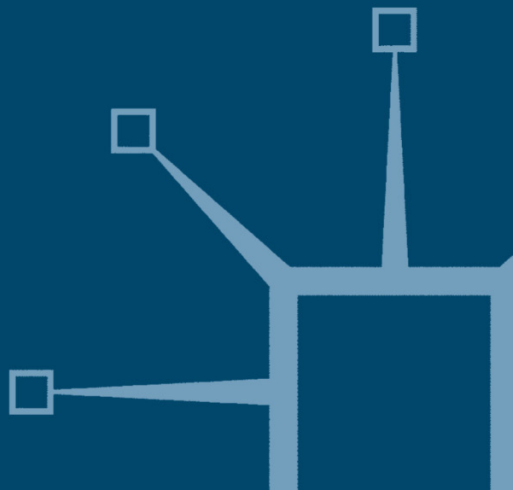


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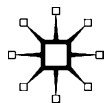


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Trevor Morris
and
Simon Goldsworthy

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Preface

In recent years increasing numbers of students from all parts of the New Europe have been coming to study Public Relations (PR) at the University of Westminster in London. Education should be a stimulating experience – for teachers as well as for those they teach – and for us this was very much the case on our PR courses. Our interaction with students from many countries in the region continues to give us plenty of food for thought about the nature of PR work in the New Europe.

“Public Relations” – under that title – may be a relative newcomer to the region, even if many of the techniques associated with it have been embedded in traditional cultures since ancient times. What is clear is that, however late their beginnings, the new PR industries across the New Europe are now growing rapidly. The latest techniques in PR are needed not just for domestic commercial reasons, or to further public policy goals, but to meet new international demands. New European markets are receiving unprecedented amounts of foreign investment and companies from the New Europe are increasingly becoming players in their own right in the international marketplace. The emergence of strong new European brands will demand strong PR support in the global arena. High-profile international events and activities also impose demands but at the same time create opportunities for PR: for example in 2008 Slovenia became the first country from the region to hold the EU Presidency, and the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, Estonia, and Bulgaria are all due to follow in the next ten years. The Eurovision Song Contest is increasingly hosted in the region – it took place in the Serbian capital Belgrade in 2008. The Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games will be held in Sochi on Russia’s Black Sea coast in 2014 (see p. 24). With their high PR content these occasions are pointers to an exciting but challenging future.

The New Europe has witnessed massive political and economic changes over the last two decades. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Bloc have paved the way for the emergence of free markets and democracy, and PR is a vital ingredient for both of these. Crucially, for PR people, there has also been a revolution in the nature of the region's media. To a large extent this also holds good for Turkey, which may have had a different experience, but has witnessed a boom in PR as its economy surges ahead and it becomes a fully fledged democracy. Increasingly the opportunities and challenges posed by the European Union, the world's largest trading bloc, are vitally important for any professional communicator working in the region, whether their home country has recently joined the EU, aspires to join it, or has to relate to it as an ever more important trading and political partner.

The youthfulness of the PR industry in much of the New Europe is also apparent. What we read confirms what we see for ourselves: PR practitioners in the New Europe are – literally – young. In the space of half a generation or less PR has become a popular career choice and PR courses are very much in demand. All of this makes for great vibrancy, and allows great scope for innovation, but it also means that there has been – understandably – little time to accumulate knowledge and experience. It leaves PR people at risk of appearing unprepared to advise senior executives and unable to deal with big problems and opportunities. This predicament must be avoided.

All of this led us to think that a book which drew upon our experience as PR educators and practitioners and explained the fundamental principles of Public Relations work would be helpful. We have tried to put contemporary PR work into context, so that you can understand the key issues under discussion in the industry. We have also tried to show, through examples and case studies, how the tried-and-tested principles of PR might be applied to the needs of your country, or the countries where you plan to work. However *you* are the people best placed to take account of everything that is distinctive about your country as you go about your day-to-day work: what holds good in one part of Europe will not always be effective elsewhere. PR work is by definition a profoundly social activity: that, indeed, is one of its great attractions. Your knowledge and insights (including a good understanding of your country's media) are a vital part of what will make you a successful PR person.

Second, although we have set out the ways in which you can put together PR strategies and tactics and have explained the key skills that you need to operate as a successful PR person, it would be foolish to deny that true success in PR depends on much more than knowing these principles. Alongside social knowledge and awareness there is another vital ingredient: judgment – the ability to weigh up the information at your disposal and make the right decisions. Reading a book cannot teach you that, but we have tried to help. In the end PR is not about abstract principles, but about how PR techniques can be applied to real-life situations. To gain the maximum benefit from the pages that follow, keep in mind one or more organizations that you know well. If you work in PR already that should not be hard, but, even if you do not, it should be possible to think about somewhere where you work or study and its PR needs. Scattered through the more practical parts of this book are exercises which you might like to undertake, but for many of them to make sense you will need to think carefully about your organization and its PR.

**Contact: _morrisgoldsworthy@btinternet.com
(mailto: morrisgoldsworthy@btinternet.com)**

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We would also like to thank numerous people from all parts of the New Europe who have shared with us their knowledge of the challenges and opportunities for the PR industry in their countries. In particular, we are indebted to our students, and above all those from many parts of the New Europe whom we have taught over the years, and who have in turn taught us about their homelands. There are too many to name, but among past and present students and colleagues who have been particularly helpful we should mention Chynara Rahmatova and Dr Burcu Sumer of the University of Ankara.

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Understanding Public Relations

Any ambitious person already working in or just starting out in Public Relations (PR) wants – quite rightly – to master the practical skills of PR. But there is much more to PR than that. You also need to understand the social, business, and economic context in which PR operates and be able to map out the main communications issues and construct a logical strategic plan that can be measured and evaluated. Although you need to think about the circumstances that prevail in the country where you are working, if you are hoping to reach wider audiences you need to consider the context in other societies as well.

PR careers are – as we shall see – immensely varied. You will want to find the kind of work which suits you. Once you have narrowed down your choice, you will want to impress people at the interview. Being able to demonstrate key practical skills is good, but, if you want to get a really good job, being able to demonstrate that you have read and thought a bit about PR is even better. Finally, if you want to advance in PR you will need much more than technical skill. Practical skills may get you your first job, but understanding the context in which you are operating and the strategic and communication issues which affect your work will get you your second job or promotion.

What is Public Relations?

PR is the planned persuasion of people to behave in ways that further its sponsor's objectives. It works primarily through the use of media relations and other forms of third party endorsement.

Since the term Public Relations (PR) was first coined over a hundred years ago, some PR people have wrestled with the problem of defining what it means (although it has to be said that the great majority have just got on with their work!). Outsiders – and journalists – have less of a problem. For them PR is overwhelmingly about things like press releases, press conferences and talking to journalists: in two words, “media relations.” Indeed many PR people have job titles such as “press officer” or “press secretary.” As we shall see, other activities may well be undertaken by PR people. For example they often create their own, managed media such as company newsletters, brochures and websites, and they set up and run events of different kinds. However such work is not always seen as PR, or done by PR people.

Again, for most outside observers, the purpose of PR is clear enough: it is to persuade people. It might be to persuade people to buy goods and services; to buy (or at least not to sell) shares in a company; to join, contribute to, or support a charity; to take action to improve their health; or to vote for a political party. Whatever the objective, PR's task is seen as one of purposeful persuasion.

Our view of PR is similar to that of most outside observers and is reflected in our definition at the start of this section. We believe that media relations work lies at the heart of PR (indeed there probably would not be a PR industry as we know it but for the growth of the

mass media in modern times) and that PR is about persuading people to support its sponsors' objectives.

We suspect this realistic definition will not bother most people in the New Europe, but it is worth briefly mentioning some of the alternative views you may find in American and West European PR textbooks, or on the websites of international PR organizations. Where do these definitions differ from ours?

For the world's largest PR body, the Public Relations Society of America, "Public Relations is the professional discipline that ethically fosters mutually beneficial relationships among social entities." For Europe's largest PR body, the UK's Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR):

Public Relations is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you.

Public Relations is the discipline which builds and maintains reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics.

As you will notice, these definitions are quite vague: they tell you little about what PR people actually do all day, and media relations is not even mentioned. They also avoid using the word "persuasion" and are not very clear about the purposes of PR activity: "mutual understanding" is all very well, but when companies pay for PR they have much more precise objectives in mind in terms of increased sales or bettering their position in the financial markets. Charities and politicians also seek to use PR with much more definite objectives than "mutual understanding." They want people to do – or even not do – something. PR people are not neutral referees, but are there to serve the interests of those paying them. Non-PR people might also point out that building and maintaining an organization's reputation is far from being a PR monopoly; instead employees across the organization contribute to the process.

Rather than being genuine and helpful attempts to explain what PR does, too many existing definitions are instead clumsy attempts to avoid issues which some people find awkward. For instance some

PR people dislike being labeled as “mere” media relations experts, and prefer to emphasize other aspects of the job. Others shy away from the term “persuasion,” which is often seen as being associated with propaganda and manipulation and seeking to impose one’s own will upon others. But there is nothing inherently wrong with trying to persuade other people, particularly if – as is the case in a free market democratic system – others are also able to put across their views.

We suggest that it is in your interests as a PR person to be straightforward about what you do: at least you will not be appearing to be hypocritical or trying to dodge the issue! Organizations hire ever-more PR people and pay them well because they want to persuade people about various things. They also care about how they are portrayed in the media. They regard all of that as important: if not, why would they pay you?

CHAPTER 2

Lessons from history

The history of Public Relations (PR) may seem irrelevant to the needs of contemporary practitioners, and we do not intend to provide a great deal of it here. However, much of the knowledge which successful PR people use to good effect is drawn from history, even if they have acquired the information informally and certainly do not think of it as “History” as such. There are few, if any, scientific laws in PR. Instead people learn from their own and others’ experiences of PR work and acquire knowledge of the industry based on what they hear about its ups and downs. Much of what they do today and plan to do tomorrow is based on collective wisdom about what happened yesterday. Some significant themes emerge from PR’s history, and some of them are particularly important to understanding the way PR is developing in the New Europe today. So rather than present a story littered with names and dates, we will simply focus on issues which seem relevant which will help you understand the present and plan for the future.

Many of the things which make up PR may be timeless, and have existed in all societies since the beginnings of human civilization. Businesses have always sought to further their interests, and political and religious leaders have always sought to win and retain support, so “PR” has been part of what people do from time immemorial. However, PR as a specialist field with formal structures, to which people devote their working lives, is a relative newcomer. While there may be important differences between the New European and the North American and West European societies where PR as we now know it first emerged, the fact that modern PR developed many decades earlier, in countries like the United States and Britain, means that there may be lessons to learn for societies where PR is newer. No one needs to reinvent the wheel.

“Public Relations” originally emerged, under that name, about a hundred years ago in the United States. There was already a well-established tradition of press agents creating publicity in the newspaper press for circuses and other forms of entertainment, but while PR drew on those skills it also represented something new, and something which has interesting parallels with the New Europe.

Connections, networking, svyazi, veza, vruski...

There is a natural overlap between Public Relations and the way in which personal relationships can be used to facilitate business and political and social arrangements. All societies place great emphasis on personal relationships and friendship – one only has to consider the way in which most languages have special terms for this kind of networking.

However, although generalizations are dangerous, anecdotal evidence and experience suggest that in the emerging market economies and democracies of the New Europe people place more emphasis on these direct, personal relationships and hence attach less importance to the “public” part of “Public Relations” (of course this does not mean that “connections” do not play their part in Western Europe or elsewhere). A legacy of bureaucratically managed economies and state-controlled media has meant that people rely more on trusted individuals for information, advice, and assistance. We believe this will gradually change, as the economic and political systems in the New Europe become more open and people come to place more faith in the media and become more trusting about official channels of decision making.

In the meantime this subtle cultural difference is just one of many that PR practitioners need to bear in mind. It certainly has a great impact on tactical considerations when devising PR plans, although it could be argued that overall PR objectives and strategies tend to be similar wherever one is in the world.

The head of Corporate Communications for a large Austrian company, OMV, which is active in the New Europe, commented that “Mobile Phone Public Affairs are still commonplace in the region – in other words, Public Affairs is reduced to using the contacts in your phone book in order to get things done.”

Source: OMV Presentation, Vilnius

PR and the growth of big business

The big new companies which emerged in the United States just over a century ago increasingly operated in large and growing markets, spread across the North American continent and beyond. The railway companies and mining, steel, and oil companies were not only big, with far-flung interests, but were also prone to highly publicized crises as accidents occurred or workers took industrial action. Gone were the days when companies could rely on local communities that they knew well and where they were well known. Instead, today's global companies and brands were emerging from provincial America. Procter was ceasing to be a Cincinnati soap manufacturer and becoming what we know as Procter & Gamble, and Coca-Cola was rapidly ceasing to be a small-time medicinal drink manufacturer in the American south. Such businesses needed to start thinking about managing their reputations more carefully, and to start employing professionals to help them do it.

As large businesses of this kind developed, they grew well beyond what an individual entrepreneur or founding family could control. Businessmen had traditionally been jacks of all trades, but increasingly companies came to rely on highly trained professional managers – often accountants, lawyers, and engineers – people who respected specialist skills and subdivided work accordingly. Companies saw that they could gain competitive advantage and operate more profitably by building on professional experience in this way.

The same process started to extend to marketing and publicity work, although this is still far from complete in many parts of the world, including many countries in the New Europe, which is one reason that so many exciting possibilities lie in this field. The US

advertising industry began to take its modern shape in the nineteenth century, while the early twentieth century saw the gradual emergence of marketing as a distinct specialism. Businessmen had always been interested in selling their goods and services, but they were now able to do it in a more deliberate and planned way, using staff with special training and experience to help them do it. They also became used to engaging advertising agencies to help them accomplish their goals. This paved the way for the birth of PR as a specialist business discipline. Although PR had always been – and continues to be – part of the portmanteau of skills that marks out the successful entrepreneur or founder of a business, it came increasingly to be entrusted to people with special skills and experience and became a career in its own right.

PR and politics

Some of the earliest users of professional PR techniques were politicians in the United States and later in Europe. Of course political leaders, even dictators, have always been interested in trying to manage public opinion. However the advent of democracy and the rise of mass electorates created a rather different challenge. Millions of people had to be persuaded to vote for a particular candidate or political party when given a genuine choice in a secret ballot. Force and threats were no longer an option. PR has come to play an important role in the battle to secure people's votes, although it operates under a variety of aliases – most commonly, in the United States and the United Kingdom, people involved in such work are called “spin doctors,” a term derived from the American sport of baseball, implying that they manipulate the information they give journalists to the advantage of the politicians they serve.

PR and the mass media

But another factor also served to bring about the birth of modern PR, and it is one that is as relevant to new European markets now as it was to American business leaders a hundred years ago.

Late-nineteenth-century America experienced an enormous growth in print journalism, the only mass medium of the day. Many

new newspapers and magazines were published, and their circulations soared. For the first time large sections of the population were absorbing the same news and information on a daily basis. Advertising boomed as companies paid to exploit the opportunities this created to reach mass audiences in new ways. However, advertisements had inherent drawbacks: not only were they costly, but also everyone knew who was behind them; however clever the ad, it was always a company singing its own praises. A paid-for advertisement has never had the credibility of a positive piece of media coverage.

Press agents, in many ways the precursors of PR in America, took advantage of the opportunities this created. They recognized that journalists had needs of their own – that they wanted interesting and newsworthy material with which to fill their pages. Press agents could supply the material, but did so on behalf of the companies who hired them, making sure that the story provided a favorable namecheck, or mention, for their paymaster. Not only was this “free” publicity (the press agent had to be paid, but the journalist and the newspaper did not), but it also offered an additional advantage. Rather than appearing in the form of an advertisement, the information appeared on the printed page as editorial content, written by an independent journalist and bearing the independent authority of the publication in which it featured. As we all know, anyone can claim they are good at something, but it is much more credible if someone else – someone who is independent and appears to be objective – says they are. This special quality, called *“third-party endorsement,”* remains the strongest unique selling proposition for PR. To use a simple but effective analogy, advertising is like walking into a meeting and telling the people present, “I am very good at what I do.” PR is like walking into that meeting and some of the people telling the others you are very good at what you do!

Although the emerging mass media created new opportunities to put across favorable messages, they also represented a threat. The new mass circulation newspapers were competing with others to sell copies and, as any journalist will confirm, bad news and stories about conflict and crises tend to sell better than good news. Hostile stories not only made unpleasant reading for businesspeople but could also lead to a loss of custom, undermine share prices

or lead to calls for government action to curtail business freedom. By the early twentieth century, in an era of growing democratic accountability, US business felt increasingly beleaguered. The big new corporations were obvious targets. Businesspeople started to feel it was worth paying to halt, or at least minimize, negative press coverage. Ideally media interest in big business could even be turned around and transformed into positive coverage. It was perhaps this, more than anything, that first gave rise to the modern PR industry.

If PR was born out of developments in journalism, it is also worth noting that many of its first practitioners were themselves former journalists who were able to exploit their knowledge of how the media work. They understood what makes a good story, and what does not, and they knew the pressures under which journalists work. This established a tradition which continues to this day: many PR practitioners, including some of the most senior, formerly worked in journalism, and their understanding of the media is greatly valued. PR continues to provide an alternative career for journalists, one which often offers better pay and working conditions. There is also the opportunity to set up a business independently by establishing a PR consultancy.

Today the New Europe is a region witnessing rapid economic and political change. Although history may not repeat itself exactly, there are many parallels with the factors which gave rise to the emergence of PR in the United States and Western Europe. In short, current patterns of development augur well for the rise of PR in the New Europe.

Recent developments

Since the 1980s the developed world's PR industry has enjoyed unprecedented levels of growth, much faster than the economy generally. The reasons for this are highly relevant for the New Europe, which is undergoing many of the same experiences. Market liberalization, as promoted by President Reagan and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, created enormous needs for PR services. The privatization of state assets – nationalized industries – by selling shares involved expensive PR campaigns.