

# Ask the Experts

*PR professionals forecast trends in public relations*

by Bridget MacMillan

**F**or this month's Public Relations column, I decided to consult the experts and find out what they are forecasting for the future of PR. Using Google, I entered "public relations trends" and checked out five of the results. The results ranged from articles in PR publications, news from PR organizations, and blogs from PR and marketing professionals (see "PR Trends Online" on page 11 for a detailed list of the results).

Reading these articles, I was struck by the similarities of the challenges PR professionals face compared to the challenges facing the librarian profession. In discussing the effect of technology, Erica Iacono of *PR Week* writes, “We [PR professionals] need to be minding the traditional processes, but we certainly can’t be looking in awe—and only awe—at the new ones.”

Does this sound familiar? “The challenge for PR leaders here [in a global community] is to see to it that our profession contributes its body of knowledge and experience to this kind of consensus-building on issues ranging from global or hemispheric immigration to the environment,” writes John Paluszek in *Tactics*, the monthly newsletter of the Public Relations Society of America.

Paluszek further adds, “Old-line journalists like me will have to accept the fact that the young shall inherit the earth, and their tastes in news and how they get it will eventually prevail.”

It is comforting to know that other professions grapple with the same challenges that we do. Librarians are not alone in facing fears and threats to our traditional existence. PR professionals also question how to stay relevant in an online, 24 hours a day, 365 days per year world.

### Cross-Over Trends

The following five PR trends cross over into the library world:

- The increase of blogs
- Content trumps source
- Portability of video content
- More noise
- More accountability.

**The Increase of Blogs.** For PR professionals, the challenge is to recognize that bloggers are influential and are opinion creators. They need to be included in PR campaigns. And PR professionals need to decide if they should become bloggers or create blogs for their clients.

For librarians, blogs are another resource to be searched. And librarians need to decide if a blog is appropriate for them, their institution, or smaller segments of their institutions, like a practice group or class. The number of blogs is growing exponentially—to ignore them is unwise.

**Content Trumps Source.** “Media credibility is at an all-time low,” writes Iacono. “People are less concerned about source and more concerned about content.” For the PR professional, this means that the audience is less concerned with whether or not a newswire is picked up as a story by a

traditional source like a newspaper. The audience gets the newswire through outlets like Yahoo News or Google News, and in their eyes it is authentic news.

For librarians, this affirms what we know: researchers are not inclined to evaluate the source of information, especially via newer technology. Furthermore, this means we must reinforce and educate users to the fact that self-publishing can be self-serving, not necessarily credible or accurate. Investigating the source of an article or document is absolutely vital if it is being used in a work product, like a brief, article, or memo.

**Portability of Video Content.** Movies, shows, and classes can be downloaded and viewed at the user’s convenience. For the PR professional, this fact impacts the delivery of the message. For librarians, this is an untapped area for education and training.

Imagine delivering orientation to library services via a video that the user can view at his or her leisure? Or imagine detailing a “how to” class, like “How to Conduct Legislative History Research,” using video. For many adult learners, seeing a demonstration is a compelling learning experience and more helpful than reading through instructions.

**More Noise.** There are many outlets and media producing messages that vie for the attention of the public: e-mail, video, audio, phone, newspaper, magazines, etc. For the PR professional, this means focusing on crafting the best message and utilizing the most appropriate distribution method. For the librarian, the challenge is the same.

How do you compete against all the other messages being received by your patrons? Evaluating the types of messages sent and the methods of distribution is necessary. Global e-mails to everyone are probably ineffective. Targeting e-mails to the users most interested in a new source or training, leaving voicemail messages to confirm a meeting, or using a blog to keep users informed of changes in library services may produce better results.

**More Accountability.** “These days, smart promoters are measuring business outcomes,” writes Joan Stewart for Larry Bodine’s *PROFESSIONAL MARKETING* blog. “They’re asking questions like: Did our publicity change minds? Move markets? Influence people’s decisions? ... In other words, before you begin a PR campaign, carefully define your goals.”

Again, these words resonate with how librarians are being asked to measure the library’s value. It is no longer sufficient to collect statistics about how much research is done, i.e., number of research requests.

It is imperative to detail the kinds of requests and the results and include analysis or other value-added components.

The connection between librarianship and PR grows more relevant each year. Librarians will become more adept PR practitioners. And who better than librarians to realize that going to experts can help uncover solutions and plan strategies for the coming years? ■

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## PR Trends Online

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