

PART ONE

The Profession

Part 1 covers the fundamentals of public relations practice. Chapter 1 gives a working definition of public relations, reviewing and refining the definitions of previous studies. Chapter 2 examines the historical roots of public relations, providing a useful perspective on the discipline as it has emerged. Chapter 3 deals with communications and systems theory as a background for public relations practice.

Finally, chapter 4 looks at the legal, ethical, and professional responsibilities of public relations practitioners in our society.



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PREVIEW

Marissa has just been promoted to account executive at the up-and-coming public relations and strategic communications agency where she works. Her client is the software giant Microsoft. Settling into her office, Marissa checks her e-mails and daily media tracking report to see what the media have reported about her Microsoft product over the past 24 hours. She also checks to see what, if anything, has been said or written about her client's competitors. Then she summarizes the highlights and e-mails them to her clients and to the other members of her Microsoft product team.

Next is her project with *Wired*, a computer publication. Marissa has been working with a *Wired* reporter to ensure that Microsoft's new-product launch announcement will be the featured article in an upcoming issue, with front-cover placement. Today she begins organizing artwork to accompany the announcement, then takes the art to an account team meeting where team members will synchronize the *Wired* feature with follow-up stories in other trade publications, consumer electronics magazines, and the financial press.

Over lunch with a group of volunteers organizing a summer reading program for kids, Marissa suggests some local business partnerships as ways to sponsor the program and provide transportation to and from the library for the children. The afternoon's agenda includes locating a Microsoft executive to field questions from a reporter writing about Internet regulation and starting a new line of research for a Microsoft brand manager looking for help with a marketing program. In just a few hours Marissa has demonstrated the communication, leadership, and management skills on which successful public relations practitioners rely.

WHAT IS PUBLIC RELATIONS?

We examine other aspects of a job like Marissa's throughout this chapter and the entire book, but first let's define public relations and its key dimensions. Attempts to define public relations as a professional field and academic discipline are many and varied. The very nature of the profession and its constant adaptation to the needs of society make it at best a moving target for definition. Public relations is practiced in organizations that range from giant, multinational telecommunications companies to small human service agencies and fledgling social movement organizations. A public relations manager for a private university may devote most of her or his efforts to fund-raising and student recruitment. In contrast, the public relations staff of a large corporation may be responsible for the firm's relationships with customers, suppliers, investors, employees, and even foreign governments.

A Working Definition

Public relations practitioners help others establish and maintain effective relationships with third parties. They usually work in businesses like public relations firms or agencies such as Marissa's, or as independent consultants, or on the communication staffs of corporations, not-for-profit organizations, or government agencies. For the purposes of this book—and to establish a broad, realistic, and accurate description of the public relations function—we offer the following working definition:

Public relations is a leadership and management function that helps achieve organizational objectives, define philosophy, and facilitate organizational change. Public relations practitioners communicate with all relevant internal and external publics to develop positive relationships and to create consistency between organizational goals and societal expectations. Public relations practitioners develop, execute, and evaluate organizational programs that promote the exchange of influence and understanding among an organization's constituent parts and publics.

We review the key dimensions of the definition on the following pages. Also be sure to look at spotlight 1.1, the official statement on public relations outlined by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). PRSA is the oldest and largest professional association serving public relations practitioners.

Public Relations Practitioners' Work

Public relations continues to be one of the most dynamic disciplines in organizational life throughout the world. One reason is that public relations practitioners bring such a diversity of skills and programmatic capabilities to their jobs. You can appreciate the broad nature of the discipline when you realize it can include any of the following:

Research	Media relations
Counseling/advising	Public affairs
Government affairs	Community relations
Investor relations	Employee relations
Development or fund-raising	Publicity
Multicultural affairs	Marketing communication
Issues management	Promotion

We look at these and other aspects of public relations throughout the remainder of the book.



Public relations helps our complex, pluralistic society to reach decisions and function more effectively by contributing to mutual understanding among groups and institutions. It serves to bring the public and public policies into harmony.

Public relations serves a wide variety of institutions in society, such as businesses, trade unions, government agencies, voluntary associations, foundations, hospitals, and educational and religious institutions. To achieve their goals, these institutions must develop effective relationships with many different audiences or publics, such as employees, members, customers, local communities, shareholders, and other institutions, and with society at large.

The leadership of institutions needs to understand the attitudes and values of their publics in order to achieve institutional goals. The goals themselves are shaped by the external environment. The public relations practitioner acts as a counselor to management and as a mediator, helping to translate private aims into reasonable, publicly acceptable policy and action. As a

management function, public relations encompasses the following:

1. Anticipating, analyzing, and interpreting public opinion, attitudes, and issues that might impact, for good or ill, the operations and plans of the organization.
2. Counseling management at all levels in the organization with regard to policy decisions, courses of action, and communication, taking into account their public ramifications and the organization's social or citizenship responsibilities.
3. Researching, conducting, and evaluating, on a continuing basis, programs of action and communication to achieve informed public understanding necessary to the success of an organization's aims. These may include marketing, financial, fund-raising, employee, community or government relations, and other programs.
4. Planning and implementing the organization's efforts to influence or change public policy.
5. Setting objectives, planning, budgeting, recruiting and training staff,

developing facilities—in short, managing the resources needed to perform all of the above.

6. Examples of the knowledge that may be required in the professional practice of public relations include communication arts, psychology, social psychology, sociology, political science, economics, and the principles of management and ethics. Technical knowledge and skills are required for opinion research, public issue analysis, media relations, direct mail, institutional advertising, publications, film/video productions, special events, speeches, and presentations.

In helping to define and implement policy, the public relations practitioner utilizes a variety of professional communications skills and plays an integrative role both within the organization and between the organization and the external environment.

Source: "Public Relations: An Overview" (New York: PRSA Foundation, 1991), pp. 4–5. Statement formally adopted by PRSA Assembly, November 6, 1982.

Public relations work is all about developing effective relationships between organizations and groups that are important to them, including the media, customers, employees, investors, community leaders and members, activist groups, and government agencies. These relationships should benefit both parties. Creating that kind of lasting, win-win situation requires a great deal of give-and-take based on a mutual understanding of each other's interests. Effective two-way communication also implies doing well by doing good, as the MTV mini-case study shows. The climate change campaign in mini-case 1.1 is both a public relations and a social marketing program. **Social marketing** is a special form of public relations that tries to change public attitudes and behaviors on behalf of a social cause whose work benefits society as a whole, rather than on behalf of the sponsoring organization.

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS BASED ON TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Much of the communicating that public relations practitioners do is both persuasive and purposive. That's why our definition talks about promoting the exchange of influence among an organization's constituent parts and publics. From the earliest times public relations has been seen as the planned effort to influence public opinion, generally through persuasive communication. Marketing communication campaigns,

INFLUENCING GROUPS, POLICIES, AND ISSUES

for example, utilize product publicity to introduce products. Social marketing programs are persuasion efforts designed to inform people and to change their behaviors regarding some public good. An example is the HIV Alliance campaign promoting safer sex through neighborhood needle exchange programs. The public relations practitioner writes the message and selects the communication channel, while the marketing specialists make sure that the messages and condoms are distributed.

THE PUBLICS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

All definitions and discussions of public relations refer to *publics* and *public opinion*. How do people who study and practice public relations make use of these terms? To begin, groups that are almost always important to organizations are called **publics**, and we generally define them in terms of their organizational relationships to us, including the media, employees, governmental officials, community leaders, and financial analysts, for example.

In other instances, we define publics as categories of people who become important to our organization because it has purposely or even inadvertently galvanized them. Perhaps they are community members who resent our organization building a new office addition immediately adjacent to a wetlands area. They become a public once they recognize an issue, understand its relevance to them, and then talk about it or even organize to do something about it.

Alert public relations practitioners communicate with these groups very early in the process, perhaps even before they become organized activists or a social movement organization. Chances are, though, that these activists understand the processes by which people begin to make up their minds on an issue once it gets publicized in local newspapers, on radio, and on television newscasts.

As the general citizenry learns about an issue, individuals begin to express opinions, talk with others about the issue, and reconcile their opinions with long-standing attitudes, values, and group affiliations. It's not surprising, therefore, that public relations practitioners monitor public opinion formation and change around many issues; it's in their best interests. Moreover, the study of public relations has always included the investigation of public opinion, attitude change processes, and social psychology. If public relations practitioners are to build and maintain an organization's reputation, they'll need to understand that public opinion formation is a dynamic process in which each of the major interests competes to frame the issue a particular way in the media. In addition, public relations practitioners influence public opinion by helping organizations attract and mobilize supporters.

This billboard encourages community relations involvement by employees mentoring young people and inspiring them to reach their dreams.





When the largest TV network in the world, with a potential audience of more than 1.5 billion people in more than 150 countries, decides to make global climate change a top priority, people take notice.

MTV launched its climate change campaign in June 2007 on MTV Switch at www.mtvswitch.org. The campaign's mission is "Who on earth are we? We're MTV's International climate change campaign, and we're on a mission to make y'all green."

The portal was launched to provide information on the environment and as a gathering place for MTV viewers or visitors interested in learning about ways to live an environmentally friendly lifestyle. MTV feels "a responsibility to

address an issue that research shows is the number-one concern among its viewers, apart from family and personal issues."

MTV plans a splash of media activity every three or four months to sustain interest in its global change effort. In December 2007 the network premiered a documentary and about 10 public service announcements. Some play on its MTVswitch Web site, and some are in places like YouTube that are designed to drive traffic to its campaign Web site. Nokia sponsored the documentary. The PSAs were prepared pro bono by ad agencies Lowe Worldwide and Ogilvy. The Web site serves as the focal point for the environmental campaign.

John Jackson, director of MTV International's public affairs group, said the goal of the messages on the Web site is to focus on "positive, achievable changes we can make."

1. Go to the Web site and write a 250-word description of your evaluation of it and its effort to raise awareness and change behavior on environmental issues.
2. Write a comment on the blog at www.mtvswitch.blogspot.com/.
3. What different channels of communication can you find that MTV is using to push its climate change campaign?

In many respects the heart of public relations work—at least for entry-level positions—is the ability to write, design, and produce materials for all media; public relations practitioners must also possess public speaking, group leadership, and event planning skills. Thus, a big share of day-to-day public relations work is identifying key messages and choosing the best combination of communication channels for directing those messages to target audiences. The integrated public relations media model developed by Professor Kirk Hallahan and shown in table 1.1 illustrates the range of communication channels for which public relations students learn to write, design, and produce.

USING COMMUNICATION SKILLS EFFECTIVELY

Because the words *public relations* are very general, it's not surprising that different organizations label the function very differently; for example, the words *communication* and *corporate communication* are now more commonly used to label the public relations function in many corporate and nonprofit settings. Government agencies often use the terms *public information* or *public affairs* to delineate the public relations and communication functions, even though **public affairs** generally refers to relationships between organizations and governments. Other terms are *corporate relations* and *marketing communication*. The labeling issue is further complicated by the fact that public relations practitioners are sometimes assigned to various departments throughout an organization rather than being housed together in a common public relations or communications department.

The terms *public relations* and *advertising* are often confused as well. Advertising refers to paid space and time in the media, whereas public relations describes publicity or stories that run without charge in the news columns of the media. Paid ads and commercials run almost exclusively in major mass media, including television, newspapers, radio, magazines, and the Internet.

DISTINGUISHING PUBLIC RELATIONS FROM RELATED FIELDS

TABLE 1.1 An Integrated Public Relations Media Model

Characteristic	Public Media	Interactive Media	Controlled Media	Events/Groups	One-on-One
Key use	Build awareness	Respond to queries; exchange information	Promotion; provide detailed information	Motivate attendees; reinforce attitudes	Obtain commitments; resolve problems
Examples	Newspapers, magazines, television, radio	Phone-based: automated response; audio text Computer-based: Internet, database, e-mail, listservs, newsgroups, chatrooms, bulletin boards, CD-ROMs	Brochures, newsletters, sponsored magazines, annual reports, books, direct mail, point of purchase displays, video, Web pages, e-mail	Speeches, trade shows, exhibits, meetings/conferences, demonstrations, rallies, sponsorships, anniversaries, sweepstakes/contests, recognitions/awards	Personal visits, lobbying, personal letters, telephone calls, telemarketing/solicitation
Nature of communications	Nonpersonal	Nonpersonal	Nonpersonal	Quasi-personal	Personal
Direction of communications	One-way	Quasi-two-way	One-way	Quasi-two-way	Two-way
Technological sophistication	High	High	Moderate	Moderate	Low
Channel ownership	Media organizations	Common carrier or institution	Sponsor	Sponsor or other organization	None
Message chosen by	Third parties and producers	Receiver	Sponsor	Sponsor or joint organization	Producer and audience
Audience involvement	Low	High	Moderate	Moderate	High
Reach	High	Moderate-low	Moderate-low	Low	Low
Cost per impression	Extremely low	Low	Moderate	Moderate	High
Key challenges to effectiveness	Competition; media cutter	Availability, accessibility	Design, distribution	Attendance, atmosphere	Empowerment, personal dynamics

Source: Kirk Hallahan, *Strategic Media Planning: Toward a Public Relations Model* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), pp. 461–70.

Marketing is a sales and distribution function whose principal publics are customers, retailers, and distributors. In contrast, public relations deals with many publics, whose interests sometimes collide with customer interests. In addition to customers, important public relations publics include the media, employees, community leaders, government regulators, investment analysts, activist groups, and more.

Finally, *journalism* is distinct from *public relations* in two ways. Journalists do not represent the organizations about which they write, but public relations practitioners

do, and this may influence their objectivity and the way they frame ideas and present facts. Journalists are trained to write for news media. Public relations practitioners must master the basic writing, graphic design, and journalistic conventions of all mass media along with more specialized media whose content they control, such as direct mail, pamphlets, posters, newsletters, trade publications, and their organization's Web site.

Public relations departments range in size from more than 400 members in large corporations to one or two individuals in small organizations. The public relations function in large corporations is frequently led by a vice president who helps develop overall policy as a member of top management. Large organizations also typically include various other public relations managers at both corporate and division levels, and they may employ a number of public relations specialists such as writers, researchers, and representatives to the media. In a small organization, however, one individual may handle all these responsibilities. Public relations counseling firms may contain specialists in a particular practice area, such as health care or financial services, as well as functional specialists for managing corporate culture change or coordinating content on the internal intranet.

PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS AT WORK

This great diversity in the duties of public relations practitioners is clear in the list of public relations functions published in PRSA's booklet *Careers in Public Relations*:

1. *Programming.* Programming means analyzing problems and opportunities; defining goals and the publics (or groups of people whose support or understanding is needed); and recommending and planning activities. It may include budgeting and assignment of responsibilities to the appropriate people, including non-public relations personnel. For example, an organization's president or executive director is often a key figure in public relations activities.
2. *Relationships.* Successful public relations people develop skill in gathering information from management, from colleagues in their organizations, and from external sources. They do this to strengthen their organization's ties to external groups, including the media, community leaders, government policymakers and regulators, investors, financial analysts, educational institutions, activist groups, and so on. They also build relationships with internal employee audiences and departments with which they maintain daily contact, such as marketing, human resources, and the legal department.
3. *Writing and Editing.* Because the public relations worker is often trying to reach large groups of people, the printed word is an important tool for creating reports, news releases, booklets, speeches, film scripts, trade magazine articles, product information and technical material, employee publications, newsletters, shareholder reports, and other management communications directed to both organizational personnel and external groups. A sound, clear style of writing that communicates effectively is a must for public relations work.
4. *Information.* An important public relations task is sharing information with appropriate newspaper, broadcast, and general and trade publication editors to enlist their interest in publishing an organization's news and features. This requires knowing how newspapers and other media operate, their areas of specialization, and the interests of individual editors. (Competition is keen for the attention of editors and broadcasters, who have a limited amount of space and time at their disposal.)

As one public relations practitioner puts it, “You have to get to the right editor of the right publication with the right story at the right time.” Although ideas are accepted on the basis of newsworthiness and other readership values, successful practitioners develop relationships of mutual respect and cooperation with the news media that are useful to both the practitioners and the news people.

5. *Production.* Various publications, special reports, films, and multimedia programs are important ways of communicating. The public relations practitioner need not be an expert in art, layout, typography, and photography, but he or she should have background knowledge of the techniques in order to intelligently plan and supervise their use.
6. *Special Events.* News conferences, convention exhibits and special showings, new facility and anniversary celebrations, contests and award programs, and tours and special meetings are only a few of the special events used to gain attention and acceptance. They require careful planning and coordination, attention to detail, and the preparation of special booklets, publicity, and reports.
7. *Speaking.* Public relations work often requires face-to-face communication—finding appropriate platforms, delivering speeches, and preparing speeches for others. Those with public speaking skills will enjoy an advantage.
8. *Research and Evaluation.* All public relations work is underpinned by research—research on issues, organizations, publics, competition, opportunities, threats, and so on. Public relations practitioners spend considerable time incorporating their research findings into position statements, public relations plans, communication campaigns, media briefing materials, and so on. They gather research through interviews, informal conversation, and review of library materials, databases, and Web sites. They may also conduct surveys or hire firms specializing in designing and conducting opinion research.

Research findings influence a public relations program’s objectives and strategies, which in turn form the basis for evaluating its planning, implementation, and effectiveness. More and more managers expect research and evaluation from their public relations advisers or staffs.

An employment psychological testing firm, RembrandtAdvantage, found in its research comparing mid- and senior-level public relations professionals at top public relations firms that high-performing public relations practitioners typically share three common traits: urgency, analytical problem solving, and flexibility. In its Web booklet *Careers in Public Relations* the Council of Public Relations Firms put together a comparison for the three traits to give aspiring public relations practitioners a test to indicate the likelihood that they would have the ability to become top public relations executives.¹ See table 1.2 for the comparison.

THE MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FUNCTIONS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations calls upon both leadership and management functions, and we distinguish between the two in this section. We also address the roles that public relations practitioners and leaders play in advancing socially responsible behavior. And finally, we consider how public relations practitioners help make decisions in their organizations.

Business scholars often distinguish leadership from management by saying that leadership means doing the right things and making the right choices, whereas management means doing things right. As managers, public relations practitioners design and

TABLE 1.2 Comparison with PR Professionals

Compare yourself with successful public relations professionals.

Are you “urgent”?

- ___ Do you move through work faster than most people?
- ___ Do you become restless when there is a lull in activity?
- ___ Do you consider yourself more intense than most people?

Are you an “analytical problem solver”?

- ___ Do complex games and puzzles hold your interest?
- ___ Do you find that solutions to various problems come to you more easily than they do to other people?
- ___ Do you instinctively want to address the root cause behind various issues/problems?

Are you “flexible” in your approach to work and interactions?

- ___ When people’s views differ from yours, do you thoughtfully consider their perspective?
- ___ Do you find that you can have many interruptions and still complete the goals that you set for the day?
- ___ Do shifts to your plans add to the excitement of your day?

If you answered yes to most or all the statements above, you may have what it takes to become a PR professional.

Source: *Careers in Public Relations: A Guide to Opportunities in a Dynamic Industry*, Council of Public Relations Firms, retrieved from www.prfirms.org on Feb. 20, 2008.

organize communication programs and campaigns. They’re the communication experts for their organizations. Like leaders, communication managers are steeped in planning, but this is generally intermediate-range planning, such as developing the communication for a multiyear marketing plan, determining the key messages for an organization’s “cultural change” training program, or developing the content guidelines for the company’s Web pages and its various intranet and extranet uses.

Traditionally, public relations professionals have been viewed more as communication managers than as organizational leaders. Leaders are the individuals charged with building and maintaining an organization’s long-term reputation, helping to meet profit goals, and advising organizations on how to act responsibly in the public interest. They reconcile strategic plans at the highest organizational levels with the interests and concerns of groups whose support is needed, whether those groups are inside the organization, in the community, or even elsewhere in the world. Let’s examine several dimensions of public relations leadership.

Advancing Socially Responsible Behavior

Public relations leaders help keep organizations profitable and long-lasting through socially responsible behavior that serves the public interest as well as their own. Events like the Enron debacle, the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and regional conflicts throughout the world underscore how critical it is for businesses, governments, and nonprofit organizations to be viewed as credible and responsible in all places at all times. And yet the technology boom of the past two decades, together with overpaid executives at home and underpaid factory workers abroad, show that the public reputations of many organizations are in serious jeopardy. Against this backdrop,

Public relations practitioners discuss campaign tactics.



thoughtful observers today argue that institutions should assume more responsibility for the consequences of their actions. Insightful public relations practitioners recognize that socially responsive and responsible behavior helps prevent labor unrest and strikes, customer boycotts, environmental lawsuits, and random attacks by disaffected individuals and activist groups.

Veteran public relations practitioner and academic Rex Harlow believed that the public relations practitioner defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve in the public interest. Former Hill & Knowlton CEO Robert Dilenschneider takes an even stronger stand, arguing that socially responsive behavior from 2000 to 2020 will determine the extent to which globalization and the world economy will survive.

Public Relations Leaders and Decision Making

What gives public relations leaders and practitioners the responsibility or the right to determine and influence socially responsive organizational behavior in the public interest? In truth, public relations leaders do not make all the decisions that lead to change within organizations, but because they constantly monitor and interact with all the publics in the organization's environment, they often possess information that suggests a need for change or indicates the direction change should take. Public relations practitioners can discover a problem when it is still manageable, thus avoiding unnecessary crises. Indeed, the late Scott Cutlip, renowned public relations educator, believed that the public relations practitioner's most important responsibility is to interpret the public opinion climate to management.

Because they understand the interests of different publics, public relations leaders can help organizations set policy and make strategic plans, establish philosophies, achieve objectives, adapt to changing environments, and successfully compete in today's markets. Public relations can make important contributions to forming an organization's ideas about itself—what it should do and what society wants and expects from it. Charles Steinberg described this aspect of public relations as the “structuring of company

philosophy and carrying out that philosophy in practice so that what the institution says is not at variance with what it does.”²² In essence, then, public relations leaders spend considerable time gauging the implications that social, political, and economic issues at home and abroad have on maintaining the organization’s long-term reputation.

One reason we distinguish public relations leadership from the management of an organization’s communication functions is that the public’s perceptions of business and organizational life are too far-reaching for public relations to address them alone. Indeed, public relations is increasingly the responsibility of executives as well as the province of public relations staffers. We see the need to reinvent the “good” in business and organizational life, as government agencies at all levels retrench in the face of new fiscal limitations. Hospitals struggle with regulations, rising costs, new technologies, and changing customer demands. Arts organizations seek new sources of funds as Congress plans to reduce or withdraw government support. Businesses deal with global competition, uncertain economic conditions, and a skeptical public. Thus successful leaders in all organizations incorporate public relations savvy and perspectives into their work.

Chief executive officers of major corporations are well aware that public relations contributes to decision making. Sir Gordon White, who as chairman of Hanson Industries made a career of buying companies and eliminating their corporate staffs, had a staff of only 12, but it included a public relations officer. Perhaps the most important task of public relations practitioners is to ensure that public relations considerations are in the mainstream of managerial decision making.

Because the global reach of public relations practice is changing so quickly, it’s hard to know exactly how many public relations practitioners there are around the world, but the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that there were 243,000 public relations specialists in the United States in 2006 and forecast that to rise to 286,000 by 2016.³ In fact, U.S. organizations spend more than \$10 billion annually on public relations. Worldwide, the public relations industry in Europe, including the Commonwealth of Independent States and former Soviet-bloc countries, is roughly one-third the size of the U.S. industry. Next come Asian countries, especially Japan, China, Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore, and Malaysia. The field is growing rapidly in Latin America and somewhat in Africa’s fastest growing economies.

As shown in figure 1.1, within the United States, it’s estimated that roughly one-third of all public relations practitioners work for agencies. Some of those agencies focus on public relations, but others combine public relations with marketing communication or advertising. Another third of practitioners work for corporations, including consumer goods such as consumer electronics, manufacturing, financial, and investment businesses; insurance firms; industrial firms; and the entertainment and media industries. Trade associations, educational institutions, and foundations employ about one-seventh of the practitioners, and health care about one-tenth. Municipal, county, state, and federal government agencies account for about 5 percent, as do social welfare, charitable, and religious associations.

THE SCOPE OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS INDUSTRY

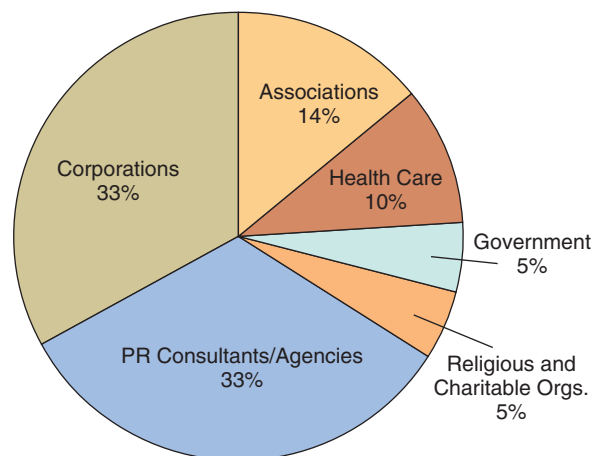


FIGURE 1.1 Where U.S. Public Relations Practitioners Work

A PROFILE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS

More than at any time in the past, today's public relations practitioner is better educated, better paid, and more prepared to take on a range of strategic planning and communication functions for organizations of all kinds. The following subsections describe the principal findings from a large-scale

U.S. and Canadian study of the profession.⁴ The study was conducted by the two largest professional associations in public relations—the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC).

Education

Two-thirds (65%) of public relations practitioners are college and university graduates with bachelor's degrees, and almost half say their degree programs focused on public relations. Almost 300 universities have student public relations chapters. In 2007–08 nearly 10,000 students were members of PRSSA, the Public Relations Student Society of America (see spotlight 1.2).

Increasingly more practitioners have not only a bachelor's degree but advanced degrees as well. More than 30 percent, or almost a third, had master's degrees, up from 27 percent five years earlier. Of those, close to half the master's degrees were in communications, public relations, or journalism or related media fields. Another 40 percent were master of business administration (MBA) degrees. The remaining 10 to 15 percent came from a range of related graduate majors. And surprisingly, an additional 2 percent of those surveyed held doctorate or PhD degrees.

Just under one-fourth (24%) of communicators surveyed have also passed national accreditation exams administered by either the IABC or the PRSA.⁵

Salaries

Salary figures can change dramatically from year to year. A good place to check a variety of salary figures for public relations is www.salary.com (search by using “public relations” as keywords and put in your desired location). According to salary.com, in 2008 the median salary for a beginning public relations specialist in Chicago was \$46,035 plus benefits and bonuses. A public relations director in Chicago had a median salary of \$136,712 plus benefits and bonuses. The top public relations executives at a few major corporations, however, make more than \$500,000 annually.⁶

The Council of Public Relations Firms says that account executives with 2–5 years experience typically make between \$35,000 and \$50,000 plus benefits and bonuses. An account supervisor with 5–10 years experience makes between \$55,000 and \$85,000 plus benefits and bonuses. The senior vice president with 10 or more years of experience is likely to make between \$120,000 and \$175,000 plus benefits and bonuses.⁷

The latest salary survey done by PRSA found the average public relations practitioner's salary was \$69,000 plus \$10,000 bonus. The average public relations consultant made \$110,000 with \$20,000 in bonuses.⁸

Age and Gender

The average age for those PRSA and IABC members surveyed was 39. It's important to note that the average age of practitioners has been dropping annually for at least the past decade.



Today students in public relations can be involved in one of 284 chapters of the Public Relations Student Society of America, an educational division of the parent Public Relations Society of America. In 2007, there were more than 9,600 student members of PRSSA across the United States. This was not always the case.

PRSSA was founded at the annual meeting of PRSA on November 11, 1967, in Philadelphia, with the support of J. Carroll Bateman, president of the society that year. Today, the PRSSA case study competition is named for Bateman. Public relations professionals had been looking at involving students in the professional society since 1950. The first nine chapters were chartered in early 1968, with five more added before the year ended.

Dr. Frederick Teahan, APR, vice president for education for PRSA and

founding father of PRSSA, wrote the following about PRSSA's first two decades: "What an unlikely time it was for the PRSA leadership to create a junior branch of the society. . . . Riots devastated cities. Violent protests about involvement in Vietnam were commonplace. The assassination of public figures both sickened and frightened. Widespread radicalism assaulted all American institutions—religion, government, the military, democracy. Universities themselves were denounced as 'irrelevant.' And all of this was inevitably connected in the popular mind with students. The champions of a public relations society of young collegiates, however, were undaunted. Radicalism appeared to be absent from the ranks of these pre-professionals."

It may have been an unlikely time to start, but PRSSA grew rapidly. It created its own national conference

in 1976. One major requirement for a chapter was the number of public relations courses offered by the unit in which public relations was taught. That number increased to five public relations courses offered by the unit in 1988. That remains the standard. In its 40th anniversary year, 2007, the friends of PRSSA, called Champions, published *PRSSA, A Brief History* as a gift to the 81,000 PRSSA alumni and the generations of future students to come.

Source: F. H. "Chris" Teahan, A Brief History: The First Two Decades, and Susan Gonders and Barbara DeSanto, A Brief History: The Second Two Decades (New York: Public Relations Society of America, 2007).

More than 7 in 10 of the practitioners (71%) were female. In fact, the female:male ratio has nearly reversed itself in the last 25 or 30 years. Even so, men continue to hold proportionately more of the top managerial public relations posts, primarily because they have spent a greater number of years in the field. Salary differences between males and females is but one of the gender issues we consider later.⁹

The Intern Assignment

You have been fortunate to get a paid internship for the summer working with Marissa and the public relations agency handling the Microsoft account. Marissa wants to do something this summer as a social marketing project. Your first assignment is to think about various social marketing projects that Microsoft might be involved with and to look at what publics and communication tools might be used. Answer the following questions:

1. What social projects would fit best with Microsoft in its northwestern United States location? Provide three ideas.
2. Who might be Microsoft's key external publics for one of these projects?
3. Who are Microsoft's key internal publics, and how would you want to involve them?
4. What media would you want to use in this project?
5. What other communication tools might work well?

Case Study

Summary



For self-testing and additional chapter resources, go to the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/lattimore3e.

Public relations is a management and relationship-building function based on effective two-way communication between an organization and its stakeholders. This function is carried out by public relations practitioners whose duties include a wide range of skills from effective writing to strategic planning. The public relations practitioner today is better educated, better paid, and better prepared to work in all types of organizations. At advanced levels public relations leaders design and execute communication campaigns, contribute to organizational strategic planning and decision-making, and assume responsibility for building and maintaining the organization's image and reputation.

While no exact figure of public relations practitioners in the United States is available, the Labor Bureau estimates there are about a quarter of a million public relations professionals here. However, public relations is a global function that is particularly fast-growing in Eastern Europe. Europe itself has about one-third the number of public relations practitioners in the United States. Asia is also a fast-growing region of the world for public relations followed by Latin America and then Africa.

Key Terms

public affairs
public relations

publics
social marketing

Notes

1. *Careers in Public Relations: A Guide to Opportunities in a Dynamic Industry*, Council of Public Relations Firms, retrieved from www.prfirms.org on Feb. 20, 2008, p. 8.
2. Charles S. Steinberg, *The Creation of Consent: Public Relations in Practice* (New York: Hastings House, 1975), p. 9.
3. Bureau of Labor Statistics. <http://stats.bls.gov/oco/ocos086.htm>, on Feb. 14, 2008.
4. *Profile 2000—A Survey of the Profession* (International Association of Business Communicators and Public Relations Society of America, 2001), p. A22.
5. *Ibid.*, p. A5.
6. Retrieved from www.salary.com on Feb. 20, 2008.
7. Council of Public Relations Firms, *Careers in Public Relations: A Guide to Opportunities in a Dynamic Industry*, retrieved from www.prfirms.org on Feb. 18, 2008, p. 8.
8. *Profile 2000—A Survey of the Profession*, p. A5.
9. *Ibid.*

