

A Message from the President

By **Joseph Cohen, APR**
President, PRSA-NJ

As my term as chapter president of PRSA-NJ draws to a close, I think of the incredible events of the past year that have changed the world and certainly the public relations industry. Bernie Madoff, the collapse of Lehman Brothers, the election of Barack Obama, the healthcare reform wars, the emergence of Twitter and Facebook as undeniable cultural forces, the passing of a number of iconic stars and media personalities ... it has been quite a year. To varying degrees, all of these happenings have affected our industry (while conveniently providing us with excellent topics for PRSA panels and workshops).

For communications professionals, now is a critical time as we adjust to a paradigm shift that has forever altered the fabric of the media industry. Our ability to do our job has always rested on our knowledge of the media and, in the past year alone, that landscape has changed dramatically. Venerable newspapers and magazines are shuttering their doors while bloggers and hyper-local news sites steadily grow in influence. In 2008, you may not have known what micro-blogging was; now Twitter could be a critical consideration when formulating your media plans.

As the communications industry evolved and continues to do so, PRSA-NJ heightened its own relevancy by serving as a resource for furthering education, as well as a community in which professionals of all ages, levels of seniority and areas of expertise can share thoughts, ideas and best practices.

I take special pride in using the word "community." We have had a number of successes in the past year but perhaps our greatest accomplishment is fostering a real sense of community among our members. Our chapter set a goal last year of producing valuable, education-focused programming on a consistent, monthly basis. Not only did we meet our goal but we became closer to one another as we did so and I am honored to count many of our members as good friends. I would be remiss not to review some of the highlights of the past year. Our ability to consistently produce well-attended events and workshops has enabled us to attract new members and strengthen our balance sheet. We also heightened our online presence with the launch of a PRSA-NJ Facebook page and Twitter handle. We introduced a quarterly dinner series and a 3-on-3 hoops tournament that have pro-

vided opportunities for us to get to know our fellow professionals in fun, relaxed settings. Further, our chapter earned industry-wide attention by teaming with PRSA National to spearhead the first-ever APR Boot Camp, a pilot program where PR pros could earn their professional Accreditation in four days.

Before closing, I would like to call attention to our executive director Ann Fody and Joe Wedick (of Fody & Associates) for the important role that they have played in helping to propel our success. I would also like to take a moment to congratulate our longtime board member Dave Bressen; our board voted unanimously to re-name our Chapter Service Award in Dave's honor to reflect his record of continually going above and beyond the call of duty for PRSA-NJ.

Finally, I am proud to pass the leadership reins to Ken Hunter. An incredibly dedicated and hard-working PR pro, Ken is also a great friend, tremendous individual and the perfect person to shepherd the chapter's continued growth and success.

Looking forward to a great year in 2010 ...

A Conversation with PRSA-NJ President-Elect Ken Hunter

By Rowan University PRaction

Ken Hunter truly loves what he does, which makes him a great asset to PRSA-NJ. Rowan University's PRSSA's student run firm, PRaction, had the pleasure of speaking with him.

What college did you attend and what degree did you earn?

I went to Syracuse University and earned a bachelor of arts in English.

What exactly made you want to begin a career in public relations?

A call at the right time to get out of journalism! Actually, my father was in community relations with several New York State Government departments, so I had some understanding of public relations growing up. When I graduated from college, I was in journalism for about seven years, and frequently worked with PR people. I got to know several of them pretty well and had many discussions about what PR is like. Knowing the reporter's perspective helped tremendously in having the confidence to move into the PR industry.

What was your first PR job?

My first job in PR was for an earlier version of the company I work at now – R&J Public Relations. When I joined R&J in 1995 after my career in journalism, the company was both a PR and advertising agency, which gave me a great perspective on how the two disciplines work together. I moved to Colorado after a bit, and worked at PR and PR/ad agencies out there for about 10 years before moving back East and rejoining R&J.

Who have been your influences in the world of public relations?

I've had a lot of influences – good and bad – in PR. On the plus side are my father and his PR background, my mother's ability to carry a conversation (yes, she's a talker...!), my current PR bosses who really reinforced my approaches to PR with guidance and agreement that our industry isn't all about "outputs," senior-level PR counselors I've known on the boards of the PRSA chapter in Colorado Springs and New Jersey, and a network of past colleagues and friends who work in PR around the country.

On the negative side – but still bringing value as a sterling example of a "bad boss" and worse PR person – is a past PR agency head at a job in Colorado who was so clueless about public relations that he would actually sit in new business meetings and tell the prospective client that he would "make them rich beyond their wildest dreams." I never forgot that revolting approach and saw first-hand the revolving-door effect that this philosophy created at that agency. It was bad for clients, bad for employees and bad for our industry in general.

Why did you to join PRSA-NJ?

I joined PRSA when I was living in Colorado so I could have the opportunity to build networking relationships among peers. Having become a mentor to junior staffers, I needed an outlet for my professional growth. I found that through connections in PRSA. PRSA also gave me an opportunity to give back to the industry, which I truly enjoy doing, and have been doing for many years in both formal and informal mentoring programs.

How long have you been a member of PRSA? Have you held any other positions in PRSA?

I joined PRSA around 2003. Since then, I have held titles as awards committee chair, programming chair, and president of the Pikes Peak Chapter in Colorado Springs. Upon moving back to New Jersey three years ago, I became programming chair for our chapter, then progressed to president-elect and will be president in 2010. I am also the professional advisor to the Rutgers University PRSSA Chapter, judged several awards programs, and recently earned my APR.

What do you hope to accomplish for PRSA-NJ during your tenure as chapter president?

When I returned to New Jersey in 2006, Joan Vander Valk was chapter president and she had terrific energy in her role, helping show me how the chapter works, and giving me entrée to our active board that was eager to help the chapter succeed. Joe Cohen, our current president, took that energy and built on it, through ambitious programming that raised our attendance at events, exposing more members and prospective members to a dynamic chapter. Plus, he really knows how to run a board meeting on a timetable!

I hope to continue that legacy and engage a greater cross-section of our members. For instance, senior practitioner networking is an area where we can make great strides, and Doug Fenichel, a past chapter president, will be bringing his experience to lead a committee aimed at just that. I would like to advance a program aimed at new professionals and job seekers to be

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In new channels for Accreditation, PRSA-NJ leads the way

By **Michele Hujber, APR**
APR Chair, PRSA-NJ

This past summer, PRSA-NJ took the lead in piloting the first-ever APR Boot Camp. Attendees, including five members of the New Jersey Chapter, received three days of intense preparation for the APR Readiness Review and computer-based Examination, and took the computer-based Examination on the fourth day. Course content included a review of all of the knowledge, skills, and abilities in which a candidate must be competent in order to be Accredited.

“PRSA wants to ensure that all practitioners who have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to pursue Accreditation have the opportunity to do so,” said Michael Cherson, APR and CEO, Public Relations Society of America. “One obstacle has been that the traditional route to Accreditation is not always conducive to busy professionals. The pilot program led by the New Jersey Chapter helped to demonstrate that the Boot Camp concept can open up additional opportunities for our members.”

Public relations practitioners from across the country attended the Boot Camp. Participants included senior-, mid-, and junior-level public relations practitioners from the nonprofit, agency and corporate sectors. Most candidates had already started to work towards the APR, and so the Boot Camp provided a “tipping point” that got them over the final hurdles of Accreditation.

Throughout the Boot Camp, experienced APRs provided instruction and practical advice about what the candidates needed to know to advance the Readiness Review and pass the computer-based Examination. Four APRs – Alan Hilburg, APR, president and CEO of Hillburg Associates; Michele Hujber, APR, Accreditation chair for PRSA-NJ; Irene Maslowski, APR, owner of Maslowski & Associates; and Kathleen Rennie, Ph.D., APR, partner at the mcgraw group and professor at Seton Hall University – participated on a panel and one-on-one coaching sessions that prepared candidates for the Readiness Review. APRs from

PRSA’s Central Pennsylvania Chapter – Bob Saline, APR, Fellow PRSA, Accreditation co-chair and president and CEO of PRWorks Inc., and Jason S. Kirsch, APR, Accreditation co-chair taught the second and third days, which focused on preparation for the computer-based Examination. In addition, 12 Accredited members from New Jersey and New York served as Readiness Review panelists for the candidates.

The APR Boot Camp was a resounding success. One hundred percent of Boot Camp participants who have taken the computer-based Examination so far have passed (a few are scheduled to take the test at a later date). All PRSA-NJ members who participated have been Accredited (see sidebar).

Comments from participants were very positive, but also acknowledged that the Boot Camp was challenging. Joseph Cohen, APR, president of the NJ Chapter of PRSA and a GVP at MWW Group, summed up his experience:

“Prior to participating in the Boot Camp program, I had held back on pursuing an APR because of the time commitment that it required. This program was perfect for my schedule and allowed me to complete the program in what felt like a manageable period of time. That said, the Boot Camp is not at all a walk in the park – I spent more than a month preparing for the test and made Accreditation my sole focus during the four days leading up to the test. In addition to heightening my overall knowledge of public relations, the Boot Camp format is a great networking opportunity. I enjoyed becoming acquainted with my classmates and expect that we will keep in touch for years to come.”

The format created for this summer’s Boot Camp will be used as a model for future APR Boot Camps. As it builds upon the template that was largely created by PRSA-NJ, PRSA is on its way to achieving its goal of helping more practitioners to successfully pursue Accreditation.

For information about future APR Boot Camps and other avenues to Accreditation, please contact Michele Hujber, APR, at mlhujber@hotmail.com.

Following is a list of PRSA-NJ members who earned their APR at the Boot Camp:

Christopher M. Biddle, APR

Joseph E. Cohen, APR

Kenneth Hunter, APR

Kristine M. Simoes, APR

Jennifer St. Pierre, APR

Getting the Measurements Right With Social Media

By **Dr. Norman Booth D. Litt**
Assistant Vice President, Coyne Public Relations

Companies implementing social media strategies face a dilemma. How do you measure the brand impact of social media activity when multiple business units (BUs) - many with their own sub-brand identity - promote overlapping products and solutions?

Right now, there are few measurement tools readily available to measure social media impact on the primary brand. At Coyne PR, many large clients with multiple BUs are collaborating with us to find ways to measure the social media impact to their core brand. The results have been encouraging.

Accurate return-on-investment (ROI) calculations are possible in marketing activities where it's feasible to isolate variables to identify incremental revenue. And today, the only internet-based marketing programs that can consistently generate bona fide results are pay-per-click, email direct marketing, search engine optimization, banner ad click-through and similar marketing programs. And even these initiatives can only generate reasonable ROI results for lead-generation or e-commerce-based transactions.

Social media tends to be vague and anecdotal, and because it's a dialogue rather than a one-sided message, consumers control the passion and frequency of the conversation. From a traditional marketing perspective, it's a difficult concept for senior management to comprehend -- much less measure with any accuracy.

With traditional customer relationship management programs (CRM), initiatives are focused on linking consumers to the company to create brand stickiness. CRM programs are measured using well-established CRM metrics, but we also know that social media activity increases corporate reputation, brand stickiness, and social engagement. Metrics for these measures are not so well defined. At Coyne PR, we have found that the best way to know how social media impacts a single brand is to directly connect social media initiatives to core brand measurement activity. So, it's not just about jumping in on any particular social media discussion; it's about how to direct social media activity in a way that achieves the objectives of the corporation.

From a social media perspective, several variables of brand equity can be measured, including Brand Loyalty, Brand Awareness, Perceived Quality, Brand Associations and "other" proprietary brand assets which provide a competitive advantage, like brand extensions or channel member interest. These brand equity variables can be organized into three categories (see sidebar) and correlated with social media measures.

Correlating brand equity elements with specific social media measures allows businesses to optimize social media-generated brand equity. The more companies can quantitatively measure the social impact on their brand equity, the better. The closer those measurements come to aligning specific BU business initiatives with corporate business outcomes, the better.

How rapidly people respond to a social media call-to-action, write a review, participate in a discussion or forum, or forward a recommendation to a colleague can all be actively measured. What we want to know is whether BU-generated social media efforts are having any incremental impact on the corporate brand equity, and if so, how much. So, even if a BU-initiated social media activity is producing a good return in terms of its single specific metric, if it isn't accelerating the corporate business outcome and contributing to the company's core brand equity, then it's time to revisit the effort.

Brand Equity Variables

Core Outputs

We can measure the effectiveness of social media initiatives such as whether a campaign creates positive/negative complimentary links (brand associations), or if the number of positive/negative reviews produced by community influencers increases (perceived quality), or whether the total number of people engaged in a blog discussion reflects an increase in the frequency of positive/negative company references (brand awareness and channel member interest).

Measurable Behavioral Outcomes

More difficult to capture is the measure of real behavioral change resulting from a social media program. This variable might represent the quantifiable change in the growth of key online influencers or an increase in traffic reflected in blog aggregators for the firm's recently launched product or solution (brand loyalty).

Achievable Business Results

This is a measure of how the social media program, campaign, or activity helped the organization achieve a specific business objective and helps to quantify the business result. For example, we can measure the adoption rate for a new product/solution -- that is, the incremental boost in sales resulting from influential social media activity, or the adoption/penetration of an integrated cross-BU solution within a pre-defined market segment based on social media initiatives.

Protecting Your Brand Against “Negative Buzz”

By Alan Chokov
Founder/CEO,
www.eNJBusiness.com

The power of social media provides user-generated comments and conversation from a galaxy containing millions of people that can enhance or destroy a brand. Ignoring a conversation in social media and not responding effectively could impact a company's image and bottom line.

A single news insertion can create a multiplier effect that spreads throughout the web often unedited and/or commented by new authors. These headlines appear on sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Digg or Technorati and are indexed by Google. The news is fanned by Twitter and professional and citizen journalists, resulting in a full-blown reputation crisis within a few hours. Are you prepared to protect yourself?

Monitoring social media content must be a priority. Every effort to monitor the conversation with select search engines, social networks, forums and blogs and to respond to negative buzz when/where appropriate makes business sense. The cost benefits of monitoring social media far outweigh the damage to your brand if you decide not to.

Start by listening to social media

You need to track down the entire “buzz” circulating your brand within social media to get an idea of what the negativity landscape resembles. There are several free tools such as socialnetworkmonitoring.com and slideshare.net that can assist you in identifying the conversations regarding your brand. You should develop a list of relevant keywords to search – for example your brand, product,

model reference or the president's name. The tools will then return results and categorize them by channels, i.e., blogs, networks, news, forums and video. If your company is global with a huge web presence, it is best to use a social media agency to produce an audit that manually searches the voice-escape ... a very labor-intensive process. Do not forget that Google alerts are also a useful approach to monitoring the conversation based on brand mentions.

Become part of the conversation

If you discover negative or factually incorrect buzz, it is imperative to react quickly so the information is not spread further via micro-blogging or services such as Twitter. You should respond to the post/comment or, more importantly attempt to contact the party directly. This creates goodwill, showing that your brand is open to dialogue. It portrays that your business is listening and values the customer and is willing to accept, yet rectify, a criticism. It personalizes to your product or services. Do not be defensive as it will encourage further negativity – instead, explain your position and encourage feedback.

Transparency

Social media within any marketing context is all about being open and honest. If something goes wrong, then tell your customers. Let your customers know how you are rectifying a situation. Failure to communicate will open your brand up to the mercy of negative social media.

Social media strategy

If you have a company blog, you can respond with a formal blog post, making sure that its title

features keywords that match the negative posts or content. This will help to add positive search engine results, pushing down negative posts indexed by search engines.

Also, counteract anonymous and negative comments by highlighting testimonials from some of your best customers. In support of the blog post, you can use your Twitter account to raise awareness of your response. Depending on the scale of the negative reaction, you can respond via video or audio in the form of webcasts and podcasts. If you have an online community, you can host the conversation on your own website, confining the negativity to one area and allowing you to respond immediately.

Make it a practice

Remember a basic principle of marketing: a recipient of good customer service will tell a few others on average. Yet a recipient of bad service will tell many more – maybe even hundreds – if they are a blogger or active on social networks. It may not prevent a crisis from occurring, but the sooner you learn of negative comments the sooner you can respond.

The key to managing and maintaining your reputation within social media is to be part of the conversation and for your brand to have a voice that is respected. This comes only through investing time in engaging with customers through social media, building relationships and in turn developing credibility. The consumer is seeking a “soapbox” to vent a frustration or disappointment in what you have represented. Although you cannot satisfy everyone's requirements,

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A Conversation with PRSA-NJ President-Elect Ken Hunter, continued

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mentored in their challenges. I also have an interest in exploring programming that will aid the New Jersey PR community in “soft skills” – those that deal with interpersonal relationships and the psychology of managing people and opinions, to help our members more effectively work with target audiences, bosses, stakeholders, team members and media.

What do you see as the largest challenges facing the NJ PR community in the coming years?

Our greatest challenges lie in educating top executives and marketing professionals as to what public relations provides. Many people in these positions think PR stands for “press release,” and too often we are sold internally as order-takers, rather than strategy experts, opinion shapers, and people with the courage to stand up and advise when we are faced with inappropriate expectations of us and/or target audiences, or asked to just do those “press releases.”

As a community, we need to raise the level of our profession in the eyes of business management, not be fodder for bitter bloggers eager to jump on the mistakes of a few of the less experienced or less ethical members of our profession, and look at our roles as counselors that will work to affect opinion and generate return on investment for our organizations.

To the job seekers and new business acquisition pros among us, the market is turning for the better. Since the start of the second quarter, I have anecdotally seen a rise in activity – be it organizations looking for public relations counsel, becoming more ambitious in

their PR needs, or companies doing targeted hiring. Colleagues in PRSA-NJ are seeing the same trends. I feel we are absolutely seeing improvements. The key to building your awareness as a job seeker is networking, rather than want ads. PRSA-NJ offers that, and I encourage job seekers to become more involved with the chapter to meet the people that may hold the key to their future positions.

Favorite aspect of PR?

Crisis communication. I look at it as a test of your ability as a PR person. You’re asked to make decisions on the spot. You don’t have to go through the whole “approval” process that typically is involved in public relations and activities are approved on the spot. It is a good test and good exercise of all your skills, everything from calming your client down to pitching a new idea. Clients hate it because they are scared about what will happen, but they count on us to be that voice of reason and help them move ahead in very emotional times.

Most interesting encounter you have had in the business?

When I worked in Denver, the client was Starbucks and Magic Johnson was a franchise investor. Magic appeared at a local Starbucks opening. I grew up playing basketball, and since he was my favorite player, it was exciting meeting him. I now have an autographed Starbucks coffee cup.

Do you have any tips for students wanting to break into PR?

Absolutely. Get experience writing for school newspapers or magazines, or for a local daily paper. It

really gives you a journalist’s perspective that will serve you well as you start your career in PR and as you start internships as well. Look for opportunities to pitch stories to reporters. For example, promote something PRSA-NJ or your PRSSA chapter is doing. Pitching reporters is one aspect that a lot of people are scared to do early in their career. Do a good job in pitching where you can tolerate it, and then you can do well as a PR person.

Protecting Your Brand Against “Negative Buzz,” continued

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the one you ignore can do the most damage to your brand.

The social web is about people, not brands or technology!

It seems as if the marketers behind many of the social networks/ communities operate on the premise that “If you build it, they will come.” Unfortunately, many have had to learn the hard way that this simply isn’t the case. Their products and services are of value only if they have value to the consumer. If we value what we have spent countless hours, intellectual assets and capital to develop, we should also invest in protecting it.