

The Private Face Of Public Relations

**Simon Young looks at the changes
in PR and asks the hard questions.**

Q: What are the best campaigns not done by your firm?

Tony Edmonds, director of Auckland-based Voyage Communications: A few years ago the front page of the *Herald* reported one of the hydroelectric dams had severe cracks in it. It should've been in the news for weeks, but it was all over in 24 hours. I suggest excellent PR was behind that.

Really good campaigns often eliminate negative press coverage. And then clients say, "why am I paying you? Did we really need it or didn't we?"

Malcolm Boyle, managing director, Porter Novelli: The two-year campaign that has turned a suspected dangerous Algerian terrorist – Ahmed Zaoui – into a possible contender for a Nobel Peace Prize. It's a remarkable massaging of the public mind in the face of government secrecy. Cleverly constructed and very effective.

The nation of Greece, which snatched a gold medal for organisational achievement from the jaws of the catastrophe that threatened to overwhelm Athens 2004.

Karyn Arkell, general manager, Consultus: The Glassons campaign for breast cancer, which raised \$800,000. A really good integrated campaign based on a good idea that was well remembered through a number of media.

Jenni Raynish, managing director, Raynish & Partners: The blog campaign by an ex-*New York Times* staffer who wanted the resignation of the editor after the

Blair plagiarism story. The editor of the *New York Times* was saying, "I'm not going to resign", but through his blog, this ex-staffer effectively got so much energy behind him, so much attention and comment, that the guy just resigned.

A powerful example of someone reaching their objective and using new media to get a very big scalp.

Jane Dodd, general manager, Network PR: Air New Zealand's done a fantastic job with the *Lord of the Rings* promotion. They painted the plane, flew people around the countryside, and got a fantastic amount of publicity for what is a pretty commercial vehicle.

The Special K Triathlon for women is brilliant; I hear so many women talking about it. Lots of positive messages and it's actually resulting in action, which is the last bastion of PR – changing behaviour.

John McKenzie, Christchurch-based PR consultant and md of Enthuse: Paul Holmes and his move to Prime TV. Prime couldn't have paid for the exposure and profile it got, most of it word of mouth. I'm sure there must have been some smart PR person pulling the right strings behind the scenes!

Jeanette Tyrrell, director of Hamilton-based Verdict Communications: The Norgate buyout of Wrightson has been really interesting to watch. It was always in your face, they kept up that momentum, maintained a strong leadership position. Their position was always quite dominant.

Q: What makes a great PR person? Is it caught, taught or both?

Dodd: It's not just about being good with people. Some of the best PR people actually like to sit in the background and make things happen. They don't want to be front and centre and they don't need to be.

It's about a willingness to learn and spot opportunities. You need a real open-mindedness to things going on around you. Almost visionary.

Gabrielle Tourelle, general manager, Text100: A curious mix of skill and natural talent. A strong action mode is required to keep making things happen, sometimes out of nothing but a brave idea.

A healthy curiosity about the world and people, communication skills, problem-solving skills and a commitment to delivering the results you promise. Above all I believe it's the ability to keep growing and learning that sets the true PR person apart.

Core skills of writing, PR planning and time management can be learned to a degree but the individual magic that each consultant can bring is the icing on the cake.

John Bishop, professional speaker, writer and trainer: Understand corporate and marketing strategy and be able to practise it at a reasonably high level.

You need some business skills, particularly customer service or account management. You need to understand business.

Be excellent in one or more commu-



Tony Edmonds: Great public relators anticipate.



Malcolm Boyle: Can we fix it? Sure we can!



Karyn Arkell: Business acumen.



Jenni Raynish: New ideas, high energy, rigorous learning.



Jane Dodd: Willingness to learn and spot opportunities.



John McKenzie: Straight PR is from last century.

nications disciplines. It doesn't much matter which ones – journalism, design, web stuff. Those are the skills you actually need to service clients at a high level, and they are largely taught.

The innate bit comes in with the personality, which is what enables clients and account managers to connect emotionally. That's what builds loyalty. But loyalty alone isn't enough; you've got to deliver and the requirements to deliver are requirements that you learn. You aren't born reciting Porter's five forces; you learn that.

Edmonds: A great PR person is no different from a great accountant or a great

lawyer. They get their qualifications, then they really start to learn the business. That's how it works.

Our business is possible to learn from a basic journalism career, or a marketing degree. Journalism skills and knowledge of the media are still the basic requirements.

The best public relators anticipate. They can transfer themselves into the audience's position and look back at themselves from their point of view. That's the key. If you can do that before you even communicate, that's when you're effective. You do that before you even begin.

Boyle: Sanity, reality and pragmatism.

And they can only be acquired by years on this planet. There's no substitute for experience and no academic prescription for effective PR.

[Communications courses] can map the environment, but unless you're hearing it from the front-line troops, out there doing it, it's difficult to get anything meaningful. The textbooks can never teach or prepare a person to be everything from a doorman, a stagehand, a caterer, a writer, a therapist, a technician or an MC – and that's what has to be done now.

Raynish: It's nature not nurture. What you fundamentally require is attitude; the technical skills are a very small percentage of the total package.

High EQ [emotional intelligence quotient], a desire to challenge yourself to achieve for others and the desire to serve. The culture is what determines whether people truly bloom or not. A culture that is consistently about new ideas, high energy, and rigorous learning will bring the best out in everyone. It's not a production line, it's about finding the most unexpected way to achieve a result.

Nicholas O'Flaherty, director, *Bullet PR*: You need to be a good persuader, you need to be able to deal with clients at a senior level. Part of the value we offer is challenging clients' assumptions.

For publicly listed companies, statutory responsibility for continuous disclosure has raised the bar – and the importance of communication overall.

Tyrrell: Experience in a range of very complex situations, which is why the best PR people are the older ones. It's a great profession. We're like a cheese, the older we get, the better we are. Unlike supermodels!

Arkell: The difference between a good

PMCA: Storm In A Teacup?

In early 2003 the Print Media Copyright Association (PMCA), a branch of the Newspaper Publishers Association, introduced charges for distributing clippings from member publications. At the time there was much consternation among PR types, for whom clipping distribution is a large part of tracking effectiveness. Almost two years later, have the charges changed the face of PR?

Short answer: no. For some, like Raynish & Partners and Jenni Raynish and Consultus gm Karyn Arkell, the clippings charges haven't even registered on the radar screen.

Others, like Hibiscus Coast-based consultant John Shattock, say they no longer provide clippings as part of their service to clients, instead putting them directly in touch with a monitoring service when needed, or in some cases even buying the publication for clients. "It's more realistic to buy the whole publication," says Shattock. "It's a blatant attempt at ticket-clipping."

Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ) president Tim Marshall says the PMCA has admitted that, "they deliberately did not talk to the PR profession until about two months before the scheme was introduced [in 2003]". He believes things still haven't improved.

In fact, PRINZ is currently involved in an action against PMCA with the copyright tribunal, "challenging the ethics of the scheme", says Marshall.

Jason Chong, director of Chong Bureau, a major distributor of clippings, says the charges haven't altered the demand for press monitoring in general but have dampened the appetite for electronic clipping distribution; a practice that attracts higher copyright charges than hard copy distribution.

Jeanette Tyrrell: Good PR people are like cheese.



Gabrielle Tourelle: Curious mix of skill and talent.



John Bishop: Not born reciting Porter's five forces.



Nicholas O'Flaherty: Challenging clients' assumptions.



John Shattock: The client wants the job done.

PR person and a great one is business acumen. That's ultimately only as good as your communication skills.

Q: Who are the great 'public relators' in non-PR roles?

Bishop: Ralph Norris [Air New Zealand ceo] heads a team with people in charge of hands-on operations, so he's able to focus on the relationships, values, culture and broad strategic direction.

Boyle: Helen Clark. She's mastered the art of practiced spontaneity, of not letting the office overwhelm her personality. She's perfected the technique of being herself.

Dodd: Helen Clark. She always hits the right messages, and she turns every interview into an opportunity to promote the right messages about what the Government's doing.

The key to success is relaxing into the role, and enjoying it as a communications challenge, versus nervously anticipating the questions.

Edmonds: Both [Clark and Brash] don't want the job at all costs. They have a phi-

losophy and they value that philosophy more than their position of leadership. That's their integrity on the line – that's why they're good at it. You have to have the underlying belief and philosophy, because then you'll make smart decisions.

Boyle: Winston Peters. A consummate communications professional, who could deliver charisma from a locked port-a-loo in Winton. Truly excels at the craft.

Raynish: Paul Holmes. He has the ability to communicate very deeply with people who come from all places. He doesn't seem patronising when he's speaking [to the public] and he doesn't seem awed when he's talking to world politicians.

Q: Is your PR firm expected to do more in today's environment?

McKenzie: Absolutely. We have moved into the marketing communications era. Straight PR is from last century. To survive and do well you have to be able to integrate marketing, events, promotional and publicity disciplines into your approach with clients.

Tourelle: This really depends on how we

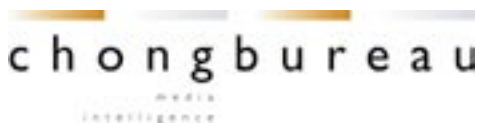
succeed in truly understanding a client's business and winning their trust. With clients with whom we have this type of relationship, we tend to do broader work around corporate reputation and even branding. This only happens after we have won their respect on the traditional media relations front.

Raynish: We started and continue to never have any boundaries around what we do. We've always done more; we continue to do more; we've never done less.

Boyle: Today's environment is the 'Bob the Builder' era of PR – can we fix it? Sure we can!

Bishop: I'm there as adviser/strategic counsel. Thinking laterally and knowing about a wide range of services is important. I don't do e-marketing, event management, or sponsorships, although I have done and I do know how to do it. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend such a strategy to a client, but I wouldn't necessarily implement it myself.

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