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Strategic Public Relations

A Constantly Evolving Discipline

Learning Objectives

- 1.1** Define and understand the perception of PR
- 1.2** Define corporate social responsibility
- 1.3** Explore the growth of the PR industry in the United States and globally
- 1.4** Review roles, functions, and career options
- 1.5** Review career options in the field of PR

Scenario

Orlando's Big Thank You: An Integrated Communications Campaign to Revive Tourism

Visit Orlando, the travel and tourism association serving the hospitality industry in Greater Orlando, faced two critical external events that could have seriously impacted the number of visitors in 2017 to the area's restaurants, resorts, theme parks, and hotels.

First, in June of 2016, the Pulse nightclub in Orlando was the site of a mass shooting, an act of domestic terrorism that shocked the city and the country. A report by Maxim Group (PRSA, 2018), "Evaluating the Impact of a Potential Florida Tourism Slowdown From the Orlando Terror Attack," stated, "We believe this weekend's tragic terror-related shooting in Orlando has the potential to reduce tourism-related spending . . . for at least the next couple of quarters."

Second, in early 2017, the Trump administration issued an executive order restricting immigration. This helped create the global perception that the United States was not welcoming to foreign visitors. Following the executive order, the Global Business Travel Association estimated "a loss of over \$1.3 billion in overall travel-related expenditures in the US in 2017 . . . that inbound travelers would have spent."

Orlando is the most visited tourist destination in the United States, and the hospitality industry generates more than \$66 billion in economic impact per year, accounting for one out of every three jobs in Orlando. According to *Visit Orlando*, the area is home to more than 450 resorts, hotels, and inns and attracted over 68 million visitors in 2016.

A decline in the reputation of the area as a safe and welcoming destination represented a serious economic challenge that demanded immediate attention.

Faced with this potential crisis, *Visit Orlando* needed a communications campaign to reassure potential visitors that Orlando was still a welcoming, safe, and worthwhile place to visit. To assist them with meeting the challenge, the company retained the services of Edelman, a leading global PR firm, and the resulting program they developed and executed won a Silver Anvil, the top award from the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), in 2018.

As you read through this chapter, consider what public relations (PR) strategies and tactics you would recommend to offset the potential damage to Orlando's global reputation created by these two unrelated events. What would you recommend that Orlando tourism officials say as they prepare to announce their annual numbers? Consider the following questions:

1. What kind of research would you recommend?
2. Who would be your target audiences?
3. What special event(s) or media relations strategy would you propose?
4. What role should social media play in your response plan?

At the end of this chapter (as with all the chapters in this text), you will see how the organization responded and the outcome(s) the public relations program produced. Pay special attention to demonstrating return on investment (ROI) for the resources allocated to meet the challenge, reduce the impact of the crisis or issue, and enhance **corporate reputation**.

The authors hope you will find this approach interesting and challenging and that it will help you connect the key takeaways of each chapter to real-life examples of strategic public relations. ●

Source: PRSA, 2018.

The goals of this introductory chapter are to provide a foundation and understanding of the field of PR (public relations) and its development into a strategic management function, as well as outline how you might pursue a career in this dynamic industry.

The chapter will also connect PR to the growing field of corporate social responsibility (CSR)—also referred to as sustainability or corporate philanthropy—and illustrate how one discipline informs and enriches the other. Later in the chapter, you will read the first of a series of “Profiles in PR.” In this section, you will be introduced to a successful PR professional who will share her or his experience and advice for building a career in PR and/or social responsibility (SR).

In subsequent chapters, the profiles will feature professionals and experts who share their experiences and advice on the topics covered in each chapter, such as media relations, crisis management, or research.

The Image of Public Relations in Popular Culture

>> LO 1.1 Define and understand the perception of PR

In this chapter, you will read about the public perception—accurate and not-so-accurate—of PR and how it contributes to an organization or cause. This issue has been discussed and debated since the early days of the profession. Historically, PR professionals focused primarily on generating publicity, versus today when the goal has shifted to impacting public opinion, influencing behavior, and driving business results (see Chapter 2). The historical image among nonpractitioners of the **publicist**, or “flack,” has been driven, in part, by how the profession has been depicted in movies, the media, and on television.

According to Joe Saltzman (2011), director of The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture project at The Norman Lear Center at the University of Southern California (USC), “Many public relations practitioners believe that the image of the publicist and the public relations professional (in the media) is one of the most negative in history” (para. 5). In Saltzman’s research, he studied more than 300 films and TV programs from 1901 to 2011. The negative images of PR range from devious

press agents who will do anything—including lie, cheat, steal, and even commit crimes—to save their reputations and protect clients. For example, the character Don Draper (played by Jon Hamm) is portrayed as a powerful and unethical communications executive on the A&E Network show *Mad Men*.

Olivia Pope (played by Kerry Washington), on her hit ABC show *Scandal*, is involved in high-stakes crisis and political communications work each week. The hit show, still running in syndication, is based on the life and career of Judy Smith, a Washington, DC-based crisis manager. Notably, Smith served as a consultant to the show, providing her input on how PR and crisis management in Washington, DC, works. However, she insists her work, while demanding, is nowhere near as dramatic as the life and



When two recent crises threatened Orlando’s global reign as a top vacation destination, the PR firm Edelman created a reputation recovery campaign to welcome back tourists.

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career of Olivia Pope. “Moving dead bodies from crime scenes—that doesn’t happen in my office in Washington, DC,” explained Judy Smith (Burton, 2014).

In her pioneering study, *Public Relations in Film and Fiction, 1930 to 1995*, Karen Miller wrote that today’s “fictitious characters . . . display very little understanding of PR or what practitioners do” (1999, p. 24). Miller explained, “Sometimes (in the movies) PR is magic,” and other times, “it is almost embarrassingly easy.”

Nowhere in these shows or movies do you see PR people working on a serious issue, such as protecting Orlando’s critical tourism industry, as outlined in the chapter-opening scenario. Perhaps that is because while the work benefits the employees of thousands of large and small businesses in Orlando, it is not as entertaining as watching the high-stakes, dramatic storylines of PR professionals common in films and on television.

These stereotypes should not be taken lightly and must be countered with facts, as with any profession. The best way to do that is by engaging professionally with people and clients and showing the value PR brings to the management table and global marketplace.

Defining Public Relations: What's in a Name?

Moving beyond the *perception* of public relations, let’s examine the various definitions of PR to see if there is a consensus. Defining PR has been a goal for much of the profession’s history. Often, practitioners have relied on saying what PR was not—for example, *advertising*, which traditionally relies on paid media “ads,” or *sales*, which is an in-person transactional exercise. At its best, PR involves an information exchange between people or “publics” with the goal of sharing information and influencing the behavior of the recipient.

Other key elements of PR that distinguish it from advertising include the need for specialized skills, such as issues and crisis management, internal communications, and providing strategic communications advice. These and other related elements are unique to PR and are not found in advertising, sales, or other marketing activity.

While the strategies, tactics, and vehicles differ over time, PR professionals are constantly engaged in delivering messages and influencing behavior or public opinion. Whether it is buying a certain brand or product, voting for a candidate, donating to a cause or charity, or investing in a **public company**, in PR your role is to build reputation and create trust. This must be done in an ethical and transparent manner in order to serve your client or company’s interests as well as your own career.

A Crowd-Sourced Definition From the Public Relations Society of America

In response to the need for an agreed-upon definition, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the leading professional organization for public relations professionals, launched an effort to develop a more “current and accurate definition of public relations.”



Judy Smith, a Washington, DC–based crisis manager (*right*), was the inspiration for the character Olivia Pope, played by Kerry Washington (*left*), on the television show *Scandal*.

Frederick M. Brown / Stringer / Getty Images

The project took the form of a “crowd-sourced” effort involving PRSA members, academics, and industry leaders to solicit input for an “official” definition of PR to be used going forward. That months-long process produced the following definition, which was first published in 2012: *Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.*

Chartered in 1947, the PRSA is the world’s largest and foremost organization of PR professionals with more than 22,000 members. In addition, it has a sister organization, the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), which consists of over 370 chapters and more than 9,700 undergraduate members, students majoring in or considering a career in public relations. PRSA provides professional development, sets standards of excellence, and upholds principles of ethics for its members. It also advocates for greater understanding and adoption of public relations services and acts as one of the industry’s leading voices on pivotal business and professional issues (see www.prsa.org).

Public Relations Scholars Weigh In

Over the years, academics and authors have developed their own definitions that share many of the same elements. Scott Cutlip, Allen Center, and Glen Broom, in the seminal text *Effective Public Relations* (first published in 2000), defined PR as the “management function that identifies, establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip et al., 2000).

This definition has echoes both in the PRSA version as well as the one put forth by leading PR scholars James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt (1984), who suggested that “public relations is the management of communication between an organization and its publics.”

INSIGHTS

What Is “Public Relations”?

If you Google “public relations,” you see it is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the professional maintenance of a favorable public image by a company or other organization or a famous person” and “the state of the relationship between the public and a company or other organization or a famous person” (Lexico Oxford Dictionary, n.d.).

Despite the varied definitions for the profession, Paul Holmes, founder and chair of The Holmes Group, notes that he likes the term “public relations” (2017a). Holmes has been writing about public relations for more than 25 years, and he

suggests reducing the term to its component parts. The words “public” and “relations” are in common usage and appear to be well understood: “public” (of or concerning the people as a whole; done, perceived, or existing in open view; or ordinary people in general; the community) and “relations” (the way in which two or more people or things are connected or the way in which two or more people or groups regard and behave toward each other).

Holmes offers his own definition, rooted in the meaning of the two words: “Public relations is the discipline of managing the relationship between

an organization and the people upon whom it depends for success and with whom it interacts, and ensuring that those relationships facilitate the organization's strategic objectives" (Holmes, 2017a, para. 10).

There are significant reasons why he likes this definition, he notes.

First, it makes it clear that the end product of public relations—and therefore the main focus of every campaign—is a relationship: hopefully, a stronger, more rewarding relationship with employees, consumers, shareholders, regulators, or the communities in which organizations operate.

Second, if you think about how relationships are formed, one thing should be clear: Communication is important, but it is far from the most important factor. Ad agencies, digital firms, and even management consultancies can all claim to be in the communications business. PR is unique in looking beyond the transactional and focusing on the long-term, mutually beneficial value of relationships. To remove that key element would be to surrender the critical differentiator between

what PR pros bring to the table and what others offer.

Holmes dismisses the current angst around the term "public relations," suggesting it's the result of a particular moment in time, of changes in the relationship between marketing and corporate communications, and of increased competition among advertising agencies, digital firms, management consultancies, and others.

At a time when public relations people are anxious to define themselves more broadly than ever before, when senior in-house people are needed at the policy-making table more urgently than ever before, and when public relations firms have embraced integrated campaigns that use paid, shared, and owned channels, Holmes suggests that PR professionals need to double down on the term "public relations." By jettisoning the term "public relations," practitioners might be turning their backs on the one thing that differentiates PR from all of those other related disciplines: the focus on relationships. ●

Source: Holmes, 2017a.

Regardless of which definition you find most relevant, each has elements and concepts in common. Note the use of the terms "mutually beneficial," "management function," "strategic," and "publics." At its heart, PR is, in fact, a communications process that keeps the interests of all parties—pro and con—in mind. It is strategic, not tactical. It is a relationship, not a one-way street where policies or positions are taken onboard verbatim by your audience. It is an interactive process that occurs over time, not a transaction or isolated event or activity.

These distinctions convey a give-and-take relationship in which the interests of all parties can be addressed and communications goals more likely achieved—all within the context of that "relationship."

Public Relations Versus Advertising: Understanding the Difference

While the lines between PR and advertising/marketing are increasingly blurred, there are distinct differences, even though both work through the public media to convey a message. To begin with, as noted earlier, PR involves persuasion, not purchasing. The result the PR pro is seeking (obtaining news coverage, influencing public opinion, enhancing a reputation or rebuilding one, etc.) comes through interaction between the PR professional and a gatekeeper (e.g., a journalist,

blogger, or **influencer**). This process of outreach and persuasion of a reporter to write or film a story is referred to as “earned” media and is central to the practice of media relations.

On the contrary, advertising is a transaction, thus the term “paid” media. A company that wants public attention for a product or a cause pays for the print ad space, broadcast airtime, or paid social media posts, and it is usually run as is with no interpretation. This distinction—between earned and paid media—has been captured in a short but accurate quote: “PR is what you *pray* for. Advertising is what you *pay* for” (Wynne, 2014).

Defining Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability Communications: Doing Well by Doing Good, or Is It More Complex?

>> LO 1.2 Define corporate social responsibility

Many PR campaigns incorporate corporate social responsibility (CSR) engagement, defined as the “economic, legal, ethical, and *discretionary* expectations that society has of organizations” (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2014, p. 36) to give back or contribute to society. In 2007, a peer-reviewed study of the top 50 global business schools defined CSR as “the sum of the *voluntary* actions taken by a company to address the economic, social and environmental impacts of its business operations and the concerns of its principal **stakeholders**” (Christensen et al., 2007, pp. 347–368). The use of the word “voluntary” is key here—no one is making these companies do this activity.

Ideally, CSR should function as a built-in, self-regulating mechanism whereby a business monitors and ensures its support of the law, ethical standards, and international norms. Consequently, businesses would embrace responsibility for the impact of its activities on the environment, consumers, employees, communities, stakeholders, and all other members of the public sphere.



In 2014, CVS pharmacies across the United States stopped selling cigarettes after the company decided that doing so was incompatible with its goal of promoting health.

Andrew Burton / Staff / Getty Images

Evolution of Corporate Philanthropy Into Corporate Social Responsibility

Carol Cone, generally regarded as the pioneer of CSR as a business and communications strategy, described the evolution of CSR in a seminal 2010 study published by Edelman (2010):

Nearly two-thirds of consumers feel that it is not adequate for corporations to simply give money away to charity or good causes, they need to integrate them into their day-to-day business. . . . It is no longer enough to slap a “green” ribbon on a product and call it CSR. Americans seek deeper involvement in social issues and expect brands and companies to provide various means of engagement . . . we call this the rise of the “citizen consumer.”

Essentially, CSR is the deliberate inclusion of public interest into corporate decision-making, and it honors a triple bottom line: people, planet, and profit.

Examples of the close relationship between PR and CSR are found throughout this book, and Chapter 9 offers an in-depth exploration of the practice.

Growth of Public Relations Into a Global Industry

>> LO 1.3 Explore the growth of the PR industry in the United States and globally

Looking ahead to Chapter 2, you will learn how the PR industry has roots throughout U.S. history, business, and politics. In addition to its long heritage in the United States, PR has become a global business; several countries in Europe—such as Great Britain—have long traditions of PR as well. Within the United States, PR remains an attractive career choice with steady growth in employment opportunities and salaries driven by increasing spending by clients and companies on PR-related activity.

The U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimates job growth in the PR field at 6% per year from 2018 to 2028, with a median income of \$60,000 per year (BLS, 2020b).

The BLS's most recent report indicates that as of the end of 2018, there were 240,700 people nationwide employed in the PR industry as public relations specialists. The BLS projected about 14,000 new jobs in PR will be added each year until 2024 (BLS, 2020b).

Social Media and Digital Communications Key to Growth

A lot of this steady growth is attributable to the demand for skilled communicators who can leverage social media for their employers or clients. For those of you with these skills, the career upside is almost unlimited. For the rest of you, this is an area of opportunity once you have these skills mastered.

The BLS noted in its most recent report that the growth of the PR industry “will be driven by the need for organizations to maintain their public image, especially with the growth of social media” (BLS, 2020b).

While much of the increase in PR spending in the United States is attributable to an improving economy, its growing recognition as an effective platform for supporting business and **corporate social responsibility** activity is a major factor as well.

There is no doubt that social media has accelerated this trend, moving rapidly from a few major platforms for leisure time use to dozens of powerful marketing and communications platforms for organizations all over the globe.

Global Public Relations Spending Trends

Industry data shows that between 2012 and 2018, global investments in marketing services were experiencing continuous growth, with the latest figures expected to surpass \$450 billion. Marketing services encompass areas such as public relations, data investment management, sponsorship, health care, and direct marketing (Duffin, 2019).

Global spending on PR itself is hard to track as there are different terms or activities included in the category (e.g., advertising, marketing, special events) in

different countries, and the documentation is not as reliable as it is in the United States. Two leading PR industry publications, *PRWeek* and *The Holmes Report*, reported continued global growth in 2018.

PRWeek's April 2019 Agency Business Report shows that overall global agency revenue for the larger, established firms rose 5% in 2018, to \$11.9 billion, up 1% on prior year growth. The 2018 U.S. number increased slightly less than the rise reported for 2017, but it was still up 4% to \$5.64 billion (Barrett, 2020).

The Holmes Report's (now part of PProvoke) April 2019 estimate, which includes smaller and newer firms outside of the top 250, along with the vast number of firms that do not provide revenue figures, puts the size of the global PR agency industry at \$15.5 billion, up from \$15 billion in 2018 (PProvoke, 2019b).

Both publications noted particularly strong markets worldwide (besides the United States), including the world's second-largest China, Europe, India, and the Middle East.

Emerging and Developing Nations

In developing countries where traditional media is limited or a free, independent press is not a given, PR's growth is being driven by social media platforms that are easily accessible and largely uncensored. In these economies, private citizens and advocacy groups use social media to spread their message(s), build followers, and conduct business without ever dealing with a newspaper or broadcast media outlet.

Pew Research reported in its 2016 online media report (Poushter, 2016) that the majority of adult Internet users in developing nations surveyed say that they use social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, for news and information, as well as to keep in touch. The report adds that adults in emerging and developing nations are more likely to use these two forms of social media compared to citizens in more developed countries (Poushter, 2016).



Smartphones in developing nations, such as India, Mexico, and Vietnam (left to right), can be essential tools for the spread of information, given the lack of traditional press.

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Roles and Functions for Public Relations Pros

>> LO 1.4 Review roles, functions, and career options

As noted earlier, some organizations rely on PR professionals solely to “play defense,” which means essentially to offset bad news or manage a crisis or major issue facing the organization. However, enlightened organizations see the benefit of using the PR staff to “play offense” as well and enhance the reputation of the company, cause, or candidate.

What are the key roles PR professionals play in an organization? What are the key strategies and tactics they use? How do you get started and build a career in PR? Let’s examine these questions now and set the stage for a more in-depth discussion of strategies and tactics in subsequent chapters.

Roles

Writer

First and foremost, to be effective as a PR professional, you *must* be an accomplished writer, and you must continue working to maintain the quality of your work as well. To succeed, you will need to be able to take complex or controversial subject matter and prepare press releases, statements, opinion pieces, and, occasionally, speeches and white papers for your clients or senior management team. In addition, your writing must not only be succinct and complete, but it must be persuasive. After all, your goal is to influence the audience and stimulate behavior (e.g., making a purchase, supporting a cause or candidate, or raising funds for a charity), so being persuasive, accurate, and honest is key.

Strategic Advisor

Good PR professionals are a strategic resource to their company or client. They keep them abreast of current issues, trends in public opinion, and on marketplace developments. No communications plan occurs in a vacuum. Knowing what competitors are doing, how the public is feeling, and what government officials might do or say that impacts your organization is critical to developing strategic plans and selecting tactics. To do this well, you will need to stay current on your company and industry and on overall business trends. You will also need to be comfortable with PR strategies and tactics to advise your company on the best path to follow given the situation.

Marketing Communications Expert

Occasionally, the role of PR is to support product introductions or ongoing sales and marketing programs. While this is most often the case with consumer product companies—sometimes referred to as **business-to-consumer (B-to-C) communications**—increasingly PR is being leveraged to boost sales and launch new products across many types of industries, including **business-to-business (B-to-B)** and **business-to-government (B-to-G)** situations.

This can take the form of news conferences or events to introduce new products, testimonials, and case studies and posting content on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat) to create interest and conversation about the product or service. This has evolved to a practice referred to as **integrated marketing communications (IMC)**.



While many have forgotten the details of what happened on the Deepwater Horizon rig, they probably recall that BP was responsible.

iStock.com/landbysea

Crisis Manager

This is one of the most well-known and often glamorized roles for PR (e.g., *Scandal*), and most PR pros see it as the ultimate test of their abilities. In a crisis, something *big* has gone wrong: A disaster has occurred; negligence or discrimination within an organization has been discovered; a product is being recalled; or financial wrongdoing by management is uncovered. Your company is in the spotlight. The so-called court of public opinion is in session, and its judgments can be harsh and swift—especially in a 24/7 digital media world. Working under these circumstances is challenging and exciting, so be aware that this work is very stressful and the stakes are high. It is not for the inexperienced, unprepared, or timid.

Also, keep in mind that what people remember the most about a crisis is not the details but how well the company (and the PR team) handled the situation and responded to the issues. One need only look at the Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill in April 2010 to see what happens when a crisis is poorly managed. More people recall the dramatic underwater footage of oil pouring into the Gulf of Mexico, the damaged coastline, and stricken wildlife than remember what happened to cause the damage. But they have not forgotten the name of company responsible: BP. The same is true for airline accidents (e.g., Boeing Max crashes); banking industry scandals (Wells Fargo), or cell phones that spontaneously combust (Samsung Galaxy).



Images like this one, of a pelican slicked with oil after the Deepwater Horizon disaster, stick with people, as does the company responsible—in this case, BP.

MCT / Contributor / Getty Images

The Public Relations Tool Kit

As a PR professional, you will learn to deploy tools and tactics to accomplish your communications goals. While there are many skills you will use in your career, there are basic ones you must master to be successful. Later in this text, in the chapters on key practice areas, there will be a more in-depth discussion of each of these. For now, we will summarize them as follows: media relations, employee communications, research and strategic planning, and social media (see Figure 1.1).

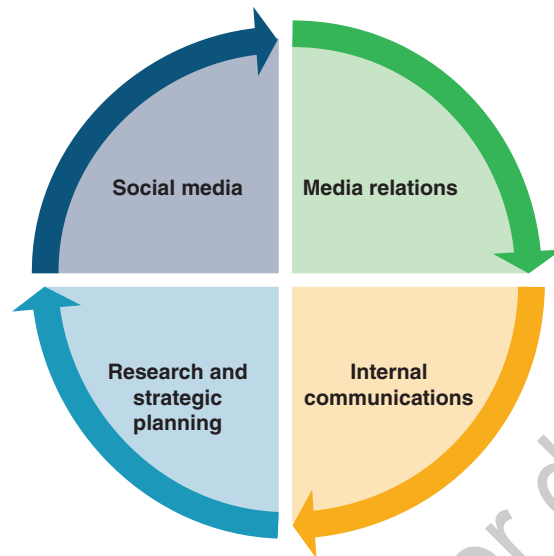
Let's examine each one separately.

Media Relations

Media relations and PR are often used interchangeably, especially by nonpractitioners. However, while they are related, they are not the same thing. Generally, media relations strategies are designed to accomplish one specific goal—for example, to create or manage publicity.

FIGURE 1.1

The Public Relations Tool Kit



Media relations can be described as a company's interactions (directly or through intermediaries) with editors, reporters, and journalists from national, local, specialty, and trade publications or online and broadcast outlets. The goal is to communicate a message, story, or information by convincing the journalist(s) it is newsworthy and deserves mention or focus in their publication or broadcast outlet.

On occasion, media relations can mean working with the media to avoid a "bad" story or "balance" one to minimize the damage. For example, a reporter may approach you with a story idea or tip that you know is based on a rumor or misleading information. Your role is to provide sufficient data and details to convince them that the story idea is flawed or incomplete and provide the information needed to support that conclusion. Sometimes, this means they will abandon the story; at other times, they will just include your company's point of view more prominently and thereby minimize the "blame game."

Another component of media relations critical to your success is to be an effective liaison between the company and the media. Dana Perino, who served as White House Press Secretary to President George W. Bush (September 2007–January 2009) and is now a commentator on Fox News, explains it this way: "Your job (*in the White House*) is to represent the President to the media, as most people expect, but it is also to represent the media to the President—both roles are crucial to your success in the job" (D. Perino, personal communication, 2017). This has clear relevance to the role you will play between your client or company and the media.

Employee Communications

Those of you whose career path leads you to work for a company or inside a large organization may find yourselves asked to manage the communications to your fellow employees. This can concern routine matters such as employee benefits

and updates to company policy or involve more complex matters like communicating before, during, and after a merger or similar major corporate event. Generally, employee communications can involve creating newsletters, websites, videos, intranets, or frequently asked questions (FAQs) and preparing remarks for senior management to convey their vision for the company to employees.

However, communications can be a crucial factor in whether the benefits of a major organizational change (e.g., a merger) are achieved or not, research shows. Depending on which research source you use, it is estimated that anywhere between 50% and 85% of mergers fail to deliver on the promises made the day the deal was announced. Often, one of the reasons cited for the failure is poor communication to the employees impacted by the transaction and lack of clarity on the vision and goals going forward.

More recently, activism among employees and encouraging their employer to take public stands on controversial issues (e.g., immigration, gender equality, discrimination) is on the rise. The firm Weber Shandwick, a popular thought leader on the topic of CEO activism, (see “CEO Activism in 2017: High Noon in the C-Suite,” Weber Shandwick, 2017) recently produced a new report (“Employee Activism in the Age of Purpose: Employees (Up)Rising”) that documents this trend: “Nearly four in 10 employees (38%) report that they have spoken up to support or criticize their employers’ actions over a controversial issue that affects society” (Weber Shandwick, 2019, para. 2).

Research and Strategic Planning

In a time when documenting your results matters more and more, PR professionals need to develop their strategic planning and research capabilities. As such, a full chapter will be spent reviewing this topic in detail later in the book (see Chapter 4). Whether you conduct the research yourself or delegate it to a colleague or an outside firm, your plans will be much more likely to succeed if they are based on solid research. This can take the form of **secondary research** (reviewing already available materials) or **primary research** (e.g., conducting new surveys and/or focus groups).

In an ideal situation, your communications plan will benefit from both of these forms of research. Ironically, secondary research often precedes primary research in that the material/data to review already exists (secondary) and does not need to be designed, fielded, and the results evaluated (primary) before any insights are available.

Your research plan should include testing your message(s), identifying your target audience, and measuring progress toward the goals you have set. The up-front investment of time and resources on research will provide a strong foundation and greatly enhance the outcome of your plan (Stacks & Michaelson, 2010). The importance of the research and planning element was outlined well in the case presented at the beginning of the chapter. The research efforts undertaken by *Visit Orlando* and Edelman included both secondary and primary research on tourist and visitor attitudes about Orlando following the two tragic events. Both were key to developing their recommendations to respond.

As noted, there will be a more in-depth discussion of research and strategic planning in Chapter 4.

Social Media

The explosive growth in digital or social media as an alternative media and information source—particularly in the developing world—has dramatically increased the need for social media skills as a prerequisite for a career in public

relations (Elliott, 2011; Perrin, 2015). Deirdre Breakenridge, a noted author and social media expert, suggests that “people in the PR industry need to become hybrid professionals” (Cision, 2012), combining traditional PR and cutting-edge social media skills.

Breakenridge recommends the following goals for young PR pros:

- Integrate traditional PR practices with digital and social communications while moving the best of both practices forward.
- Work outside of the PR “silo” and cross-functionally with marketing, including learning and applying marketing tactics.
- Collaborate with other departments, such as web/IT, sales, customer service, human resources, and so on.
- Be flexible and adaptable in an ever-changing global communications environment (Cision, 2012).



The explosive growth in social media has required companies to combine traditional PR and cutting-edge social media skills. PR crises can quickly go viral online, as United learned after several incidents in which passengers were mistreated and, in one instance, injured by their employees.

iStock.com/Laser1987

Given this trend, employers will be looking for professionals who are comfortable in this space and competent in leveraging this resource to accomplish business and communications goals. It is no longer sufficient to know how to use Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or Snapchat for personal outreach. Employers are looking for staff that know how to work with social media to reach new customers, engage with them, drive sales and marketing programs, or impact public opinion.

In the corporate arena, this can include managing the social media profile, monitoring online conversations, and developing and posting content on company-owned sites to enhance reputation and support business objectives.

In the nonprofit arena, social media is a very cost-efficient way to build followers and raise money for operations and charitable activities, as well as activate and engage people to support a cause or issue.

Finally, in government and in politics, social media represents a direct communications channel to reach citizens and voters to inform and educate them about government services, policy, candidates, and—in the case of elections—serve as a get-out-the-vote weapon.

Career Paths for Public Relations Professionals: Which Way Is Right for You?

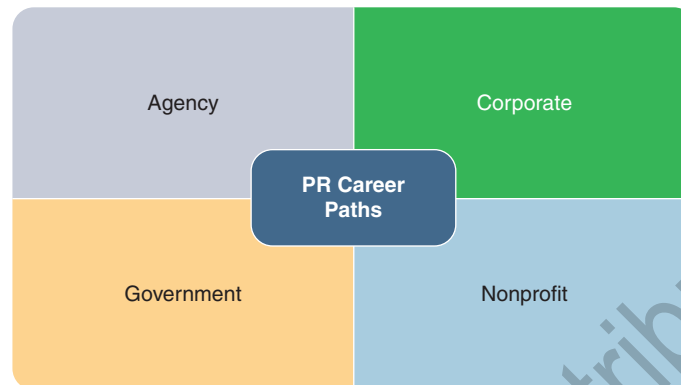
>> LO 1.5 Review career options in the field of PR

While there are many variables and options, there are generally four paths your PR career might take: agency (such as a PR or consulting firm); corporate, in a communications staff role; government (e.g., local, state, or federal), or working for a nonprofit organization (like World Wildlife Fund) or an association (such as the National Restaurant Association; see Figure 1.2).

Let’s review each one individually and put them into perspective.

FIGURE 1.2

PR Career Paths



Agency

The path of working in an agency setting is one many PR professionals take, especially early in their careers when they are first learning their craft. As a young PR professional, joining an agency has many advantages. First and foremost is that the focus of the business is on public relations—that is what they do for clients every day. As such, you are in an environment where nearly everyone you work with is a PR professional. The opportunity to learn new tactics and strategies, benefit from a colleague's previous work, or bounce an idea off someone with more experience is actively encouraged. Some people make an entire career of working for an agency, rising to become practice leaders, office managing partners, or even part of the senior management of a firm.

PR PROFILE

How I Started and Built My Career

Erin Munley DeWaters



Photo courtesy of Erin Munley DeWaters

Research shows millennials change jobs four times before the age of 32—I beat that average.

By the age of 32, I had held six jobs with titles ranging from "assistant" to "strategist" to

"vice president." I've done many types of communications—from digital to crisis—and

helped launch an award-winning CSR program. I have had an interesting, challenging, and rewarding career so far. I joke that I must have good career karma, but I also know my success has been achieved by leveraging two things: education and opportunities.

Careers start with decisions about education. When you select a college, you start to create your network. Professors, counselors, and peers will be avenues to career opportunities. People you know from childhood, like friends of your parents, are also your initial network. That's how my career started.

My mom had a friend whose daughter worked on Capitol Hill. Through that connection, I got an internship in a congressional office. When I graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I wanted to go back to DC, so I scoured the job boards online and applied to entry-level roles. I was open to *all* opportunities, and I encourage you to be, too.

My first job was in a nonprofit membership organization. It wasn't a PR agency or well-known company, yet today, I do PR for a company that is part of a global retail group. So when you're evaluating roles, please know there is no "typical" career path.

Another major step in my career was graduate school. Two years after college, I got my master's in PR at The George Washington University. I learned a ton, broadened my network, and built confidence. Based on that confidence, I've raised my hand many times to take on new professional responsibilities so I could learn and gain experience.

Raising my hand helped me get the chance to launch a new CSR program for Food Lion, the southeastern U.S. regional grocery chain. There was a vacant position, and I stepped into a lead role on the project. Food Lion was looking to integrate PR and CSR, and that's exactly what we did through "Food Lion Feeds." It was the most rewarding experience of my career.

After that, I joined MetLife, where I managed PR for two of its U.S. divisions. MetLife's reputation as a good corporate citizen is one of the things that drew me to the company.

Today, I'm the director of communications for the services company of Ahold Delhaize USA, the largest grocery retail group on the East Coast. Ahold Delhaize is the parent company to Food Lion and other top grocery chains across the United States. In this role, I've had the opportunity to help the newly formed subsidiary company establish its community engagement program.

In my experience, I have learned that CSR isn't a nice-to-do; it's a must-do, and smart companies get that. An integrated PR/CSR strategy creates opportunities to tell stories, reach consumers, and build corporate reputation. If you're entering PR today, you'll be at a significant advantage by understanding the intersection.

As you think about the road ahead, lean into your education and value the relationships it helps you create. Be open to opportunities. Raise your hand and learn. You'll build competency and credibility, and they will be the foundation for your career path—wherever it takes you. ●

Erin DeWaters is a self-described "older millennial" and a working wife, mom, and graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and The George Washington University. She serves as director of communications for Retail Business Services, the services company of leading grocery retail group, Ahold Delhaize USA.

Barri Rafferty, worldwide president of Ketchum Public Relations, got her start in the industry working at Cone Communications while in graduate school in Boston. She then moved to New York and experimented with a big agency (Burson-Marsteller), the corporate side (SlimFast), and at a small beauty boutique PR agency (Lippe Taylor). Rafferty decided that a big agency would provide her with a supportive environment as she started her family, so she joined Ketchum as a vice president and account supervisor in New York.

Working her way up to her present position of president and CEO of Ketchum, Rafferty has held several key roles, including group manager for the New York brand practice, associate director of the New York office, and director of the global brand marketing practice. She previously relocated to Atlanta to be director of that office and later became director of the Ketchum's South region. She came back to New York to serve as its office director. In 2012, Rafferty became CEO of North America, and in 2016, she was named worldwide president. Since her appointment



Barri Rafferty was the first woman to lead a global PR firm.

Photo courtesy of Barri Rafferty

in 2017 as the first woman to lead a global firm, several other major firms have followed suit and named female leaders.

After working in an agency for a few years, you might decide to move to an internal (or client-side) position in a government, corporate, or nonprofit setting. Others decide to start their own firms or set up shop as independent counselors to leverage the skills and contacts gained while working for a larger firm. Still others move into the academic arena to share their knowledge and experience with the next generation.

Corporate

For those PR professionals who pursue a career in a corporate setting, there are challenges and opportunities to develop skills not found in other work settings. As a corporate PR professional, you would generally work in the communications department, although it may have many different names depending on the nomenclature and culture of the company. Some companies refer to the department as public relations; others will use variations of corporate communications, external affairs, corporate affairs, public affairs, and/or just communications or marketing.

The name of the department is often dependent on the reporting relationship of the function. According to a recent study by USC Annenberg Center (Holmes, 2017b), in most companies, PR reports to marketing or the CEO, but in a few cases, it reports to others, including legal or human resources (HR). Reporting to the CEO is viewed as desirable because it positions the function as a key corporate department with direct access and interaction with top management (see Figure 1.3).

These individuals often have responsibility for writing the company's annual report to stockholders, news releases on quarterly financial results, announcement on mergers and acquisitions, and senior management changes. These are known as **material events**, and publicly traded companies are required to report them to the public in a timely manner.

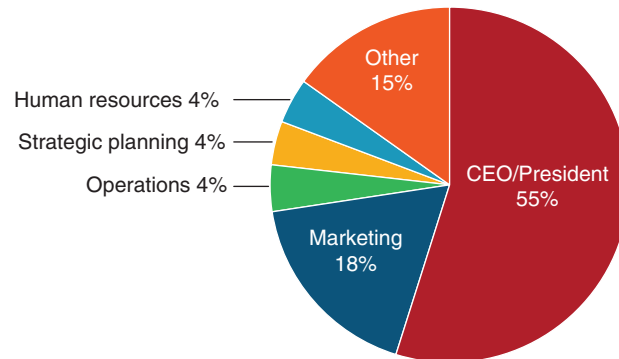
A career in corporate PR can be challenging and rewarding, and the compensation and benefits are often quite good. As well, corporate PR positions can be more stable and less susceptible to client budget shifts or staffing changes that often impact agency work.

Recent research suggests that succeeding in a corporate role requires communications executives "to be knowledgeable about the business—from strategy to operations—so they are able to provide strategic input on issues that span business functions" (Arthur W. Page Society, 2017). The Page report quotes one anonymous CEO as suggesting, "I don't think a healthy organization can do much without (communications) being involved in every part of the strategy and every part of the operation" (p. 2).

A cautionary note about this path: Unlike the agency world, PR teams are relatively small in most companies, and most likely, you will be one of only a few people who work on PR for your company. This can limit your internal network and

FIGURE 1.3

In-House Reporting Lines



Regardless of the reporting relationship, staff members in a corporate communications department are usually responsible for media relations, executive, internal (sometimes shared with HRO, and financial communications if the company has public shareholders and is listed on a stock exchange (e.g., the New York Stock Exchange or NASDAQ).

Source: "2017 Global Communications Report Predicts Convergence of Marketing And PR," Paul Holmes, March 30, 2017. Reprinted with permission.

be challenging because your fellow employees may not understand what you do and how it adds value to the company's business objectives. As a result, many PR pros wait to pursue corporate opportunities until later in their careers when they have more general PR experience. As such, building and maintaining a good personal network of mentors and colleagues outside of your current employer is strongly recommended.

Government

Many professionals have long careers in a government communication role, working at the federal or state level. In the federal government, the function is more commonly referred to as **public affairs**. Most every cabinet department—from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—has a public affairs office. In larger departments with a national or international focus (like the U.S. State Department), there are often regional offices outside the United States where communications professionals interact with the global and local media and serve constituents (e.g., U.S. citizens and companies) locally.

Similarly, at the state, county, or city level, public information and public service are the driving forces and primary focus. Most cities' locally elected officials (e.g., governor, county commissioner, or mayor) have a dedicated press secretary, who serves at the pleasure of the elected official. In each major city or state department, there is usually also a public information office, focused on responding to the media and the public, providing information about essential services and responding in crisis or disaster situations. As with some of the other career paths noted here, the government PR professional (or public affairs officer) is usually part of a small group of dedicated professionals. As such, there

are few others in the office who understand your role and can offer suggestions or advice, making your external network all the more important. Here again, having an outside network of colleagues—or participating in organizations such as the National Association of Government Communicators (NAGC)—is strongly advised.

Nonprofit and/or Association Public Relations

Nonprofit and association work is an increasingly popular path for young PR professionals, especially in the Washington, DC, area and in New York City, where many of these national and global organizations are headquartered. However, success in this setting is measured in awareness, membership growth, and fundraising success, as well as by traditional PR activities. Nonprofits such as the United Way, the Red Cross, and the World Wildlife Federation are focused on a key cause or issue, such as community service, disaster relief, or protecting endangered species. The PR professionals in this environment handle media relations and provide executive counsel as well as support ongoing fundraising efforts and membership communications and development.

Nonprofit company members frequently look to their association to monitor events and activity of the local, state, and federal government as well as advance the profession through research, training, and overall visibility. Often, these organizations take on the additional role of managing industrywide issues and crises on behalf of their members or assist member companies as they work their way through the situation.

Jeff Joseph was formerly senior vice president of communications and strategic relationships at the Consumer Technology Association (CTA), based in northern Virginia. According to the CTA website, the group “advocates for the entrepreneurs, technologists and innovators who mold the future of the consumer technology industry” (J. Joseph, personal communication, 2017). The CTA (formerly the CEA—the Consumer Electronics Association) is best known as the host of the huge Consumer

Electronics Show (CES) each year in Las Vegas, which draws thousands of tech suppliers and customers to see what’s new and cool in high technology and popular entertainment from the biggest names in technology. “Association PR allows you to engage in a variety of PR disciplines. One moment you’re focused on public affairs. The next, media relations, or crisis communications. All while supporting our singular mission—to help grow the industry,” Joseph said. Currently, he serves as president of the Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA).



The Red Cross PR team is actively involved in community outreach and fundraising support along with community and media relations activity when the organization responds to disaster situations across the United States and around the world.

Orlando Sentinel / Contributor / Getty Images

Scenario Outcome

In this chapter, you were introduced to media relations, research, crisis management, and other foundations of strategic public relations. Now, it is time to apply that knowledge to a “real-world” business challenge.

At the start of the chapter when the *Visit Orlando* case was outlined, you were asked to think about how the organization should respond to two external events—the Pulse nightclub shooting and President Trump’s executive order on immigration—as it prepared to release its annual visitation reports for 2017.

The following questions were suggested to guide your thinking:

1. What kind of research would you recommend?
2. Who would be your target audiences for the announcement of the annual results?
3. What special events or media relations strategy would be most effective?
4. What role should social media play?

To begin with, the communications team (*Visit Orlando* and Edelman) gathered key stakeholders to brainstorm new approaches. The team set the overarching objectives of reinforcing Orlando’s brand identity as a top vacation and meetings destination and creating a personal and emotional connection between Orlando and its core audiences, which included consumers, media (travel and national outlets), travel professionals, meeting planners, convention attendees, and families.

The brainstorm resulted in an idea to create a major, one-of-a-kind event: sending thank-you cards to *all* the tourists who visited Orlando in 2017. To capture the creative spirit of Orlando, the team decided to seek a Guinness world record for “the most hand-written thank you cards collected within a 24-hour period.”

The effort succeeded, as more than 19 million consumers were reached with “thank-you” messages in one day, through tactics such as thank-you cards, postcards, advertising, client events, newsletters, and more. There was significant media coverage in target publications and a high volume of social media posts and traffic created by this event as well. The “Big Thank You” event was timed to coincide with the release of the annual visitation numbers to add color and excitement to the news conference.

The project’s goal was to engage Orlando’s tourism community (owners and employees) to maximize the impact of the positive news on the annual visitation numbers for 2017, which increased compared to the prior year. The Guinness stunt, combined with the positive news on visitation numbers, shone an international spotlight on the area’s desirability as a resort destination and reinforced the key message that all are welcome in Orlando.

Here is a summary of how the event was covered (PRSA, 2018):

- Overall coverage garnered globally reached the target media in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Brazil, Mexico, and China.
- More than 65 broadcast stories ran in markets across the United States. More than 30 local media attended the launch event. The Associated Press article featured quotes from *Visit Orlando* president and CEO (George Ague) and was syndicated in 130 news outlets around the country.
- Social media impressions reached 6.9 million, with over 4,000 engagements and more than 17,000 views on the Facebook Live of the announcement.
- More than 19 million consumers were reached with “thank-you” messages through combined tactics such as thank-you cards, postcards, advertising, client events, newsletters, and more.

(Adapted from 2018, Public Relations Society of America, Inc., Silver Anvil Winners)

WRAP UP

This initial chapter discussed the definitions of PR throughout history and the “official” one by the PRSA, first developed in 2012. The chapter also examined the differences between PR and advertising, noting the credibility gap between what people read and see on the news versus paid advertisements. The impact of social media was addressed, with a focus on “sponsored” and “owned” content used to bridge the gap between “paid” and “earned” media.

In addition, the skills that PR professionals use in their work—including media relations, employee communications, research, and strategic planning—were reviewed. Finally, the chapter looked at the career paths a PR professional might follow.

As you move through the remainder of the text, there will be detailed chapters on these concepts as well as the areas of specialization for a career in this dynamic and exciting industry.

KEY TERMS

Blogger 8

Business-to-Business (B-to-B) 11

Business-to-Consumer (B-to-C) 11

Business-to-Government (B-to-G) 11

Corporate Reputation 3

Influencer 8

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) 11

Material Events 18

Primary Research 14

Public Affairs 19

Public Company (Publicly Traded Company) 5

Publicist 4

Secondary Research 14

Stakeholders 8

Sustainability Communications 9

THINK ABOUT IT

Early in the chapter, you read about the perception of PR and PR people based on the research from USC and others on how popular culture (movies, television, etc.) have portrayed PR over the years. As part of that research, they produced a YouTube video with a compilation of scenes from movies and television over the past 50-plus years. For this activity, it is suggested that you form small work groups. You can find this video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqGCgg68Wt4>.

Here is your task:

1. View the YouTube video from USC.
2. Discuss your thoughts and reactions to how it portrays PR.
3. Capture your notes from the discussion and share them with the class.
4. Brainstorm ideas to change the perception (if necessary).
5. Determine if you can (or feel you need to) improve the public’s understanding of PR.

WRITE LIKE A PRO

Assume you are on the PR team for a regional bank nearing its 150th anniversary. The bank serves both its economically challenged headquarters city and an affluent state in the northeastern United States. As such, the bank’s customers have a variety of challenges, including home affordability, paying for college and health care, and caring for family

members, such as senior citizens. Remember, as a bank your company's expertise in financial services lends itself more to some challenges than others. How do you decide which ones to take on and which to leave for others? How do you leverage and engage your employees and customers?

1. Develop an outline of a plan (250 words) to celebrate the bank's anniversary, based on these suggestions.
2. Make sure to include tactics from PR (media relations and community events) and social responsibility initiatives (employee volunteers, contributions, or fundraising) into one comprehensive outline.

CASE STUDY

Allstate Foundation Purple Purse: Raising Awareness and Funds for Victims

The issue of domestic violence has become a national phenomenon in recent years. Research indicates that one in four women will be a victim of domestic violence in her lifetime and that financial abuse occurs in 98% of those cases. Financial abuse (withholding funds, destroying credit, jeopardizing jobs) provides abusers with another way to control and punish their victims.

The Allstate Foundation created the Purple Purse in 2010 to ignite a national conversation about domestic violence and financial abuse. The Allstate Foundation committed to an expanded Purple Purse program in 2014, including a fashion statement around the Purple Purse imagery, a social statement on a serious issue, and better financial support for the local organizations that victims depend on to rebuild their lives. The actress Kerry Washington has served as the national spokesperson for the campaign since its inception.

According to the program's website, www.purplepurse.com, through year-end of 2018 the program had invested \$66 million dollars in programming for domestic abuse survivors and helped over 1.7 million victims (Allstate Foundation Purple Purse, n.d.).

Research and Strategy

The Allstate Foundation commissioned a 2014 national survey (*Silent Weapon: Domestic Violence and Financial Abuse*), which showed that two thirds of Americans believe domestic violence is a serious problem, while revealing that just over one in three has ever talked about it. Further, nearly eight in 10 said they were not familiar with financial abuse and considered it the least likely form of abuse to be recognized by others. In fact, 65% believed their own family or friends would not know if they were in a financially abusive relationship, and 70% said family or friends would not know how to help them. Strategies included media relations, social media, celebrity involvement, and fundraising challenges (Allstate Foundation Purple Purse, 2014).

Execution

The centerpiece of the program was a launch event held in New York City, timed to coincide with Fashion Week and featuring a purple purse designed by Kerry Washington. An Associated Press exclusive interview with her was placed to break the story the morning of the announcement of the event, creating a cascade of media coverage. Washington also appeared in a public service announcement (PSA) about the Purple Purse program, conducted interviews with national media, engaged fans through her social media feeds,

and introduced new audiences to the cause by showcasing her personally designed purple purse at numerous high-profile events during Fashion Week.

At the local level, the Allstate Foundation issued the Purple Purse Challenge to 140 nonprofits across the country. The goal was to raise money for domestic-violence survivors and the organizations that serve them. The challenge was launched through www.purplepurse.com, with \$650,000 in incentives from the Allstate Foundation. Each program partner company received a package of purple purses, purple purse charms, and other collateral to generate awareness and promote fundraising.

The Allstate Foundation delivered program kits internally to help company employees and allied Allstate agents involve their local communities in the campaign, thereby expanding the program's impact.

To engage the Hispanic audience fully, the Allstate Foundation placed an exclusive on the Hispanic survey statistics with the international news agency Agencia EFE. A Spanish-language satellite media tour, audio news release, and a new Spanish-language site—www.espanol.purplepurse.com—completed this outreach initiative and provided key information to an essential program audience.

Evaluation

In only one month in its first year, the Purple Purse Challenge raised nearly \$2.5 million to benefit financial empowerment services for survivors, a 614% increase from the revenues raised in 2013. More than half of all donations were at \$25 and under, demonstrating that this was truly a successful grassroots fundraising campaign. The progress in fundraising and assisting victims has steadily increased since then. The program resulted in more than 23,000 media placements through earned media and social platforms as well as through paid amplification, a 447% increase in program media results from 2013.

Earned broadcast placements included ABC's *Good Morning America*, MSNBC's *Morning Joe*, CNN, and E! *Extra* and *Access Hollywood*. Top print and online placements included stories in the Associated Press, WSJ.com, Huffington Post, CBSNews.com, Yahoo! Celebrity, TIME.com, and many more. Other print placements appeared in *People*, *Living*, *Ebony*, *ESPN The Magazine*, *Money*, *Martha Stewart Living*, *TIME*, and *Working Mother*.

Online, the Allstate Foundation Purple Purse became a continuing topic of conversation, with more than 13,500 #PurplePurse social posts across Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. On September 17, 2014, a few days after the Purple Purse Challenge program launch, Kerry Washington was trending on Facebook due to her involvement in the Purple Purse campaign.

Source: Adapted from PRSA Silver Anvil Case Study. PRSA, 2015.

Engage

1. Explore the National Network to End Domestic Violence (www.thehotline.org) and Purple Purse (www.purplepurse.com) websites to see how they communicate with their various stakeholders.
2. Do a Google search for "controversial celebrity endorsements" and learn what can go wrong and what can be done.

Discuss

1. The Purple Purse campaign deals with a very sensitive and controversial topic. Do you think it is wise for the Allstate company to connect itself so visibly? What are the downsides of this approach for customers, employees, and the public?
2. How do the issues of domestic violence and financial abuse connect or relate to the business of the Allstate insurance company?
3. Is there a risk of tying your CSR campaign to a celebrity so closely? What if he or she gets into difficulty or has his or her own crisis? How does Allstate protect itself from any backlash?
4. The case mentions special outreach to the Hispanic community. Why do you think this is a key part of the program?

Do not copy, post, or distribute