

INTRODUCTION TO THE FOURTH EDITION

Welcome to The New PR Client Service Manual — Fourth Edition. Since the previous edition was published in 1997, our profession has hurtled through both the hottest growth period in its history and an era of tumultuous change.

We had a collective learning experience as the so-called new economy, driven by every business model on earth attaching itself to the Internet, soared and then plummeted with similar velocity. Firms and internal staffs wrenched back and forth between highs from the surge of new business and working with exciting startups with major budgets to suffering the equivalent of month-long ice cream headaches as funding dried up and clients disappeared, often from the face of the earth.

The first surges of new business in 1999 and early 2000 raised our profession to new financial levels and increased professional respect but also created momentum for future travail. Faced with unprecedented growth and prosperity, some agencies abandoned the things that got them there in the first place — good strategic planning, creativity and providing honest, professional counsel — and became expedient. Companies in the new economy thought they could suspend the basic law of PR credibility, namely the requirement that they walk their talk and deliver on their promises within a reasonable amount of time.

With new clients coming aboard weekly, competition for PR talent reached epic proportions and resources became thinner than a dot-com cash flow projection. Agencies leapt to the challenge by adjusting their hiring criteria to recruit anyone with a pulse; the ability to speak in simple declarative sentences with a noun and a verb was a secondary consideration in some cases.

Hordes of fresh-checked lads and lasses were soon given media lists and scripts and put into cubicles to start dialing for dollars. The mission: pitch clients they'd never met and technology they didn't understand to writers they'd never read at publications they'd never seen.

The media reacted like families enjoying dinner at home when the telemarketer interrupts with offers of new long distance service. They started hanging up electronically. They created “bozo and jargon filters” on their e-mail, to automatically delete

messages that contain certain words and releases from PR firms known for their hypester approach (See the special report in Chapter 14 on “Nine Easy Ways to Kill a Startup Through PR”). Several publications wrote major hit pieces, citing tech PR for its lack of professionalism, particularly in cluttering media e-mail or voice mail boxes with meaningless and jargon-filled non-new stories.

On the good news side of the ledger, most agencies provided honest, strategic counsel and the profession gained the highest level of respect in its history. The most compelling achievement was the growing recognition of public relations as the primary means for building new brands and managing reputations. PR became the first discipline brought on board by start-ups after the venture capitalists, lawyers and accountants. Building image and brand identity as fast as possible became a growing part of corporate strategy, especially for companies racing toward initial public offerings (IPOs).

With both branding and IPOs high on the agenda, clients and agencies embraced more complex models for total reputation management and integrated marketing communications. Increased use of the integrated approach, although a little more complicated than cranking out reams of solutions-laden technology news releases, helped establish a strong foundation for our profession evolving into a more trusted consultant role, such as those enjoyed by the Arthur D. Littles, Deloittes and Accentures of the world.

Studies support the evolution. Charles J. Fombrun, research professor of management at the Stern School of Business, New York University, noted in his book, *Reputation*, that building, sustaining and defending a company’s reputation requires a closer coordination of traditional fiefdoms: employee relations, public relations, customer relations, investor relations, and media relations — a job for the public relations firm.

Reputation, he writes, builds strategic value for a company by granting it a competitive advantage that rivals have trouble overcoming. The payoff includes premium prices for products, lower costs of capital and labor, improved loyalty from employees, greater latitude in decision making, a cushion of goodwill when crises hit and enhanced profitability because a good reputation

attracts customers to the company's products, investors to its securities, and employees to its jobs.

Thomas L. Harris, in *Value-Added Public Relations*, stresses that integrated marketing communications requires speaking with one voice — total management of the marketing communications process — so that all messages about a product or service to which a customer is exposed are coordinated and controlled. It's about building a relationship, not just making sales, and looking at business from the consumer's point of view. Credibility is key. "And of all the components of integrated marketing, public relations alone possesses a priceless ingredient that is essential to every IMC program — its ability to lend credibility to the product message," writes Harris.

Jack Trout, the guru of positioning, says the general rule is: PR first, advertising second (PR plants the seed; advertising harvests the crop).

Our profession is all about planting the right seeds and watching them grow. We now have more elaborate and high-powered tools to make it happen than ever before. Of course we need to be more diligent about what we plant, when, for whom and how we nurture it so we achieve the desired results and not something unfit for human (market) consumption.

Results, after all, are what this manual has been all about since it was first published in 1993. The results ethic springs from the principles of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and many of the tenets espoused by its Counselors Academy. We are in business to serve our clients intelligently, strategically and well and prosper accordingly. I believe the results ethic separates practitioners who truly care about their profession and clients from the marginal performers who simply don't get it or resort to the expedient (the churn and burn model of client service).

The new Fourth Edition plows some familiar ground but has been revised considerably. You'll find the core values the same, with a focus on relationships, quality listening, establishing the results ethic, detailed and precise plan implementation, managing conflict and budgeting for results. You'll also see new chapters, checklists, spreadsheets, case histories, tactics and tools to use in managing your organization for results and profits. Also,

for anyone wanting free working samples of the PR Macrovision and other spreadsheet programs shown in the manual, please e-mail me directly (tomg@gablegroup.com).

These are wonderful, challenging times for the public relations profession and I feel fortunate to be a part of it. We live in a new communications world where we have to start each day thinking about what has changed overnight, because there will surely be something new we should pursue quickly in adjusting existing programs to competitive challenge, launching new creative efforts to break through the clutter and providing smart, intuitive, proactive and highly valued counsel to our clients on a regular basis.

Whether a previous reader or a new one, we hope this new edition provides insights, observations, thought processes and tools you can use in organizing for results and advancing your business or organization. As always, your feedback is important, through e-mail or with the form at the end of the manual. Many thanks to the colleagues, media and academicians who provided input to previous editions. Your ideas and alerts to ongoing change have hopefully helped me keep pace with the most exciting period of evolution in the history of the public relations profession.

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