

Chapter two



A short history of communications and public relations

Introduction

Key dates in the development of communications
and public relations

Introduction

Man has communicated since the first organised group understood that it had a need to communicate with others – in other words, it has been around since the dawn of time. In simple societies relationships were – and are – relatively straightforward. As a society becomes more sophisticated and multi-layered so the interplay of relationships becomes more intricate. This, together with the introduction of mass media in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, led to the development of the theory and practice of public relations. Communications and technology have always been interlinked. As I sit here writing, developers are launching new systems, services and products that will accelerate the change in communications practice.

Let us look to the past for a moment. For the public relations practitioner, the roots of modern public relations illustrate clearly how public relations can be used to change perceptions, effect patterns of behaviour and accomplish far more than simply shifting products off shelves.

The provision of information to precipitate change has been in evidence for thousands of years. Archaeological digs have unearthed shards of tablets written nearly 4,000 years ago which contain information for Mesopotamian farmers – handy hints and tips to help them improve productivity, including information on how to deal with field mice. In the ancient world, the concept of public will and the power of public opinion was widely acknowledged as vital to any politician's success. The Caesars knew the importance of effective communication when they addressed the citizens of Rome in order to gain support and approval – from the Latin comes the expression *vox populi, vox Dei* – 'the voice of the people is the voice of God'.

The fight organiser at the Coliseum knew he had to reach his potential customers with information about his product, i.e. the dates and times of events. If he was canny he would also be aware that word of mouth accounts and reports of remarkable shows and outstanding gladiators – in other words the positive reputation of the Coliseum – would be the ultimate persuasive pull, encouraging even greater numbers of eager Romans to attend those events. Here we see roots of showbiz publicity – armour clad fighters as A-list celebrities – and it drew the crowds then just as positive film reviews do now.

The first organised groups of persecuted Christians used the symbol of the fish for internal communications purposes, as a secret sign that only



other Christians would recognise. It could be argued that this is one of the earliest examples of the use of a badge – a logo as corporate identity. Other examples are the use of crests in heraldry and of uniforms and regimental banners on the battlefield. Flags were the earliest corporate ID of a country, identifying one ship as friend and the other as foe.

There are many examples of early communication designed expressly for the purpose of creating understanding between an organisation and its target audiences, ranging from stone tablets, with hieroglyphics describing new laws, and ‘wanted’ posters, seeking highwaymen and bandits, through to hand bills, discussing new and challenging old political or social ideas.

With the industrialisation of society and the formation of many new organisations with political or commercial interests came the conscious understanding and widespread use of mass media. First there were manuscripts. Before the invention of printing all books and other written materials had to be written out by hand. This was a time-consuming and labour-intensive process, and could take months or years. The subject matter was sacred (Lindisfarne Bible) or political (Magna Carta). While paper was available in parts of Europe from the twelfth century, its use did not become widespread until the end of the Middle Ages. There was no paper mill in England until the fifteenth century. Before this, parchment (also known as vellum) was used – this was made from stretched, treated animal skins. A large manuscript might require one whole cow or sheep-skin to make a folded sheet of two to four pages, and a thick book could require the hides of entire herds. Some manuscripts were made even more precious by ‘illumination’, where bright colours and gold were used to embellish initial letters or to portray entire scenes. Medieval books were therefore hugely expensive items.

The technology of moveable type and the ability to bind pages and print multiple copies changed all this and enabled the development of the newspaper. Many authorities cite the *Courante uyt Italien, Duytslandt, &c* as the world’s first modern newspaper. A regular weekly publication, it was first published in Amsterdam in June 1618. In the USA the first daily paper *The Courant* was published in 1703. In the UK *The Times* was established in 1785, acquiring a printing press capable of making 1,100 impressions per minute in 1814.

The development of audiovisual technology enabled even more sophisticated communications. The development of photography and then portable cameras enabled the lay person to see images of remote parts of the world, different nations and their people, battlefields and curiosities - this had a huge impact on communication. Even today those earliest photographs - of men in trenches, African tribesmen, New York under construction - have huge impact.

The flexible and cheap medium of radio got (and still gets) the message to even those who could not read. The first extended broadcast of the human voice was transmitted through the air on December 24, 1906 from Brant Rock, Massachusetts, by Canadian Reginald Fessenden. He was convinced that the 'wireless telegraph', which up until then carried just the Morse code, could carry the human voice. The most common use for wireless at that time was communication with merchant ships at sea, directing them to ports where the cargo would bring the best price. The shipboard wireless operators were called 'Sparks'. Fessenden's wife, Helen, reported his historic transmission, as the Sparks on ships across the Atlantic heard what they had dreamed about - and thought impossible:

"...a human voice coming from their instruments - someone speaking... Then a women's voice rose in song. It was uncanny! Many of them called their officers to come and listen; soon the wireless rooms were crowded. Next someone was heard reading a poem. Then there was a violin solo; then a man made a speech."

In the UK in 1926, John Logie Baird transmitted the very first television picture from one room to another. By 1927, he used telephone wires to successfully send a moving image from London to Glasgow and in 1928, he made the first trans-Atlantic television broadcast. The BBC first began television broadcasting in 1936. In 1954 the Television Act established commercial television and set up the ITA (Independent Television Authority). A year later independent television began in the London area, with a live transmission from the Guildhall. The first TV commercial ever screened was in 1955 for Gibbs SR toothpaste. Television facilitated enormous quantity and variety of output and its range and reach, combining visual with audio, made it the most powerful medium of all in the twentieth century.

Now, with computer based technologies, which are hybrid, non-dedicated and flexible in character, and which have such enormous interactive potential, we see a complete revolution in the way we send and receive messages. Web-based communications have both private and public functions, are not as heavily regulated as other media, enable interconnection, have no boundaries and enable anyone who has access to PC or Mac to be a communicator. You or I can blog, make videos, make podcasts, take photographs and publish all of it in a matter of seconds; we are all communicating with everyone.

With these developments in media, media exposure to reach a specific listener/reader/viewer, i.e. a defined and measurable audience, became the goal for communications practitioners working in government, in companies and in charitable organisations. The goal was status, kudos and influential third party editorial endorsement.

Aside from these developments in media, periods of political, economic or social crisis precipitated faster developments in public relations practice and a more widespread use of public relations techniques. These factors moved public relations forward and helped to define it as the management practice we know today.

Successive governments have used public relations to effect changes in behaviour at home and abroad by running campaigns explaining new policies relating to public spending, taxation, the economy, migration/immigration, social issues, public health, education, policing, law and order, agriculture, fisheries and food, business, trade and industry, environment, transport, redevelopment, culture, media and sport. Communications campaigns were also extensively used to recruit in the public sector, the first major examples being for the army. Perhaps the most famous historical example is the army recruitment campaign that appeared during the First World War, memorable for the posters carrying Kitchener's image and the slogan 'Your country needs you'. This was specifically designed to communicate with young, able-bodied men and persuade them that their duty lay in signing up to the war effort. This was complemented by other information, arguably closer to propaganda. These uses of public relations have continued with contemporary campaigns using traditional and new media attempting to attract teachers, police and even blood donors.



Taken to the ultimate, public relations techniques can be used politically to transmit messages which are part of a propaganda campaign.

Successful communications campaigns win votes – the Barack Obama election campaign of 2008 was one of the most memorable of all time.

There are two main strands concerning the history of the development of communications as a management function. Uninterrupted by the Second World War with its attendant trading restrictions and rationing, the public relations industry in the US developed apace in the '40s and '50s, alongside the growth of the advertising industry. Consequently, public relations consultants and consultancies appeared in the States long before they appeared in the UK – the US has therefore claimed to be the originator of modern public relations practice.

In the UK advertising professionals who had been fully employed producing wartime propaganda, metamorphosed into the first professional public relations practitioners. They worked in-house for government and commercial organisations, and as consultants in newly established public relations consultancies or branches of US consultancies which were beginning to expand as international networks.

Posters and packaging had been the main advertising media up until the '40s. After this, advances in technology, particularly in mass communications, gave advertisers new and incredibly powerful routes to customers, enabling them to project their products into the home, most importantly via the TV screen. Vast numbers of magazines – dependent on advertising for their growth and survival – were launched, designed to appeal to a society that was becoming ever more fragmented, with women emerging as a vital target audience with their own spending power and independence to make choices about the way they lived their lives and the way they spent their money. Manufacturers of fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) were among the first to use the new media to promote their products; from hairspray to cigarettes, chocolate bars to beer, toothpaste to toilet soap. As cars became more affordable, petrol and car advertising began to appear.

Public relations worked alongside advertising to create strong brands with perceived values and personalities, via consumer campaigns using media relations and editorial promotions, leaflets, exhibitions and demonstrations.

The last twenty years of the twentieth century saw enormous changes in the way we live and work. Against a political backdrop which believed the state should relinquish publicly owned utilities and industries and which encouraged entrepreneurialism, heavy industries were replaced by light industries, manufacturing declined and service industries boomed. As a concomitant, there was even greater need for business-to-business public relations to explain what was going on and to give companies a competitive edge. Deregulation was also a major driver for communications.

Likewise, people were encouraged to become homeowners and to take responsibility for themselves, their families and their own health – enter mortgage lenders, building societies and banks, insurance brokers, financial services providers and healthcare companies as heavy users of public relations. Privatisation helped the general public to understand that they too could own stocks and shares. Corporate and financial public relations became a vital part of the communication strategy for most successful organisations. With the banking, stock market and financial system breakdown in 2007/8, communications became even more important; to explain to savers and borrowers what was happening and why, to engage with stakeholders and to get vital messages across to them to try to calm nerves.

One thing is for sure, whenever a major incident or scare occurs, the organisations that remember reputation is a very valuable item on the balance sheet – and that a lost reputation is rarely found again – will fare best in the longer term.

In the early days PR was learnt on the job. Most professionals had worked their way through the ranks. Towards the end of the twentieth century professional qualifications were available to the PR practitioner. This started to contribute towards raising the status and reputation of the industry as a whole.

Today, alongside massive political and economic change has been the development of new communications across the globe. In developed countries people have PCs at work and at home, access to the internet and e-mails, mobile phones, micro-technology and ever cheaper, ever smaller and more powerful technology. It has all combined to change the way we live. We can access the world by using a device we hold in the palm of one hand. Workers in multinational corporations communicate

across cultures instantly. The international brand is king and pan-European/global campaigns are commonplace.

At the same time anti-capitalists, pressure groups, environmentalists, those who speak for the underdog and the dispossessed have organised themselves professionally to protest against globalisation, human and animal exploitation and environmental damage caused by governments and corporations all over the world.

The media is fragmented. More magazines come and go every year, fewer as print publications, more as websites. Broadband and the huge choice of online or downloadable viewing and listening, plus endless cable and satellite channels has steadily changed the way we use media for entertainment and information gathering. Opportunities for media coverage via media relations have never been greater, while at the same time the world has got wise to the fact that public relations is a powerful tool. This includes people who work in the media who know organisations want coverage, airtime and column inches, and increasingly look for reciprocal deals through advertising, sponsorship and joint activities. The interdependency between media and advertiser is still there.

For the PR professional, PR has become a mature marketing discipline and is now a central feature of many successful companies' strategies. It is ranked alongside - and sometimes even in place of - advertising, and has achieved professional status with vocational training and recognised qualifications. Evaluation means that the positive contribution made by PR to the organisation's communication strategy can now be measured and appreciated.

Even if people are spending more time looking at screens and reading news on mobile devices, they still need to buy groceries (even if they are delivered to the door). They still enjoy a glass of wine, going on holiday, furnishing their homes, planning for their families' futures. Businesses will always need to trade with each other, companies are always looking for investors, voluntary organisations are still seeking to raise funds and put their cause on the map, and government departments still need to get policy and educational messages across.

What is changing is technology and the way organisations communicate with their target audiences via an increasing number of sophisticated and direct routes. The PR practitioner must keep abreast of developments in the media world.

Key dates in the development of communications and public relations

The PR practitioner is best placed to manage any ethics committees within an organisation, charged with interrogating corporate behaviour in order to protect corporate reputation. It is already a demanding role – PR at the highest level is now and will continue to be a 24 hours a day, 365 days a year job. Systematic evaluation is a major element in most organisations' PR plan and this trend will continue using ever more sophisticated tools. With faster technology the numbers of those employed in public relations could fall – conversely the growing importance of public relations may mean that numbers employed in the profession will increase. One thing is for certain – public relations is here to stay.

- 3500 Sumerians make envelopes and tablets from clay
- 3200 Egyptians invent black ink
- 2500 Animal skins are used for scrolls in Asia
- 2400 Earliest surviving written papyrus scroll
- 1800 The Egyptian Book of the Dead is prepared
- 1500 'Phaistos disc', a clay tablet on which symbols had been imprinted, then baked, is the earliest example of printing
- 950 Leather used for writing and scrolls
- 650 Papyrus from Egypt arrives in Greece
- 600 First astronomy texts written in India
- 451 Roman laws were inscribed on tablets
- 170 Pergamons invent parchment, which can be folded and which scholars can write on on both sides
- 47 Fire at Great Library in Alexandria destroys an estimated 50,000 volumes
- 105 Tsai Lun invents paper in China by mixing hemp, mulberry bark and rags with water
- 350 Chinese develop printing technology using symbols carved into a wooden block

- 510 Block-book printing invented by the Chinese; this involved the carving of wooden blocks with symbols and text, inking and printing
- 748 Printed newspaper appears in Chinese city of Peking
- 793 Paper is made in Baghdad, Iraq
- 868 First dated printed document, the Diamond Sutra, produced by block-type printing in China
- 1023 Chinese print paper money
- 1045 Chinese inventor Bi Sheng invents moveable type, four hundred years before Gutenberg's device
- 1107 Chinese print money in three colours to stop the growing practice of counterfeiting
- 1151 First paper made in Europe, at Xativa, Spain
- 1155 Map of Western China - oldest known printed map
- 1221 Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II declares that paper documents are invalid, as he believed paper to be a Muslim creation
- 1276 Watermarking introduced in paper manufacture
- Middle
ages Public proclamations, posted bulletins and announcements for political and religious purposes
- 1390 First paper mill established in Germany
- 1403 Moveable type is cast in bronze by Koreans
- 1450 Invention of printing press enables navigation tables and maps to be widely published
- 1455 Gutenberg bible printed - first book to be printed with moveable metal type
- 1465 Johannes Regiomontanus uses printing to produce astronomy books and tables
- 1474 William Caxton prints the first book in English: *The Eneas*, a translation of *The Aeneid*

- 1475 William Caxton publishes the first book printed in the English language, *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*; it is printed in Bruges, Belgium
- 1476 William Caxton establishes a printing press in Westminster, London
- 1480 First known circular for advertising purposes in Germany
- 1552 Many astronomical books are burned in Britain
- 1565 First pencil invented
- 1597 First chemistry and alchemy textbook is published by Libavius (*Alchemia*)
- 1610 Jean Beguin's *Tyrocinium chymicum* is the first book dealing solely with chemistry
- 1618 First newspaper *Courante uyt Italien, Duytslandt, &c* published in Amsterdam
- 1643 Publication of *New England's First Fruits* – first known public relations bulletin produced for fundraising purposes, printed in London for the US
- 1665 Publication of first periodical other than a newspaper – *Journal des Scavans*
- 1690 Paper making introduced to America
- 1729 Newton's *Principia* translated into English for the first time
- 1754 *Yorkshire Post* launched
- 1775-
- 1782 American War of Independence – the first coherent campaign to change opinion and legislation using classic public relations techniques, e.g. the formation of a campaigning group (*The Sons of Liberty*), staged events (the *Boston Tea Party*), symbols (the *Liberty tree*) and slogans (*"Taxation without representation is tyranny"*)
- 1785 *The Times* founded as the *Daily Universal Register*
- 1798 Aloys Senefelder invents the lithographic method for printing maps and charts
- 1809 British Treasury appointed its first press spokesman
- 1814 Steam powered cylinder press first used to print *The Times* in London

- 1821 Manchester Guardian founded (renamed The Guardian in 1959)
- 1820s
- /30s Rise of democracy in the US and use of media to convey political messages
- 1829 Louis Braille invents embossed typing for the blind reader
- 1837 ABC Telegraph invented by Cooke and Wheatstone
- 1837 Northern Star (Leeds) regional paper launched
- 1840 First postage stamps - Rowland Hill
- 1843 Wood used for the first time in paper manufacture
- 1846 The cylinder printing press is invented, a major step forward in paper technology and printing
- 1850s Information campaigns enticing settlers from the East to the West coast of America including Burlington Railroad's campaign of 1858
- 1851 Invention of plate camera
- 1854 Post Office recognises the necessity to explain services to the public
- 1855 Daily Telegraph founded
- 1865 Further developments in the printing world with Bullock's press that feeds paper continuously and printed on both sides of the paper
- 1870 Invention of the typewriter
- 1876 Invention of the telephone by Alexander Graham Bell
- 1894 Marconi sends first radio waves
- 1896 Launch of the Daily Mail
- 1906 First extended broadcast via radio of the human voice
- 1911 Air mail adopted
- 1912 Lloyd George organises a team of lecturers to explain the first pension scheme for the elderly
- 1914 'Your country needs you' poster campaign
- 1918 Launch of the Daily Express
- 1920 First radio station, Pittsburgh, USA

- 1922 First edition of Good Housekeeping
- 1922 Crystal sets to listen to radio broadcasts
- 1926 Empire marketing board campaign to promote fruits and other products imported from the British Empire
- 1926 John Logie Baird demonstrates television for the first time
- 1926 Royal Charter awarded to the British Broadcasting Corporation
- 1936 BBC'S first television broadcasts from Alexandra Palace, North London
- 1938 Invention of the ball-point pen and photocopier
- 1930's Development of all-electronic television
- 1940's Wartime propaganda using radio and educational campaigns using posters and print
- 1943 Invention of circuit board
- 1943 Concept of the mobile phone appears
- 1946 First paper disposable nappy invented by Marion Donovan
- 1946 Invention of the computer
- 1947 Invention of the transistor
- 1948 Institute of Public Relations (UK) and Public Relations Society (USA) formed
- 1950's Many women's magazines launched
- 1950 Diner's Club - first credit card
- 1953 First colour television broadcast
- 1955 Commercial TV launched in the UK
- 1954 First transistor radio built
- 1956 First video recorder
- 1956 Launch of New Scientist magazine
- 1959 Invention of the microchip
- 1962 First communication satellite
- 1963 First cassette recorder
- 1964 First word processor

- 1964 Development of the internet by the Pentagon
- 1974 Invention of the bar code
- 1976 IBM develops ink-jet printing technology
- 1978 First personal computer
- 1979 Sony Walkman launched
- 1979 Internet developed
- 1979 Mobile phones begin to appear
- 1980 Post-it notes appeared
- 1982 First smart card and CD player
- 1990 Videophone
- 1990 World Wide Web developed by European scientists
- 1990 Voice recognition software for PCs
- 1990s Mobile phone saturation in UK
- 2001 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US broadcast live across the globe
- 2001 War declared on Afghanistan
- 2001 First i-pod
- 2003 Invasion of Iraq
- 2004 Tsunami
- 2005 7/7 terrorist attacks in London
- 2005 Hurricane Katrina
- 2005 Institute of Public Relations (UK) achieves Chartered status - now Chartered Institute of Public Relations
- 2006 Wii launched
- 2008 Barack Obama becomes the first black President of the United States of America having spent nearly \$500 million on his campaign, including a 30 minute infomercial on prime time TV