

PROFILE

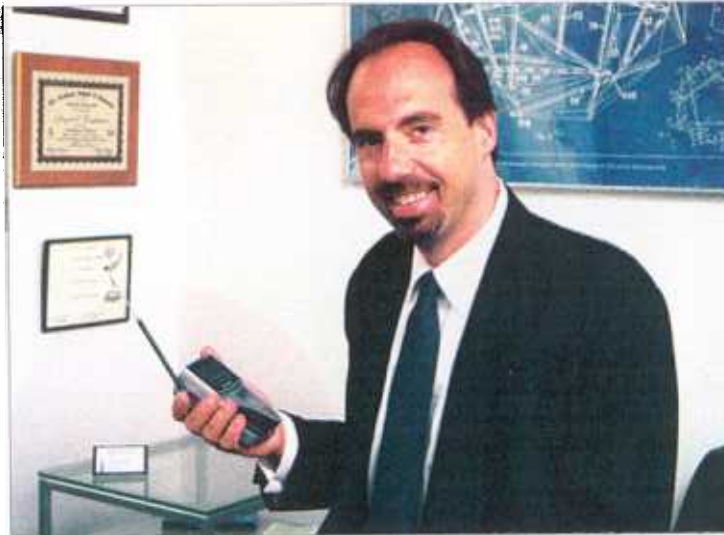
# Trufelman celebrates the spontaneity of PR at Trylon

As president of Trylon Communications, Lloyd Trufelman takes the lessons that he learned about structure and uncertainty while working in New York's art world and applies them to PR. By Matthew Creamer

In 1983, New York City's public radio station, WNYC, changed its format to a bold mix of 20th century music that cut across genres. The new approach, which ranged from Coltrane to Gershwin to Shostakovich, sparked an outrage among its board and the city's rather insular arts community. As the station's promotion director, Lloyd Trufelman was also in charge of its PR, and it became very clear that he had the first crisis of his young career on his hands. In searching for guidance, other PR pros in his shoes may have called a mentor from an agency or perhaps an old instructor. Trufelman, however, called John Cage, the composer perhaps best known for an extreme mode of experimentation that pulled in Eastern thought and his tinkering with electronic media forms.

Cage's counsel was suitably unconventional. Upon hearing the nature of the crisis, he said, "I guess we could write a poem." Trufelman encouraged Cage to read the verse, called "FM 94," at an upcoming concert, and he persuaded a music reviewer from *The New York Times* to mention it. The story, which came out a day before a board meeting where the irate members were expected to scuttle the format change, ended up changing their tune, and the matter went away.

More than two decades later, Trufelman says this was the moment when he grasped the lessons he'd learned in the New York art community in the late 1970s and early 1980s, working with people like Cage and Philip Glass, and applied them to his career.



..... "he's not a yes man," Fazio says

From their music concepts, particularly Cage's ideas of chance operations and determinacy, Trufelman came to understand a lot about PR.

"You have to operate in a structure, but you also have no idea what's going to happen," he says.

This still informs his philosophy on his trade. Now the president of Trylon Communications, the agency he began in 1990, Trufelman celebrates the uncontrolled nature of media relations. Where others in the industry try to exert a kind of brainwashing control over reporters, Trufelman revels in the uncertainty of putting a message or an idea in the media and through the various levels of interpretation, from reporter to the audience.

"I don't have a problem with PR being an intangible," he says. "You're dealing with images and facts, but you're also dealing with subjectivity, interpre-

tation, and different points of view. You don't have control over the message, no matter how many messaging points you put together."

A conversation with Trufelman is as much about esoteric concepts drawn from music and pop culture as it is about communications jargon. History, too, is in abundance. His midtown Manhattan office is awash in historical artifacts. Trufelman's firm is named for the 700-foot tower that loomed over the 1939 World's Fair in Queens, NY, signifying not only a fondness for old New York, but a fascination with technology and the future—which is also apparent in the latest tech gadgets that are often found within arm's reach in his office.

Since its founding, Trylon has been at the center of media and technology. It was one of the first to do internet PR, boasting MSNBC.com as a client when the prevailing wisdom was that no one

Lloyd Trufelman	
1990-present	President, Trylon Communications
1988-1990	PR director, VH1/HA!, MTV Networks
1986-1998	Comms director, Cabletelevision Advertising Bureau
1985-1986	AE, Howard J. Rubenstein Associates
1985	Press aide, New Yorkers for Koch
1982-1984	Comms director, WNYC-AM/FM/TV, New York
1980-1982	Company manager, Philip Glass Ensemble/Performing Artservices

would go to the web to consume news. More recently, Trufelman and his team have been at the forefront of pitching blogs when many other PR people were more hesitant.

Despite a roster of high-profile media and tech clients—past and present clients include *Variety*, CNBC, and Lifetime—Trylon doesn't have a massive profile within the industry.

"Trylon is one of the industry's best-kept secrets," says Lauren Leff, a former Trylon executive and, as VP of communications at Regal CineMedia, a current client. "They're a mid-size-to-small firm, but they pack a very powerful punch."

Indeed, Trufelman manages to be loquacious without being an obvious self-promoter, a sometimes rare combination in the industry. But, at the same time, his focus as a communications adviser is all about publicity, an outlook he says he gained from a short tenure

at Rubenstein Associates, New York's famed media shop. "Lloyd and his team have a focus on media relations," says Leff. "They understand how media organizations work, and they place an emphasis on using editorial placement to further business goals."

For someone so grounded in the media, Trufelman spent very little time as a reporter. He majored in journalism at American University and spent a short time working at the *Soho News* in New York. But Trufelman was turned off by a central job requirement of the reporter: "I didn't like it because I felt I was constrained by objectivity."

This led him into PR. "I wanted to be an advocate," he says. "That was what I liked about PR. You can take a point of view. If there's something you like and have a passion for, you can get behind it. And rather than just watch it, you could help make something grow."

After working at the Performing Artservices, where he met Glass and Cage, and WNYC, he worked as a press aide for Mayor Ed Koch's 1985 re-election bid. Following a stint at Rubenstein, he worked at VH1 and the Cabletelevision Advertising Bureau before beginning Trylon.

Trufelman's diverse background makes Trylon a good place to learn the trade, says Debra Fazio, who worked there from 1994 to 1998. Now director of communications at Spike TV, Fazio is another former staffer turned client. She hired Trylon Communications on a project basis when she worked for The History Channel.

"He's not a yes man," Fazio says. "He wants to do what's best for the client. He won't say yes just to appease them. He'll tell them, 'Listen, you hired me as the expert to mold your image in the media, and this is more important than hearing what you want to hear.'"