

“Newsjacking is powerful, but only when executed in real time. It is about taking advantage of opportunities that pop up for a fleeting moment, then disappear. In that instant, if you are clever enough to add a new dimension to the story in real time, the news media will write about you. [story on page 2]”

Coming soon: a new definition of public relations

The beginning of a new year is a logical time to take a get-back-to-basics view of whatever it is you're trying to do.

That's what the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) seems to be doing with its research and outreach program designed to create a new definition for what constitutes "public relations" and, by inference, the profession itself.

The definitions under consideration are all very flattering to the profession and in fact border on the downright cerebral. But the proposed definitions do not address a widely held perception that PR is a way of making sure that the facts do not get in the way of a good story. Hey PRSA, what about that?!

We'll see where this goes but, seriously, individuals and organizations who ignore proven and accepted PR principles are just asking for trouble. Mass. Lieutenant Governor Tim Murray's evasive action on circumstances surrounding his car wreck on November 2 are a perfect example. The story just will not die, and he's solely responsible.

While the PR industry is working to redefine itself, the profession is found to be among the most stressful occupations. Stress exists in any occupation, and I don't feel that PR is particularly stressful. How do you feel about your job, and how do you deal with stress?

I am taken with the notion of "newsjacking," which is a way to elbow your way into reporting of major news coverage opportunistically so you also become part of the unfolding story. Newsjacking requires decision making with knee-jerk instincts, so not every organization can pull it off. But for those who can act in real time, the tactic can lead to wide coverage very quickly. Of course, you can't be sure all the attention will be positive, so be very careful about the star you hitch your wagon to.

Winter finally seems to be acting more like we expect in New England. Frigid temperatures are becoming more common, and snow forecasts are too. I think my favorite feeling in life is "shaking off the cold" when I come inside this time of year. All my senses are awake and relaxed at the same time. I wouldn't trade that sensation for a year-round warm climate. Call me crazy, but that's the honest truth. Try it yourself. Concentrate on how you feel the next time you come in from the cold and feel the warmth of indoors wash over you. Ahh...

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) has introduced a plan and timeline for its "Public Relations Defined" initiative. The plan is designed to redefine what I like to call the world's second oldest profession.

This month, PRSA unveiled the three candidate definitions, one of which will form the basis of a new, modern definition of public relations. They were culled from hundreds of submissions from PR professionals and PRSA global partners during a two-week crowdsourcing phase.

The current candidate definitions are presented below. Further input is being accepted through January 23, after which PRSA will aggregate and analyze feedback in preparation for a second "Definition of PR" summit with PRSA's international partners. From there, three final definitions will arise for voting by the profession.

1. Public relations is the management function of researching, engaging, communicating and collaborating with stakeholders in an ethical manner to build mutually beneficial relationships and achieve results.
2. Public relations is a strategic communications process that develops and maintains mutually beneficial relationships

Five reasons why PR is so darn stressful

It should be no surprise that a profession striving for a new definition of itself finds its practitioners working in stressful conditions.

CareerCast recently listed PR as number seven on its list of most stressful jobs. Its job description says PR pros are often responsible for addressing large crowds, work in public, and keep tight deadlines, not to mention the hostility coming from the media, particularly in a crisis situation. Why do practitioners think PR

is so tough? In MediaBistro, Tonya Garcia boiled it down to five reasons.

1. **Clients.** Can't live with them, can't live without them. From "unrealistic expectations" to rudeness to limited budgets, respondents on our Twitter feed and in the comments section of the post talked about how difficult clients can be to work with. Based on our unscientific observation, this was the number one reason for the

industry's tension.

2. **Constant change.** Media changes never stop. And technology always has something new to offer. But there's more to it than that. "Doing PR is stressful because you're working toward a creative vision that changes as it develops," Tweeted someone. Another post said, "You often have to have a hundred different balls in the air at one time, and you have to be able to

"PR Stress" (cont.)



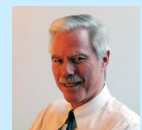
Sound public relations is grounded on being consistently truthful with various stakeholders. That's how to make all the complex pieces of the relationship puzzle fit together, and minimize costly surprise "PR gotchas."

- between organizations and their key publics.
3. Public relations is the engagement between organizations and individuals to achieve mutual understanding and realize strategic goals.

I submitted my own definition, a variation on 1&2: *Public relations is a strategic, ethical communications management function meant to foster positive collaboration among organizations and their key stakeholders to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.*



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The power of 'newsjacking': how to leverage breaking news to make your own headlines

The concept of "newsjacking" is fairly new but enormously powerful. I learned about the concept in an article by David Meerman Scott, marketing strategist and best-selling author, and think it's a great plan.

The idea is to "commandeer" a major news story soon after it breaks by connecting your name to the story...newsjacking! Doing this requires malice of forethought, quick action and reliance on social media and other real-time tools to attach your name to a major story almost as soon as it breaks.

For an example, Meerman cites the arrest of Paris Hilton and her boyfriend in Las Vegas in August 2010, he on misdemeanor DUI charges, she on felony drug-possession charges. In a tweet to fans on September 1, Hilton said: "These rumors going around are so ridiculous, untrue and cruel. I'm not going to even pay attention to them, because I know the truth."

PR Stress (cont.)

make that look effortless to clients. Demands and expectations are high, budgets are often low, and dealing with the media can be challenging and draining!"

3. **Because that's the way relationships are.** Tweeted one PR pro, "...it's based on relationships with people, and everyone is so different & [you] have to manage emotions." It's also the number of relationships. "We are managing multiple relationships: media, analysts, clients, our team, advisors," and more, stated another contributor.
4. **Publicist personalities.** "Cuz we touch everything, and we're Type A control freaks," said another, an attribute that pops up often. Also, publicists aim to please. "The type of personality required to make a great PR pro wants to please everyone from the client, media, customer," said another.
5. **Lack of research.** "PR people know the principles of the practice and have past experience to draw on and (often) good intuitions," said one PR pro. "But we have just about no evidence, no data to predict the outcome of a PR tactic or strategy. Some find stress in just explaining what they do. "In my 15 years as a PR pro, many of my relatives still think I'm in advertising. Imagine my stress during holiday parties."

I agree it's not easy to explain PR to others, but that makes it fun for me, not stressful. Also, successful PR speaks for itself.

No one really cares about the perils of being Paris, but Meerman points to what happened soon after the story broke that got his adrenaline going.

Wynn Resorts Ltd. spokeswoman Jennifer Dunne told the Associated Press that Hilton was to be barred from Wynn Resorts properties, Wynn Las Vegas and Encore. Newsjacking! Now the media has another news hook!

Not only has the party girl been arrested, but she is banned from Wynn Resorts properties! This melodramatic punishment quickly becomes an element of nearly every story about Hilton's arrest. It's huge news. Hey, isn't Paris Hilton a hotel heiress? What a deliciously catty story, writes Meerman.

A quick Google news search of that period for "Paris Hilton Wynn" brings up a remarkable 5,286 stories from news outlets around the globe. The story may be about Paris Hilton, but Wynn Resorts crops up in more than 5,000 news stories.

Anyone familiar with how corporate PR spending effectiveness is measured by frequency of mentions in the media will grasp the implications. In one day with one call, Meerman guesses Dunne likely snagged more media mentions than Wynn's entire PR budget obtained in the entire preceding year. And apart from the cost of Dunne's salary, it didn't cost a dime.

How to newsjack

You've got to follow the new rules of speed, says Meerman. The traditional PR model, stickling closely to a preset script and campaign timeline, doesn't work when a story breaks.

Newsjacking is powerful, but only when executed in real time. It is about taking advantage of opportunities that pop up for a fleeting moment, then disappear. In that instant, if you are clever enough to add a new dimension to the story in real time, the news media will write about you (Figures 1 & 2).

Newsjacking favors quick, observant and skilled communicators. The obsession large corporations have with process may be their undoing here, warns Meerman. No move can be made without prior approval by a weekly meeting of department managers, if not the top brass. The slightest corporate utterance must be signed off by legal and run past PR and ad agencies.

Real-time communication is antithetical to the megacorporate paradigm in which any message should reflect the consensus



Figure 1

emerging from an extensive process. That might have worked back when public discourse was essentially a corporate monologue. It surely does not work in the age of social media, round-the-clock news, and newsjacking., writes Meerman.

Empowering here means more than simply giving permission. People need to be encouraged and given rock-solid assurances that they will not be scapegoated if a shot goes astray. To successfully newsjack — or fend off a newsjack — you can't wait for approval. You just have to shoot on sight.



Figure 2

Newsjacking may be relatively new, but Meerman thinks it is here to stay because it works and it can generate huge returns on investment.

With a single hour's work, many people manage to generate more media attention than a whole year's return on a PR budget.