



Certified Public Relations Officer Sample Material

V-Skills Certifications

**A Government of India
&
Government of NCT Delhi Initiative**

V-Skills



1. PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER

1.1 Fundamentals and Emergence

1.1.1 The Interdependent World

Business persons depend on customers for sales and profits, organizations depend on employees for productivity and quality of their products industry relies on several engineers and skilled men and women to produce products that satisfy human needs like food, clothing, cars and homes. All of these resulted into a greater need for relationships and communications among people at all levels. The birth of democracies worldwide and the concept of power to the people have generated the importance of people's opinions on various issues concerning the human race. The exchange of ideas and opinions commonly called public opinion has become common. The interdependence of people, businesses, governments and social and religious organizations, has given birth to the new philosophy and a function of management, which has come to be known as public relations.

1.1.2 Definition of Public Relations

Although there is no formal definition of public relations but different people have tried to give it various definitions. According to Dr REX F Harlow, public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between organization and its publics, involve the management of problems or issues, helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion defines and emphasizes the responsibilities of management to serve the public interest helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends and use research and sound and ethical communication as its principal tools.

According to Webster's New Word Dictionary, Public Relations is Relations with the general public, as through publicity, specifically, those functions of a corporation, organization etc, concerned with attempting to create favorable public opinion for itself. Public Relations are management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organization with the public interest and executes programme of action to earn public understanding and acceptance. Public Relations are the attempt by information, persuasion and adjustment to engineer public support for an activity, cause, movement or institution.

Publicity is different from Public Relations as Publicity is type of promotion that relies on public relations effect of a news story usually carried free by mass media. The main objective of publicity is not sales promotion, but creation of an image through editorial or independent source commentary.

1.2 Functions of Public Relations

The aim of public relations by a company often is to persuade the public, investors, partners, employees, and other stakeholders to maintain a certain point of view about its leadership, products, or of political decisions. Common activities include speaking at conferences, winning industry awards, working with the press, and employee communication. Public Relations are similar to Analyst Relations, Investor Relations and Public Affairs depending on the firm, organization or population it represents.

- ✓ Public Relations is a top management function and deserves attention
- ✓ Public relations has the responsibility of establishing relationship between an organization and its groups like employees, customers, dealers, vendors, shareholders, media, community, government etc.
- ✓ It is the eyes and ears of the company as it monitors awareness levels, opinions, attitudes, behaviors and responses of various publics
- ✓ It is the catalyst of change in the company
- ✓ It is also expected to evaluate and measure the impact of organizational policies, procedures, and actions of various publics
- ✓ It plays an advisory role of counseling the management to modify and adjust the policies, procedures, and actions conflicting with the public interest of smooth functioning of the organization.
- ✓ It is a watch dog of corporate interests and public expectations.
- ✓ It has to maintain a two way communication between publics and the organization.
- ✓ It acts as an early warning sign to monitor the changes happening in the industry.

1.3 Strengths of a Public Relations Officer

The major qualities of good public relation officers are their writing and speaking skills. A PRO must be eloquent and expert speakers and beautiful writers incorporating mind storming words to invoke media and masses. A PRO has to prepare the press releases, pitching mail, teasing mails, business mail, etc time to time to deal with media and client. Here are some must-have qualities and traits of a PRO.

- ✓ A PRO must have high standard of integrity.
- ✓ A public relation professional should be a learned eye readers.
- ✓ A good PRO is very influential. He/she should gain the people's confidence easily.

- ✓ He/she should be very precise and expressive. Should bring the important points very briefly and clearly both verbally and written manner. Being a good communicator is a treasure for PR people.
- ✓ He/she must be bold.
- ✓ Leadership qualities in a PRO are an added advantage for the PR people.
- ✓ Should have interview skills.
- ✓ Should be good presentation skills.
- ✓ Should be creative, and have a flair for writing
- ✓ Should have business acumen, should be a good motivator, gets along with most difficult people, has drive and enthusiasm, is a good listener.
- ✓ Should have good sense of anticipation, and tolerance for frustration

1.4 Duties and Responsibilities of a Public Relations Officer

As a PRO has to be dedicated 24/7 to protect the interest of a company, it can be a very demanding job.

- ✓ **Reputation Management:** The prime function of a public relations officer is to create, maintain and enhance the reputation of an organization. It is the responsibility of the PRO to promote the people, products, services or solutions of the establishment he works for.
- ✓ **Goodwill Creation:** A seasoned PRO should not only manage and maintain reputation, but should also continuously work towards creating and maintaining the goodwill of the organization. This will help in creating a favorable public image of the organization by strengthening its credibility.
- ✓ **Crisis Management:** One of the most crucial and difficult duties of a public relations person is crisis management. Mostly, the need for such communication arises when the stock position of the company is not favorable, mitigation of losses is required, during a takeover situation, the organization decides to dissolve a joint venture, there is a change in the senior management, etc. At times, there may be a conflict of interest between the public and the company because of some issues related to its policies or product. A PRO should be capable enough to deal with such problems, without causing damage to the reputation of the company.
- ✓ **PR Strategies and Campaigns:** A PRO should constantly look out for opportunities to present the organization in a positive light. He needs to come up with different PR strategies that will lead to easy acceptance and appreciation of any new move by the organization. When a company has to launch a new product, announce a new scheme, enter a new Joint Venture etc.; it is the job of the PR official to make arrangements to promote a new corporate move. He has to plan promotional strategies, keeping the target audience and desired result in mind.

- ✓ **Press Conference:** Whenever an important decision of the organization is to be made public, the PRO must arrange a press conference. He has to invite the press beforehand, make arrangements at the venue, manage catering, audio-visual facilities, stage set-up, ambiance etc. Also, he has to prepare a press kit for the journalists, which includes a press release, providing details of the announcement. After the press conference, he has to request the press to ask their questions. He should be very careful and clever in answering their queries.
- ✓ **Preparing Media Plan:** A PRO must prepare an event-wise media plan and thereafter detailing and short listing the journalists from publications and electronic media for gaining substantial visibility. Other media platforms like advertising, bill boards, social media, etc. are also to be considered. This is an important decision to be taken by the PRO as the quality and quantity of publicity mileage can be entirely based on the media plan.
- ✓ **Coordinating Interviews:** Most of the senior management professionals of an organization give interviews to newspapers, magazines, and websites and television channels. The PRO of the company will have to coordinate the communication between the senior management and the journalists. To decide and discuss where the interview is to be conducted, the briefing points, the probable list of questions, etc. before the interview rest on his shoulders.
- ✓ **Communication Budget:** It is important that a separate budget is set aside at the beginning of every financial year for various public relations activities. The PRO has to prepare a communication plan at the beginning of the year, giving details of the activities along with the budget allotted to them individually. Contingency plan for emergency communication should also be done in the budget.
- ✓ **Cordial Relations:** A PRO needs to take special efforts in maintaining cordial relations with the clients, potential clients, media persons, top management of the company, employees, etc. He should have knowledge about every update regarding the organization.
- ✓ **Excellent Communication:** It is necessary for a PR officer to have excellent oral and written communication skills. He must be well versed in corporate jargon as he has to draft speeches for the senior management, and might have to address the press himself. Apart from this, he has to prepare publicity brochures, press releases, and news letters for employees, handouts, company magazines, etc.
- ✓ **Effective Marketing:** The PRO should have sound sales and marketing skills that will help in effective promotion of the products and services. Besides, it also helps if he is a creative person and is able to come up with new and innovative ideas to attract the public. He may have to plan mass media films and videos to promote or enhance the sales of a particular product. He may even have to assist in market research.

- ✓ **Internal Communications:** He has to work closely with the internal communications team, for devising an objective bound communication for employees located at one or several locations. He has to play an instrumental role in communicating a single message throughout the organization. This can also impact the employee engagement effectively.
- ✓ **Media Coverage:** His job not only involves getting media coverage, but also includes following its tone and nature. He should also evaluate and analyze the coverage to understand the impact of the communication.
- ✓ **Communicating with Senior Management:** Other duties of the PRO include keeping the senior management abreast about the moves made by competitors. He has to be aware about the cutting edge competition and should have up-to-date information on the prevalent market conditions.
- ✓ **Answering Queries:** Media people often raise queries about the decisions and working of the organization. It is the duty of the PRO to answer them diplomatically without divulging unnecessary details.
- ✓ **Corporate Identity:** Every organization has its own set of corporate brand identity. The PRO has to check whether the logo and branding of the company in advertisements, newsletters, brochures, etc. are in accordance with the company's interests. The placement, size, color and other details pertaining to the corporate identity are to be verified before a public event.
- ✓ **Translating Content:** Sometimes the content on the website, press releases, press notes, brochures, leaflets, etc. needs to be in different languages for easy readability and comprehension of people in a particular country. It is the duty of the PRO to get the content translated from an agency and verify it before communicating the same.
- ✓ **Maintaining Archives:** As a part of the responsibilities of a PRO, he has to maintain an event-wise docket of all the press coverage in both print and electronic media. Also, maintenance of proper documentation and archives is expected from him.
- ✓ **CSR Activities:** Organizations across the world are increasingly waking up to the idea of environmental sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR). It is expected from the PRO to give an impetus to such activities and provide them good publicity by utilizing various platforms of communication.
- ✓ **Anthropology and Psychology:** Along with knowledge of the media, sales and marketing, it is also important for the PR official to know something about the anthropology and psychology. This will help him in understanding and planning different kind of strategies that would work for varied group of people.

- ✓ **Other Functions:** A PRO has to conduct events, exhibitions, road shows, parties, facility tours, delegation meets, and conferences and undertake sponsorships or allied activities that the firm supports in order to gain public attention. It is his responsibility to get the website and social networking pages of the organization updated from time to time.

1.5 Emergence of Public Relations

A painting of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, one of the early pioneers of public relations in eighteenth century England. One early practitioner of public relations is Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, who conducted press relations, lobbying and celebrity campaigning on behalf of Charles James Fox, a British politician supporting the Whig party in the late 1700s. In the United States, publicists that promoted circuses, theatrical performances, and other public spectacles are considered a precursor to public relations.

Many of the first practitioners of public relations in the US supported railroads. Scholars believe that the first appearance of the term "public relations" appeared in the 1897 Year Book of Railway Literature. Edward Bernays, often described as the father of public relations

Some historians regard Ivy Lee as the first real practitioner of public relations, but Edward Bernays, a nephew and student of Sigmund Freud is generally regarded today as the profession's founder. In the United Kingdom Sir Basil Clarke (1879–1947) was a pioneer of public relations. Development as war-time propaganda.

The First World War helped stimulate the development of public relations as a profession. Many of the first PR professionals, including Ivy Lee, Edward Bernays, John W. Hill, and Carl Byoir, got their start with the Committee on Public Information (also known as the Creel Committee), which organized publicity on behalf of U.S. objectives during World War I.

In describing the origin of the term public relations, Bernays said, "When I came back to the United States [from the war], I decided that if you could use propaganda for war, you could certainly use it for peace. And propaganda got to be a bad word because of the Germans ... using it. So what I did was to try to find some other words, so we found the words Counsel on Public Relations". As Harold Lasswell explained in 1928, "public relations" was a term used as a way of shielding the profession from the ill repute increasingly associated with the word "propaganda": "Propaganda has become an epithet of contempt and hate, and the propagandists have sought protective coloration in such names as 'public relations council,' 'specialist in

public education,' 'public relations adviser.' "In the 1930s Edward Bernays started the first vocational course in public relations.

Modern public relations advertising dollars in traditional media productions have declined and many traditional media outlets are seeing declining circulation in favor of online and social media news sources. One site even tracked the death of newspapers. As readership in traditional media shifts to online media, so have the focus of many in public relations. Social media releases, search engine optimization, content publishing, and the introduction of pod casts and video are other burgeoning trends.

Social media has increased the speed of breaking news, creating greater time constraints on responses to current events. Increasingly, companies are utilizing social media channels, such as blogs and Microblogging. Some view two-way communications in social media in two categories: asymmetrical and symmetrical. In an asymmetrical public relations model an organization gets feedback from the public and uses it as a basis for attempting to persuade the public to change. A symmetrical public relations model means that the organization takes the interests of the public into careful consideration and public relations practitioners seek a balance between the interest of their organization and the interest of the public.

1.5.1 Public Affairs

With the progressive emergence of democratic forms of governments all over the world and also with the maturing of some of the democracies like America, European, and Canadian and Indian, the need for public relations professional to understand the intricacies of the political and social environment has become essential.

Lobbying in parliament and the government, and convincingly advocating the corporate view points have to be done. These job assignments generally goes to very senior and experienced professionals with a vision, either with aptitude and taste for law or to personnel with legal education and backgrounds.

To summarize, from ancient times to modern, the discipline of public relations has come a long way to establish itself as a profession. Over the last one century, public relations witnessed several changes and developments that shaped its future.

The American Civil War, the Greta Depression and conflict between people and businesses generated the need for public relations to express the need for co existence of conflicting groups for progress and growth. The leading corporate houses developed their own public relations departments headed by people with vision and far sight.

The last quarter of the 20th century with multi nationalism and globalization of business and advent of media explosion and computers, have brought about several challenges of greater specialization for the public relations profession.

The sinister developments like terrorism—both violent and economic, poverty and diseases, have brought about several challenges for the professional to the rise to the occasion and foster new and rational mind sets amongst publics, for harmony to prevail.

Public relations are now no more a cosmetic attachment to the organizations but an important management functions. The fast changing environment and the resultant challenges are an invitation to all the professionals with maturity, vision and wisdom.

1.6 Public Relations in India

Public relations, despite being over a century old across the world, began in India in the early 1990s. Though there were several individuals and small companies which started even before that, they offered PR with the limited scope of media relations only. It was only natural that the entrepreneurs who began these services came from a background of journalism, seen as a natural hunting ground for the nascent PR industry.

1.6.1 Public Relations Agencies' in India in the 1990s

India came with many advantages in the context of PR - it showed a consistently high growth rate of the economy; the initial penetration of PR had been low leaving much scope for growth, and the internet & traditional media also penetrated exponentially giving rise to the quick rise of PR in India. Though some international PR agencies (usually offshoots of advertising agencies) like Ogilvy PR set base in India in mid-1980s, they floundered to find a firm footing especially since their core focus remained mainly in advertising services. By early 1990s, after the opening up of the Indian economy, several other PR agencies, notably Perfect Relations, Text 100 and Genesis started with a core focus on PR alone. This decade also saw the advent of Indian IPO agencies offshoots like Ad factors.

1.6.2 PR began to offer PR services as a freebee along with their IPO services

Unlike Edward Bernays and Ivy Lee in the United States, Indian Public Relations unfortunately did not have any mentor or any significant thought leader in the initial decade. PR agencies were seen to be waving a magic wand to create an intangible called image.

1.6.3 PR agencies in India in the 2000s

If the 90s were the starting block for the Indian PR sector, the next decade was the growth era. Blue Lotus, an awarded agency, began in 2002. Significant in this time was the full buyout of Genesis by Burson Mars teller, and the investment in Hammer & Partners by MS&L, a Publicis company. The new century saw new agencies being born with a new approach to PR. Edelman entered India with by taking over Roger Pereira, the grand old man of PR by 2008 and with the decade almost coming to a close, 2008 saw the birth of i9 Communications, a specialist in Lifestyle, Entertainment and hospitality PR. Several such boutique agencies also started in other parts of the country. In 2011, Le Communiqué Consultancy, a complete Communications Management Consultancy, was formed by Industry experts like Yusuf uz Zaman and SAUV was also started in this year by Uday Sahay. After the economic slowdown and the resultant market crashes worldwide, several international PR agencies suffered enormous losses when clients cut back marketing budgets. This forced these agencies to turn to higher growth markets like India and China. India naturally took a higher priority due to its large English-speaking base, stable political governance and consistent legal structure. The corporates need for image building and strategic PR is very well understood and accepted.

According to the 2007 report on The State of the Public Relations Industry prepared by Paul Holmes (author of the Holmes Report), the western growth of PR has almost plateaued to a stable range of 9% to 11%, with the growth geographies being India (as too China) growing at four times the Western pace. To quote the report, "The greatest future in growth is expected to come in China and India, with good prospects for growth in Eastern Europe (particularly those countries recently admitted to the European Union) and in the Middle East (albeit from a very small base)."

Naturally then, India and similar paced economies have become favored destinations for global PR firms keen to extract their share of growth from this market. The late realization by many global majors that India has an equal or superior potential than China, has left quite a few panting in the race for market share.

1.6.4 Recent PR Crisis and its mitigation

On January 7, 2009, Ramalinga Raju, the erstwhile chairman of Satyam Ltd., India's leading IT firm, made an admission of conscious fraud & misreporting perpetrated by him over several years. The media, who had eulogized him till then, suddenly turned on him with a vengeance, conscious that they had also failed in their duty as watchdogs of businesses. This crisis coincided with the peak of the global crisis and held

the potential to snowball into credibility & trust issue for brand India and its IT firms, where several billion dollars worth of services were being outsourced every year. The crisis also impacted several companies associated with Satyam including EMRI (Emergency Medical Response Institute), a not-for-profit Endeavour (for running free ambulance services) in which Satyam had committed 5% of running costs with the balance 95% coming from various state governments.

However, the Indian government took quick action and set up an interim board consisting of industry stalwarts for the company to assess the true worth of Satyam and to seek a suitable investor & management. The swiftly conducted and fiercely contested bid was won by Mahindra & Mahindra and Satyam was merged with a group IT Company. This swift & timely execution and the confidence-building measures taken by the interim board helped regain faith by the customers and the world at large in the Indian IT industry.

Crisis in the Indian PR industry

After the global slowdown hit that Indian PR agency in 2008, it took a further hit in November 2010 due to what has come to be known as the 'Radiagate' scam. Open Magazine in an expose, covered the story of Nira Radia's nefarious power-dealings. An Income Tax phone tap collected more than 5000 tapes and hundreds of these tapes were leaked and found their way into Outlook magazine's website. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) interrogated Radia several times and as fallout of the tapes, the Telecom minister, A. Raja, with whom Radia had close links was also forced to resign. Several prominent journalists like Barkha Dutt and Vir Sanghvi were also in the middle of the quagmire, caught in power-lobbying conversations with Radia.

1.6.5 PR Education and academics in India

Public Relations have been taught as a curriculum for the last decade or so in India. Whistling Woods International's School of Communication (SOC) in Mumbai has a post graduate program that allows one to specialize in PR and Corporate Communications along with an MBA (global) degree in Media and Entertainment. While some PR specialist courses exist in The Delhi School of Communication (Delhi), Xavier's Institute of Communications (Mumbai) and Symbiosis Institute of Media and Communication (Pune), most of the courses are combined with Journalism or Mass Communications. The Mudra Institute of Communications (MICA) is mainly focused on advertising and the 6 year old AICAR (Asian Institute of Communications & Research) started with an MBA and communication which soon became limited to

advertising only, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (BVB) spread across the country offers PR courses. BVBs are located in all major cities that include New Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata.

Although the advertising sector is faring better than the PR sector in the North East, the absence of a full-fledged institute dedicated to advertising is causing a great deal of inconvenience to students who want to make a career in this field. Cotton College along with Guwahati University is offering Mass Communications courses but they are not PR specific. Also, Tezpur Central University's course is MA Mass Communication rather than PR alone.

The state of PR pedagogy in India is yet getting the rigour that the industry requires. The high-growth PR industry is unfortunately caught in the classical trap of oversupply of clients and a shortage of good talent. Also, the industry needs to move cohesively towards a curriculum and talent that will be able to meet their needs. The Indian School of Communications, a school floated by prominent people from the PR industry brings formal theory and practice of PR within the reach for the PR student.

1.6.6 Public Relations Society of India (PSRI)

The national association of PR practitioners' .It was established in 1958 to promote the recognition of public relations as a profession and to formulate and interpret to the public the objectives and the potentialities of public relations as a strategic management function. The society functioned as an informal body till 1966 when it was registered under the Indian Societies Act XXVI of 1961, with headquarters in Mumbai. The father-figure of professional PR practitioners in India, Kali H. Mody, was the founder President of PRSI from 1966 to 1969.

Self Assessment Questions

Q.1 An announcement distributed to members of the press in order to supplement or replace an oral presentation is called _____.

- A. Handout
- B. Hand copy
- C. Supplementary copy
- D. Press copy

Q.2 Computer Programme that searches databases and Internet sites for documents containing keywords specified by a user is called _____.

- A. E-Newsletter
- B. Search engine
- C. Blogging
- D. Editorial

Q.3 An advertising agency that provides a comprehensive professional service to clients is called _____.

- A. Media Management
- B. Comprehensive Media
- C. Full Service Agency
- D. Advertising media

Q.4 The term Public Relations was first used in 1882 in the Yale Law School by _____.

- A. Dorman Eaton
- B. Lee Harris
- C. Abraham Lee
- D. Ivy Lee

Q.5 The Greek adage the voice of the people is the voice of the God is _____.

- A. Big Populi
- B. Vox Populi
- C. Voice Populi
- D. Public Populi

Answers: 1 - A, 2 - B, 3 - C, 4 - A, 5 - B