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What Will Media Relations Look Like Over the Next 10-20 Years?

For PRSA-NY Members
FREE 34-Page 2009 Media Research Report

What will media relations look like over the next 10-20 years and how will it impact the public relations practice? Will it remain as it has always been? Or will it change so much that we will barely recognize it for what it once was?

Based on the research survey, Don Bates, PRSA-NY member, conducted at the end of 2008 with the *pro bono* help of George Washington University's Graduate School of Political Management and Cision, and with more than 12,000 U.S. media (yes, that's 12,000), the answer lies somewhere in between.

To assess the results for yourself, check out the free 34-page report of the study's findings at GWU's news site: <http://www.gwu.edu/~newsctr/newscenter/research/index.cfm>. Don says there's a lot of "old hat," albeit more nuanced, but a lot of surprises, too, several of which contradict the prevailing notion among practitioners and even the media themselves that the use of social media is more important than more traditional media resources.

Broadly considered, the study suggests that media relations will remain the same with respect to editorial behavior. Years out, mainstream editors and reporters will still follow the same standards of journalistic conduct as they do now, although they may do so with more pressure from top management to write nice.

They'll still have an overwhelming need for PR help and probably more so because of staff cutbacks, newspaper bankruptcies and the speed of media transactions. They'll still require credible news and information, too, even as blogs, wikis and other forms on Internet dialogue continue to distort the reality of what's true and what's false. And they'll still hate spam, exaggerated claims, and misdirected story ideas just as they do today. It goes with the territory and will remain so until PR practitioners stop resisting the rules (don't hold your breath).

This said, the survey findings suggest that there will also be a lot of serious change in editorial behavior, if for no other reason than the continued influence and development of new communications technology, as well as in organized PR's response. Social media will become ever more important (duh), but as a constellation of enterprises, the phenomenon may not be as revolutionary in the end as some pundits suggest or more self-aggrandizingly hope.

While acknowledging, as noted, the heavy use of PR submissions, the respondents also strongly endorsed a list of proposed improvements for PR "pitches," including clearer writing, less promotional material, and more newsworthy content. Being more relevant to their beat or area of interest and being less promotional struck the strongest chords.

One finding that Don deeply appreciated as a writing consultant and teacher: "Over half of the editors/journalists responding wanted to receive unsolicited e-mail pitches from communications professionals as simple text only."

As Don often tells participants in his PRSA-NY writing workshops when looking at their submissions, "Why the marketing graphics, why the 'brochurish' look, why all the bells and whistles? You're writing to editors and reporters. They want credible news and information. The rest for them is fluff."

Don's next writing workshop will be April 7, 2009. See PRSA-NY listings for more information.

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