

THE PRACTICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

The inherent value of **public relations** as a discipline reaches well **beyond publicity** and events; public relations is a **responsive** and **cost-effective** way to **reach consumers** and healthcare professionals

When effectively managed, public relations creates unique opportunities for marketers to provide consumers and healthcare professionals with immediate and thorough drug and healthcare information.

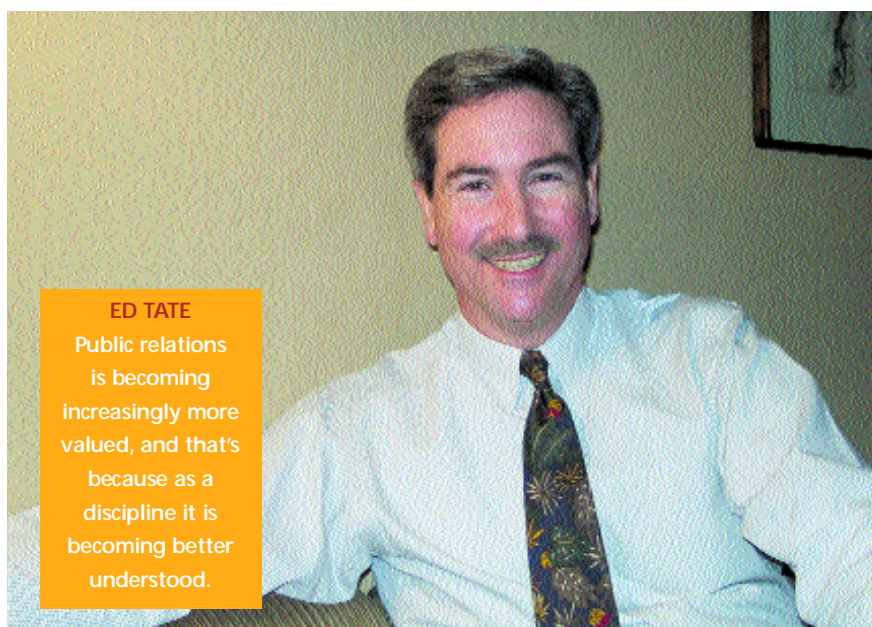
The healthcare public-relations market in the United States grew 30% last year and is now valued at \$434 million, with about 76% dedicated to pharmaceuticals and device and diagnostics. It is not surprising, therefore, that one-half, or 51%, of all brand managers consider public relations to be the most effective marketing tool in terms of dollars spent, according to a survey conducted by M Booth & Associates. Second to public relations is advertising at 44%, with sales promotion coming in at 21%, followed by new media, 17%.

Pharmaceutical marketers no longer regard public relations as simply publicity and events — it is an immediate medium that can reach thousands. Marketers view public relations as an important part of their broader marketing activities.

“Public relations is becoming increasingly more valued, and that’s because as a discipline it is becoming better understood,” says Ed Tate, executive VP of Dudnyk Public Relations. “One of the factors that has benefited public relations is direct-to-consumer advertising. DTC advertising has raised expectations and demand among consumers who want more extensive and more comprehensive and more immediate information and news about drugs and health issues. Consumers want to get as much information and news about drugs and health issues as possible. And one of the strengths of public relations is its

immediacy, another is that public-relations initiatives can be responsive and proactive when an opportunity is created by news events.”

There has been a tremendous amount of emphasis on healthcare public relations as an alternative form of DTC communications, according to Gil Bashe, CEO of Health!Quest, at the potential neglect of building true brand value, true science, and the mastery of issues.



ED TATE

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"A lot of healthcare PR has been directed toward the pure generation of awareness about the brand," he says. "People are aware of certain brands, but it comes down to, does that brand work for me? Does it make a difference in my life?"

"There is a lot of dialogue on what is the real value of DTC," Mr. Bashe says. "No one doubts its pull-through capacity. But people are

starting to question its retention capacity. PR can be very cost effective, and at the same time it is a magnificent educational tool that can have a tremendous impact on patient compliance."

"Over the past three to five years, the direct-to-consumer advertising push has opened the door a bit wider to embrace consumer public relations," says Nancy Bacher Long, executive VP/director of public relations at Dorland Sweeney Jones Health Communications. "Which is a good thing ... some very exciting and interesting programs have been done. I'm not certain, however, that they are always fully integrated into the strategic marketing vision."

Developing an Integrated approach

A growing number of companies are starting to adopt a more integrated approach to developing effective communications campaigns.

"There used to be a lot of lip service to this, but more and more companies realize that they have to take all of the elements that can grow a brand and bring them all together," says Ron Schmid, VP of public relations at Centocor Inc. "A little PR program, that doesn't really get a company much, a little advertising doesn't get much — a little of anything doesn't generate much. But when companies start to tie all these together they can increase reach and frequency, whether that is directed at physician communities, consumers, or the investment community."

Developing solid end-user communications, meaning patient and prescriber, is one of the goals of a good public-relations campaign, according to pharmaceutical company PR practitioners and communications managers.

"It's easy to sometimes lose sight of the customer," says Robert W. Grupp, VP of corporate communications at Cephalon Inc. "We exist really to discover, develop, and market products that enhance and improve lives. That should be the starting point for much of what we do, whether it be quarterly financial results, beating a competitor to market, or getting a certain headline in major media. Sometimes other factors get in the way ... causing our communicators to lose focus of the end-user audience. We would do well to continue to focus on patients as being the end user of our products and ultimately the receiver of our messages."



SHEILA GIES

Marketers now view public relations as a true part of the marketing mix. Several years ago, there wasn't as much conviction that public relations had a role to play, it was usually equated just with generating media coverage.

HOW TOTAL PR BUDGETS ARE ALLOCATED ACROSS ALL INDUSTRIES (EXCLUDING AUTOMOTIVE)

2001 Budget breakdown in dollars	% change from 2000
\$585 Corporate Media Relations	down 173% from 2000
\$518 Product Media Relations	down 58% from 2000
\$203 Special events	down 126% from 2000
\$180 Internal Communications	down 149% from 2000
\$135 Investor Relations	down 108% from 2000
\$113 Community Relations	down 121% from 2000
\$113 Charitable Contributions	down 64% from 2000
\$113 Public Affairs	down 46% from 2000
\$113 Research	down 30% from 2000
\$90 Government Relations	down 49% from 2000
\$90 Issues Advertising	down 2% from 2000

2001 Budget breakdown in percentage	% change from 2000
26% Corporate Media Relations	up 2% from 2000
23% Product Media Relations	up 5% from 2000
9% Special events	down 1% from 2000
8% Internal Communications	down 2% from 2000
6% Investor Relations	down 2% from 2000
5% Community Relations	down 2% from 2000
5% Charitable Contributions	down 1% from 2000
5% Public Affairs	no change from 2000
5% Research	up 1% from 2000
4% Government Relations	no change from 2000
4% Issues Advertising	up 1% from 2000

Note: Based on reported internal and external PR/PA budgets by participating clients.
Source: Thomas L. Harris and Impulse Research

A particular challenge to biotech companies such as Cephalon and Centocor is communicating complex data and information about the science on which their products are built.

"Certainly in the biotechnology field, it's about the data," Mr. Schmid says. "It's about the science, and the science is absolutely fascinating. At Centocor we are working with monoclonal antibodies, which have an extraor-

dinary future in biotechnology, and the science around that is transforming. A lot of energy needs to be put into understanding that science and articulating that science to the trade journals, to broadcast media — because that's who PR deals with as a constituency.

"One of the most important points in the field of biotechnology is that we have a tendency to have a far greater focus on the patient," Mr. Schmid says. "We believe

strongly that there should be parables about patients. And miracle parables. It is truly moving to see the impact of a drug. We need to celebrate those miracle parables to other people — through communication."

Public-relations initiatives also are becoming more focused, pharmaceutical companies are starting to hire specialists to handle specific brands and therapeutic categories.

"Marketers now view public relations as a true part of the marketing mix," says Sheila Gies, international communications manager for Hoffmann-La Roche. "Several years ago, there wasn't as much conviction that PR had a role to play, it was usually just equated with generating media coverage. That was a pretty limited view of what PR could accomplish and that has changed. Because of the acknowledgement of what PR can accomplish, we are seeing more sophisticated programs being devised that are multi-faceted.

"On the industry side, I am seeing more people like myself being assigned to develop and manage public-relations programs for specific brands. Before, there was generally a PR department with responsibility for all prod-

Building An Effective Healthcare Public-Relations Program

LAY THE FOUNDATION – RESEARCH. Knowledge of the brand, issue, and marketplace is the basis of the campaign. Know the client's objectives and the needs of their customers. Push to understand the latest trends and demographics of the therapeutic category.

DEFINE YOUR STAKEHOLDERS. Healthcare is not a mass market — it is segmented into many different audiences. Define which are critical to your client's success. Aside from physicians and patients, consider other groups that have the power to influence the cascade of customers. These might include payers, public health professionals, patient advocates, and professional societies.

GATHER BRAND INSIGHT. What is the value — perceived or real — of the client's brand among the key audiences? Informal research, focus groups, or surveys can lead you on the right course to formulate your strategy — the end product of this critical step.

BRAINSTORM. Your strategic direction is clear. Now you can generate the "big idea." Flush it out from A to Z. Put yourself in the shoes of the client's customer and ask yourself the difficult questions. If it doesn't fit, go back to the drawing board.

DEVELOP THE MESSAGE. The building blocks of your campaign, core messages are neither tag lines nor slogans. They are the positioning tools through which a brand's values and attributes are conveyed. Your messages tell your story.

GET BUY-IN. Ideas and messages must be agreed upon by key internal and external stakeholders including clients, affiliates, salesforce, key thought leaders, and advocates. At this point, train your spokespeople to effectively deliver your messages.

MOBILIZE THE MEDIA. The media is often the main vehicle through which your message is conveyed. Now is the time to fine-tune your media strategy, target specific outlets/reporters, and ensure proper expertise and relationships are in place.

EXECUTE. Adjustments can be made mid-project, but flawless execution is an absolute requirement from start to finish. Attention to detail and adapting rapidly to change is what clients expect from their agencies. The simplest slip-up can be fatal to a program and, at times, a relationship.

FOLLOW THROUGH. Consistency of program and message delivery can make the difference between success and mediocrity. Ensure your spokespeople are available for interviews. Analyze and merchandise results as they come in.

EVALUATE. Did the program work? Oftentimes it isn't so clear. Success goes beyond the number of media hits or audience impressions. If customers demonstrate repeat trial, if satisfaction surveys are positive, and if media analyses demonstrate consistency of messages reported and understood, you are on track. Finally, apply your lessons learned — evaluation is the final step of your current program, but also the first step to your next.

Source: Steven Immergut, MPH, managing partner and director of client services, HealthQuest Public Relations, Metuchen, N.J.



STEVE IMMERGUT
Pharmaceutical
and device and
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now demand
high-level sector
knowledge.



**NANCY
BACHER LONG**
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"There are so many good patient-education programs today that make great use of publicity," Mr. Tate says. "Marketers have a much greater appreciation for that. We are seeing more frequent use of partnerships with patient advocacy groups and healthcare professionals and organizations to do a better job of educating patients. That is really one of the great strengths of public relations."

Marketers realize that in delivering a complex message they can benefit from having that message delivered by a third party, whether that be an opinion leader or an advocate group through the media.

"Complex messages that hope to bring about changes in action can be delivered sometimes better through public-relations activities

than they can through advertising," says Neil McGregor-Paterson, managing director of Shire Hall US. "I have been in the business for many years, and the perception of public relations has changed considerably in the past 10 years. Marketers now view public relations as a valid opportunity to create the appropriate environment to support other activities."

ocusing on **Action** orientation

As a discipline, public relations has evolved to become an action-oriented medium, especially as communications are faster and globally oriented.

"Collectively as a profession, we have become more focused on action-oriented communications, that is focusing on the behavioral model of public relations," Mr. Grupp says. "What do we want our audience to do? As a result of our communications, what action do we want them to take? What point of view do we want them to adopt? Particularly in the pharma sector, but I think in PR generally, there has been a decided move in that direction. And that's very good. This enables us to position ourselves as another business tool in our organizations. We can go to senior management and point out the actions that took place as a result of our efforts. Whether that be a physician prescribing our drug or a patient requesting it."

The old days of public relations viewed as the P.T. Barnum of the media mix are over. Today, PR is more than fluff and spin.

"That was then, and this is now," Ms. Long says. "And what PR is now is a critical tool for moving the market, accelerating adoption of a product, accelerating a trial, or getting inquiries about a product."

"Sometimes those efforts are very synergistic, well-coordinated, and well-thought out, sometimes they're not," she says. "The ability of PR to try to change consumer behavior as well as physician behavior is well-documented, it is highly valued on the marketing side when it's viewed as an integral part of the marketing mix."

The perception of public relations maybe changing, but Ms. Long, who has been in the business for more than 20 years, is still amazed at the lack of true understanding about what public relations is and what it can accomplish.

"There are many people who understand PR on the marketing side, but there are many more who don't," she says. "There is still a disconnect. I don't think marketing people fully appreciate that public relations can be a marketing tool against which outcomes can be measured."

Ms. Gomez agrees, stating that public relations is more than simply issuing press releases. She defines, in part, effective public relations tactics as those that encompass task-force development and by-lined articles developed by key thought leaders.

"PR is not just press releases, that's a common misconception," she says.

For Ms. Gies, a successful public-relations campaign entails having a solid understanding of the environment in which a particular drug is used, clear objectives, a focused target audience for the initiative, and measurable outcomes or at least ensuring that a distinct activity furthers a broader goal or direction for the brand.

"I have always found that by immersing oneself in a category and trying to learn as much as one can about the environment in which that disease or health condition is treated, what is needed in terms of PR usually becomes evident," Ms. Gies says. "This analysis of the market — and the competition — usually leads to finding gaps and opportunities that arise from asking questions about where the company currently is in the market and where it would like to be."

"It may sound obvious, but as a PR professional one needs to be very clear on what he or she is trying to accomplish from the initiative and the initiative needs to support the marketing objectives for the brand," she says. "I've seen many programs fail when a PR agency has a great idea, but strategically it isn't aligned with the marketing objectives the pharmaceutical company has. Linked to this is having a focused target audience for the program."

Years ago, most PR campaigns were broad in scope with the goal of building general awareness about a disease and its treatments.

ucts, which didn't allow for specialization," she says.

Ms. Gies moved to the U.S. in January of this year to conduct global communications for Hoffmann-La Roche in the capacity of international communications manager for Pegasys, the company's flagship hepatitis C medication. Pegasys recently was launched in Switzerland and is expected to launch in the European Union and the U.S. next year.

While many pharmaceutical companies recognize that public relations is a viable medium, there are still only a few that are putting their marketing dollars into public-relations initiatives targeted directly to healthcare professionals.

"Public relations has been relegated to the consumer sector as part of a DTC program or a direct-to-patient program," says Marita Gomez, CEO of HealthInfo Direct. "The problem is pharmaceutical companies forget that it is also crucial to develop a public-relations campaign directed to healthcare professionals — the physicians, the nurses, the other individuals who patients talk to in relation to products and brands."

"Companies are starting to make strides," she says. "Slow but sure, enlightened pharmaceutical companies are now seeing the value of public relations in general. And as DTC becomes stronger and as the value of PR grows, there will be more PR in the healthcare professional market."

PR initiatives are being geared to educating consumers and patients about disease states, related wellness issues, and about how a particular drug fits into that equation.

"Today, programs are more likely to be very focused initiatives that may target one particular segment of the population for a media-relations campaign," Ms. Gies says. "Or, it may be strategically more important to build alliances and educate third-party organizations about the brand than it is to generate media coverage. It all depends on what the program is trying to achieve, hence the focus on clear objectives."

Public relations encompasses the gamut of a company's corporate communications initiatives. In addition to providing information about products, corporate public relations practitioners and consultants have the task of communicating a company's strategies and position in the market. Synchronized and effective communications are as important for large pharmaceutical companies as they are for small-cap and mid-cap organizations.

"Cephalon is going to be profitable for the first time in the third quarter this year," Mr. Grupp says. "It's a huge milestone for us. There are about 1,300 biotech companies in the U.S., of which about 350 are publicly traded. And of those, we can count about 15 or 20 that are profitable. And we are going to become one of those."

"For our 14-year-old company, there is an enormous challenge within this economy to sustain that," he says. "Communications become one of the tools that can help achieve that. As we become a profitable biotech company and join that elite group, we are spending a fair amount of time on how we position ourselves publicly and how we communicate our strategy. Communications or investor relations 101 would necessitate, tell investors and customers what the company is going to do, tell them when it did it, and then remind them what it has accomplished. Communications and public relations becomes a key business tool for accomplishing that. It's valued by the senior management team. I am proud of that, but it doesn't happen automatically. It happens with a lot of deliberate effort and hard work."

Return on Investment

Measuring the outcome of a public-relations program is just as important for pharmaceutical marketers as measuring the return on investment for their other promotional activities. With only three out of 10 approved drugs recovering their research and development costs — costs which are projected to reach \$30.5 billion in 2001 — there is increased scrutiny on promotional budgets. Fewer products are being promoted on increasingly diminished budgets. Pharmaceutical companies will not turn to public relations as they have in the past unless the PR industry can effectively demonstrate a return on invest-

ment. Agencies must demonstrate the benefits of public-relations programs in a quantifiable way (see box on page 36). In response, PR agencies are getting better at evaluating and communicating the return on investment of their services.

"This is something we have been talking about for several years," Mr. Tate says. "And it's not just PR agencies, but advertisers as well. It is more challenging for PR, but people are doing some excellent work in that regard. The University of Florida Institute for Public Relations recently did a study that put a value on the relationships built through PR. One of the great services that PR agencies provide is relationship building with key third parties, key influencers. But how to put a value on that is difficult."

The evaluation of public-relations and media campaigns remains somewhat of an enigma, especially since these programs frequently do not run in isolation. The trend is for multiple disciplines to operate simultaneously in a coordinated effort.

"It is our duty to demonstrate the benefits of our PR programs on the bottom line," Mr. McGregor-Paterson says. "What does it mean for the sales of the products we are supporting? That is really key. PR can no longer — should no longer — carry out a program, run a media event, or a press conference, and then tell the client how many inches of press coverage they got. That's an output ... that doesn't tell the client anything. It doesn't tell the client what change of action was brought about with consumers or clinicians. As agencies, we need to effectively evaluate the output as well as the outcomes to clearly demonstrate ROI. If we are going to get our share of the budgets, which PR clearly deserves, we need to demonstrate what a campaign is going to do for clients."

Mr. McGregor-Paterson suggests one of the best ways to demonstrate outcomes is to work with the client company's market research team. Baseline evaluations should be carried out before a program is implemented, then a similar evaluation should be conducted after the program has been completed.

Mr. McGregor-Paterson says, "As long as there are baseline measurements and the evaluation is carried out at the end of the program, we should be able to get some sort of fix on it. One of the challenges is that a PR program is not run in isolation. There is an advertising campaign, a PR program, sales representatives, maybe a relationship marketing program. Differentiating a result due to PR will remain a challenge."



MARITA GOMEZ

Slow but sure, enlightened pharmaceutical companies are now seeing the value of public relations in general.

The debate about measurement tools and how public relations can be measured has been ongoing for years.

"Ours is a 'fuzzy' science and difficult to measure in absolute terms," Ms. Gies says. "Media coverage has traditionally been how PR agencies measured their success: they simply added up the reach or circulation of a publication or broadcast to come up with the number of impressions generated. I'm personally more interested in knowing if our messages were understood and reflected in the media coverage. Millions of impressions are meaningless if the story is not being correctly interpreted. In addition, I now see much more focus on targeting the publications and making sure the readership/viewership is in line with the demographics of the audience the drug treats."

There are some ways to quantify the tactical results of a PR campaign, such as anecdotal reports from sales reps or requests for brochures or other materials from a 1-800-number that was part of the campaign.

"But there is so much that isn't measurable," Ms. Gies says. "How do you quantify a relationship with a stakeholder group that leads to reimbursement for your product? Or measure a tactic that pushes health authorities to act more quickly to approve a product due to public pressure? In my mind, you can't put a value or strict measurement on one aspect of a PR campaign, which may reap incredible rewards."

Pharmaceutical companies, however, need to maximize their return, especially now that there are fewer pharmaceutical products being promoted in medical journals and other media. Marketers are striving to maximize their share of voice in the market — using advertising, medical education, public rela-

Survey Pinpoints

Value of Public Relations in Building Brands

Public relations is considered a vital component for building brand value, maintaining brand vitality, and establishing brand credibility according to a national poll of brand managers by M Booth & Associates, a national public-relations firm.

The study, based on responses of more than 100 brand managers, provides evidence that public relations is the most effective way to establish brand credibility, to surround a brand in a particular editorial context, and provides the best return for the marketing dollar spent. The survey was fielded by McBain Associates, a research firm.

The majority of brand managers polled — 51% — believe that public relations, when compared to advertising, sales promotion, and new media, is critical (“very important”) for establishing brand credibility. In comparison, 44% characterized advertising as “very important”; 21% said sales promotion, and 17% reported new media.

Public relations also led the way as the most effective marketing communications discipline when editorial context is important: 51% of brand managers said public relations was “very important” in targeting editorial context; 30% said advertising was “very important”; 15%, sales promotion, and 14%, new media. Furthermore, brand managers feel that PR is the best way to garner third-party endorsement: 39% said PR was “very important”; compared with 17% for advertising, 13% for sales promotion, and 10% for new media.

tions, relationship marketing, and direct-to-consumer advertising.

“What we need to deliver on the public relations side is a team that has an understanding of all the different communications disciplines,” Mr. McGregor-Paterson says. “And how these disciplines can be integrated to maximize outcomes.”

Mr. Schmid agrees that for a true evaluation of a program there needs to be a clear definition of the metrics and initiatives needed and the long-term benefits.

“Sometimes there is a tendency to view PR as a one-time deal,” Mr. Schmid says. “Having said that, there are one-time deals, when we make certain announcements or communicate particular data. But if the goal is to develop positive platforms, and not communications related to a defensive position on a product, then positive platforms need to be viewed for the long term — a year, two years, etc., so that a program can really begin to raise awareness and drive reach and frequency.”

Public relations practitioners are starting to adopt the role of a strategic consultant for clients. They have a wider understanding of the different communication disciplines, which enhance the public-relations initiatives but also support the other disciplines and support outcomes. Because the pharmaceutical industry is so highly regulated and the stakes are higher, public relations professionals serving the healthcare sector need to have a greater knowledge of the industry, of the clients, and of the media than professionals serving other industries.

“It is one thing to deliver a program,” Mr.

Bashe says. “But we have to ask ourselves ... what is the return on investment for the client in terms of brand reputation, brand building, education, impact at patient advocacy groups, and professional associations? How do those tools directly reflect on the brand creation and building process?”

Public relations practitioners know that the brand-building process requires integrated communications — everything in the media mix, from outreach programs to media tours to developing third-party advocacy contacts — all centered around education.

“The salesforce should know what’s happening, key doctors should know what’s happening, medical education people should know what’s happening,” Ms. Long says. “Success is having transparency and integration within the marketing mix. That concept is moving forward, but I don’t think it’s always early enough, or as coordinated as it could be. A key to pharmaceutical PR success involves bringing in a PR team early on and making sure that there is an open dialogue about the total marketing program so that we can identify and seize opportunities.”

Basic public-relations techniques enhance the message reach of other initiatives. For example, Ms. Long says, if a client is developing a relationship-

marketing program around compliance, and is spending a considerable sum of money in producing patient compliance materials, the public relations team should be working with the product team to raise awareness about the importance of compliance in that particular therapeutic area before the service is launched. When there is a demonstrated benefit for a program, clients get better use of the resource.



There may be tremendous people doing tremendous work, but an agency’s ability to deliver on time and on budget is greatly diminished if the organization has not properly allocated the appropriate resources.

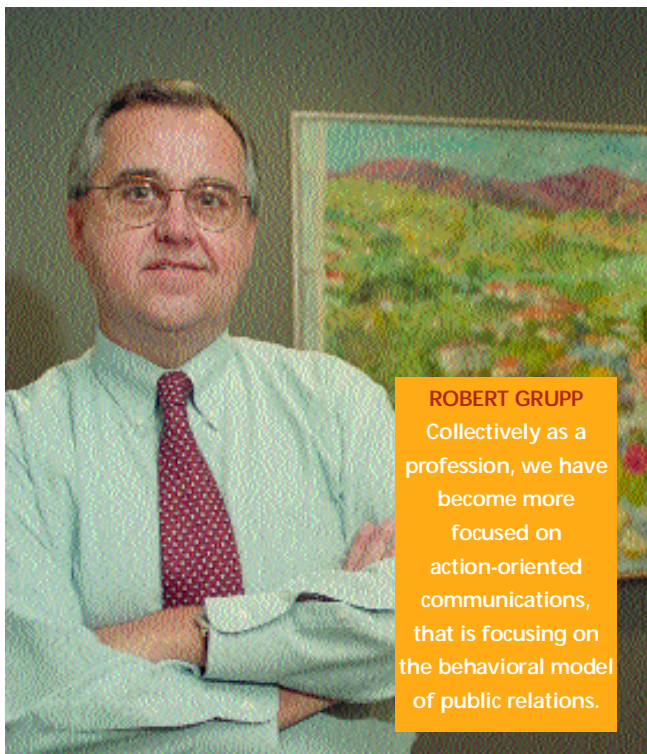
“That means everything from the technology that is resident in the service firms to the accounting department,” Mr. Bashe says. “Accounting is sometimes viewed as a back-office process, but I contend that’s wrong. The accounting/financial services group, in fact, directly touches the client because the client is trying to manage two things: their message and their resources.”

Managing a campaign in the fast-paced environment of the Internet and intense media scrutiny can thwart the efforts of a controlled message. As a result, there is an increasing need for issue management.

Public relations practitioners need to work with opinion leaders, third parties, and the client to identify potential risk issues. Then all parties need to agree on how to produce standards for how an organization should manage these issues with investigators, opinion leaders, and internally with staff.

“Today, it’s important to have the infrastructure to rapidly respond to an issue in France, because it’s an issue in the U.S. 45 minutes later,” Mr. McGregor-Paterson says. “We need to be able to respond very rapidly. Our clients are not always geared up to quickly respond to issues that may impact their brand.”





ROBERT GRUPP
Collectively as a profession, we have become more focused on action-oriented communications, that is focusing on the behavioral model of public relations.

A good partnership with the client entails understanding the challenges the client faces.

"Agencies may lose focus on what is happening in the client's world," Mr. Bashe says. "In looking at their own budgets and their own need to meet forecasts, they can become very insular, instead of keeping their finger on the pulse of the client and maintaining a long-term vision for client service."

By working in coordination with the client, as well as third parties, many issues that might get overlooked can be identified.

"We need to be able to identify the top five or six issues that are likely to happen any where in the world," Mr. McGregor-Paterson says. "And from that we can produce standards, off-the-shelf statements, questions and answers, so you and the client are prepared. That is effective issues management."

eveloping internal Leadership

Effective issues management starts with effective leadership. Public relations agencies, frequently challenged to retain staff, need to monitor and enhance their internal performance. A revolving project team is arguably the No. 1 client complaint.

"Turnover is the enemy of professionalism, and our industry was greatly affected by a hot job market," Mr. Tate says. "Now that things have calmed down, leaders in the PR industry have a chance to better focus on the professional development of staff."

Mr. Bashe concurs: "Public relations is challenged to ensure that there is a pipeline of

great people, and that's not only about retaining and hiring. It is also an inherent responsibility — very special to the field of healthcare public relations — towards training and mentoring. Agency executives hire good people, but then assume that the new hires will learn through osmosis once they are integrated in day-to-day operations. There has to be an organized process of learning."

According to Mr. Bashe, a core aspect of public relations healthcare communications is the process of people applying their ideas, their creativity, and their passion to improve the dialogue among physicians, patients, and policy makers.

"That's a skill," he says.

"And when leaders don't spend enough time concentrating on the quality of their people, the enthusiasm of their people, the knowledge of their people, the organization's service capacity begins to diminish. Often what happens is that leaders look at the economic data

of their agency, and they see all is well with the world. They assume that because the money is coming in, everything in terms of talent must be right. But there is always a lag between billing and the client's reaction to the service. A true leader is going to make sure that the client, as well as the market, is receiving what is necessary. Not what the agency has."

Ms. Gies has seen a shift in the type of people agencies are hiring. There is a growing trend in healthcare PR to hire people who come from a variety of disciplines — who have more than just a traditional PR agency background. Agencies are putting together multidisciplinary teams that have backgrounds in government, industry, media, etc.

"By hiring people who wear different hats, so to speak, they can bring different perspectives to the table for the client and provide a more well-rounded view of what will work on a particular initiative or campaign," Ms. Gies says. "This approach allows a PR agency to tailor the client's account to be in line with the over-arching objectives. Maybe the client needs a good scientific writer. Maybe the client also requires someone with a background as a patient advocate. Or perhaps, someone who was a nurse or dietitian before joining the agency is a perfect match." ♦

PharmaVoice welcomes comments about this article. E-mail us at feedback@pharmalinx.com.

Experts on this topic

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