

Tips for crafting a PR career

 By Louise Marsland

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Since we've pegged PR as a top career choice, we asked top communications professionals what advice they would give young public relations professionals entering the industry.



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Continuous learning is the key to success, as is curiosity and a desire to understand the industry you are working in:

1. **Your credibility is yours to build**, emphasises Lebo Madiba, MD of PR Powerhouse. "Competition is tough; lack of skills remains a big challenge. The industry is just not producing the best. Young PR professionals are not well equipped to come into the industry, over and above what tertiary education is teaching them. Young professionals need to invest time in themselves to learn the ropes. Just writing and passing exams is not enough - they need to know what this industry is about and how it connects to business.

"PR is not a big party, you need to ensure you're able to diversify between various channels of communication because the role has changed, PR companies are becoming the content aggregators for clients online, on social media channels, radio, print and TV are add-on platforms."

2. **Learn how to create compelling content** says Andre Fourie, strategic communications director, marcusbrewster. "Most people entering the industry today have smartphones - use the various freely available apps and services to start creating interesting photo editorials, take short videos, write blog posts, filter content to Twitter and Facebook, and then test the response from friends and followers. The PR industry has a leadership role to play in the creation of content - if we can develop these skills among the new PR candidates entering the workplace, we will all collectively reap the rewards in future."

3. **Be as technically versatile as possible**, urges Vincent Magwenya, CEO of Magna Carta. "Stretch yourself as far as you can, so you understand the benefits of technology and how it can be used in PR. Acquire as much knowledge in the key sectors of the economy as you can and you will thrive. Be aware of the continent in which you operate; its issues and its future by understanding its challenges and successes, so you understand where the opportunities lie. Be able to easily transverse the world of communications and media. Understand where PR fits in the broader marketing mix."

4. **Understand the media industry**, says Greg Forbes, group MD, Lion's Wing. "You should know the journalist and the editor, where the publication sits within the media house, the position of the media house within the broader industry, where the industry is headed, and factors that could influence the editorial style. It seems to be a dying skill for PR practitioners to understand and build a strong relationship with a media contact. Many PR practitioners do not understand the newsroom process. There is still a spray-and-pray approach prevalent in sending out press releases. There is room for broad dissemination of releases, but it still requires an understanding of who you are sending it to, what is relevant for which publications, and tailoring your content to that publication. This also requires understanding the audience that the publication is targeting. If you do not have the relationship to determine that, you are not providing a service to the journalist, publication, audience, or your client. Building a relationship where a journalist trusts you is a dying skill."

5. **Don't break promises**, says Fourie. "Respect the journalist's time. Don't send irrelevant pitches to media - make sure you've read at least three recent copies of a newspaper or magazine before you pitch a story. Listen to the radio show you want to pitch to and learn what content is most suited to certain presenters. Know when editorial teams are on deadline. If you committed to providing a journalist with information by a certain date, make sure you follow through on your promise. And most importantly, remember that the media are partners. PR and journalism are complementary to each other and our fortunes are often tied together. So take the time to build strong relationships with media."

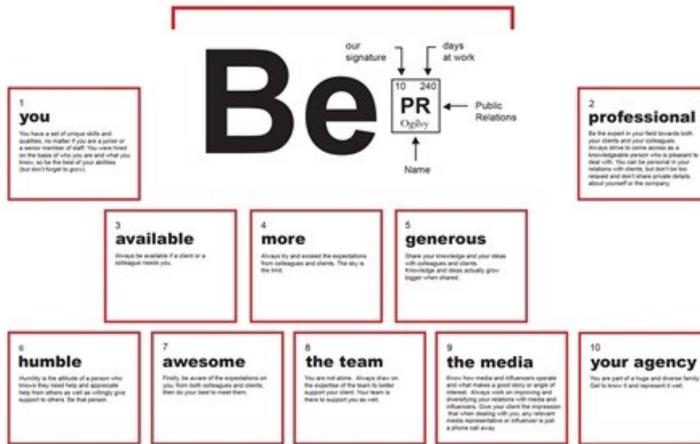
6. **Live the brand and be prepared**, is the advice from Galia Kerbel, MD of Greater Than. Research your clients, know their business inside and out and be the expert. Know your media, be curious, read, listen and watch, she says.

As Ingrid Lotze, the next PRISA President says: "I would say to young public relations professionals entering the industry now, 'Your time is now!' Take your intuitive knowledge of technology and apply it to communication, harness your enthusiasm and don't let the old fogies shoot your creative thinking down. You've got the chance to make an impact on our world from within the communication industry - go for it!"

The PR Periodic table

In a handy infographic, Kajsa Claude, head of client services at Ogilvy Public Relations has shared her top 10 tips for a successful PR career from her years of experience in the industry. She emphasises humility, generosity and professionalism in all dealings with clients, your team and the media.

The Periodic table for PR Professionals



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ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

Louise Burgers (previously Marsland) is Founder/Content Director: SOURCE Content Marketing Agency. Louise is a Writer, Publisher, Editor, Content Strategist, Content/Media Trainer. She has written about consumer trends, brands, branding, media, marketing and the advertising communications industry in SA and across Africa, for over 20 years, notably, as previous Africa Editor: Bizcommunity.com; Editor: Bizcommunity Media/Marketing SA; Editor-in-Chief: Advantage magazine; Editor: Marketing Mx magazine; Editor: Progressive Retailing magazine; Editor: BusinessBrief magazine; Editor: FMCG Files newsletter. Web: www.sourceagency.co.za.

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