

## Message 5

### Media Relations Online

While public relations managers are among those professionals who are deeply affected by the invasion of Information Technology (IT), generally speaking they are among those professionals who have been taken by surprise by IT. They have yet to take full advantage of what IT has to offer.

Media relations is part of the public relations practice. The real benefit of doing media relations on the Internet comes from targeting the media as a dedicated audience and crafting a strategy that specifically addresses their needs.

Steven Ross, associate professor at Graduate School of Journalism in Columbia University, and Don Middleberg, chief executive officer of Middleberg & Associates have conducted a series of studies that focus on the penetration of the Internet in the print and broadcast media. While these studies consider other territories than Greece, they indicate trends that are going to affect public relations practice and media relations in Greece, too.

The results of the *1999 Print Media in Cyberspace study* prove that the Internet has been fully integrated into the journalists' toolbox. Responses show an increase in use of the Internet for story ideas and pitches, article research, and gathering of reference materials. Nearly three fourths of the respondents report that they go online at least once a day, a huge jump from 1998's 48 percent. In addition, e-mail has become increasingly popular among journalists both as a contact method with sources, and in communicating with readers.

Despite being powerful and valuable, the Internet as a tool for media relations is not a substitute for personal contact but rather it is a tool that intends to enhance your personal contact with reporters by providing extensive information-based services to the mass media that cover you. The Internet cannot replace interpersonal communication -- at least, the Internet as we know it today. However, communication in the Internet can possibly integrate many elements of interpersonal communication

and can definitely enhance it.

A corporate subsite\* dedicated to media relations is a very powerful public relations tool that is based on the "pull" model of information in cyberspace. Instead of merely pushing information to the mass media and the "gatekeepers" in real space, a media relations subsite mostly pulls the mass media in cyberspace while at the same time overcomes the "gatekeepers."

Elements of a media relations corporate subsite:

1. The Breaking News site
2. The Contact List site
3. The Position Statement site
4. The Activity Calendar site
5. The Press Releases site
6. The Speeches site
7. The Company Info site
8. The Products and Services site
9. The Press Kit site
10. The Extra Multimedia site
11. The Social Action Groups List site

Note:

\* The term "subsite" refers to a part of a website. The dedicated to media relations area in a corporate website is usually a portion of the area that corporate information occupies in cyberspace.

### **The Breaking News site**

It displays your most current news. It is one of the most efficient sites for information delivery during a corporate crisis.

### **The Contact List site**

It displays your media and public relations contacts. It should include the person's:

- name
- area of responsibility
- phone number
- facsimile number
- electronic mail

It could include links to contact information in other webpages of the corporate website.

### **The Position Statement site**

It displays information that refers to business practices and policies.

It should display information that pertains to every subject with which your company grapples.

It could include links to thorny issues in other webpages of the corporate website.

### **The Activity Calendar site**

It displays information on your upcoming events. It should include:

- The date and time of the event
- The location
- The nature of the company's involvement
- The media contact for the event -- hyperlink to the Contact List site

### **The Press Releases site**

It displays your press releases. Press releases should be organized chronologically. They could also be organized by subject or by other variables.

### **The Speeches site**

It displays the text of speeches delivered by the company's key executives.

It could include multimedia files -- audios, videos, slide presentations etc -- relevant to speeches delivered by executives.

### **The Company Info site**

It displays information about the company such as:

- when the company was founded
- what the nature of the company is
- what products and services the company offers
- what the work force of the company is
- what the company's hierarchical structure is
- what the job vacancies in the company are
- other information

It could include multimedia files -- audios, videos, slide presentations etc -- relevant to speeches delivered by executives.

### **The Products and Services site**

It displays information about the company's output. Aside from listing products and services' specs, this site should also include:

- downloadable products and services' photographs and other audiovisuals
- manufacturing details
- customer profiles
- customer comments on products and services
- links about events relevant to products and services
- concise marketing information on products and services -- extensive coverage of marketing issues could take place in a site

dedicated to the marketing department of the company

It could also include multimedia files -- audios, videos, slide presentations etc -- for an interactive tour in the company's electronic shopping mall.

### **The Press Kit site**

It displays information that can be included in a press kit. While press kits in real space have a significant cost of production, the production of press kits in cyberspace -- online press kits -- is financially wise. Online press kits can include much more information than real space items; they are easier to read and more effective, too. They can provide links to relevant information scattered throughout the company's website.

Aside from the press releases, the online press kit could include:

- Fact sheets
- Statistics
- Feature stories
- Fillers
- Letters to the editor
- Op-ed pieces
- Public Service Announcements
- News conference info
- Satellite Media Tour info
- Photographs
- Q & A statements
- Interviews
- Biographies
- Video News Releases
- Audio News Releases

- Celebrity endorsements
- Breaking news
- Tie-ins

The online press kit should provide information on the person responsible for its content. That person might or might not be the same with the company's spokesperson, who the reporters and journalists could turn to for any clarification.

#### **The Extra Multimedia site**

It displays multimedia files that include information relevant to the company's output and performance. This information could include:

- videos
- radio spots
- audios
- articles
- case studies
- news clippings
- online press briefings
- slide shows
- online ads archive
- other multimedia

#### **The Social Action Groups site**

It displays information that pertains to social action groups which are involved with your company's operation, products and services.

It should include lists to external websites wherein the company's stakeholders aggregate and discuss online issues that pertain to the company.

It should include lists to internal social action group areas wherein stakeholders express their views about the company.

**Tips for online media relations:**

- You should have only one core media relations goal. You may have more than one sub-goals which should be supportive to the core goal.
- Segment the media that cover your company in the various categories of mass media.
- Segment the media that cover your company between IT-friendly and non-IT-friendly depending on whether the media are hooked on the use of IT.
- Identify the kind of information that is required by reporters and journalists who work for each major segment of media.
- Find out how the reporters and journalists who cover your organization want to receive information from you. While you should always keep your website's content up-to-date, you might have to deliver your information in any means that best fits the reporters and journalists' needs. Only use e-mail with reporters and journalists who have said that they use and like it.
- Find out what information reporters and journalists want to pull from you vs. the information you have to push to them.
- Provide direct e-mail link from your website to you.
- Establish a control point within your company through which all media inquiries must go. The control point could be the public relations manager or the media relations specialist within the public relations department.
- State clearly that all media inquiries should be directed through the control point within your company. The benefit of having this statement is that it reminds reporters and journalists that authorized statements can only come through a certain source.
- Keep the public relations department separate from the legal department. If the public relations manager reports to the company's principal legal advisor the odds are that the communication is not open. Instead, have the public relations manager reporting to the chief executive officer or the board of directors of the company.
- Your company's primary spokesperson should be accessible virtually at any time.
- Even with the journalists and reporters who can be accessed

electronically avoid bombarding them with press releases and other media relations tools via e-mail.

-- Alert journalists and reporters of new offerings in your website either through an electronic newsletter or through e-mail.

-- Always respect a reporter or journalist's request to be taken off your e-mail lists.

-- Pitch reporters and journalists electronically by concise messages.

Send them further information when they requested so. Have all the information online so that they can go and get it by themselves whenever they need to do so.

-- Find out where journalists and reporters hang out online.

-- Make journalists and reporters' life easier by labelling information as "Press Only" or "For Media Only."

-- Depending on the architecture of your online media relations system, you may give reporters and journalists passwords for authorized access to materials dedicated to media relations in cyberspace.

-- Finding your target audience is difficult. While media relations online exploit the pull model for information delivery, you will certainly need to push information to your target audience, too. The following process might help:

- - Identify the target audience you are attempting to reach through online media relations.
- - Identify the media your target audience uses to get its news.
- - Identify the individual sections (business news, editorial, local news, etc.) at the media you have selected.
- - Identify the individual editors, writers or columnists within those sections.
- - Develop media lists based on your research.

-- Treat journalists and reporters as if they were your company's customers.

-- Get to know the media you want to reach.

-- Return phone calls and e-mails promptly.

-- Know reporters and journalists' deadlines and respect them accordingly.

-- Make the company's executives or key people accessible to the media.

- Skip the gimmicks.
- When possible, give exclusives.
- Tell the truth.

**references:**

Wilma K. Mathews, ABC, *Effective Media Relations -- A Practical Guide for Communicators*, International Association of Business Communicators, Strategic Communicator Series, 1998.

Shel Holtz, *Public Relations on the Net -- Winning Strategies to Inform and Influence the Media, the Investment Community, the Government, the Public, and More!*, American Management Association, 1999.

David R. Yale, *The Publicity Handbook -- How to Maximize Publicity for Products, Services & Organizations*, NTC Business Books, 1991.

Carole M. Howard and Wilm K. Mathews, *On Deadline -- Managing Media Relations*, Waveland Press, Inc., 1994.