



## The keys to online media relations

**R**egardless of what you may have heard about online media relations, it should NOT be rocket science. Web sites and e-mail are two of the most efficient and inexpensive methods of delivering company information to reporters electronically, and learning to use these tools is the key to success in online media relations.

According to a 2001 survey conducted by Vocus, a provider of Web-based media relations campaigns, the information that journalists find on corporate Web sites often influences whether they include a company in their story. The survey also showed that 90 percent of journalists waste a significant amount of time looking through company sites for the information they need.

A Web site should be developed so that it serves the media, not just clients. In a journalist's rush to gather background information, a Web site can act as a litmus test: the accessibility and quality of information may determine whether or not someone calls you to set up an interview. There are several things every corporation should do to best cater to reporters online, for example:

- Include all relevant company information (address, PR contact, direct-dial phone number, etc.);
- Eliminate PR lingo and jargon from your site; and
- Advertise your Web site (include your Web address on all materials sent to media, register with search engines).

### Company information

When developing a Web site, companies often create fictional e-mail addresses like *pr@yourcompany.com* to protect employee identity. "Most of the stories we work on are timely: we need the information within a span of a few minutes to a few hours so that we can get it in the next day's paper," said Mike Blahnik, *Star Tribune* business section coordinator.



**Mike Blahnik**

Typically, journalists are not interested in big logos and fancy splash pages. Web sites should make information easily accessible. The media is looking to get a story quickly rather than being hassled with technical difficulties.

"Corporations should focus some of their attention on journalists' needs so that their company gets the attention they desire," said Lisa Stammer, senior technology writer, *Healthcare Informatics*. "I hate it when companies put too much on a Web site and make it too flashy, because it just makes my computer operate more slowly, or it crashes."

Most importantly, Web sites should always include a company story and basic company information such as an address and phone number for a PR contact.



**Lisa Stammer**

### Important dates to remember

#### October

- 10 Classics award entries due
- 18 Monthly meeting
- 28-30 International Conference in Atlanta

#### November

- 1 Deadline nominations for Padilla Public Service award
- 2 Pro-Am Day
- 15 Annual meeting; balloting closes for 2002 Board of Directors

#### December

- 13 Monthly meeting

#### January

- 24 Classics banquet

What's new on [www.mnprsa.com](http://www.mnprsa.com)  
2001 Skill Seminar presentations



## A few thoughts ...

As I write this, it is Thursday, Sept. 13. CNN blares constantly from the lunchroom here in our offices. While I want to shut it off and escape the national nightmare that the media is calling "Attack on America," I can't help but want to know the latest developments.

Yesterday, I read an e-mail notice from a New Zealand public relations firm that had an office of about 20 or so folks located in one of the World Trade Center towers. They had not yet heard from any of their staff members. It's presumed that no one survived. One of our clients tells us that a staff member from their firm was on one of the hijacked planes. My heart absolutely aches. Surely, yours does, too.

By the time you read this column, who knows how our world will have changed? Will there be another terrorist attack against the U.S.? Will the U.S. have bombed the living daylights out of Afghanistan? Will the U.S. markets have plunged? Who knows?

In the weeks and months ahead, these will be uncertain times that will try the best of us. And while we seek to go forward and not allow terrorists to paralyze our lives, it's clear that life as we know it will never be normal again. From now on, we're always going to have to look over our shoulder.

These are times that call for wisdom. And as public relations counselors, that is our stock and trade. It's our calling. Our vocation. Whether we're behind the scenes counseling the CEO on whether to still hold that special event in midtown Manhattan or on the world's stage, like President Bush's press secretary, Ari Fleisher, it is our duty to communicate flawlessly in order to unite stakeholders and fight misinformation. It's time to shine.

### Member communications survey

More than 30 percent of Minnesota PRSA's 550 members recently responded to a survey about member communications. The top line: the survey revealed that Minnesota PRSA is doing a very good to excellent job of communicating with its members.

In addition, you told us that you rely on all three of our primary communication vehicles — [mnprsa.com](http://mnprsa.com), *PRSA Today* newsletter and the bi-weekly *PRSA Link* e-mail — and find value in each. Generally, as a theme, the membership suggested continuing to focus on each vehicle. Place more timely, quick news and notes and upcoming meeting notices in *PRSA Link*, and use *PRSA Today* for more intellectually stimulating, meatier articles. The membership also said that they like their *PRSA Today* newsletter printed on paper because it can travel with them to home or wherever they may be traveling.

Your Minnesota PRSA leadership will use the results of this survey, combined with the information gleaned in the membership survey, to guide our decision making on what programs and services our chapter should and should not offer the membership going forward.

I'd like to single out Amy Fisher, APR, and Eva Keiser, APR, chairs of the Member Communications committee, for their help with coordinating the survey, and Padilla Speer Beardsley Inc., for sponsoring the electronic survey service that allowed our members to quickly and easily respond to the survey.

### 2001 PRSA International Conference

By the way, if you're planning to attend the 2001 PRSA International Conference in Atlanta, please let me know. In addition to myself, David Hakensen, APR; Rick Naymark, APR; Ted Davis, APR; and Kelly Groehler, APR, will also be attending as assembly delegates on Saturday and plan to stay through Sunday evening. If there's any interest, maybe those of us attending from Minnesota can get together for cocktails or dinner. Send me an e-mail at [sdupont@clynch.com](mailto:sdupont@clynch.com) to let me know of your flight, hotel and conference plans.

### PR takes a hit

One final note. No doubt, many of you read or at least heard of a recent front-page *City Pages* story about crisis communications. The article focused on the recent situation between Attorney General Mike Hatch and Allina, and singled out the use of GCI Tunheim by Allina for crisis communications.

Your board leadership discussed the pros and cons of responding to the story in much detail. I personally discussed the issue with the leadership of IABC, the media relations counsel at Allina, as well as those who recently heard me speak at the Skills Seminar.

After analyzing the story, as well as previous stories written by Mike Moseland, we decided it didn't merit a response from PRSA. It's a no-win situation that's better left alone.

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*Editor's Note: The results of the member communications survey are available at [www.mnprsa.com](http://www.mnprsa.com).*

## To collaborate or not to collaborate

In reality, the answer to whether traditional public relations agencies and communication consultancies can play together in the sandbox is not that simple. Two local communication professionals — both specializing in internal or employee communication — shared their opinions.



**Mary Quain**

“What I think HR consulting firms and public relations agencies both want is for employees to be treated with the same respect given to other audiences,” said Mary Quain, manager of internal communication at Weber Shandwick Worldwide. “By working together, internal and external audiences could be placed on the same page.”

Amy Finsand, the communication office practice leader at Watson Wyatt Worldwide, said, “Sometimes competitors can make your best partners. You just have to be creative in using the strengths of each type of firm.”

### Friends or foes?

Both Quain and Finsand feel that while the competencies of HR consulting firms and public relations agencies can overlap — resulting in probable increased competition for projects — the differing strengths of both types of organization will ultimately lead to opportunities to explore creative collaboration between the two.

“PR agencies definitely have an understanding of external branding and how to apply that to the organization,” Finsand said. “We, as HR-focused communicators, can add value to the process because we have deep knowledge of the employee audience and the company or HR practices that affect them.”

Quain agrees. “HR consultants have access to the knowledge and employee research data and background — all pieces PR wants to get at. What PR can bring to the table is a



**Amy Finsand**

potentially deeper creative bench and perhaps a broader business perspective.”

Finsand added that she has observed an increasing number of communication specialists switching from PR and advertising settings to HR and management consultancies, giving communication practices — traditionally more focused on technical benefits knowledge — a marketing savvy not as evident in the past.

### Partnership possibilities

Quain and Finsand agreed that identifying the strengths of both parties and marrying the two are key for strategic partnership opportunities between entities that might otherwise compete.

“Difficulties arise when one side doesn’t want to let go of a piece of the pie,” Finsand said. “Realistically, our types of organizations are and always will be primarily competitors. But the snags in potential partnerships can be avoided as long as both players are clear on what each can and cannot do.”

Quain said, “We both ultimately want the ear of the CEO. Let’s figure out how getting there can be mutually beneficial for PR agencies as well as communication consultants throughout the process.”

Looks like the sandbox just got a little friendlier.

— Beth Zimmerman  
Watson Wyatt Worldwide

*Editor’s Note: What are your ideas on the subject? We would like to share your thoughts in an upcoming issue of PRSA Today and on the Web site. E-mail your comments to Eva Keiser, APR, at [ekeiser@psbpr.com](mailto:ekeiser@psbpr.com).*



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### Eliminate PR lingo

Does your client provide “solutions?” Are you a “mission-critical company?” Does your company use lots of words that sound important but are meaningless to anyone outside of the company? If you answered yes to any of these questions, your site may be filled with jargon.

“PR lingo is more prevalent with

tech companies. You don’t get a clear understanding of what the company does, and they don’t often explain it in ways that anyone can understand,” Blahnik said.

Company sites should target the average person and aim to make the reporter’s job easier. If a reporter cannot go to your Web site and find simple answers to difficult questions, then

your site is not doing its job. Web sites like [www.jargonfreeweb.com](http://www.jargonfreeweb.com) can help you determine if your site needs to be rewritten.

“Most people aren’t experts, and most of the people we write for aren’t either, so we have to be able to put stories in words most people can understand,” said Blahnik.

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# Pro-Am Day 2001: showcase your profession

Don't miss Minnesota PRSA's Pro-Am Day on Nov. 2, 2001. This annual mentoring event provides college seniors who are members of the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) the chance to learn more about the public relations field while spending a day with PR professionals at work.

"Pro-Am Day gives PRSSA students a firsthand look at the public relations field," said Jennifer McNamara, co-chair of the Minnesota PRSA Student Relations committee. "It is also an excellent opportunity for professionals to showcase their expertise while giving back to the profession."

Throughout the day, professionals typically involve students in a variety of activities such as:

- Providing company tours, highlighting various public relations roles throughout the company
- Including students in a brainstorming session

- Offering the chance to take an entry-level writing test
- Exposing students to other professionals in the company
- Describing how they entered the profession
- Explaining what is unique about their particular area of public relations
- Reviewing student resumes or portfolios

At the end of the day, professionals and students are encouraged to attend a reception to meet and mingle with fellow participants. The reception will be held at the new offices of Weber Shandwick Worldwide in Bloomington at 4:30 p.m. For more information on Pro-Am Day or to host a student, please contact Holly Langdon at (952) 346-6289.

— Holly Langdon  
Weber Shandwick Worldwide

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### Get the word out

Even if you provide everything on your Web site that a journalist could desire, reporters need to be able to find your site quickly and easily. The simplest way to draw journalists to your site is to include your Web address on all of your news releases.

It is also important to register with search engines because journalists will often use them to find your site. "The most popular search engine here is Google," said Blahnik. "It seems to know what you are looking for. I use it 10 to 15 times a day."

To catch a reporter's attention, a timely e-mail can be a quick and easy tool, but public relations professionals often fall into the habit of e-mailing all their "news" to reporters. "On an average day I get between 50 and 100 e-mails, and if it is not a company or agency that I am familiar with, I tend to bypass it," said Blahnik.

Also, asking reporters to click on links and e-mail attachments can be risky. "More often than not I will not take the extra step to go to a link," said Stammer. "Unless it is something

that really catches my attention or is appropriate to a current story, I will not take the time to visit."

Both Blahnik and Stammer agree that if a news release is very important, U.S. mail is the best form of communication. E-mails might be overlooked, and faxes often get lost in piles of paper.

### Looking into the future

In the last decade, media relations has changed drastically, and the next 10 years will likely bring about just as

much change — if not more. "I think the lines between journalism and PR will continue to blur now and in the future," said Nancy Anderson-Smith of ARA Content, a provider of free content to online and news media. "It is likely that all media relations will be done online. Journalists will be using Web cams and taking video tours of your facilities. They will contact you, talk with you, and edit the interview all from their PC."

— Ryan May  
Strother Communications Group



**Nancy Anderson-Smith**

## The Ten Essential Elements of an Online Newsroom

1. Link directly from your homepage
2. Post news releases simultaneously with distribution
3. Maintain a searchable database of news releases
4. Offer online media kits
5. Make it easy for reporters to reach you
6. Include corporate and executive information
7. Feature a searchable database of recent coverage
8. Allow reporters to request news
9. Provide additional tools and information
10. List awards and recognition

(Source: Vocus 2001 Survey, [www-vocus.com](http://www-vocus.com))

## Photo Highlights from the PRSA Skills Seminar, September 5, 2001

A. Richard Sprouse, Public Information Officer for the Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources — Division of Enforcement, shared some of his personal experiences about communicating in a crisis.



B. Ann Folkman, APR, director of public relations, Select Comfort, provided an overview of an integrated marketing program for the launch of the new Sleep Number Bed, including a recent placement on the NBC *Today* show.

C. Lynn Casey, APR, CEO, Padilla Speer Beardsley Inc., and Glenn Karwoski, managing director, Karwoski & Courage, discussed books that should be on every practitioner's reading list, including Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point*, and anything by Peter Drucker.



D. Gretchen Tiberghien, APR, professor at St. Cloud State, listed *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom and, of course, Cutlip and Center's *Effective Public Relations* as her favorites.



E. Ted Murphy, principal, Ted Murphy Communications Management Inc., shared his love of books with attendees.

*For additional photo highlights and copies of the presentations, visit [www.mnprsa.com](http://www.mnprsa.com).*

## Padilla Community Classic Award nominations due

The nomination deadline for the Donald G. Padilla Community Classic Award is November 1.

The Donald G. Padilla Community Classic Award honors an individual who has demonstrated a long-term commitment to use his or her public relations expertise and knowledge for the benefit of nonprofit organizations.

Those honored with this award not only volunteer their time, they also offer their skills and talent to organizations with which they are associated. They bring credit to the

public relations profession and have encouraged others to emulate their dedication to the profession through volunteerism.

To nominate an individual, please send a completed and signed nomination form to: Christy Gunnerud, Maritz Marketing Research, 7701 France Ave., Ste. 300, Mpls., MN 55435. Nomination forms are available at [www.mnprsa.com](http://www.mnprsa.com).





# Announcements and Opportunities

## Local agency relocates

The Minneapolis office of **Weber Shandwick Worldwide** has relocated to 8000 Norman Center Dr., Ste. 400, Mpls., MN 55437. The main phone number remains (952) 832-5000, and the direct dial numbers now begin with area code 952 and prefix 346.

## Member kudos

Congratulations to **Joe Dangor** for his promotion to manager of Media & Communications at HealthPartners.

Congratulations to **Danielle Engholm** for her promotion to senior account executive at Padilla Speer Beardsley Inc.

## Members who have recently changed positions include:

**Leslie A. Hammer** has joined Northland Affiliate AHA as youth market director. Her new address, phone, fax and e-mail are: 4701 W. 77th St., Mpls., MN 55435; (952) 278-3658; (952) 835-5828 (fax); and lhammer@heart.org.

**Jessica Henry** has joined Minnesota Technical Assistant's Program as a communications specialist. Her new address, phone, fax and e-mail are: 200 Oak Street S.E., Ste. 350, Mpls., MN 55455; (612) 624-5122; (612) 624-3370 (fax); and henry038@tc.umn.edu.

**Chris Reese** has joined HealthPartners as an account executive. His new address, phone, fax and e-mail are: 8100 34th Ave. S., Mpls., MN 55440; (952) 883-5304; (952) 883-5310 (fax); christian.l.reese@healthpartners.com.

**Shelly Rushmeyer, APR**, has joined MDA Consulting Group as director of marketing. Her new address, phone and e-mail are: 150 S. 5th St., Ste. 3300, Mpls., MN 55402; (612) 332-8182; and srushmeyer@mdaconsultinggroup.com.

**Daniel Wolter** has joined the Minnesota House of Representatives as press sec-

retary for Speaker of the House Steve Sviggum. His new address, phone and e-mail are: Minnesota House of Representatives, 100 Constitution Ave., Ste. 469, St. Paul, MN 55155; (651) 296-0640; and dan.wolter@house.leg.state.mn.us.

## Welcome new members

Welcome to new Minnesota PRSA members who have recently joined. They include: **Robert Bauer**, BlueFire Partners; **Bill Brady**, Cargill Public Relations; **Eapen Chacko**, Possis Medical, Inc.; **Robin Chance**, Watson Wyatt Worldwide; **Doreen Clark**, Lincoln Financial Advisors & Sagemark Consulting; **Susan Denelsbeck**, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Minnesota; **Jill D. Johnson**, Concordia University; **Alpa Goswami**, Tartan Marketing; **Kristin Heinmets**, Padilla Speer Beardsley Inc.; **Catherine Higgins**, Children's HeartLink; **Kelly Lessard-Humaid**, Minnesota Zoo; **Jennifer Skatter**, Carlson Marketing Group; and **Todd Sorensen**, Minnesota AIDS Project.

## MAP volunteer opportunities

In the aftermath of our nation's tragedy, many people are looking for ways to help. Serving on a nonprofit board of directors and providing nonprofit consulting services are excellent ways to contribute to the community. Please consider the current board and consulting opportunities available through The Management Assistance Program for NonProfits (MAP).

New board opportunities include:

- Cheerful Givers
- Phyllis Wheatley Community Center
- Shakespeare in the Park

New volunteer consulting opportunities include:

- Volunteers needed to join MAP's board recruitment team
- Marketing/communications consultant needed to create brand and

increase visibility for Resources for Child Caring (RCC), a nonprofit organization that provides training and education for child care providers, a referral network for parents looking for quality child care, outreach to diverse communities and advocacy for effective public policy regarding child care legislation. RCC operates a publishing business called Red Leaf Press that is known throughout the country as a leading publisher and distributor of children's books and educational materials.

For more information on these and other current project opportunities, please visit [www.mapnp.org](http://www.mapnp.org).

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