus. Barnum's circus, dubbed "The Greatest Show on Earth," included the "midget" General Tom Thumb, Swedish soprano Jenny Lind, Jumbo the Elephant, and Joice Heth (who Barnum claimed was the 161-year-old nurse of George Washington, but who was actually eighty when she died). These performers

▼ Public Relations and Framing the Message

Early Promotions through Media

In a career that spans the 1840s to the 1880s, theatrical agent P.T. Barnum employs early PR tactics to promote his many acts, including the Swedish soprano Jenny Lind and Jumbo, the twelve-foot-tall African elephant (pp. 416–417).

"Poison Ivy" Lee

After opening one of the first PR firms in New York in the first decade of the twentieth century, Lee, in 1914, works for the wealthy Rockefeller family, transforming the senior Rockefeller's reputation as a stingy curmudgeon into that of a child-loving philanthropist (pp. 419–420).

Walter Lippmann

In 1922, the newspaper columnist publishes the book *Public Opinion*, illustrating how slogans, stereotypes, and other media messages can shape public perception (p. 421).

1840

1860

1880

1900

1920



The Railroads

The PR practice of bribing reporters for positive news stories and deadheading (giving reporters free rail passes) reaches its height (p. 418).

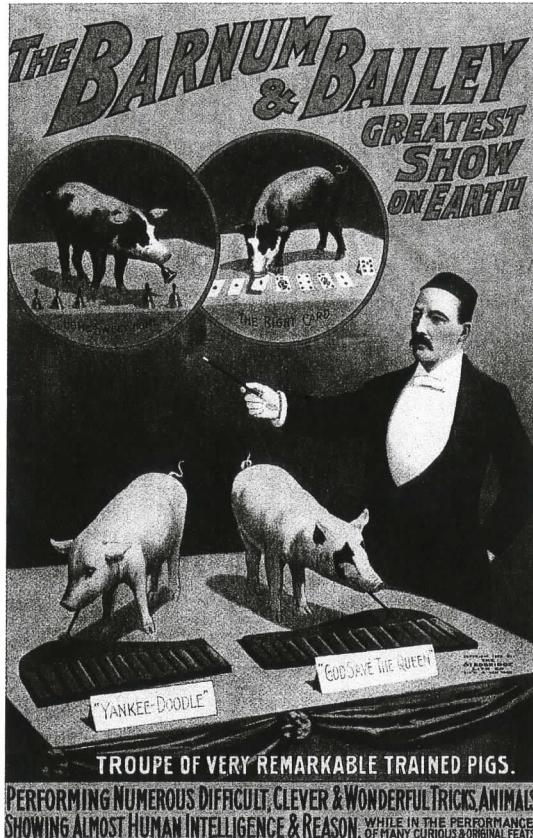


Edward Bernays

In 1923, Bernays teaches the first public relations course at New York University and writes the first PR textbook (p. 420).

became some of the earliest nationally known celebrities because of Barnum's skill in using the media for promotion. Decrying outright fraud and cheating, Barnum understood that his audiences liked to be tricked. In newspapers and on handbills, he later often revealed the strategies behind his more elaborate hoaxes.

From 1883 to 1916, William F. Cody, who once killed buffalo for the railroads, promoted himself and his traveling show: "Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World." Cody's troupe—which featured bedouins, Cossacks, and gauchos, as well as "cowboys and Indians"—re-created dramatic gunfights, the Civil War, and battles of the Old West. The show employed sharpshooter Annie Oakley and Lakota medicine man Sitting Bull, whose legends were partially shaped by Cody's nine press agents. These agents were led by John Burke, who successfully promoted the show for its entire thirty-four-year run. Burke was one of the first press agents to use a wide variety of media channels to generate publicity: promotional newspaper stories, magazine articles and ads, dime novels, theater marquees, poster art, and early films. Burke and Buffalo Bill shaped many of the lasting myths



The Advertising Archives

EARLY PUBLIC RELATIONS

Originally called "P.T. Barnum's Great Traveling Museum, Menagerie, Caravan, and Hippodrome," Barnum's circus merged with Bailey's circus in 1881 and again with the Ringling Bros. in 1919. Even with the ups and downs of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus over the decades, Barnum's original catchphrase, "The Greatest Show on Earth," endures to this day.



Tylenol Scare

After a criminal laces Tylenol capsules with cyanide in 1982, Johnson & Johnson responds with rapid and ethical PR crisis management, saving the Tylenol brand (pp. 432–433).

Video News Releases (VNRs)

Responding to citizen pressure, in 2005 the FCC mandates that the source of a VNR must be clearly disclosed when broadcast (p. 424).

1940

1960

1980

2000

2020

PRSA
To better its standing among the public and news media, the PR industry forms the Public Relations Society of America in 1948 to function as an internal watchdog group (p. 435).

Consumer Relations

In 1965, consumer activist Ralph Nader publishes *Unsafe at Any Speed*, a book that blasts the safety conditions of GM's Chevrolet Corvair. A consumer movement is ignited, and the PR industry develops new customer relations strategies (p. 429).

BP Oil Spill

A deadly explosion and gushing leak at a BP deep-sea oil well in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 becomes the largest U.S. oil spill ever and annihilates BP's effort to cultivate an environmentally friendly image (p. 432).



about rugged American individualism and frontier expansion that were later adopted by books, radio programs, and Hollywood films about the American West. Along with Barnum, they were among the first to use **publicity**—a type of PR communication that uses various media messages to spread information about a person, a corporation, an issue, or a policy—to elevate entertainment culture to an international level.

Big Business and Press Agents

As P. T. Barnum, Buffalo Bill, and John Burke demonstrated, utilizing the press brought with it enormous power to sway the public and to generate business. So it is not surprising that during the nineteenth century, America's largest industrial companies—particularly the railroads—also employed press agents to win favor in the court of public opinion.

The railroads began to use press agents to help them obtain federal funds. Initially, local businesses raised funds to finance the spread of rail service. Around 1850, however, the railroads began pushing for federal subsidies, complaining that local fund-raising efforts took too long. For example, Illinois Central was one of the first companies to use government *lobbyists* (people who try to influence the voting of lawmakers) to argue that railroad service between the North and the South was in the public interest and would ease tensions, unite the two regions, and prevent a war.

The railroad press agents successfully gained government support by developing some of the earliest publicity tactics. Their first strategy was simply to buy favorable news stories about rail travel from newspapers through direct bribes. Another practice was to engage in *deadheading*—giving reporters free rail passes with the tacit understanding that they would write glowing reports about rail travel. Eventually, wealthy railroads received the federal subsidies they wanted and increased their profits, while the American public shouldered much of the financial burden of rail expansion.

Having obtained construction subsidies, the larger rail companies turned their attention to bigger game—persuading the government to control rates and reduce competition, especially from smaller, aggressive regional lines. Railroad lobbyists argued that federal support would lead to improved service and guaranteed quality because the government would be keeping a close watch. These lobbying efforts, accompanied by favorable publicity, led to passage of the Interstate Commerce Act in 1887, the first federal law to regulate private industry, which required railroads to publicize their shipping rates, banned special lower rates to certain freights or passengers, and established a commission to oversee enforcement of the law.⁹ Historians have argued that, ironically, the PR campaign's success actually led to the decline of the railroads: Artificially maintained higher rates and burdensome government regulations forced smaller firms out of business and eventually drove many customers to other modes of transportation.

Along with the railroads, utility companies such as Chicago Edison and AT&T used PR strategies in the late nineteenth century to derail competition and eventually attain monopoly status. In fact, AT&T's PR and lobbying efforts were so effective that they eliminated all telephone competition—with the government's blessing—until the 1980s. In addition to buying the votes of key lawmakers, the utilities hired third-party editorial services, which sent favorable articles about utilities to newspapers, assigned company managers to become leaders in community groups, produced ghostwritten articles (often using the names of prominent leaders and members of women's social groups, who were flattered to see their names in print), and influenced textbook authors to write histories favorable to the utilities.¹⁰ The tactics of the 1880s and 1890s, however, would haunt public relations as it struggled to become a respected profession.

The Birth of Modern Public Relations

By the first decade of the twentieth century, reporters and muckraking journalists were investigating the promotional practices behind many companies. As an informed citizenry paid more



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IT'S GREAT TO BE A NEW YORKER

Elevated Express
Published now and then by the Interborough Rapid Transit Company

Our Men
Know
Their Jobs

Always
Dependable

VOLUME VI OCTOBER NUMBER 27

Your Children and you
will enjoy seeing
the thousand and
one wonders in the
Museum of Natural History

The Subway Station at 79½ Street
is only 2½ Blocks away

Take the
West Side
Elevated to
81st Street

Interborough Rapid Transit Co.

Photo courtesy of Princeton University. Reprinted by permission.

attention, it became more difficult for large firms to fool the press and mislead the public. With the rise of the middle class, increasing literacy among the working classes, and the spread of information through print media, democratic ideals began to threaten the established order of business and politics—and the elite groups who managed them. Two pioneers of public relations—Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays—emerged in this atmosphere to popularize an approach that emphasized shaping the interpretation of facts and “engineering consent.”

Ivy Ledbetter Lee

Most nineteenth-century corporations and manufacturers cared little about public sentiment. By the early 1900s, though, executives had realized that their companies could sell more products if they were associated with positive public images and values. Into this public space stepped Ivy Ledbetter Lee, considered one of the founders of modern public relations. Lee understood that the public’s attitude toward big corporations had changed. He counseled his corporate clients that honesty and directness were better PR devices than the deceptive practices of the nineteenth century, which had fostered suspicion and an anti-big-business sentiment.

A minister’s son, an economics student at Princeton University, and a former reporter, Lee opened one of the first PR firms in the early 1900s with George Park. Lee quit the firm in 1906 to work for the Pennsylvania Railroad, which, following a rail accident, hired him to help downplay unfavorable publicity. Lee’s advice, however, was that Penn Railroad admit its mistake, vow to do better, and let newspapers in on the story. These suggestions ran counter to the then standard practice of hiring press agents to manipulate the media, yet Lee argued that an open relationship between business and the press would lead to a more favorable public image. In the end, Penn and subsequent clients, notably John D. Rockefeller, adopted Lee’s successful strategies.

By the 1880s, Rockefeller controlled 90 percent of the nation’s oil industry and suffered from periodic image problems, particularly after Ida Tarbell’s powerful muckraking series about the ruthless business tactics practiced by Rockefeller and his Standard Oil Company appeared in *McClure’s Magazine* in 1904. The Rockefeller and Standard Oil reputations reached a low point in April 1914, when tactics to stop union organizing erupted in tragedy at a coal

IVY LEE, a founding father of public relations (above), did more than just crisis work with large companies and business magnates. His PR work also included clients like transportation companies in New York City (above right) and aviator Charles Lindbergh.

company in Ludlow, Colorado. During a violent strike, fifty-three workers and their family members died, including thirteen women and children.

Lee was hired to contain the damaging publicity fallout. He immediately distributed a series of “fact” sheets to the press, telling the corporate side of the story and discrediting the tactics of the United Mine Workers, who had organized the strike. As he had done for Penn Railroad, Lee also brought in the press and staged photo opportunities. John D. Rockefeller Jr., who now ran the company, donned overalls and a miner’s helmet and posed with the families of workers and union leaders. This was probably the first use of a PR campaign in a labor-versus-management dispute. Over the years, Lee completely transformed the wealthy family’s image, urging the discreet Rockefellers to publicize their charitable work. To improve his image, the senior Rockefeller took to handing out dimes to children wherever he went—a strategic ritual that historians attribute to Lee.

Called “Poison Ivy” by corporate foes and critics within the press, Lee had a complex understanding of facts. For Lee, facts were elusive and malleable, begging to be forged and shaped. “Since crowds do not reason,” he noted in 1917, “they can only be organized and stimulated through symbols and phrases.”¹¹ In the Ludlow case, for instance, Lee noted that the women and children who died while retreating from the charging company-backed militia had overturned a stove, which caught fire and caused their deaths. One of his PR fact sheets implied that they had, in part, been victims of their own carelessness.

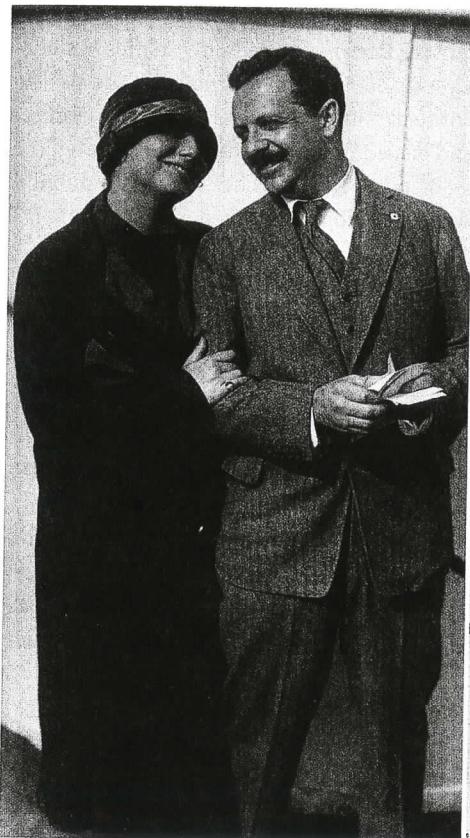
Edward Bernays

The nephew of Sigmund Freud, former reporter Edward Bernays inherited the public relations mantle from Ivy Lee. Beginning in 1919, when he opened his own office, Bernays was the first person to apply the findings of psychology and sociology to public relations, referring to himself as a “public relations counselor” rather than a “publicity agent.” Over the years, Bernays’s client list included General Electric, the American Tobacco Company, General Motors, *Good Housekeeping* and *Time* magazines, Procter & Gamble, RCA, the government of India, the city of Vienna, and President Coolidge.

Bernays also worked for the Committee on Public Information (CPI) during World War I, developing propaganda that supported America’s entry into that conflict and promoting the image of President Woodrow Wilson as a peacemaker. Both efforts were among the first full-scale governmental attempts to mobilize public opinion. In addition, Bernays made key contributions to public relations education, teaching the first class called “public relations”—at New York University in 1923—and writing the field’s first textbook, *Crystallizing Public Opinion*. For many years, his definition of PR was the standard: “Public relations is the attempt, by information, persuasion, and adjustment, to engineer public support for an activity, cause, movement, or institution.”¹²

In the 1920s, Bernays was hired by the American Tobacco Company to develop a campaign to make smoking more publicly acceptable for women (similar campaigns are under way today in countries like China). Among other strategies, Bernays staged an event: placing women smokers in New York’s 1929 Easter parade. He labeled cigarettes “torches of freedom” and encouraged women to smoke as a symbol of their newly acquired suffrage and independence from men. He also asked the women he placed in the parade to contact newspaper and newsreel companies in advance—to announce their symbolic protest. The campaign received plenty of free publicity from newspapers and magazines. Within weeks of the parade, men-only smoking rooms in New York theaters began opening up to women.

Through much of his writing, Bernays suggested that emerging freedoms threatened the established hierarchical order. He thought it was important for experts and leaders to control the direction of American society: “The duty of the higher strata of society—the cultivated, the learned, the expert, the intellectual—is therefore clear. They must inject moral and spiritual motives into public opinion.”¹³ For the cultural elite to maintain order and control, they would have to win the consent of the larger public. As a result, he described the shaping of public



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EDWARD BERNAYS with his business partner and wife, Doris Fleischman (left). Bernays worked on behalf of a client, the American Tobacco Company, to make smoking socially acceptable for women. For one of American Tobacco's brands, Lucky Strike, they were also asked to change public attitudes toward the color green. (Women weren't buying the brand because surveys indicated that the forest green package clashed with their wardrobes.) Bernays and Fleischman organized events such as green fashion shows and sold the idea of a new trend in green to the press. By 1934, green had become the fashion color of the season, making Lucky Strike cigarettes the perfect accessory for the female smoker. Interestingly, Bernays forbade his own wife to smoke, flushing her cigarettes down the toilet and calling smoking a nasty habit.

opinion through PR as the “engineering of consent.” Like Ivy Lee, Bernays thought that public opinion was malleable and not always rational: In the hands of the right experts, leaders, and PR counselors, public opinion could be shaped into forms people could rally behind.¹⁴ However, journalists like Walter Lippmann, who wrote the famous book *Public Opinion* in 1922, worried that PR professionals with hidden agendas, rather than journalists with professional detachment, held too much power over American public opinion.

Throughout Bernays’s most active years, his business partner and later his wife, Doris Fleischman, worked with him on many of his campaigns as a researcher and coauthor. Beginning in the 1920s, she was one of the first women to work in public relations, and she introduced PR to America’s most powerful leaders through a pamphlet she edited called *Contact*. Because she opened up the profession to women from its inception, PR emerged as one of the few professions—apart from teaching and nursing—accessible to women who chose to work outside the home at that time. Today, women outnumber men by more than three to one in the profession.

The Practice of Public Relations

Today, there are more than seven thousand PR firms in the United States, plus thousands of additional PR departments within corporate, government, and nonprofit organizations.¹⁵ Since the 1980s, the formal study of public relations has grown significantly at colleges and

universities. By 2014, the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) had more than eleven thousand members and over three hundred chapters in colleges and universities. As certified PR programs have expanded (often requiring courses or a minor in journalism), the profession has relied less and less on its traditional practice of recruiting journalists for its workforce. At the same time, new courses in professional ethics and issues management have expanded the responsibility of future practitioners. In this section, we discuss the differences between public relations agencies and in-house PR services and the various practices involved in performing PR.

Approaches to Organized Public Relations

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) offers this simple and useful definition of PR: “Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other.” To carry out this mutual communication process, the PR industry uses two approaches. First, there are independent PR agencies whose sole job is to provide clients with PR services. Second, most companies, which may or may not also hire independent PR firms, maintain their own in-house PR staffs to handle routine tasks, such as writing press releases, managing various media requests, staging special events, and dealing with internal and external publics.

Many large PR firms are owned by, or are affiliated with, multinational communications holding companies, such as Publicis, Omnicom, WPP, and Interpublic (see Table 12.1). Three of the largest PR agencies—Burson-Marsteller, Hill+Knowlton Strategies, and Ogilvy Public Relations—generated part of the \$17.2 billion in revenue earned by their parent corporation, the WPP Group, in 2013. Founded in 1953, Burson-Marsteller has 158 offices and affiliate partners in 110 countries and lists Facebook, IKEA, Coca-Cola, Ford, Sony, and the United Arab Emirates among its clients. Hill+Knowlton, founded in 1927, has 90 offices in 52 countries and includes Johnson & Johnson, Nestlé, Proctor & Gamble, Canon, Splenda, and Latvia on its client list. Most independent PR firms are smaller and are operated locally or regionally. New York-based Edelman, the largest independent firm, is an exception, with global operations and clients like Starbucks, Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard, Samsung, and Unilever.

In contrast to these external agencies, most PR work is done in-house at companies and organizations. Although America’s largest companies typically retain external PR firms, almost every company involved in the manufacturing and service industries has an in-house PR department. Such departments are also a vital part of many professional organizations, such as the American Medical Association, the AFL-CIO, and the National Association of Broadcasters, as well as large nonprofit organizations, such as the American Cancer Society, the Arthritis Foundation, and most universities and colleges.

TABLE 12.1

THE TOP 10 PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS, 2013 (BY WORLDWIDE REVENUE, IN MILLIONS OF U.S. DOLLARS)

Data from: “CRM/Direct and PR,” Advertising Age, April 28, 2014, p. 31.



Rank	Agency	Parent Firm	Headquarters	Revenue
1	Edelman	Independent	New York/Chicago	\$741
2	Weber Shandwick	Interpublic	New York	\$567
3	Fleishman-Hillard	Omnicom	St. Louis	\$551
4	MSL Group	Publicis	Paris	\$501
5	Burson-Marsteller	WPP	New York	\$466
6	Ketchum	Omnicom	New York	\$464
7	Hill+Knowlton Strategies	WPP	New York	\$390
8	Ogilvy Public Relations	WPP	New York	\$296
9	BlueDigital	BlueFocus Communication Group	Beijing	\$271
10	Brunswick Group	Independent	London	\$231

Performing Public Relations

Public relations, like advertising, pays careful attention to the needs of its clients—politicians, small businesses, industries, and nonprofit organizations—and to the perspectives of its targeted audiences: consumers and the general public, company employees, shareholders, media organizations, government agencies, and community and industry leaders. To do so, PR involves providing a multitude of services, including publicity, communication, public affairs, issues management, government relations, financial PR, community relations, industry relations, minority relations, advertising, press agency, promotion, media relations, social networking, and propaganda. This last service, **propaganda**, is communication strategically placed, either as advertising or as publicity, to gain public support for a special issue, program, or policy, such as a nation's war effort.

In addition, PR personnel (both PR technicians, who handle daily short-term activities, and PR managers, who counsel clients and manage activities over the long term) produce employee newsletters, manage client trade shows and conferences, conduct historical tours, appear on news programs, organize damage control after negative publicity, analyze complex issues and trends that may affect a client's future, manage Twitter and other social media accounts, and much more. Basic among these activities, however, are formulating a message through research, conveying the message through various channels, sustaining public support through community and consumer relations, and maintaining client interests through government relations.

Research: Formulating the Message

Before anything else begins, one of the most essential practices in the PR profession is doing research. Just as advertising is driven today by demographic and psychographic research, PR uses similar strategies to project messages to appropriate audiences. Because it has historically been difficult to determine why particular PR campaigns succeed or fail, research has become the key ingredient in PR forecasting. Like advertising, PR makes use of mail, telephone, and Internet surveys and focus group interviews—as well as social media analytics tools such as Google Analytics, Twtrland, and Twitter Analytics—to get a fix on an audience's perceptions of an issue, policy, program, or client's image.

Research also helps PR firms focus the campaign message. For example, the Department of Defense hired the PR firm Fleishman-Hillard International Communications to help combat the rising rates of binge drinking among junior enlisted military personnel. The firm first verified its target audience by researching the problem, finding from the Department of Defense's triennial Health Related Behaviors Survey that eighteen- to twenty-four-year-old servicemen



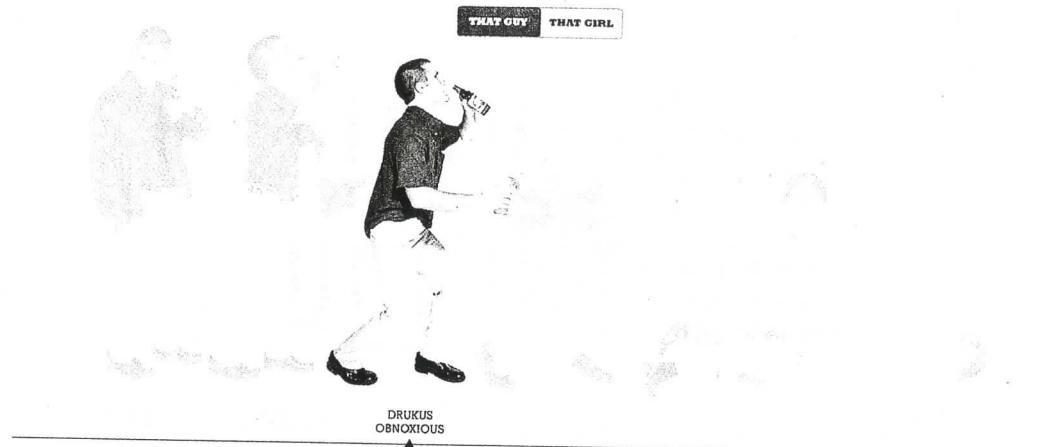
WORLD WAR II was a time when the U.S. government used propaganda and other PR strategies to drum up support for the war. One of the more iconic posters at the time asked women to join the workforce.

MESSAGE FORMULATION

Appealing to the eighteen- to twenty-four-year-old target age group, the interactive Web site for the Department of Defense's "That Guy!" anti-binge-drinking campaign uses humorous terms like "Sloberus Sweatmucus" and "Drunkus Obnoxious" to describe the stages of intoxication.

EVOLUTION OF THAT GUY

WITNESS THAT GUY REVERSING CENTURIES OF HUMAN PROGRESS ALL IN ONE NIGHT



Out of nowhere, That Guy has the urge to challenge every guy he sees to an arm wrestling match. He barges through the bar and picks a fight with every dude he bumps into...but the 300-pound bouncer doesn't seem too amused. Inevitably, this leads to him waking up with a pretty serious UPI (Unidentified Party Injury).

Courtesy of Defense Health Agency/Department of Defense

had the highest rates of binge drinking. It then conducted focus groups to refine the tone of its antidrinking message and developed and tested its Web site for usability. The finalized campaign concept and message—"Don't Be *That Guy!*"—has been successful: It has shifted binge drinkers' attitudes toward less harmful drinking behaviors through a Web site (www.thatguy.com) and multimedia campaign that combines humorous videos, mobile games, and cartoons with useful resources. By 2012, the campaign had been implemented in over eight hundred military locations across twenty-three countries, and the award-winning Web site had been viewed by approximately 1.3 million visitors.¹⁶

Conveying the Message

One of the chief day-to-day functions in public relations is creating and distributing PR messages for the news media or the public. There are several possible message forms, including press releases, VNRs, and various online options.

Press releases, or news releases, are announcements written in the style of news reports that give new information about an individual, a company, or an organization and pitch a story idea to the news media. In issuing press releases, PR agents hope that their client information will be picked up by the news media and transformed into news reports. Through press releases, PR firms manage the flow of information, controlling which media get what material in which order. (A PR agent may even reward a cooperative reporter by strategically releasing information.) News editors and broadcasters sort through hundreds of releases daily to determine which ones contain the most original ideas or are the most current. Most large media institutions rewrite and double-check the releases, but small media companies often use them verbatim because of limited editorial resources. Usually, the more closely a press release resembles actual news copy, the more likely it is to be used. Twitter has also become a popular format for releasing information—140 characters or less—to the news media.

Since the introduction of portable video equipment in the 1970s, PR agencies and departments have also been issuing **video news releases (VNRs)**—thirty- to ninety-second visual

press releases designed to mimic the style of a broadcast news report. Although networks and large TV news stations do not usually broadcast VNRs, news stations in small TV markets regularly use material from VNRs. On occasion, news stations have been criticized for using video footage from a VNR without acknowledging the source. In 2005, the FCC mandated that broadcast stations and cable operators must disclose the source of the VNRs that they air. As with press releases, VNRs give PR firms some control over what constitutes "news" and a chance to influence what the general public thinks about an issue, a program, or a policy.

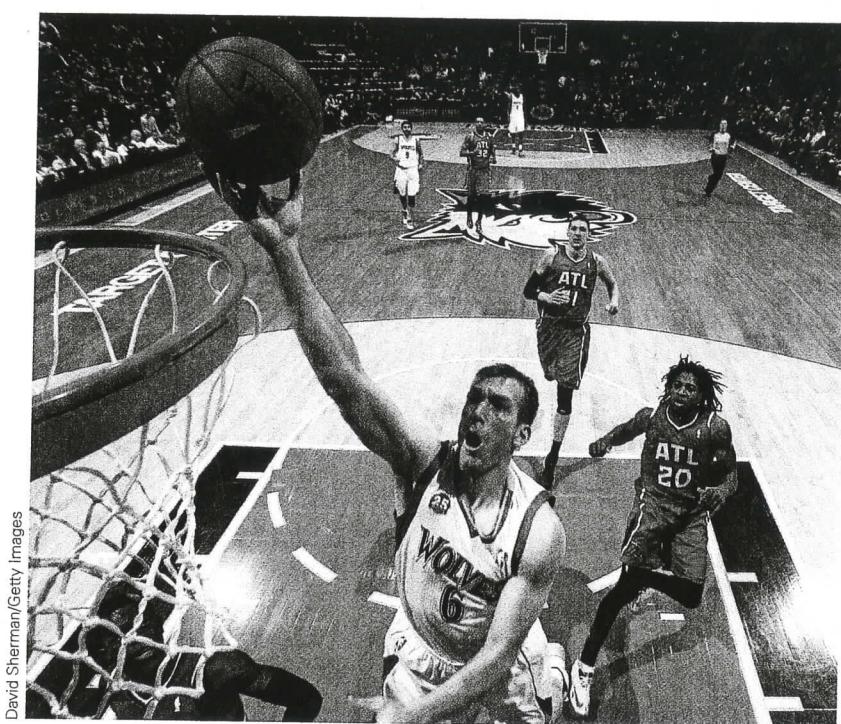
The equivalent of VNRs for nonprofits are **public service announcements (PSAs)**: fifteen- to sixty-second audio or video reports that promote government programs, educational projects, volunteer agencies, or social reform. As part of their requirement to serve the public interest, broadcasters have been encouraged to carry free PSAs. Since the deregulation of broadcasting began in the 1980s, however, there has been less pressure and no minimum obligation for TV and radio stations to air PSAs. When PSAs do run, they are frequently scheduled between midnight and 6:00 a.m., a less commercially valuable time slot.

Today, the Internet is an essential avenue for distributing PR messages. Companies upload or e-mail press releases, press kits, and VNRs for targeted groups. Social media has also transformed traditional PR communications. For example, a social media press release pulls together "remixable" multimedia elements, such as text, graphics, video, podcasts, and hyperlinks, giving journalists ample material to develop their own stories.

Media Relations

PR managers specializing in media relations promote a client or an organization by securing publicity or favorable coverage in the news media. This often requires an in-house PR person to speak on behalf of an organization or to direct reporters to experts who can provide information. Media-relations specialists also perform damage control or crisis management when negative publicity occurs. Occasionally, in times of crisis—such as a scandal at a university or a safety recall by a car manufacturer—a PR spokesperson might be designated as the only source of information available to news media. Although journalists often resent being cut off from higher administrative levels and leaders, the institution or company wants to ensure that rumors and inaccurate stories do not circulate in the media. In these situations, a game often develops between PR specialists and the media in which reporters attempt to circumvent the spokesperson and induce a knowledgeable insider to talk off the record, providing background details without being named directly as a source.

PR agents who specialize in media relations also recommend advertising to their clients when it seems appropriate. Unlike publicity, which is sometimes outside a PR agency's control, paid advertising may help focus a complex issue or a client's image. Publicity, however, carries the aura of legitimate news and thus has more credibility than advertising. In addition, media specialists cultivate associations with editors, reporters, freelance writers, and broadcast news



David Sherman/Getty Images

TWITTER MAKES A NEWS STORY

Less than 10 percent of U.S. adults get their news directly from Twitter, but more than half of journalists follow Twitter to get news tips. A tweet can be just as successful as a complete press release in gaining news media coverage. In this example, Priority Sports, a leading sports management firm based in Chicago and Los Angeles, tweeted that its client, NBA forward Robbie Hummel, had just re-signed with the Minnesota Timberwolves. This resulted in dozens of news stories, including one by *Sports Illustrated* online that incorporates an image of the tweet in its story, as well as Robbie Hummel's tweet that he's "excited to be back in Minneapolis for another season."

CASE STUDY

The NFL's Concussion Crisis

The stylized violence of hard-hitting is a favored American football tradition. Broadcasts of games repeat the most violent tackles with instant replay, often using slow motion to enhance the drama of the hit. Over the years, NFL Films has created several video collections featuring hours of player collisions, with titles like *Crunch Course*, *Moment of Impact*, and *NFL's Hardest Hits*.

But this celebration of big hits has begun to seem callous and cruel, as decades of professional football popularity have produced retired players in their thirties, forties, fifties, and older who are experiencing the trauma of brain damage. The diagnosis is CTE, chronic traumatic encephalopathy, which can leave its victims with problems like hearing loss, memory loss, aggression, depression, and overall dementia. The concussion problem for football players is caused not only by the big concussions that knock them unconscious but also by what researchers call smaller "subconcussions"—the hits to the head that happen many times during a game, and that can number in the hundreds and thousands over the course of a career.

CTE can best be confirmed upon death, when the interior of the brain can be examined to show the buildup of a protein that strangles neurons—not unlike what happens in much older patients with Alzheimer's disease. Several distraught players suffering the symptoms of CTE have committed suicide. Dave Duerson, who played in the NFL in the 1980s and 1990s,

killed himself in 2011 at age fifty, leaving a message to his family requesting that his brain be studied for CTE; researchers verified that he had the condition. In 2012, just two years after he retired from the field, NFL star Junior Seau committed suicide at age forty-three; as with Duerson, researchers checked his brain and confirmed that he had CTE.

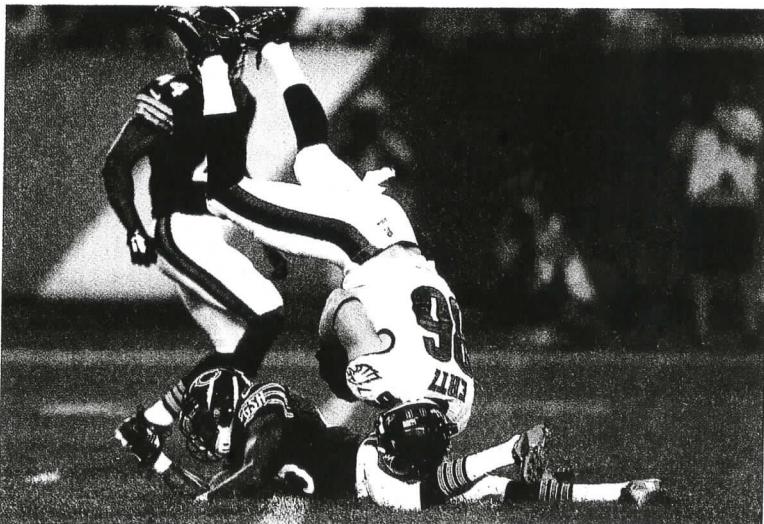
In the 2013 book *League of Denial: The NFL, Concussions, and the Battle for Truth*, ESPN investigative reporters (and brothers) Mark Fainaru-Wada and Steve Fainaru explain that the NFL spent years responding to the crisis of concussions with dubious public relations tactics: first covering it up, then denying it, and then generating their own scientific studies to dispute the independent research. The NFL's response mirrors the same deceptive tactics used by big tobacco companies for decades to deny smoking's link to cancer.

The NFL has a lot to protect. Their business is a \$10 billion industry, and the very nature of the game requires hulking players to knock their heads and bodies

into other very large players, often running at full speed.¹ As a result, more than four thousand retired players are suing the NFL to cover their head trauma expenses. These stories have begun to change the country's attitude toward the game. News stories about the effects of football concussions are increasingly common, and youth football league participation has dropped nearly 10 percent in the past two years, as parents have grown scared of the impact of the game on their children's health.

More recently, the NFL has responded by trying to change the conversation, acknowledging a concussion problem but emphasizing that the game has always evolved toward more safety in rules and technology (suggesting, perhaps, that it's just a matter of time before this forward march solves the concussion crisis). Indeed, the NFL hired a public relations counsel to help develop the NFLevolution.com site (motto: Forever Forward Forever Football). NFL's Corporate Communications Department also courted "mommy bloggers" to promote football as a healthy, safe activity for their children.

Yet as players continue to come forward with fears or diagnoses of CTE, and as long as the game (and business) of football continues to be played this way, the NFL's public relations crisis will likely persist. As Fainaru-Wada and Fainaru write, "There has never been anything like this in the history of sports: a public health crisis that emerged from the playing fields of our twenty-first-century pastime."² ▲



Chris Sweda/Chicago Tribune/MCT via Getty Images

directors to ensure that press releases or VNRs are favorably received (see “Examining Ethics: What Does It Mean to Be Green?” on page 428).

Special Events and Pseudo-events

Another public relations practice involves coordinating *special events* to raise the profile of corporate, organizational, or government clients. Since 1967, for instance, the city of Milwaukee has run Summerfest, a ten-day music and food festival that attracts about a million people each year and now bills itself as “The World’s Largest Music Festival.” As the festival’s popularity grew, various companies sought to become sponsors of the event. Today, Milwaukee’s Miller Brewing Company sponsors one of the music festival’s stages, which carries the Miller name and promotes Miller Lite as the “official beer” of the festival. Briggs & Stratton and Harley-Davidson are also among the local companies that sponsor stages at the event. In this way, all three companies receive favorable publicity by showing a commitment to the city in which their corporate headquarters are located.¹⁷

More typical of special-events publicity is a corporate sponsor’s aligning itself with a cause or an organization that has positive stature among the general public. For example, John Hancock Financial has been the primary sponsor of the Boston Marathon since 1986 and funds the race’s prize money. The company’s corporate communications department also serves as the PR office for the race, operating the pressroom and creating the marathon’s media guide and other press materials. Eighteen other sponsors, including Adidas, Gatorade, PowerBar, and JetBlue Airways, also pay to affiliate themselves with the Boston Marathon. At the local level, companies often sponsor a community parade or a charitable fund-raising activity.

In contrast to a special event, a **pseudo-event** is any circumstance created for the sole purpose of gaining coverage in the media. Historian Daniel Boorstin coined the term in his influential book *The Image* when pointing out the key contributions of PR and advertising in the twentieth century. Typical pseudo-events are press conferences, TV and radio talk-show appearances, or any other staged activity aimed at drawing public attention and media coverage. The success of such events depends on the participation of clients, sometimes on paid performers, and especially on the media’s attention to the event. In business, pseudo-events extend back at least as far as P. T. Barnum’s publicity stunts, such as parading Jumbo the Elephant across the Brooklyn Bridge in the 1880s. In politics, Theodore Roosevelt’s administration set up the first White House pressroom and held the first presidential press conferences in the early 1900s. By the twenty-first century, presidential pseudo-events involved a multimillion-dollar White House Communications Office. One of the most successful pseudo-events in recent years was a record-breaking space-diving project. On October 14, 2012, a helium balloon took Austrian skydiver Felix Baumgartner twenty-four miles into the stratosphere. He jumped from the capsule and went into a free dive for about four minutes, reaching a speed of 833.9 mph before deploying his parachute. Red Bull sponsored the project, which took more than five years of preparation.

As powerful companies, savvy politicians, and activist groups became aware of the media’s susceptibility to pseudo-events, these activities proliferated. For example, to get free publicity, companies began staging press conferences to announce new product lines. During the 1960s, antiwar and Civil Rights protesters began their events only when the news media were assembled. One anecdote from that era aptly illustrates the principle of a pseudo-event:



LADY GAGA established the nonprofit Born This Way Foundation (BTWF) in 2011 to help address childhood bullying and to inspire young people to serve their communities. The organization has incorporated various media elements into its campaign, including a blog and online public service announcements.

EXAMINING ETHICS

What Does It Mean to Be Green?

Back in the 1930s, public relations pioneer Edward Bernays labored behind the scenes to make green a more fashionable color. Why? Bernays was working to change women's attitudes toward the forest green packaging of his client Lucky Strike's cigarettes so women would smoke them.

Today, public relations professionals are openly working on behalf of clients to promote a different kind of green—environmentally sustainable practices. The idea of green practices goes back at least as far as the very first Earth Day, April 22, 1970, which marked the beginnings of the modern environmental movement. The term *green* as a synonym for being environmentally conscious was inspired by Greenpeace, the international environmental conservation organization founded in 1971, and by a similar political ideology that gained roots in Europe and Australia in the 1970s that prized ecological practices, participatory democracy, nonviolence, and social justice.

TIMBERLAND'S green practices include a nutritional label to show customers the environmental impact of each pair of shoes.

Corporations in the United States and elsewhere began adapting to the changing culture, integrating environmental claims into their marketing and public relations. But it wasn't always clear what constituted "green." In 1992, the Federal Trade Commission first issued its "Green Guides," guidelines to ensure that environmental marketing practices don't run afoul of its prohibition against unfair or deceptive acts or practices, sometimes called "greenwashing." As concern about global warming has grown in recent years, green marketing and public relations now extend into nearly every part of business and industry: product packaging (buzzwords include *recyclable*, *biodegradable*, *compostable*, *refillable*, *sustainable*, and *renewable*), buildings and textiles, renewable energy certificates and carbon offsets (funding projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in one place to offset carbon emissions produced elsewhere), labor conditions, and fair trade.

Although there have been plenty of companies that make claims of "green" products and services, only some have infused environmentally sustainable

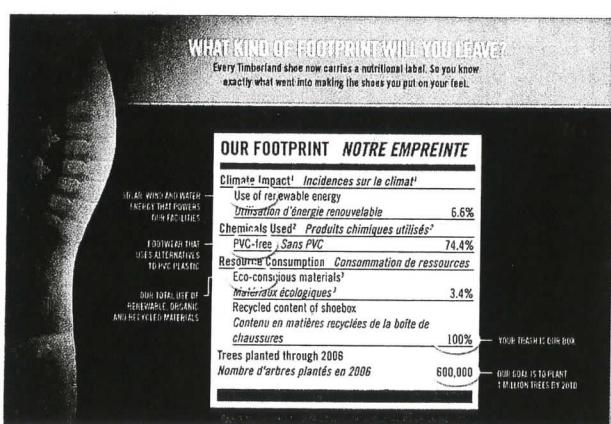
practices throughout their corporate culture. In the United States, the New Hampshire-based footwear and clothing company Timberland has been a model for green practices and PR. In 2008, Timberland released a short- and long-term plan for corporate social responsibility performance covering the

areas of energy, product, workplace, and service, which represent the company's material impacts. Timberland's plan is particularly noteworthy in that it reports its key corporate social responsibility indicators quarterly (not just once a year) and encourages a two-way dialogue with its stakeholders using social media platforms.

Ultimately, green PR requires a global outlook, as sustainability responds to issues of an increasingly small planet. There are now more than 10,000 corporations in 145 nations belonging to the United Nations Global Compact, a strategic policy initiative launched in 2000 for businesses to align their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles in human rights, labor, environment, and anticorruption. Still, the move toward sustainable business practices has a long way to go, as there are more than six million business firms in the United States alone.

The good news for sustainability and green public relations is that executives around the world are embracing the concept. A study by the UN Global Compact in 2011 revealed that 93 percent of 766 CEOs surveyed believe that sustainability will be "important" or "very important" to the future success of their company.¹

Yet putting sustainability ideas into practice is more difficult. The 17th Annual Global CEO Survey in 2014 found that only 46 percent of global CEOs agreed that resource scarcity and climate change would transform their business, and only 26 percent of them reported they would be addressing the risks of climate change and protecting diversity as a priority over the next three years.²



Courtesy of Timberland

A reporter asked a student leader about the starting time for a particular protest; the student responded, "When can you get here?" Today, politicians running for office are particularly adept at scheduling press conferences and interviews to take advantage of TV's appetite for live remote feeds and breaking news.

Community and Consumer Relations

Another responsibility of PR is to sustain goodwill between an agency's clients and the public. The public is often seen as two distinct audiences: communities and consumers.

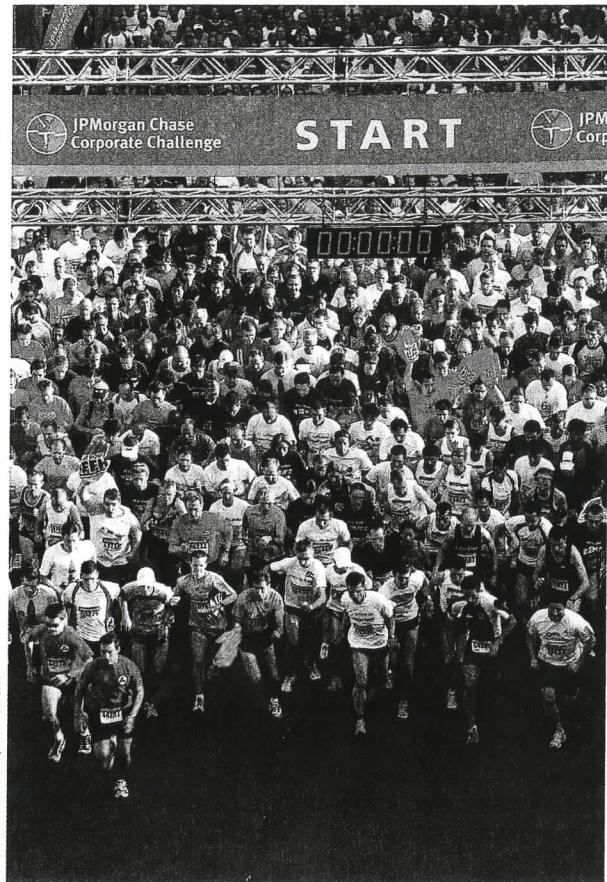
Companies have learned that sustaining close ties with their communities and neighbors not only enhances their image and attracts potential customers but also promotes the idea that the companies are good citizens. As a result, PR firms encourage companies to participate in community activities, such as hosting plant tours and open houses, making donations to national and local charities, and participating in town events like parades and festivals. In addition, more progressive companies may also get involved in unemployment and job-retraining programs, or donate equipment and workers to urban revitalization projects, such as Habitat for Humanity.

In terms of consumer relations, PR has become much more sophisticated since 1965, when *Unsafe at Any Speed*, Ralph Nader's groundbreaking book, revealed safety problems concerning the Chevrolet Corvair. Not only did Nader's book prompt the discontinuance of the Corvair line, but it also lit the fuse that ignited a vibrant consumer movement. After the success of Nader's book, along with a growing public concern over corporate mergers and corporations' lack of accountability to the public, consumers became less willing to readily accept the claims of corporations. As a result of the consumer movement, many newspapers and TV stations hired consumer reporters to track down the sources of customer complaints and embarrass companies by putting them in the media spotlight. Public relations specialists responded by encouraging companies to pay more attention to customers, establish product service and safety guarantees, and ensure that all calls and mail from customers were answered promptly. Today, PR professionals routinely advise clients that satisfied customers mean not only repeat business but also new business, based on a strong word-of-mouth reputation about a company's behavior and image.

Government Relations and Lobbying

While sustaining good relations with the public is a priority, so is maintaining connections with government agencies that have some say in how companies operate in a particular community, state, or nation. Both PR firms and the PR divisions within major corporations are especially interested in making sure that government regulation neither becomes burdensome nor reduces their control over their businesses.

Government PR specialists monitor new and existing legislation, create opportunities to ensure favorable publicity, and write press releases and direct-mail letters to persuade the public about the pros and cons of new regulations. In many industries, government relations has developed into **lobbying**: the process of attempting to influence lawmakers to support and vote for an organization's or industry's best interests. In seeking favorable legislation, some lobbyists contact government officials on a daily basis. In Washington, D.C., alone, there



EPA/Uwe Ansbach/Newscom

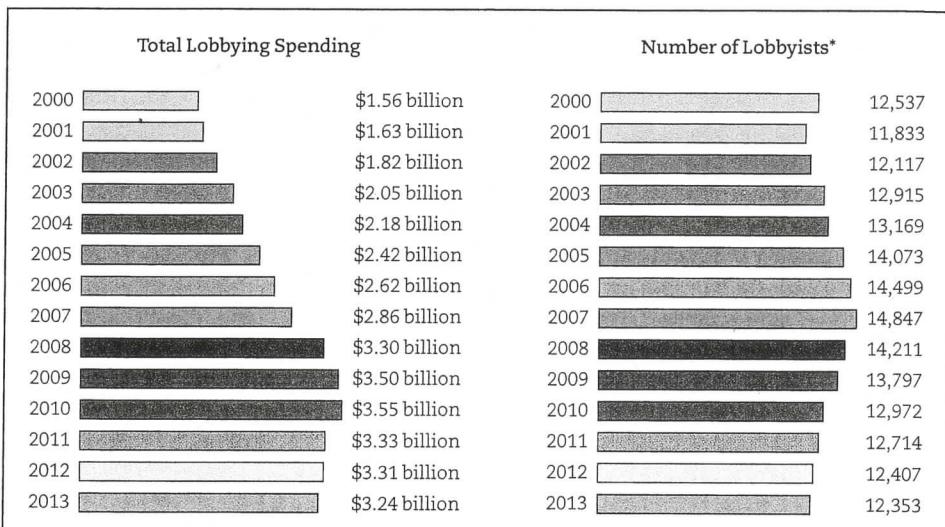
JP MORGAN organizes the JPMorgan Chase Corporate Challenge each year, a series of road races that raise money for several not-for-profit organizations around the world. Taking place in twelve major cities, including New York, Frankfurt, and Shanghai, these races, which are owned and operated by JPMorgan Chase, also allow the financial firm to gain valuable publicity.

FIGURE 12.1

TOTAL LOBBYING SPENDING AND NUMBER OF LOBBYISTS (2000–2013)

Data from: Figures are calculations by the Center for Responsive Politics based on data from the Senate Office of Public Records, accessed August 20, 2014, www.opensecrets.org/lobby.

*The number of unique, registered lobbyists who have actively lobbied.



are about thirteen thousand registered lobbyists—and thousands more government-relations workers who aren't required to register under federal disclosure rules. Lobbying expenditures targeting the federal government were at \$3.24 billion in 2013, far above the \$2.05 billion spent ten years earlier.¹⁸ (See Figure 12.1.)

Lobbying can often lead to ethical problems, as in the case of earmarks and astroturf lobbying. *Earmarks* are specific spending directives that are slipped into bills to accommodate the interests of lobbyists and are often the result of political favors or outright bribes. In 2006, lobbyist Jack Abramoff (dubbed “the Man Who Bought Washington” in *Time*) and several of his associates were convicted of corruption related to earmarks, leading to the resignation of leading House members and a decline in the use of earmarks.

Astroturf lobbying is phony grassroots public affairs campaigns engineered by public relations firms. PR firms deploy massive phone banks and computerized mailing lists to drum up support and create the impression that millions of citizens back their client's side of an issue. For instance, the Center for Consumer Freedom (CCF), an organization that appears to serve the interests of consumers, is actually a creation of the Washington, D.C.–based PR firm Berman & Co. and is funded by the restaurant, food, alcohol, and tobacco industries. According to SourceWatch, which tracks astroturf lobbying, anyone who criticizes tobacco, alcohol, processed food, fatty food, soda pop, pharmaceuticals, animal testing, overfishing, or pesticides “is likely to come under attack from CCF.”¹⁹

Public relations firms do not always work for the interests of corporations, however. They also work for other clients, including consumer groups, labor unions, professional groups, religious organizations, and even foreign governments. In 2005, for example, the California Center for Public Health Advocacy—a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization—hired Brown-Miller Communications, a small California PR firm, to rally support for landmark legislation that would ban junk food and soda sales in the state's public schools. Brown-Miller helped state legislators see obesity not as a personal choice issue but as a public policy issue, cultivated the editorial support of newspapers to compel legislators to sponsor the bills, and ultimately succeeded in getting a bill passed.

Presidential administrations also use public relations—with varying degrees of success—to support their policies. From 2002 to 2008, the Bush administration's Defense Department operated a “Pentagon Pundit” program, secretly cultivating more than seventy retired military officers to appear on radio and television talk shows and shape public opinion about the Bush agenda. In 2008, the *New York Times* exposed the unethical program, and its story earned a

Pulitzer Prize.²⁰ President Obama pledged to be more transparent on day one of his administration, but in 2014, an Associated Press analysis concluded that “the administration has made few meaningful improvements in the way it releases records.”²¹

Public Relations Adapts to the Internet Age

Historically, public relations practitioners have tried to earn news media coverage (as opposed to buying advertising) to communicate their clients’ messages to the public. While that is still true, the Internet, with its instant accessibility, offers public relations professionals a number of new routes for communicating with the public.

A company or an organization’s Web site has become the home base of public relations efforts. Companies and organizations can upload and maintain their media kits (including press releases, VNRs, images, executive bios, and organizational profiles), giving the traditional news media access to the information at any time. And because everyone can access these corporate Web sites, the barriers between the organization and the groups that PR professionals ultimately want to reach are broken down.

The Web also enables PR professionals to have their clients interact with audiences on a more personal, direct basis through social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, and blogs. Now people can be “friends” and “followers” of companies and organizations. Corporate executives can share their professional and personal observations and seem downright chummy through a blog (e.g., Whole Foods Market’s blog by CEO John Mackey). Executives, celebrities, and politicians can seem more accessible and personable through a Twitter feed. But social media’s immediacy can also be a problem, especially for those who send messages into the public sphere without considering the ramifications.

Another concern about social media is that sometimes such communications appear without complete disclosure, which is an unethical practice. Some PR firms have edited Wikipedia entries for their clients’ benefit, a practice Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales has repudiated as a conflict of interest. A growing number of companies also compensate bloggers to subtly promote their products, unbeknownst to most readers. Public relations firms and marketers are particularly keen on working with “mom bloggers,” who appear to be independent voices in discussions about consumer products but may receive gifts in exchange for their opinions. In 2009, the Federal Trade Commission instituted new rules requiring online product endorsers to disclose their connections to companies.

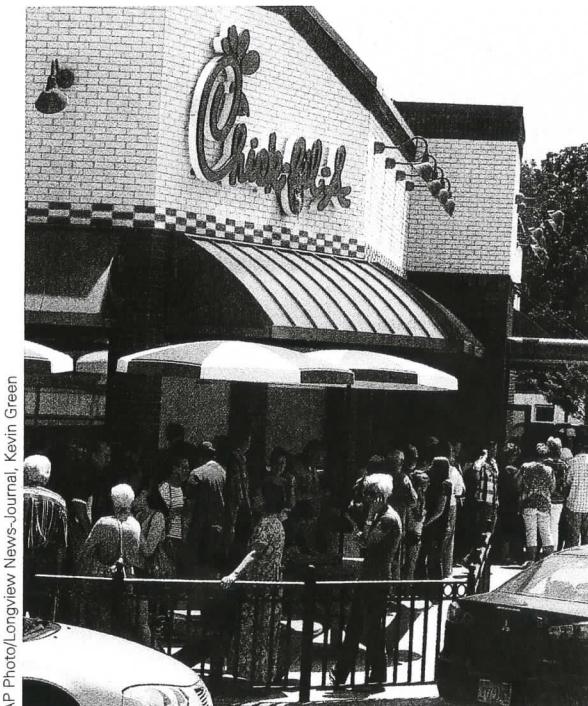
As noted earlier, Internet analytics tools enable organizations to monitor what is being said about them at any time. However, the immediacy of social media also means that public relations officials might be forced to quickly respond to a message or an image once it goes viral. For example, when two Domino’s Pizza employees in North Carolina posted a YouTube video of themselves allegedly contaminating food in 2009, it spread like wildfire, much to the horror of the company. The traditional response of waiting for bad news to pass and quietly issuing a statement wasn’t sufficient to defuse the situation. Ultimately, Domino’s used the Internet to respond to the crisis; the company created a Twitter account to address customers’ concerns, and the CEO posted his own apology video.

Public Relations during a Crisis

Since the Ludlow strike, one important duty of PR has been helping a corporation handle a public crisis or tragedy, especially if the

PR AND SOCIAL MEDIA

More companies are using social media tools like Twitter and Facebook to interact with their customers on a more personal level. Chick-fil-A used its Twitter feed in an attempt to counter bad press over the company president’s antigay comments.



public assumes the company is at fault. Disaster management may reveal the best and the worst attributes of the company and its PR firm (see “Case Study: The NFL’s Concussion Crisis” on page 426). Let’s look at two contrasting examples of crisis management and the different ways they were handled.

One of the largest environmental disasters so far in the twenty-first century occurred in 2010. BP’s Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded on April 10 of that year, killing eleven workers. The oil gushed from the ocean floor for months, spreading into a vast area of the Gulf of Mexico, killing wildlife, and washing tar balls onto beaches. Although the company, formerly British Petroleum, officially changed its name to BP in 2001, adopting the motto Beyond Petroleum and a sunny new yellow and green logo in an effort to appear more “green-friendly,” the disaster linked the company back to the hazards of its main business in oil. BP’s many public relations missteps included its multiple underestimations of the amount of oil leaking, the chairman’s reference to the “small people” of the Gulf region, the CEO’s wish that he could “get his life back,” and the CEO’s attendance at an elite yacht race in England even as the oil leak persisted. In short, many people felt that BP failed to show enough remorse or compassion for the affected people and wildlife. BP tried to salvage its reputation by vowing to clean up the damaged areas, establishing a \$20 billion fund to reimburse those economically affected by the spill, and creating a campaign of TV commercials to communicate its efforts. Nevertheless, harsh criticism persisted, and BP’s ads were overwhelmed by online parodies and satires of its efforts. Years later, entire communities of fishermen and rig workers continue to be affected, and BP made its first \$1 billion payment for Gulf restoration projects.

A decidedly different approach was taken in the 1982 tragedy involving Tylenol pain-relief capsules. Seven people died in the Chicago area after someone tampered with several bottles and laced them with poison. Discussions between the parent company, Johnson & Johnson, and its PR representatives focused on whether or not withdrawing all Tylenol capsules from store shelves might send a signal that corporations could be intimidated by a single deranged person. Nevertheless, Johnson & Johnson’s chairman, James E. Burke, and the company’s PR agency, Burson-Marsteller, opted for full disclosure to the media and the immediate recall of the capsules nationally, costing the company an estimated \$100 million and cutting its market



RALPH LAUREN attracted media scrutiny when it was discovered that the 2012 U.S. Olympic Team uniforms the company designed were manufactured in China. After lawmakers publicly chastised the decision to outsource the uniforms, Lauren released a statement promising to produce the 2014 U.S. Olympic Team’s uniforms in the United States.

Doug Mills/The New York Times/Redux Pictures



share in half. As part of its PR strategy to overcome the negative publicity and to restore Tylenol's market share, Burson-Marsteller tracked public opinion nightly through telephone surveys and organized satellite press conferences to debrief the news media. In addition, emergency phone lines were set up to take calls from consumers and health-care providers. When the company reintroduced Tylenol three months later, it did so with tamper-resistant bottles that were soon copied by almost every major drug manufacturer. Burson-Marsteller, which received PRSA awards for its handling of the crisis, found that the public thought Johnson & Johnson had responded admirably to the crisis and did not hold Tylenol responsible for the deaths. In fewer than three years, Tylenol recaptured its former (and dominant) share of the market.

Tensions between Public Relations and the Press

In 1932, Stanley Walker, an editor at the *New York Herald Tribune*, identified public relations agents as "mass-mind molders, fronts, mouthpieces, chiselers, moochers, and special assistants to the president."²² Walker added that newspapers and PR firms would always remain enemies, even if PR professionals adopted a code of ethics (which they did in the 1950s) to "take them out of the red-light district of human relations."²³ Walker's tone captures the spirit of one of the most mutually dependent—and antagonistic—relationships in all of mass media.

Much of this antagonism, directed at public relations from the journalism profession, is historical. Journalists have long considered themselves part of a public service profession, but some regard PR as having emerged as a pseudo-profession created to distort the facts that reporters work hard to gather. Over time, reporters and editors developed the derogatory term **flack** to refer to a PR agent. The term, derived from the military word *flak*, meaning an antiaircraft artillery shell or a protective military jacket, symbolizes for journalists the protective barrier PR agents insert between their clients and the press. Today, the Associated Press manual for editors defines *flack* simply as "slang for press agent." Yet this antagonism belies journalism's dependence on public relations. Many editors, for instance, admit that more than half of their story ideas each day originate with PR people. In this section, we take a closer look at the relationship between journalism and public relations, which can be both adversarial and symbiotic.

Elements of Professional Friction

The relationship between journalism and PR is important and complex. Although journalism lays claim to independent traditions, the news media have become ever more reliant on public relations because of the increasing amount of information now available. Newspaper staff cutbacks, combined with television's need for local news events, have expanded the news media's need for PR story ideas.

Another cause of tension is that PR firms often raid the ranks of reporting for new talent. Because most press releases are written to imitate news reports, the PR profession has always sought good writers who are well connected to sources and savvy about the news business. For instance, the fashion industry likes to hire former style or fashion news writers for its PR staff, and university information offices seek reporters who once covered higher education. However, although reporters frequently move into PR, public relations practitioners seldom move into journalism; the news profession rarely accepts prodigal sons or daughters back into

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Give and Take: Public Relations and Journalism

This video debates the relationship between public relations and journalism.

Discussion: Are the similarities between public relations and journalism practices a good thing for the public? Why or why not?

the fold once they have left reporting for public relations. Nevertheless, the professions remain codependent: PR needs journalists for publicity, and journalism needs PR for story ideas and access.

Public relations, by making reporters' jobs easier, has often enabled reporters to become lazy. PR firms now supply what reporters used to gather for themselves. Instead of trying to get a scoop, many journalists are content to wait for a PR handout or a good tip before following up on a story. Some members of the news media, grateful for the reduced workload that occurs when they are provided with handouts, may be hesitant to criticize a particular PR firm's clients. Several issues shed light on this discord and on the ways in which different media professions interact.

Undermining Facts and Blocking Access

Journalism's most prevalent criticism of public relations is that it works to counter the truths reporters seek to bring to the public. Modern public relations redefined and complicated the notion of what "facts" are. PR professionals demonstrated that the facts can be spun in a variety of ways, depending on what information is emphasized and what is downplayed. As Ivy Lee noted in 1925: "The effort to state an absolute fact is simply an attempt to achieve what is humanly impossible; all I can do is to give you my interpretation of the facts."²⁴ With practitioners like Lee showing the emerging PR profession how the truth could be interpreted, the journalist's role as a custodian of accurate information became much more difficult.

Journalists have also objected that PR professionals block press access to key business leaders, political figures, and other newsworthy people. Before the prevalence of PR, reporters could talk to such leaders directly and obtain quotable information for their news stories. Now, however, journalists complain that PR agents insert themselves between the press and the newsworthy, thus disrupting the journalistic tradition in which reporters would vie for interviews with top government and business leaders. Journalists further argue that PR agents are now able to manipulate reporters by giving exclusives to journalists who are likely to cast a story in a favorable light or by cutting off a reporter's access to one of their newsworthy clients altogether if that reporter has written unfavorably about the client in the past.

Promoting Publicity and Business as News

Another explanation for the professional friction between the press and PR involves simple economics. As Michael Schudson noted in his book *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*, PR agents help companies "promote as news what otherwise would have been purchased in advertising."²⁵ Accordingly, Ivy Lee wrote to John D. Rockefeller after he gave money to Johns Hopkins University: "In view of the fact that this was not really news, and that the newspapers gave so much attention to it, it would seem that this was wholly due to the manner in which the material was 'dressed up' for newspaper consumption. It seems to suggest very considerable possibilities along this line."²⁶ News critics worry that this type of PR is taking media space and time away from those who do not have the financial resources or the sophistication to become visible in the public eye. There is another issue: If public relations can secure news publicity for clients, the added credibility of a journalistic context gives clients a status that the purchase of advertising cannot offer.

Another criticism is that PR firms with abundant resources clearly get more client coverage from the news media than their lesser-known counterparts. For example, a business reporter at a large metro daily sometimes receives as many as a hundred press releases a day—far outnumbering the fraction of handouts generated by organized labor or grassroots organizations. Workers and union leaders have long argued that the money that corporations allocate to PR leads to more favorable coverage for management positions in labor disputes. Therefore, standard news reports may feature subtle language choices, with "rational,

coolheaded management making offers” and “hotheaded workers making demands.” Walter Lippmann saw such differences in 1922 when he wrote, “If you study the way many a strike is reported in the press, you will find very often that [labor] issues are rarely in the headlines, barely in the leading paragraph, and sometimes not even mentioned anywhere.”²⁷ This imbalance is particularly significant in that the great majority of workers are neither managers nor CEOs, and yet these workers receive little if any media coverage on a regular basis. Most newspapers now have business sections that focus on the work of various managers, but few have a labor, worker, or employee section.²⁸

Shaping the Image of Public Relations

Dealing with both a tainted past and journalism’s hostility has often preoccupied the public relations profession, leading to the development of several image-enhancing strategies. In 1948, the PR industry formed its own professional organization, the PRSA (Public Relations Society of America). The PRSA functions as an internal watchdog group that accredits PR agents and firms, maintains a code of ethics, and probes its own practices, especially those pertaining to its influence on the news media. Most PRSA local chapters and national conventions also routinely invite reporters and editors to speak to PR practitioners about the news media’s expectations of PR. In addition to the PRSA, independent agencies devoted to uncovering shady or unethical public relations activities publish their findings in publications like *Public Relations Tactics*, *PR Week*, and *PRWatch*. Ethical issues have become a major focus of the profession, with self-examination of these issues routinely appearing in public relations textbooks as well as in various professional newsletters (see Table 12.2).

Over the years, as PR has subdivided itself into specialized areas, it has used more positive phrases, such as *institutional relations*, *corporate communications*, and *news and information services* to describe what it does. Public relations’ best press strategy, however, may be the limitations of the journalism profession itself. For most of the twentieth century, many reporters and editors clung to the ideal that journalism is, at its best, an objective institution that gathers information on behalf of the public. Reporters have only occasionally turned their pens, computers,

PRSA Member Statement of Professional Values

This statement presents the core values of PRSA members and, more broadly, of the public relations profession. These values provide the foundation for the Member Code of Ethics and set the industry standard for the professional practice of public relations. These values are the fundamental beliefs that guide our behaviors and decision-making process. We believe our professional values are vital to the integrity of the profession as a whole.

ADVOCACY

We serve the public interest by acting as responsible advocates for those we represent.

We provide a voice in the marketplace of ideas, facts, and viewpoints to aid informed public debate.

HONESTY

We adhere to the highest standards of accuracy and truth in advancing the interests of those we represent and in communicating with the public.

EXPERTISE

We acquire and responsibly use specialized knowledge and experience. We advance the profession through continued professional development, research, and education. We build mutual understanding, credibility, and relationships among a wide array of institutions and audiences.

INDEPENDENCE

We provide objective counsel to those we represent. We are accountable for our actions.

LOYALTY

We are faithful to those we represent, while honoring our obligation to serve the public interest.

FAIRNESS

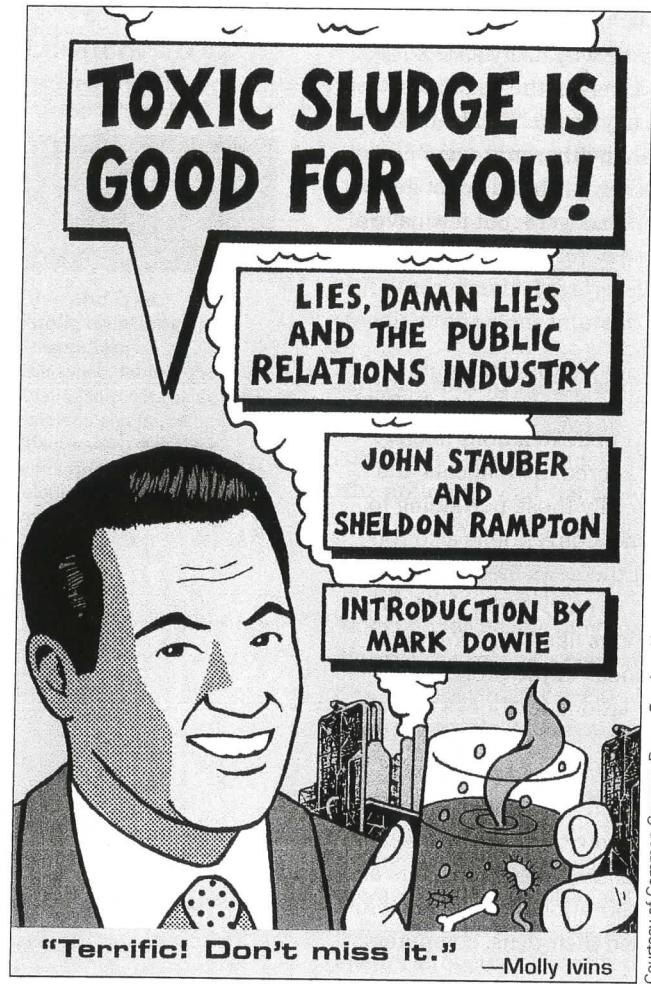
We deal fairly with clients, employers, competitors, peers, vendors, the media, and the general public. We respect all opinions and support the right of free expression.

TABLE 12.2

PUBLIC RELATIONS SOCIETY OF AMERICA ETHICS CODE

In 2000, the PRSA approved a completely revised Code of Ethics, which included core principles, guidelines, and examples of improper conduct. Here is one section of the code.

Data from: The full text of the PRSA Code of Ethics is available at www.prsa.org.



THE INVISIBILITY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS is addressed in a series of books by John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton.

Public Relations and Democracy

From the days of PR's origins in the early twentieth century, many people—especially journalists—have been skeptical of communications originating from public relations professionals. The bulk of the criticism leveled at public relations argues that the crush of information produced by PR professionals overwhelms traditional journalism. However, PR's most significant impact may be on the political process, especially when organizations hire spin doctors to favorably shape or reshape a candidate's media image. In one example, former president Richard Nixon, who resigned from office in 1974 to avoid impeachment hearings regarding his role in the Watergate scandal, hired Hill & Knowlton to restore his postpresidency image. Through the firm's guidance, Nixon's writings, mostly on international politics, began appearing in Sunday op-ed pages. Nixon himself started showing up on television news programs like *Nightline* and spoke frequently before such groups as the American Newspaper Publishers Association and the Economic Club of New York. In 1984, after a media blitz by

and cameras on themselves to examine their own practices or their vulnerability to manipulation. Thus by not challenging PR's more subtle strategies, many journalists have allowed PR professionals to interpret "facts" to their clients' advantage.

Alternative Voices

Because public relations professionals work so closely with the press, their practices are not often the subject of media reports or investigations. Indeed, the multibillion-dollar industry remains virtually invisible to the public, most of whom have never heard of Burson-Marsteller, Hill+Knowlton, or Edelman. The Center for Media and Democracy (CMD) in Madison, Wisconsin, is concerned about the invisibility of PR practices and has sought to expose the hidden activities of large PR firms since 1993. Its *PRWatch* publication reports on the PR industry, with the goal of "investigating and countering PR campaigns and spin by corporations, industries and government agencies."²⁹ (See "Media Literacy and the Critical Process: The Invisible Hand of PR" on page 437.)

CMD staff members have also written books targeting public relations practices having to do with the Republican Party's lobbying establishment (*Banana Republicans*), U.S. propaganda on the Iraq War (*The Best War Ever*), industrial waste (*Toxic Sludge Is Good for You!*), mad cow disease (*Mad Cow USA*), and PR uses of scientific research (*Trust Us, We're Experts!*). Their work helps bring an alternative angle to the well-moneyed battles over public opinion. "You know, we feel that in a democracy, it's very, very critical that everyone knows who the players are, and what they're up to," said CMD founder and book author John Stauber.³⁰

Media Literacy and the Critical Process

1 DESCRIPTION. Test the so-called invisibility of the PR industry by seeing how often, and in what way, PR firms are discussed in the print media. Using LexisNexis, search U.S. newspapers—over the last six months—for any mention of three prominent PR firms: Edelman, Weber Shandwick, and Fleishman-Hillard.

2 ANALYSIS. What patterns emerge from the search? Possible patterns may have to do with personnel: Someone was hired or fired. (These articles may be extremely brief, with only a quick mention of the firms.) Or these personnel-related articles may reveal connections between politicians or corporations and the PR industry. What about specific PR campaigns or articles that quote “experts” who work for Edelman, Weber Shandwick, or Fleishman-Hillard?

The Invisible Hand of PR

John Stauber, founder of the Center for Media and Democracy and its publication *PRWatch*, has described the PR industry as “a huge, invisible industry . . . that’s really only available to wealthy individuals, large multinational corporations, politicians and government agencies.”¹ How true is this? Is the PR industry so invisible?

3 INTERPRETATION. What do these patterns tell you about how the PR industry is covered by the news media? Was the coverage favorable? Was it critical or analytical? Did you learn anything about how the industry operates? Is the industry itself, its influencing strategies, and its wide reach across the globe visible in your search?

4 EVALUATION. PR firms—such as the three major firms in this search—have enormous power when it comes to influencing the public image of corporations, government bodies, and public policy initiatives in the United States and abroad. PR firms also have enormous influence over news content. Yet the U.S. media are silent on this

influence. Public relations firms aren’t likely to reveal their power, but should journalism be more forthcoming about its role as a publicity vehicle for PR?

5 ENGAGEMENT. Visit the Center for Media and Democracy’s Web site (prwatch.org) and begin to learn about the unseen operations of the public relations industry. (You can also visit SpinWatch.org for similar critical analyses of PR in the United Kingdom.) Follow the CMD’s Twitter feed. Read some of the organization’s books, join forum discussions, or attend a *PRWatch* event. Visit the organization’s wiki site, SourceWatch (sourcewatch.org), and if you can, do some research of your own on PR and contribute an entry.

Nixon’s PR handlers, the *New York Times* announced, “After a decade, Nixon is gaining favor,” and *USA Today* trumpeted, “Richard Nixon is back.” Before his death in 1994, Nixon, who never publicly apologized for his role in Watergate, saw a large portion of his public image shift from that of an arrogant, disgraced politician to that of a revered elder statesman.³¹ Many media critics have charged that the press did not counterbalance this PR campaign and treated Nixon too reverently. In 2014, on the fortieth anniversary of the Watergate scandal, former CBS news anchor Dan Rather remembered Nixon’s administration as a “criminal presidency” but added, “There has been an effort to change history, and in some ways it has been successful the last 40 years, saying well, it wasn’t all that bad.”³²

In terms of its immediate impact on democracy, the information crush delivered by public relations is at its height during national election campaigns. The 2012 presidential election was the most expensive in history, with President Barack Obama’s and Republican candidate Mitt Romney’s campaigns spending a combined \$2.34 billion. Although much of that money was spent on television advertising, public relations helped hone each campaign’s message. PR professionals assembled by *PR Week* magazine generally agreed that Obama’s reelection campaign succeeded because it was able to change the focus of the campaign from a referendum on Obama’s first term (the Romney campaign’s goal) to a choice between candidates with two very different philosophies. They also acknowledged that there were unexpected events that aided Obama with his message. One was Romney’s infamous comment at a private

\$50,000-a-person fund-raiser. Romney told his supporters, “There are 47 percent of the people who will vote for the president no matter what” because they are “dependent on government,” “believe that they are victims,” and “believe that they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing. . . . My job is not to worry about those people.” His comments were secretly videotaped by a bartender, and when they became a viral sensation, Romney had difficulty recovering from it. As public relations firm owner Carolyn Grisko noted, “The words that come out of a candidate’s own mouth are ultimately the ones that resonate.”³³ The other unexpected event was Superstorm Sandy, a hurricane that hit the Atlantic coast a week before the election. As president and commander in chief, Obama dominated news headlines in responding to the storm and received praise for his actions from Republican New Jersey governor Chris Christie. Christie later experienced his own public relations nightmare with the George Washington Bridge lane closure scandal. Several of his staff members and appointees ended up losing their jobs for conspiring to close lanes on a busy New Jersey toll plaza for several days in 2013, creating huge traffic jams. Christie denied any involvement in the bridge lane closings and hired a law firm that produced a report exonerating him, but the continuing cloud of scandal tarnished his future political prospects.

Though public relations often provides political information and story ideas, the PR profession bears only part of the responsibility for “spun” news; after all, it is the job of a PR agency to get favorable news coverage for the individual or group it represents. PR professionals police their own ranks for unethical or irresponsible practices, but the news media should also monitor the public relations industry, as they do other government and business activities. Journalism itself also needs to institute changes that will make it less dependent on PR and more conscious of how its own practices play into the hands of spin strategies. A positive example of change on this front is that many major newspapers and news networks now offer regular critiques of the facts and falsehoods contained in political advertising. This media vigilance should be on behalf of citizens, who are entitled to robust, well-rounded debates on important social and political issues.

Like advertising and other forms of commercial speech, PR campaigns that result in free media exposure raise a number of questions regarding democracy and the expression of ideas. Large companies and PR agencies, like well-financed politicians, have money to invest to figure out how to obtain favorable publicity. The question is not how to prevent that but how to ensure that other voices, less well financed and less commercial, also receive an adequate hearing. To that end, journalists need to become less willing conduits in the distribution of publicity. PR agencies, for their part, need to show clients that participating in the democratic process as responsible citizens can serve them well and enhance their image. ►

DIGITAL JOB OUTLOOK

Media Professionals Speak about Jobs in the Public Relations Industry

Alex T. Williams, Pew Research Center

One factor behind the increase in public relations jobs has been digital technology. Agencies and companies are now able to reach out directly to the public in any number of ways and are hiring public relations specialists to help them do so.

Lindsay Groepper, Vice President, Blastmedia

When I first began my career in PR more than a decade ago, we would e-mail or fax (gasp!) the full press release text to the press. What we see now is new methods of distributing the info, driven by social media. Rather than e-mailing a press release, PR people are sending journalists to custom landing pages created just for that specific announcement, contacting them via Twitter with a BudURL link to the release, or even directing them to a YouTube video with a message from the CEO making the announcement.

Erica Swallow, Owner, Southern Swallow Productions

There is also a growing demand for social platforms that make it easier for journalists and PR reps to contact one another. Help a Reporter Out (HARO), PRNewswire's ProfNet, NewsBasis, and Media Kitty are all enabling the communication lines to run in both directions. Rather than having PR reps make the first moves all the time, now members of the media can put out requests for pitches from particular types of experts.

Cara Stewart, Founder and Principal, Remark Media

The most important platforms for PR pros in the future will be the ones most targeted for their clients. Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook are "fun"; getting nitty-gritty into community sites that are industry-specific is less "fun," because PR pros have to really understand clients' technologies, business models, services, and more. Really, it's more about PR pros becoming better PR pros and understanding their clients' businesses, as well as what their clients do. . . . Social media is not a one-size-fits-all solution.

CHAPTER REVIEW

COMMON THREADS

One of the Common Threads in Chapter 1 is the role that media play in a democracy. One key ethical contradiction that can emerge in PR is that (according to the PRSA Code of Ethics) PR should be honest and accurate in disclosing information while being loyal and faithful to clients and their requests for confidentiality and privacy. In this case, how does the general public know when public communications are the work of paid advocacy, particularly when public relations plays such a strong role in U.S. politics?

Public relations practitioners who are members of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) are obligated to follow the PRSA Code of Ethics. Members are asked to sign a pledge to conduct themselves “professionally, with truth, accuracy, fairness, and responsibility to the public.”

Yet the code is not enforceable, and many public relations professionals simply ignore the PRSA. For example, only 14 of PR giant Burson-Marsteller’s 2,200 worldwide employees are PRSA members.³⁴ Most lobbyists in Washington have to register with the House and Senate, so there is some public record of their activities to influence politics. Conversely, public relations professionals working to influence the political process don’t have to register, so unless they act with the highest ethical standards and disclose what they are doing and who their clients are, they operate in relative secrecy.

According to National Public Radio (NPR), public relations professionals in Washington, D.C., work to engineer public opinion in advance of lobbying efforts to influence legislation.

As NPR reported, “For PR folks, conditioning the legislative landscape means trying to shape public perception. So their primary target is journalists like Lyndsey Layton, who writes for the *Washington Post*. She says she gets about a dozen emails or phone calls in a day.”³⁵

Less ethical work includes assembling phony “astroturf” front groups to engage in communication campaigns to influence legislators, spreading unfounded rumors about an opposing side, and entertaining government officials in violation of government reporting requirements—all things the PRSA code prohibits. Yet these are all-too-frequent practices in the realm of political public relations.

PRSA CEO Rosanna Fiske decries this kind of unethical behavior in her profession. “It’s not that ethical public relations equals good public relations,” Fiske says. “It is, however, that those who do not practice ethical public relations affect all of us, regardless of the environment in which we work, and the causes we represent.”³⁶

KEY TERMS

The definitions for the terms listed below can be found in the glossary at the end of the book. The page numbers listed with the terms indicate where the term is highlighted in the chapter.

public relations, 415

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(PSAs), 424

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