

Chapter 12

Public Relations and Framing the Message

Public Relations Changes Perception

In 1956, the nation's top blue jeans manufacturers formed the national Denim Council "to put schoolchildren back in blue jeans through a concerted national public relations, advertising, and promotional effort."

Public Relations

- Public relations refers to the total communication strategy conducted by a person, a government, or an organization attempting to reach and persuade an audience to adopt a point of view.

P.T. Barnum and Buffalo Bill

- P.T. Barnum
 - Used gross exaggeration, wild stories, and staged events to secure newspaper coverage for clients
- William F. Cody (Buffalo Bill)
 - Hired press agents who used a wide variety of media channels
 - Shaped many lasting myths about rugged American individualism
 - Among the first to use publicity



Big Business and Press Agents

- Press agents in the 1800s
 - Hired by large industrial companies
 - Used by rail companies to gain government support
 - Utility companies also used PR strategies to derail competition and eventually attain monopoly status.
 - Used bribes and fraud to garner support and eliminate competition

The Birth of Modern Public Relations

- Ivy Ledbetter Lee
 - Understood the importance of public sentiment
 - Contained damaging publicity fallout from the Ludlow Mine strike deaths
- Edward Bernays
 - First to apply findings of psychology and sociology to PR
 - Taught the first PR class



The Practice of Public Relations

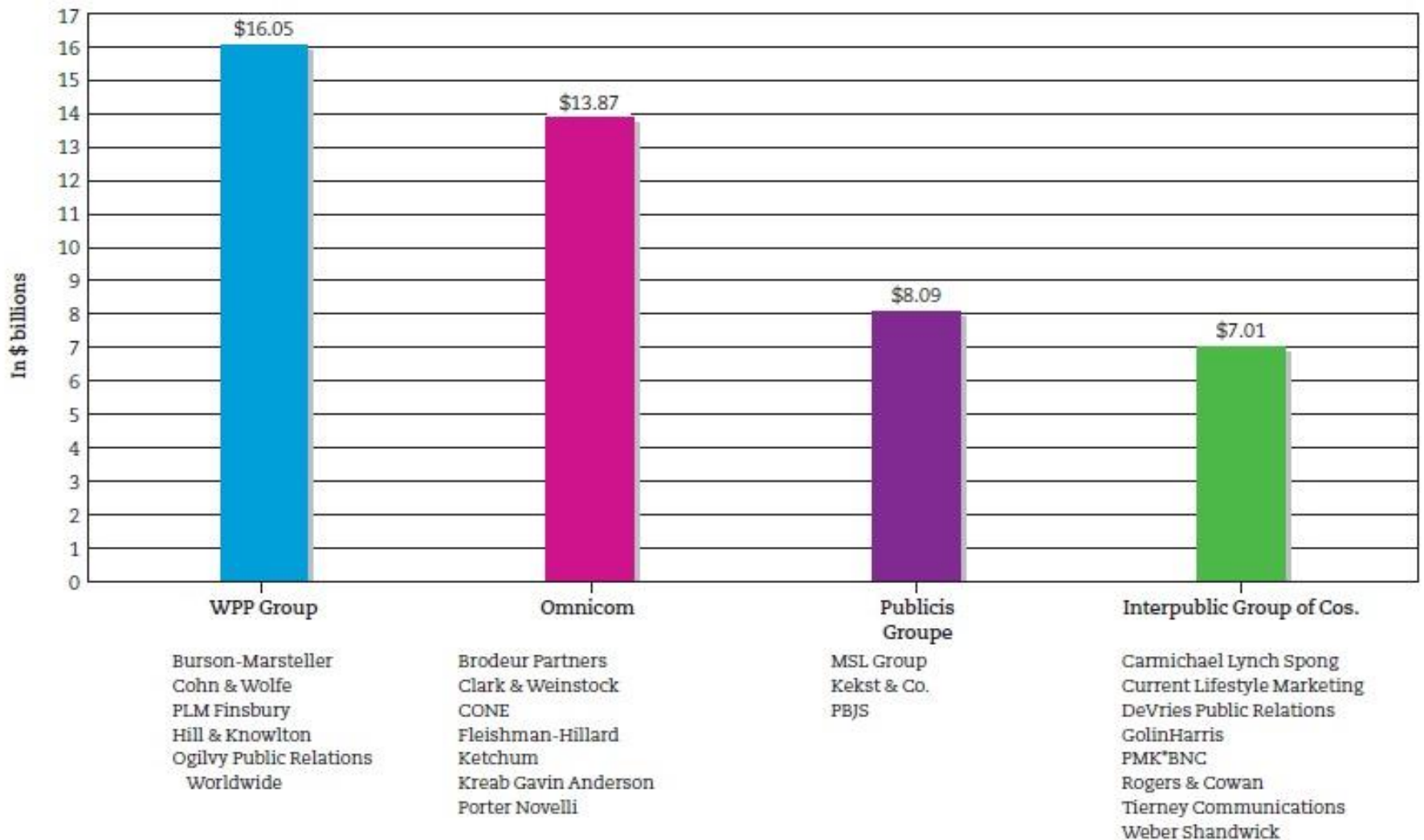
- More than 7,000 PR firms in the United States
- Growing academic field since the 1980s
- By 2011, Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) had more than 10,000 members, and 322 chapters at colleges and universities.



Approaches to Organized Public Relations

- PRSA definition of PR
 - “Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other.”
- Two approaches
 - Independent PR agencies
 - Burson-Marsteller and Hill & Knowlton
 - Corporate in-house PR staffs
 - Used by most companies and organizations

Figure 12.1: Top 4 Holding Firms with Public Relations Subsidiaries, 2012



Performing Public Relations

- PR pays careful attention to the needs of its clients and the perspectives of target audiences.
 - Provides a multitude of services
 - Publicity, communication, public affairs, issues management, government relations, financial PR, community relations, industry relations, minority relations, advertising, press agency, promotion, media relations, social networking, and propaganda

Performing Public Relations (cont.)

- Formulating the message
 - Surveys
 - Focus groups
 - Social media analytic tools
- Conveying the message
 - Press releases
 - Video news releases (VNRs)
 - Public service announcements (PSAs)
 - Online options

Performing Public Relations (cont.)

- Media relations
 - PR managers
 - Secure publicity to promote clients
 - Act as the point of contact during crises
 - Recommend advertising to clients when it seems appropriate
- Special events
 - Raise a client's profile
 - Pseudo-event
 - Created solely to gain media coverage



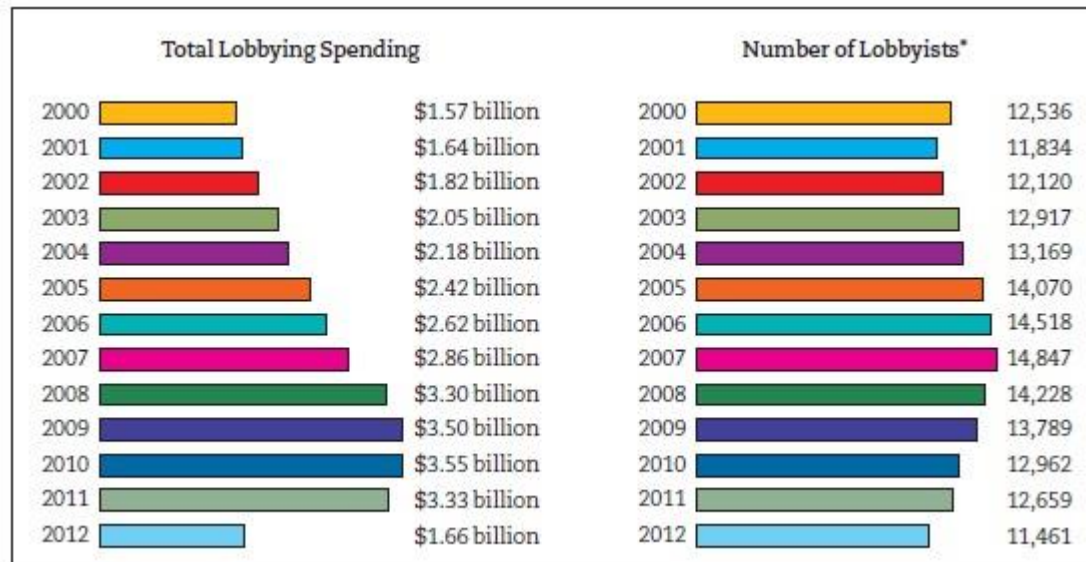
Performing Public Relations (cont.)

- Community relations
 - PR firms encourage companies to participate in community activities.
- Consumer relations
 - Companies are encouraged to
 - Pay more attention to customers
 - Establish product service and safety guarantees
 - Ensure that all calls and mail from customers are answered promptly

Performing Public Relations (cont.)

- Government relations
 - Work to prevent burdensome government regulation
 - Lobbying
 - Attempting to influence lawmakers to support and vote for an organization's or industry's best interests
 - Astroturf lobbying
 - Phony grassroots public-affairs campaigns engineered by PR firms

Figure 12.3: Total Lobbying Spending and Number of Lobbyists (2000-2012)



*The number of unique, registered lobbyists who have actively lobbied.

Public Relations Adapts to the Internet Age

- Company Web sites are the home base for PR efforts.
- Companies can interact with audiences via social media.
- PR still needs to control messages.
 - Firms have edited company Wikipedia entries, and paid bloggers to promote products.



Public Relations during a Crisis

- *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in 1989 was benchmark for how April 2010 BP oil spill was judged.
 - BP's PR mistakes included multiple underestimations of damage done and the CEO's lack of empathy.
- Tylenol scare of 1982
 - Full disclosure, pulled products, replaced with more secure bottles



Tensions between Public Relations and the Press

- Elements of Professional Friction
 - Flack
 - Derogatory term for PR agents that refers to the protective barrier they insert between clients and the press
- Sources of conflict
 - Undermining facts and blocking access
 - Promoting publicity and business as news

Shaping the Image of Public Relations

- PRSA
 - Internal watchdog group
 - Accredits PR agents and firms
 - Maintains a code of ethics
 - Probes its own practices
 - PRSA Member Professional Values
 - Advocacy
 - Honesty
 - Expertise
 - Independence
 - Loyalty
 - Fairness

Alternative Voices

- PR practices are not often the subject of media reports because PR works closely with the press.
- Center for Media and Democracy
 - Published books about PR practices
 - *The Best War Ever*
 - *Toxic Sludge Is Good for You*
 - *Mad Cow USA*

Public Relations and Democracy

- Politicians hire PR firms to improve their images.
- PR campaigns that result in free media exposure raise questions regarding democracy and the expression of ideas.
- Journalists need to become less willing conduits in the distribution of publicity.

