Chapter 12

Public Relations and Framing the Message
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 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
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
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

- **WPP Group**: $16.05 billion
  - Burson-Marsteller
  - Cohn & Wolfe
  - PLM Finsbury
  - Hill & Knowlton
  - Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide

- **Omnicon**: $13.87 billion
  - Brodeur Partners
  - Clark & Weinstock
  - CONE
  - Fleishman-Hillard
  - Ketchum
  - Kreab Gavin Anderson
  - Porter Novelli

- **Publicis Groupe**: $8.09 billion
  - MSL Group
  - Kekst & Co.
  - PBJS

- **Interpublic Group of Cos.**: $7.01 billion
  - Carmichael Lynch Spong
  - Current Lifestyle Marketing
  - DeVries Public Relations
  - GolinHarris
  - PMK*BNC
  - Rogers & Cowan
  - Tierney Communications
  - Weber Shandwick
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 agentry, 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
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.
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.
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
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*
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.