

GORDON –
CCP Pod Cast #2 – Media Relations
April 29, 2007



Welcome to the Corporate Communication Pod cast on Media Relations. My name is Shelby Gordon and the title of this podcast is Media Relations Today – what skills and tools have the best results in pitching and having stories picked up by the media.

Today we will discuss a brief description of recent developments in media platforms and the resulting changes in the practice of media relations. I will also share an outline of what skills and tools are needed to present a message, product, or event to the public through print and broadcast media outlets.

Twenty years ago a well written press release distributed to a broad list of media contacts would generally result in the message wanting to be conveyed about a company, product, or event receiving viable coverage. This was a time when newspapers had a stronghold on the information disseminated to the interested masses. Local news television efforts were concentrated and their ranks were comprised of dedicated teams of reporters. Lastly, national news resonated highly with viewers based on the journalist credibility of legendary journalists such as Edward R. Morrow or Walter Cronkite.

Today the media relations playing field is much more complex. Changes in the area of media relations have been driven, primarily, by the emergence of the Internet. Add the expansion and adoption by the public of the 24-hour news channel as primarily sources of news and the result is that capturing the attention of a reporter is now harder than ever.

The emergence of these new media entities have challenged the metropolitan newspaper business resulting in the consolidation of longtime newspaper empires, staffing layoffs and a drastic drop in both readership and advertising revenue. Local and national network broadcast news have also experienced a decline in viewership, and overall there are now wider boundaries of journalistic credibility by traditional news sources which are working hard to compete with the tabloid-like presentations of the cable news network and internet based news sources, such as the Drudge Report.

David Geary, in a Public Relations Quarterly article entitled: “The Decline of Media Credibility and its Impact on Public Relations,” published in the fall of 2005 outlines findings from the Gallup Organization, which in September 2004 “found that news media credibility was at its lowest point in 30 years. The score of those who had confidence in media to report fairly and accurately had plummeted 10 percent – from 54 percent to 44 percent in only one year.” Geary’s article goes on to outline examples of this decline and he references Jayson Blair’s plagiarized articles for the New York Times, the battles network news entities have had to capture exclusive interviews such

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as those with former POW Jessica Lynch and runaway bride Jennifer Wilbanks, and actually faking live television shots.

How do media relations practitioners manage the expectations of their leaders? In many cases, as author Paul Argenti, noted in his book Corporate Communications, “Most executives today recognize that the media are typically not going to get very excited about the good things that companies do. Instead, the worse the news is about a company or its CEO, the more likely it is to become a major news story. That will capture the media’s (and the public’s) attention, if only briefly.”

So how do you get a message communicated to the public through this narrow passage?

Here are a few suggestions:

(1) Walk in the journalists shoes

Be sure that the information being disseminated is news worthy. Another way of thinking about the standard information journalists are seeking could be found in the terms:

New-ness: Why should a reporter write this story now?

Near-ness: Does the story fit into the coverage area of the publication or broadcast entity geographically, or topically?

Known-ness: Does your story have something familiar that will catch the reader’s eye? A local business? A place everyone knows?

Unusual-ness: Is your story “dog bites man” or, better is it “man bites dog”?

Conflict: Are there two sides to this story that make it interesting? Are there two or more viewpoints that are in opposition to each other?

Importance: will a lot of people have a personal interest the story? What can be learned from the story?

Human element: Does the story capture human emotion? Not just the despair of a homeless person or the sympathy of a volunteer, but humor, anger, discovery, greed, surprise, courage, regret.

Visual Element: does the story paint a picture literally or in the mind’s eye.

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A tip in this situation would also be to ensure that you're in communication with the appropriate journalist within the media organization regarding a specific story. Analyzing specific reporters' needs and wants builds credibility and trust with reporters. This is considered a "retail" media relations circumstance based on one-on-one relationships rather than a wholesale media relations circumstance that is typically a blanket press document distribution that no longer is effective or efficient.

- (2) Present the information in a way that makes the story easy for the journalist to grab and elaborate on. This can be done primarily with a well constructed press release, but can also be done with a well crafted personal pitch to a reporter. This personal pitch is typically a synopsis of the story's hook and content that is developed via phone with an e-mail follow-up. Yes, reporters still answer their phones and they'll be glad to speak with anyone who has a story that is from a credible source, offers new and interesting ideas and values their time with a well through-out and quickly delivered presentation.

(3)

Also be sure that updated information is available to the media via the Internet, again with contact information clearly outlined for follow-up.

Lastly, manage expectations – both yours and that of your organization. Every press release or story pitch is not picked up by the media or is it picked up immediately. Sometimes the content is not of interest, the concept needs to be further developed and re-pitched by the media relations person, or the timing isn't right. Constant cultivation and development of quality new stories will help media relations professionals become viable and credible sources for the media.

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Veteran reporter, Scott Sayres of FOX 4 in Dallas offered a series of suggestions he calls ARCH in the December 2006 issue of Public Relations Tactics which I'm paraphrasing:

A- stands for Access –

If you tell a reporter I'll get back to you- do it and do it with some viable information that will be useful to their story. Let them become reliant upon you to get them the information they need when they need it.

R – stands for Responsiveness –

Be sure that reporters can get in contact with you. On all press materials, out-of-office voice and e-mail messages, and business cards, there should be alternative numbers where you can be reached. This which may include pager or cell numbers.

C – stands for Creativity –

Here again, working in partnership with a reporter for the development of a story will build credibility for the media relations personnel and their entity.

H – stands for Honesty –

The phrase "no comment" is death to a media relations person, but – surprisingly – the phrase "no" isn't. If the answer to a question by the media is no, the media relations person should be prepared to explain why.

A takeaway from this pod cast is that media placement is not guaranteed, the media relations world has been through dynamic change resulting in a change of philosophy and response from media relations professionals. However, with thoughtful, accurate and newsworthy material, stories regarding product, companies and events can still be developed and pitched to the press resulting in successful coverage.

Resources used in this pod cast include the book Corporate Communications by Paul Argenti, Corporate Communication, New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin 2007

Edd Applegate's article entitled, Mistakes Made in Company's Press Releases from the Winter 2005 Issue of Public Relations Quarterly Volume 50/Issue 4-Pages 25-30.

Scott Sayres article entitled "A broadcast reporter reviews how to win (or lose his trust) from the December 2006 issue of Public Relations Tactics Volume 13/Issue 12, page 12.

The Decline of Media Credibility and its Impact on Public Relations is an article from the Fall 2005 Issue of Public relations quarterly by David L Geary.

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Also key points were incorporated from an April 28, 2007 workshop on the art of feature story pitching, presented by Mark Hazlin of Xenophon Strategies and Kathy Lovin of the Salvation Army at the 2007 Salvation Army National Advisory Organizations meeting in Dallas .

Thank you for tuning in Again, this is Shelby Gordon. You have just listed to Corporate communication Podcast on Media Relations.