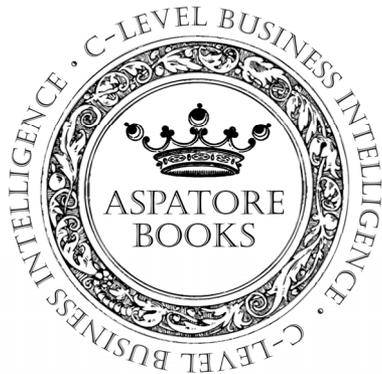


I N S I D E T H E M I N D S

The Creative Side of Public Relations

*Industry Leaders on Understanding the Client's
Objectives, Establishing a Unique Approach, and
Developing Breakthrough Campaigns*

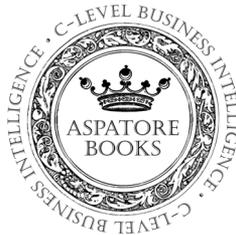


Thoughtful Creativity for Campaigns of Substance

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The Changing Face of PR

There are many ways to define the practice of public relations. For our firm, the foundation of the practice rests on media relations. For our clients, the objective is to consistently get a credible message out that is picked up by conventional or new media outlets, depending on the story. For a story to be credible and actively considered by any target audience, an effective message must deliver third-party value—editorial endorsement for the product or service being offered. This sort of endorsement can be a favorable review in a newspaper, a positive post on a blog, or an engaging radio interview or television segment. At the end of the day, good PR is really all about getting third-party editorial validation about the company's products or services and getting favorable coverage.

The creativity in implementing an effective media relations campaign is built on an intellectual and conceptual foundation, backed by precise research and competent execution. Many marketers think they need to “wow” the media through “creative” publicity stunts, which are sometimes not disclosed as publicity stunts. They think they need to give journalists flowers or champagne or produce giant inflatable balloons or fleets of spray-painted VW Beetles driving around downtown. While such “creative” ventures might generate a one-shot brief story or photo somewhere, working reporters do not see that sort of approach as creative—they see it as a blatant marketing campaign. As a result, such efforts often backfire.

PR firms have to walk a careful balance. Many of these efforts please clients, but actually alienate reporters. It can often be less splashy, but more effective, to send an intelligent and precisely targeted two-paragraph e-mail or make a quick phone call to the appropriate media outlet. In fact, the more legitimate and influential the media outlet, the more substantial the outreach must be. That is not to say that publicity stunts do not work. But if you compare the amount of time, effort and expense they require to the amount of sustained attention they generate, they are not terribly efficient. However, sometimes clients want a big event, and it is difficult to explain to them that it would be more useful to target the three reporters who would be interested in the story and simply make a telephone call to them at the right time. Some clients want what they want, regardless of whether it will accomplish their goals; in this situation, PR firms have the choice of either

going through the motions and billing out the hours or telling the client that a ten-minute phone call will do the trick—but behind that phone call, we have years of strategic knowledge that we are using to their benefit.

In certain industries such as fashion and entertainment, PR parties, gifts, and stunts are more acceptable than in others, albeit with an eye to ethical considerations. However, even in those industries, such activities are much less frequent now. And they are certainly not too effective in sectors such as technology, business, and finance. Perhaps the most notorious example of excessive creativity was Turner Cartoon Network placing light-up devices that depicted a cartoon character in different cities to promote an upcoming movie. In Boston, officials thought the devices were bombs, and Turner ended up with very negative coverage—and the departure of its general manager as a result. Similarly, a few years ago Snapple wanted to unveil the world's largest frozen Ice Pop. They chose to do so in August, in 90-degree weather—and nobody had the foresight to notice that unwrapping a giant frozen popsicle in Manhattan in 90-degree weather is probably not a good thing. Of course, it melted, somebody skidded into it, and it was a big problem. And a few years ago, a tech company put stickers on New York subway stations and got slapped with a fine for defacing public property. So sometimes it is best to use a more professional manner to say something substantial. All publicity is *not* good publicity!

Online Communication and PR

About ten years ago, a typical town had one newspaper, three television affiliates, and a few local radio stations, most of which ran syndicated and network programming.

These days, there are myriad more media outlets. The local newspaper is still there, but now it has an online site with different offerings than the print edition has. And many newspapers, especially in big cities, have free versions. In addition, there are podcasts, blogs, and online video. Some are developed by independents and others by major media companies. The traditional three TV channels have been replaced by about three hundred cable channels, not to mention about thirty thousand streaming video choices. The good news is that a PR firm has more avenues to get the message out, and how quickly the message moves is reasonably accountable—if a story appears online it often links via an embedded URL to the client's Web site and thus drives traffic.

The challenge associated with this proliferation of media outlets is that competition is greater than ever before. People who are afraid of new ideas will see this as a challenge, but people who embrace new ideas are thrilled by the increased opportunities. The skills are basically the same, though there are new ways to approach PR or to augment the traditional approaches. There is no difference between cable television and regular television; and there is no difference between the Internet and print media. It is just a matter of different communications platforms. Analog skills, such as critical thought, precise research, and clear writing are more important than ever in navigating and evaluating the new media landscape.

The roadblocks unfortunately tend to come from marketing professionals who do not understand media relations, who think that putting something in a fancy box will draw attention when a plain envelope may be just as effective. Sometimes you wonder whether creativity is being driven by internal politics or the marketplace of ideas. More often than not, there is a straight, simple, and direct way to accomplish a particular goal, but client top management may not approve. Flashy approaches may work on sales prospects, but journalists of any of kind—print, online, or television—prefer to cut through all of the stuff and focus on the substance. A reporter who gets a fancy press kit usually throws out most of it, keeping only the one or two fact sheets that make sense. So save paper and save trees: Keep in mind that most media outlets prefer to get their written information, as well as videos and photos, in online/digital form.

Creativity in PR

The standard definition of creativity might not apply in PR. Rather, PR professionals focus on generating as much beneficial coverage as possible for clients by determining the most newsworthy part of the message, getting in touch with the appropriate reporters, and fashioning the story to them in a way that makes sense.

To encourage creativity, PR professionals should emphasize rigor and intelligence. They should read constantly. I read seven newspapers a day, on the train as I commute to work. It is also important to read blogs and other online news sources, either by surfing the Internet or setting RSS feeds (a family of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated digital content, such as newsfeeds or blogs). Good PR people are, in essence, information

brokers, and they need to know who is covering what, how they are covering it, what the news is, and what the story is. They need to be up on it to the minute to avoid being uninformed and behind the news cycle. That is true whether working with the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, or the *Columbia Journal Review*. It is also useful to read business books, particularly about communications and writing. It is important to have a critical understanding of the media and how it can apply to PR.

I once worked for a company where potential clients would come in and say they wanted to be on *Oprah* and in the *Wall Street Journal*, which is not always possible, but that could not be said. It would have been easier if they were told that they probably would not get on *Oprah*, but might make it on the local news channel. It is important for PR firms to be honest and direct with their clients, to set up reasonable expectations, and to make sure that the client has something inherently noteworthy or newsworthy to share.

Case Study: MSNBC.com: Establishing the Leading Online News Site

Immediately following MSNBC.com's in-house launch effort in 1996, Trylon SMR was engaged to help MSNBC.com generate consumer, business, and trade press for advertising deals, content distribution agreements, and new partnerships, as well as technological developments and editorial events, to position MSNBC.com as the leading online news Web site and drive traffic to it.

Trylon SMR developed and coordinated the communications strategy for MSNBC.com's broadband products, streaming technology, and Interactive TV programming. Additionally, over the years, Trylon SMR worked with Microsoft corporate communications and NBC corporate communications to position MSNBC.com correctly as part of such initiatives as the Office XP, Digital Dashboard, and MSN launches, including various NBC News programming TV kickoffs. Trylon SMR coordinated an ongoing campaign to position MSNBC.com as the leader in online news from both the editorial and the technological vantage points, garnering feature coverage in key media outlets such as *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, National Public Radio, *PBS News Hour*, *USA Today*, AP, Reuters, *Washington Post*, *San Jose Mercury-News*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Internet World*, *PC Magazine*, *Publish*, *Variety*, *Broadcasting and Cable*, *Electronic Media*, *The Industry Standard*, *Interactive Week*, and *Broadband Week*, among others.

Situation: Position leading online news site as provider of credible online journalism and the number one news Web site, within the overall parent company brand structures.

Marketing Challenge: To raise awareness of leading online news site by promoting high-profile editorial coverage that draws attention to the journalistic standards and editorial independence of the news operation. Drive home the point that, although it has a business relationship with technology and TV products, the news site holds itself to the same high standards of objective news reporting as other news organizations.

Application of Solutions:

- Regularly promoted and championed the cause for online journalism and the news site brand as the leading provider of interactive news
- Conducted extensive outreach to promote original and exclusive reporting generated out of the news site newsroom
- Regularly promoted news site editorial components as integral part of the resources of its TV network parent company
- Regularly promoted coverage associated with larger enterprise media events
- Leveraged expertise in technology sector reporting

Results: The leading online news site has garnered coverage in all major media as a provider of breaking news and superior journalism. It was rated the best online news Web site by *Yahoo! Internet Life* for 1999 and 2000 and has received awards for journalistic merit from the Society of Professional Journalists, the National Press Club, and Editor and Publisher. News stories, feature coverage, profiles, cover stories, and in-depth reviews of MSNBC.com's content and applications, as well as interviews with top management, including John Nicol and Merrill Brown, were regularly secured in key publications such as *The Industry Standard*, *Interactive Week*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, CNN, NPR, NBC, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *Dow Jones*, *The San Jose Mercury News*, CNET, *The Seattle Times*, *USA Today*, *Adweek*, *ZDNet*, *Internet World*, *PC Magazine*, *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Broadcasting and Cable*, *ZDnet*, *Electronic Media*, *Publish*, *Bloomberg*, *CNBC* and *E-Content*, among others.

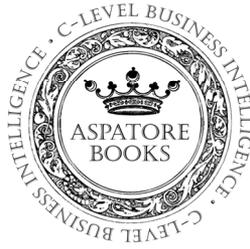
Lloyd P. Trufelman is president and CEO of Trylon SMR (www.trylonsmr.com), a strategic media relations firm exclusively serving companies in the technology, media, and telecom industries. Included on Trylon's client and project list are such major communications companies as AT&T Broadband, Business 2.0, Cablevision, CNBC, Court TV, Discovery Communications Inc., HBO, IDG, King Features Syndicate, Lifetime Television, Microsoft, Scripps Networks, Rodale, Hubbard Broadcasting, The Weather Channel, and Variety, among others.

Prior to establishing the firm in 1990, Mr. Trufelman was director of public relations for MTV Networks' VH-1 and HA! TV Comedy networks. He came to MTV Networks from the Cabletelevision Advertising Bureau, where he served as director of communications. Previously, he held positions as an account executive at Howard J. Rubenstein Associates public relations and as promotion director of WNYC AM/FM/TV. He began his professional career as company manager of the Philip Glass Ensemble, during which time he also served as a consultant to CBS Masterworks, the Brooklyn Academy of Music/Next Wave Festival, the New York Shakespeare Festival, and District Curators Inc.

In addition, Mr. Trufelman has served as a press secretary for the political campaigns of presidential candidate Bruce Babbitt, U.S. Senate candidate Mark Green, and New York mayor Edward Koch.

An accredited member of the Public Relations Society of America and a member of its Counselors Academy, Mr. Trufelman has served as a board member of Promotion & Marketing Executives in the Electronic Media (PROMAX) and as a member of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, the National Academy of Cable Programming, the International Radio & Television Society, the New York New Media Alliance, the Software & Information Industry Association, and the New York Software Industry Association, of which he is co-chair of its Sales & Marketing SIG. He has been a speaker at meetings of the Cable Television Public Affairs Association, the Cable Television Marketing and Administration Society, the National Broadcasting Society, and Columbia University's Strategic Communications Program, among others.

Mr. Trufelman holds a B.A. in communications and philosophy from American University and has undertaken postgraduate course work at New York University, the University of North Carolina School of Business Administration at Chapel Hill, and Columbia University Graduate School of Business.

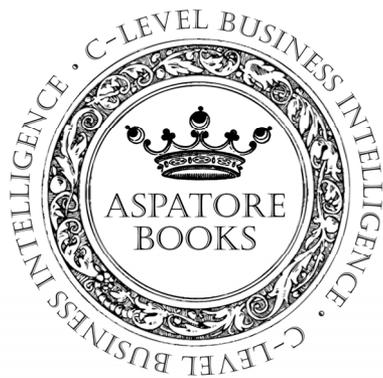


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