

Current media view on PR

 By [Louise Marsland](#)

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Six editors and senior journalists were polled to find out their views on current working relationships with the public relations industry, as well as what their needs are in a leaner, under-resourced media industry, where newsrooms are a quarter of the size they used to be and digital media has crushed the profit model of traditional media.

The shrinking and increasing juniorisation of media newsrooms is a wonderful opportunity for PROs; while the speed of digital media has meant less opportunity for old-school networking. The perennial problem of communicating with the right media, in the right context, at the right time, remains an issue.

And adding visuals appropriately and embracing new technologies such as the Cloud and social media in communicating with the media, are a growing disruption for PR professionals.

The journalists polled were:

- Leigh Andrews ([@Leigh_Andrews](#)), editor-in-chief, Media & Marketing portal, Bizcommunity.com
- Danette Breitenbach ([@danettefrog44](#)), specialist industry writer and former editor of AdVantage magazine
- Brian Berkman ([@BrianBerkmanZA](#)), travel writer and PR-Net founder
- Sindy Peters ([@SindyLP](#)), managing editor, Bizcommunity.com
- Beverley Klein ([@BevCPT](#)), deputy editor, Media & Marketing, Bizcommunity.com

- Annabel Eaton, specialist freelance journalist

Q: How can media relations be improved with communications professionals?

Andrews: It's all about the underlying relationship and knowing that you're sending information on to the relevant person. Social media has made this a lot easier, as most members of the media list their interests and beat in their Twitter profiles. Basic groundwork of checking in to see you've reached the relevant editor, that they do in fact publish the format of content you're sending through before you schedule that GB-eating raw video file goes a long way.

Also, there's no need to follow up with phone calls before and after sending an email - if you've not heard back within a week it's a good idea to check the info hasn't slipped through the cracks, but also possibly a sign that it wasn't relevant and to perhaps try a different approach, as rude as it may seem, many simply don't have the time to respond to each email with our inboxes overflowing and constant social media alerts to track, over and above meeting basic deadlines and other assorted admin that eats up the hours.

Breitenbach: My first point - trust me. By this I mean in doing the simple things - such as not asking me to send you questions. I will send a brief but not questions. By asking for a factual check and then re-writing the story. Trust me. My second point - recognise me for the professional I am. I don't tell engineers or accountants how to do their job; please grant me the respect that I know how to do mine. You might not like what I say, but I know how to say it correctly. So when you ask to do a factual check, please do that and don't re-write the story.

Berkman: Key to improving the relationship between media and communications professionals is to know we both want the same thing: a great story. Media information that is rich in detail but poor in adjectives is the most useful. Great images complete with captions also make the life of the writer easier and, most essentially, all the contact and social media details that the PR professional would like published. A third-party comment that lends balance to a piece is also useful as are facts and figures about the industry sector. Personally, I prefer information sent to me either in the body of the email or in PDF so that cutting and pasting is a cinch.

■ **Q: *How important are communications professionals to you?***

Andrews: Hugely important. As an editor your PR contacts are your bridge to accessing the right spokespeople for comment, getting hold of breaking news before your competitors and answering specific questions so that you can put something together from a more relevant angle than the often-generic original press release that you know will be published by all and sundry.

Breitenbach: Very important as they are often the first point of contact when I start working on a project or article. Besides assisting with finding you the correct person to talk to/interview and therefore saving you time, they are often able to set up and facilitate a meeting for you. They are also able to supply background information and other necessities, such as photographs.

Peters: When you're working on a multi-industry news site like Bizcommunity, PR professionals are vital in helping you stay on top of breaking news, trends and events, as well as who's who in the business arena - they're the Sam to our Frodo. The communication process is vastly smoother between business and media when there's a PR professional working the grind with you.

■ **Q: *How should communications agencies transform to keep pace with media industry change?***

Peters: Our readers, across the age spectrum, are hungry for easily digestible multimedia content, and as a news portal, we have to try and provide that content, and in turn, so do communications agencies. If people are going to steal a few moments away from their nine-to-fives, it's going to be with something that requires the least amount of effort. If you want to get a piece of that time, offer them something short, sharp and to the point, and visually stimulating - whether it's an infographic, a three-minute video clip, or a photo essay. Get malleable with your content creation.

Andrews: They definitely need to keep pace - it would be a travesty for the media world to embrace certain new communication or publishing platforms with communicators left back at a different level, or vice versa. Technology is changing the information realm at a rapid pace, so it's essential for all parties to keep up-to-date and at least be aware of new communication channels and publishing methods, even if you haven't quite embraced them yet.

Klein: PR releases need to be more visual. High quality images and video are so important today because media is heading to a very visual place, and as an editor we obviously want to keep that up and therefore so do communications agencies. It would also grab the attention of media editors amongst the hundreds of emails we get every day.

Breitenbach: With the speed of the world having increased dramatically and the time line for delivery so much shorter, the need for a quick response from communications professionals has to be a given not a nice to have. Communications agencies are too often, still, too slow in reacting. They need to be more agile and to respond quicker.

Eaton: There is a move from print to online publications. Therefore online communication platforms and strategies are today essential for all clients. It is also vital to have social media skills.

■ **Q: *What is the biggest trend transforming how media and PR work and communicate?***

Andrews: I've noticed a lot more 'personal' communication, with PR professionals calling the media on their cell over the office line or even sending a WhatsApp message - some balk at this 'always on' aspect but truth be told, it's the way the media's evolving. You have to be available/contactable at all times in case of breaking news, and good luck to those who think a 'digital detox' is possible. We're only going to get more connected as technology evolves. This should be taught in basic media studies/journalism classes, as it comes as a shock to some that they can't just 'switch off' come weekend.

Peters: A lot more PR agencies are embracing the cloud - which I love! The load on my inbox has lessened - with just a synopsis in an email, and a link to download the larger files at my discretion, the communication process moves along swimmingly well.

Breitenbach: The lines have blurred and many PR professionals recognise this. This allows stories to be told without the fluff. PR has also become more than the event and press release, with professionals becoming more business-orientated to achieving their clients goals than just providing coverage. For example, approaching you with good story angles.

Berkman: The biggest change I've seen in the more than 20 years I've been in the media and PR industries is that we are all busier now than we've ever been and very rarely have time for those legendary six-hour lunches I so fondly remember in the 90's. If an invitation to a media event is likely to take up more than an hour of my day than there'd better be really compelling reasons to go.

Something that works extremely well for my clients is a media roadshow where we go into the media house for briefings rather than invite media out. Also, nowadays, we are all in multi-channel communications and so links to multi-media content such as audio, video and into-graphics is also useful. The increasing juniorisation of the newsroom is a wonderful opportunity for PR professionals.

Klein: There seems to be a more multi-channel way of communicating these days. Although it doesn't happen often yet, I think communicators are going to be contacting media on social media more so than email. Not everyone checks their email after hours, but everyone still has social media alerts set up, so it's a definitely a new channel for communicators to connect with the media.

■ **Q: *What change would you like to see in how you are communicated with?***

Andrews: I think it's a case of going back to the basics. With the very first communication, whether it's telephonic/email/in person, check that you have the relevant person at hand. So make sure they work for the company you meant to reach, that they cover your news genre, that you have their name right and that you understand what type of news they cover. The amount of 'Dear Andrew' emails I receive on a weekly basis inviting me to cover sport events, would make anyone consider running for the hills!

Breitenbach: From the big communications agencies I would love to see a more speedy response. I would also like to see more high level people understand the importance of communication, of talking to the media - a comment only takes five

minutes - and for communications to be viewed as a strategic part of their business that adds value.

Peters: While the cloud has offered a solution, my biggest gripe remains around images. When it comes to the media, one image res doesn't fit all. Just the other day I had to download a zip folder that was 54MB large just so I could access one image file to use in an article. Still, on images, if you have them, send them - they can only add to the reader experience often offering something a stock image can't.

Klein: Honestly, I would like to see a few changes. As mentioned above it's really important for communicators to know who to send releases to, and better yet to know their names. You're more likely to grab an editor's attention if they see it's addressed to them. Another change would be fact-checking. So many times I've gotten releases that either makes no sense, or they've simply gotten their own client's name wrong... It's these little things that need changing and some research on the desired media platform should really be done before sending releases through.

Eaton: Certain editors are excellent at providing feedback and are in ongoing communication with PR executives - it would be tremendous if this were the case with all editors. Two-way communication between the PR executive and editor provides a win-win situation. The goal should be ongoing communication and relationship building.

Berkman: No phone calls. Quick turnaround time.

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