

**The Institute for Public Relations**  
University of Florida • PO Box 1184400 • Gainesville, FL 32611-8400  
(353) 392-0280 • (352) 846-1122 (fax)  
www.instituteforpr.com

# **The Magic Communication Machine**

**Examining the Internet's Impact on Public  
Relations, Journalism, and the Public**

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**Principal Investigator:**

**Donald K. Wright, Ph.D.  
Professor of Communication  
1000 University Commons  
University of South Alabama  
Mobile, AL 36688-0002  
(251) 380-0850  
DonaldKWright@aol.com**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This study examines the Internet's impact on public relations professionals, journalists, and the American public, and researches Internet credibility, and the impact new technologies are having on relationships between journalists and public relations people.
- As the world's largest information source, the Internet provides the public relations industry with an exciting communication medium offering unlimited message dissemination potential.
- Some believe special interest groups, NGOs, and a variety of anti-corporate and anti-capitalism organizations (ACOs), have taken better advantage of these opportunities and used the Internet more effectively for public relations purposes than many corporations and most public relations and advertising agencies. Most corporate and agency websites focus upon information dissemination and communication outputs, However, special interest, NGO, and ACO web sites focus on communication outcomes, and provide more interactive opportunities which enhance relationship development.
- As the America Online/Roper Starch Cyberspace indicates, the American Internet audience continues to grow each year, and is becoming decidedly mainstream. Research conducted by the Pew Research Center clearly shows new communication technologies and the Internet are changing the way Americans live.
- Research also shows American journalism has been impacted dramatically by the Internet which continues to attract key segments of the national news audience. Studies conducted by Middleberg and Ross indicate journalists use the Internet extensively, particularly to send and receive e-mail messages and to conduct article research.
- Journalists believe the Internet has made their jobs easier and improved the quality of their work. Journalists now rate e-mail equal to the telephone as the preferred medium for interviewing news sources. And, journalists report they regularly use the Internet when gathering information for news stories.
- American news consumers also are extremely attracted to the Internet. One-in-three Americans now go online for news at least once each week.
- Although most research finds minimal differences between the credibility of information received from the Internet and that obtained from traditional news sources, some report web-based information is more credible. All factors being equal, information delivered via the Internet has the potential to be perceived as being as credible and believable as information delivered through any other mass communication source.
- A significant factor with Internet credibility is the fact information can be placed online without editorial filters so prevalent with other mass media. A big advantage of the Internet as a public relations medium is the reality it has the potential to provide direct and immediate access to specific target audiences, thus bypassing journalists and traditional news media.
- The most important component in credibility and believability of Internet information is the source of the information. Some web sites are considered more credible than others, and some sources are more believable than others.
- Since effective public relations not only involves sending information to target audiences, but also requires forming relationships with these audiences, the building of relationships with key publics is a fundamental goal of what public relations professionals do. This monograph represents one of the first studies examining how the Internet is impacting relationships between journalists and those who practice public relations.

- This monograph reports on a web-based survey of a random sample of public relations professionals conducted by The Institute for Public Relations with a grant from the WORLDCOM Public Relations Group. Subjects came from the US and 20 foreign countries. Results of the survey included these highlights:
- There was virtually unanimous agreement (98%) when the public relations professionals were asked if recent advances in technology such as e-mail and the Internet have had an impact on how they do their jobs.
- An equally high number (97%) say recent advances in technology such as e-mail and the Internet have had an impact on relationships between public relations professionals and journalists. And most (86%) of those who believe there has been an impact say it has been positive.
- Nearly two-thirds (65%) indicate the increased information the new technologies have provided has strengthened the professional ties between journalists and public relations people. Only 19% believe the technologies have weakened these ties.
- More than half (53%) say increased information the new technologies have provided has strengthened the personal rapport and relationships between journalists and public relations people. Less than a third (31%) suggest they have weakened this rapport.
- Most (91%) claim they now stay in touch with more people in their business and professional environments than they did before e-mail, and 85% they now stay in touch with more people in their personal environments than they used to.
- Responses differ considerably, however, when public relations professionals are asked if they believe technology teaches interpersonal communication skills. More than half (55%) disagree with this statement and only 19% agree.
- The public relations professionals surveyed consider national newspapers the most believable news source, followed by local newspapers, newspaper web sites, and network or national TV stations.
- Almost half (47%) said they perceived no credibility difference between face-to-face and e-mail communication in terms of information received from a friend. Half (50%) said face-to-face communication was more credible.
- Nearly half (47%) said there was no difference between receiving business information via e-mail or through face-to-face communication. Face-to-face was considered to be more credible for business/professional communication by 46 percent.
- Most (90%) agreed the ability to transmit instantaneous written communication via e-mail and to access real-time information via the Internet has quickened the pace of decision-making in news journalism.
- About half (53%) thought the need to disseminate information with rapid speed via the Internet has compromised the truth, credibility and believability of news journalism.
- Results clearly show e-mail has become the most popular method of delivering information to journalists.
- The average public relations professional surveyed in this study spends between 15 and 19 hours online each week, and goes online 5.8 days during an average week.

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## INTRODUCTION

More than half a century ago, Harold D. Lasswell, a distinguished Yale University sociologist, suggested the scientific study of the process of communication could be narrowed down to an examination of, "*Who says What to Whom through which Channel with what Effect.*"<sup>1</sup> While this noted paradigm would be at the center of much of the communication study and research which took place for several decades, even Lasswell noted most of these research concerns focused upon senders, messages, receivers and effects, with minimal interest in the channels communication was being disseminated through.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, in Lasswell's time there were not very many channels available for communication dissemination. Just prior to the mid-point of the last century, he listed "radio, press, film" as the only communication channels scholars were researching.<sup>3</sup> All of that changed dramatically with the introduction and then the development of television, but the greatest technological impact upon communication message delivery – the "channel" in terms of Lasswell's paradigm – came with the arrival of the Internet.

As we pointed out three years ago in another monograph, the Internet represents a paradigmatic shift in communications and public relations, creating the possibility of fully two-way communications between organizations and their publics.<sup>4</sup> Since the Internet provides fast, easy, and immediate access to so much information it is having a unique impact on the way public relations is practiced.

By utilizing its unlimited potential, the Internet has grown into an extremely powerful communication medium which public relations professionals simply can not ignore. Estimates suggest the Internet is now used for a variety of communications and information sharing tasks by more than 275 million people in at least 175 countries.<sup>5</sup> And research strongly suggests people all over the world rely considerably upon the Internet for gathering information.<sup>6</sup> There should be absolutely no question the Internet has developed into a magic communication machine.

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<sup>1</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society," in Lyman Bryson (Ed.), *The Communication of Ideas*, (New York: Institute for Religious and Social Studies, 1948. Also see, Harold D. Lasswell, "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society," in Wilbur Schramm (Ed.), *Mass Communications* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), pp. 117-130.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Lasswell, 1975, *op.cit.* .

<sup>4</sup> Donald K. Wright, *Corporate Communications Policy Concerning the Internet: A Survey of the Nation's Senior-Level, Corporate Public Relations Officers*, (Gainesville, FL., The Institute for Public Relations, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Nielsen // NetRatings. Available online at: <http://www.nielsennetratings.com/>. Accessed in August 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew J. Flanagin and Miriam J. Metzger, "Perceptions of Internet Information Credibility," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 77, No. 3, Autumn, 2000, pp. 515-540; Adrienne W. Fawcett, "Online Users Go for Facts Over Fun," *Advertising Age*, October 14, 1996,

## ABOUT THIS MONOGRAPH

This monograph examines the impact the Internet and other new technologies are having on three major groups of people – the general public, journalists, and public relations professionals. It also examines the perceived credibility of the Internet, and looks at what impact the new technologies are having on relationships between public relations professionals and journalists. Results of a variety of research studies are used to examine technology's impact upon the general public and journalists, and a special web-based survey was developed to obtain information about technology's effect on those who practice public relations.

The new technologies have radically changed how all three of these groups of people communicate. In a groundbreaking research study published in 2000, IMT Strategies estimated the Internet's impact on global commerce at less than one percent of the value of all global trade, but said the Internet's impact on communication throughout the world has been "logarithmically large."<sup>7</sup>

## THE INTERNET AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

In addition to quickly becoming the world's largest information source, the Internet has rapidly developed into an important medium for the distribution of public relations messages. New technologies have dramatically changed the way public relations works by providing new and more efficient ways in which communication messages can be produced, distributed, displayed, and stored.

As public relations scholars Pavlik and Dozier have written, "little is known with great certainty about the future of the information superhighway except that the pace of technological change is likely to continue to accelerate."<sup>8</sup> Cutlip, Center, and Broom point out successful public relations professionals have been matching appropriate media with suitable messages since public relations began.<sup>9</sup> They also say, "The Internet represents the most ubiquitous leading edge of what is a major communication revolution. The digital world has changed communication within organizations and between organizations and their various publics."<sup>10</sup> Newsom, VanSlyke Turk, and

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p. 46; Andrew J. Flanagin and Miriam J. Metzger, "Internet Use in the Contemporary Media Environment," *Human Communication Research*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2000), pp. 153-181.

<sup>7</sup> "The Impact of the Internet on Public Relations and Business Communications: How New Models of Communications Will Create Risks and Opportunities for Communications Professionals," in *Tactical Insights*, (IMT Strategies: Stamford, Connecticut, 2000). Also available online at <http://www.imtstrategies.com>. Accessed in June 2001.

<sup>8</sup> John V. Pavlik and David M. Dozier, *Managing the Information Superhighway: A Report on the Issues Facing Communications Professionals*, (Gainesville, FL: The Institute for Public Relations, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Scott M. Cutlip, Allen H. Center and Glen M. Broom, *Effective Public Relations*, 8<sup>th</sup> Ed., (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2000), p. 284.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

Kruckeberg now say, "It is virtually impossible to effectively practice public relations today without using the Internet."<sup>11</sup> And, Wilcox, Ault, and Agee suggest, cyberspace communication is "a significant, swiftly expanding tool for public relations practitioners."<sup>12</sup> One Internet scholar says public relations professionals, journalists, and advertisers use the new technologies to work more effectively, and in the process work faster, more efficiently, and reduce costs in the process.<sup>13</sup>

In 1998, Bunz found the Internet was having a strong impact on public relations in her survey of professionals in the US and seven other countries.<sup>14</sup> Among other findings, Bunz reported boundary spanning activities such as two-way communication were being improved and facilitated through functions such as e-mail and the Internet.<sup>15</sup> This research reported minimal differences between American public relations professionals and practitioners from other countries in terms of either their impressions of the Internet's impact on their jobs or the level of their Internet expertise.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the obvious impact of providing organizations with an exciting communication medium offering unlimited message dissemination potential, the Internet also has provided that same opportunity for those wishing to distribute negative public relations messages. This has resulted in making the task of monitoring everything said about an organization on the Internet by friend and foe, an important component of contemporary public relations practice. As Cutlip, Center, and Broom point out, "Rumors on the Internet have the potential to influence labor negotiations, attract regulatory attention, drive stock prices up or down, and increase or decrease sales."<sup>17</sup>

Organizational reputations can be damaged, the value of brands can suffer, and goodwill can be diminished by those accessing the kind of uncontrolled and uncensored messages which have appeared on the Internet. Some refer to this as the Internet's "dark side" where the dissemination of false and misleading information can result in serious injury.<sup>18</sup> Jackson and Stoakes have urged public relations professionals to

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<sup>11</sup> Doug Newsom, Judy VanSlyke Turk, and Dean Kruckeberg, *This is PR: The Realities of Public Relations*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2000), p. 399.

<sup>12</sup> Dennis L. Wilcox, Phillip H. Ault, and Warren K. Agee, *Public Relations: Strategy and Tactics*, (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> John V. Pavlik, *New Media and the Information Superhighway*, (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1996), p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Ulla K. Bunz, "An International Communications Perspective on Professional Internet Usage: A Survey of Public Relations Practitioners' Usage of the Internet in Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom with Comparisons to the United States," Unpublished MA thesis, University of South Alabama, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Cutlip, Center, and Broom, *op.cit.*, p. 358

<sup>18</sup> Amy Jackson and Unity Stoakes, "Internet Vigilance: Monitoring Public Opinion Online," *Public Relations Tactics*, November 1997, p. 12.

monitor cyberspace because, "rumors that originate on the Internet often make their way into print and broadcast media before a company ever knows they exist."<sup>19</sup> Two years ago, Ryan surveyed PRSA members and found 99 percent of them used computers to access the Internet.<sup>20</sup> Duke surveyed science public relations practitioners and says they consider the Internet and e-mail essential in their work.<sup>21</sup> She also reports Internet and e-mail use by journalists has increased media coverage of some organizations, because it is now easier for reporters to obtain information.

Some claim the most effective public relations use of the Internet has been made by special interest groups such as environmentalists and hundreds of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that have effectively used the new technologies to advance their positions and by doing so have gained ground with the media, government, and public opinion.<sup>22</sup> Research has found many of these groups are successful because they have effectively used their web sites to build relationships with various publics.<sup>23</sup>

An equal amount of success has been accomplished via Internet web sites falling within the category which has become known as ACOs, an acronym for anti-corporate organizations and anti-capitalism organizations.<sup>24</sup> A variety of religious groups also have used the Internet with considerable effectiveness,<sup>25</sup> There is even a recently revised and updated book – full of practical information written in an easy-to-understand format – designed to help Christians make effective use of the Internet.<sup>26</sup> Most websites hosted by corporations and public relations agencies concentrate upon information dissemination or communication outputs, but many special interest, NGO, and ACO web

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Michael Ryan, "The World Wide Web, Online Resources and Public Relations Practitioners: What They Use and What They Recommend," paper presented to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, New Orleans, August, 1999.

<sup>21</sup> Shearlean Duke, "Wired Science: Use of World Wide Web and E-Mail in Science Public Relations," paper presented to the International Communication Association, Washington, DC, May, 2001.

<sup>22</sup> Ross S. Irvine, "It's Alive! The Internet Fact PR Folks Need to Understand," *ePublicRelations Web Page*, September, 2001. Available online at <http://www.epublicrelations.org/>. Accessed, September 2001. Also see, "Activists' On-Line Effectiveness Demonstrates A New Way to Mobilize Key Publics," *pr Reporter*, Vol. 44, No. 9, February 26, 2001, pp. 1-2.

<sup>23</sup> Maureen Taylor, Michael L. Kent, and William J. White, "How Activist Organizations Are Using the Internet to Build Relationships," *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 27, No. 3, Fall, 2001, pp. 263-284.

<sup>24</sup> Examples of such websites include <http://www.sucks500.com/>, Accessed, September, 2001, and <http://www.cranberrystressline.com/>, Accessed, August 2001.

<sup>25</sup> For examples of effective religious oriented web sites see: <http://www.integritymusic.com>, Accessed, August, 2001; and, <http://www.gospelcom.net>, Accessed, September 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Quentin J. Schultze, *Internet for Christians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Gospel Films Publications, 2000).

sites focus on communication outcomes, and provide more interactive opportunities which enhance relationship development.

Ironically, as Morris and Ogan indicate, during the early years of the Internet's development many communication scholars did not view it as a mass medium.<sup>27</sup> The attitude expressed by DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach in 1989 was typical of many leaders in the communication field. They dismissed the idea of the Internet being a form of mass communication, and compared computers to telephones saying, "Even if computer literacy were to become universal, and even if every household had a personal computer equipped with a modem, it is difficult to see how a new system of mass communication could develop from this base alone."<sup>28</sup> Rankow says similar apprehensions about communication potential were apparent shortly after development of the telephone as a means of communication.<sup>29</sup> Fortunately, communication scholars have come to accept the Internet as the powerful information medium it is. Recently published communication theory books now devote chapters to subjects such as "The Theory of Cyber Communication,"<sup>30</sup> and one goes so far as to suggest, "The new electronic communication media offer possibilities for great change in society."<sup>31</sup>

Middleberg believes public relations professionals are making effective use of the Internet.<sup>32</sup> However, IMT Strategies, which recently surveyed 100 US public relations professionals in an attempt to define what kinds of impact the Internet was having on the field, say public relations people have not yet come to understand the impact the Internet could have on their field.<sup>33</sup> Results of this survey found the new technologies have provided public relations professionals with the ability to communicate with more targeted audiences and more media, but suggest these new technologies have not yet been used to their full potential.<sup>34</sup> And, the Internet also has provided a medium which makes it possible to bypass other media and permit communication directly from an organization to its customers, stockholders, employees, and other strategic publics.

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<sup>27</sup> Merrill Morris and Christine Ogan, "The Internet as Mass Medium," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 1, No. 4, September, 1998.

<sup>28</sup> Melvin DeFleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach, *Theories of Mass Communication*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., (New York: Longman, 1989), pp. 335-336.

<sup>29</sup> Lana Rakow, *Gender on the Line: Women, the Telephone and Community Life*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

<sup>30</sup> Severin and Tankard, *op.cit.*, pp. 366-388.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p, 384.

<sup>32</sup> Don Middleberg, *Winning PR in the Wired World: Powerful Communications Strategies for the Noisy Digital Space*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> "The Impact of the Internet on Public Relations and Business Communications," IMT Strategies, Stamford, CT, 2000. Available online at <http://www.imtstrategies.com>. Accessed in June 2001.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

## BRIEF HISTORY OF THE INTERNET

The global Internet which has played such a major role in the development of communication and public relations had its roots as a Cold War project nearly half a century ago, and originally was designed for US military communication in the event of a Soviet Union nuclear strike.<sup>35</sup> The birth of computer versions of the Internet can be traced to 1957 when the USSR launched *Sputnik I*, a earth orbiting satellite prompting the US to create the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) within the Ministry of Defense.<sup>36</sup> In addition to being the technological think-tank of American defense efforts, ARPA opened a computer research program in 1962.<sup>37</sup>

In 1969 additional developments took place with electronic connections of researchers who were working on a Department of Defense project at four US universities.<sup>38</sup> ARPA's network grew throughout the 1970s, and the first e-mail program was introduced by Ray Tomlinson in 1972.<sup>39</sup> The restrictive nature of ARPA led to the development of several additional networks such as Usenet, BITNET, and Fidonet which provided greater public access to technologies being used on the APRANET.<sup>40</sup> The concept of Domain Name Servers (DNS) was introduced in 1984.<sup>41</sup> This initiated the development of categories into US Internet addresses – such as ".com" (commercial), ".org" (international organizations), ".edu" (educational institutions), and ".gov" (government agencies) – along with a series of codes for other countries.

The Internet continued to develop when a number of national governments encouraged its use through higher educational systems. In the US, for example, the Internet is one of the few technologies that developed more fully within universities and higher education than within public and private organizations. The concept of the World Wide Web was enhanced in 1989 when British researcher Tim Berners-Lee created HTML, thus permitting the transmission of text, pictures, and sound in a single format.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Bruce Sterling, "A Short History of the Internet," *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, February 1993, pp. 15-23. Also available online at <http://www.forthnet.gr/forthnet/isoc/short.history.of.internet/>. Accessed in August, 2001.

<sup>36</sup> R.T. Griffiths, "Internet for Historians, History of the Internet, The Development of the Internet," unpublished paper, March 1999. Available at <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/history/ivh/INTERNET>. Accessed in September 2001.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> C. Barron, "The European Internet Connection: Guide to European Web Sites," *Europe*, February, 1997, pp. 6-9.

<sup>39</sup> "The History of the Internet and the WWW." Author and date of publication unknown. Available at <http://members.magnet.at/dmayr/history.htm>. Accessed in September, 2001.

<sup>40</sup> Henry Edward Hardy, "The History of the Net," Unpublished MA thesis, Grand Valley State University, 1994.

<sup>41</sup> Griffiths, *op.cit.*

<sup>42</sup> Barron, *op.cit.*

According to Griffiths,<sup>43</sup> in 1994 there were about three million domain hosts and approximately 3,000 web sites, and those numbers virtually have more than doubled each year since. At last count, late in 2000, there were 93 Million domain hosts and 10 Million web sites. As Sterling asserts, "The future of the Internet bids fair to be bigger and exponentially faster."<sup>44</sup>

### CREDIBILITY AND THE INTERNET

The degree of credibility audiences give the Internet when compared to other information media is a very important question for public relations because people are less likely to pay attention to media they do not perceive as credible. Studies on the credibility of newspapers, magazines, radio, and television continually report if people do not believe what they read, see, and hear, they are less likely to pay attention to it.<sup>45</sup> And, as Johnson and Kaye point out, "lack of trust in information obtained from the Web could keep it from becoming a major source of news."<sup>46</sup>

The belief some information sources are more reliable than others dates back to ancient Greece and the work of Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle.<sup>47</sup> Self recently reviewed these works and says sources have credibility if (a) "their message's rightness is perceived by the audience," (b) "they rightly read how to reveal themselves to particular audiences," and (c) "because of audience characteristics."<sup>48</sup> Severin and Tankard suggest credibility research in communication is closely connected to research in the areas of persuasion and attitude change.<sup>49</sup>

Even though Internet and web-based information is potentially inaccurate and biased, research is finding people increasingly rely upon it as an information medium. Callahan claims journalists make considerable use of Internet as an information gathering tool.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Griffiths, *op.cit.*

<sup>44</sup> Sterling, *loc.cit.*

<sup>45</sup> Cecile Gaziano, "How Credible is the Credibility Crisis?" *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 2, Summer, 1988, pp. 267-78, 375.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas J. Johnson and Barbara K. Kaye, "Crusing is Believing?: Comparing Internet and Traditional Sources on Media Credibility Measures," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No. 2, Summer, 1998, pp. 325-340. (325).

<sup>47</sup> Aristotle, *The Works of Aristotle II – Rhetoric* (Trans. by W. Rhys Roberts), Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952); and Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato – Phaedrus* (Trans. by B. Jowett, Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952).

<sup>48</sup> Charles C. Self, "Credibility," in *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research* (N.B. Salwen and D.W. Stacks, eds., Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996, p. 423.

<sup>49</sup> Werner J. Severin and James W. Tankard, Jr., *Communication Theories: Origins, Methods, Uses in the Mass Media*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 2001), pp. 139, 158, 181.

<sup>50</sup> Christopher Callahan, *A Journalist's Guide to the Internet: The Net as a Reporting Tool*, (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1999).

And, a 1999 study found 97 percent of American journalists have used the Internet indirectly in researching information for news stories, while 73 percent have used it directly.<sup>51</sup>

Although most studies appear to find Internet information to be about as credible as that received from traditional news sources, some report web-based information as being the most credible.<sup>52</sup> Some studies have found no significant differences between the credibility of Internet information and that obtained from more traditional media sources.<sup>53</sup> Other research reports Americans find Internet information to be as credible as that obtained from television, radio, and magazines, but not as credible as newspaper information.<sup>54</sup>

A significant variable in the perception of Internet credibility is the fact information can be placed online without editorial filters so prevalent with the other mass media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. Starobin points out traditional news sources are subject to a variety of social and professional pressures which require accurate and unbiased dissemination of information, but says the Internet is not subject to similar constraints.<sup>55</sup> Johnson and Kaye agree.<sup>56</sup> Since the Internet does not utilize the same gatekeeping functions as traditional news media, White believes some organizations now bypass the news media and manage communication directly between the company and specific target audiences.<sup>57</sup> Flannigan and Metzger say some information obtained via the Internet might be "dubious or difficult to appraise."<sup>58</sup> Springston reports, "the Internet might level the playing field between large and small organizations," since it provides easy opportunities for those opposed to a company to

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<sup>51</sup> Craig Trumbo, Kim J. Sprecker, Rebecca J. Dumalo, Gi Woong Yun, and Shearlean Duke, "Use of E-Mail and the Web by Science Writers," *Science Communication*, Vol. 22, No. 4, June, 2001, pp. 347-378.

<sup>52</sup> Johnson and Kaye, *op.cit.*

<sup>53</sup> "Internet Sapping Broadcast News Audience," The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2000. Available online at <http://www.people-press.org/media00rpt.htm>. Accessed in June, 2001.

<sup>54</sup> Flanagan and Metzger, (2000), *op.cit.*

<sup>55</sup> Paul Starobin, "On the Square," *National Journal*, May, 1996, pp. 1145-1149.

<sup>56</sup> Johnson and Kaye, *op.cit.*

<sup>57</sup> Candace White, "The World Wide Web as a Public Relations Medium," *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 25, No. 4, Winter, 1999, pp. 405-419.

<sup>58</sup> Flannigan and Metzger (2000), *op.cit.*, p. 517.

come together in communication.<sup>59</sup> This unique characteristic of the Internet is fostering new concerns about the honesty and integrity of information distributed via the Internet.<sup>60</sup>

The most important component in credibility and believability of information contained on the Internet is the source of the information. Some web sites are considered more credible than others, and some sources are more believable than others. Sundar found direct quotes from reliable sources enhanced the perceived credibility of online news stories.<sup>61</sup> Although it was originally thought the factor structures relating to perceived credibility might be different for printed and online information, recent research finds a striking similarity between the two.<sup>62</sup> This suggests the same rules apply when comparing the perceived credibility of online and printed information.

Another important concern regarding credibility and believability of Internet messages for public relations professionals relates to how reliable journalists consider information delivered to them via cyberspace. Garrison says the leading problems journalists have in using online sources are (a) verification of facts, (b) web sites containing unreliable information, (c) badly sourced information, and (d) lack of source credibility.<sup>63</sup>

Essentially then, all factors being equal, information delivered via the Internet has the potential to be perceived as being just as credible and believable as information delivered through any other mass communication source, provided the Internet information originated with a credible and believable source.

## HOW DOES THE INTERNET IMPACT RELATIONSHIPS?

Most public relations campaigns not only involve sending information to target audiences, but also require forming relationships with the receivers of these communication messages. In recent years a number of articles have appeared on topics concerning technical, legal, ethical, and other issues involving the public relations and the Internet.<sup>64</sup> However, there is a scarcity of research on how the new technologies are

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<sup>59</sup> Jeffrey K. Springston, "Public Relations and New Media Technologies: The Impact of the Internet," in Robert L. Heath, Ed., *Handbook of Public Relations*, (Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage, 2001), pp. 603-614.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew Calabrese and Mark Borchert, "Prospects for Electronic Democracy in the United States: Rethinking Communication and Social Policy," *Media, Culture and Society*, Vol. 18, April, 1996, pp. 249-268.

<sup>61</sup> S. Shyam Sundar, "Effect of Source Attribution on Perception of Online News Stories," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No. 1, Spring, 1998, pp. 55-68.

<sup>62</sup> S. Shyam Sundar, "Exploring Receivers' Criteria for Perception of Print and Online News," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 76, No. 2, Summer, 1999, pp. 373-386.

<sup>63</sup> Bruce Garrison, "Journalists Perceptions of Online Information-Gathering," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 77, No. 3, Autumn, 2000, pp. 500-514.

<sup>64</sup> Wright, *op.cit.* Also see, Melissa A. Johnson, "Public Relations and Technology: Practitioners Perspectives," *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Vol. 9, No. 3, Summer, 1997, pp. 213-236; Robert Grupp and William G. Margaritis, "Face Off: Who Should Own the Web Site?" *Public Relations Strategist*, Vo. 5, No. 4, Winter, 2000, pp. 30-35; G.A. Marken, PR E-Mail Overused,

impacting relationships between public relations professionals and journalists. According to many, this monograph might be the first publication to address this issue.

Although not specifically addressing relationships, Duke reports the public relations professionals she surveyed make considerable use of e-mail but do not believe it ever will replace face-to-face communication as the best way to interact with journalists.<sup>65</sup> Hon and Grunig call building relationships with key publics the fundamental goal of public relations.<sup>66</sup> They stress, "Public relations practitioners need special skills to negotiate relationships with management and with multiple publics because maintaining relationships with one public may make it difficult to maintain a relationship with another public with competing goals."<sup>67</sup> Cutlip, Center, and Broom insist the relationships between senders and receivers of public relations messages deliver a huge impact on the communication process.<sup>68</sup>

In the early development of public relations, research designed to evaluate effectiveness almost always focused upon communication outputs. Such measures concentrated on messages themselves and the amount of attention or exposure a public relations effort received. Later, evaluation research would focus upon communication outcomes measuring whether or not messages actually reached their intended audiences, and whether or not the messages were understood, were paid attention to, and were retained. These studies also looked for any evidence suggesting the messages resulted in any change in opinion, attitude, or behavior.

As the late Pat Jackson frequently pointed out, output and outcome measurements both focus upon short-term successes and the real value of a sustained public relations campaign can only be evaluated by examining the impact of long-term relationships developed between an organization and its publics.<sup>69</sup> Today, most public relations scholars believe the best way to determine the value of public relations is by measuring the quality of relationships an organization has with its strategic publics. Most business leaders agree. Scott McNealy, Chairman and CEO of Sun Microsystems, who is noted for saying, "Information is power and it's all there on the web," recently said, "Business is still about relationships, and technology can help us build and maintain those relationships."<sup>70</sup> And, some are now encouraging communication researchers to become

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Abused, and Invaluable, *Public Relations Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 4, Winter, 1998, pp. 20-22; Reid Goldsborough, "Connecting to the Net Easily," *Public Relations Tactics*, February, 2000, p. 160.

<sup>65</sup> Duke, *op.cit.*

<sup>66</sup> Linda Childers Hon and James E. Grunig, *Guidelines for Measuring Relationships in Public Relations*, (Gainesville, FL: The Institute for Public Relations, 1999).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>68</sup> Cutlip, Center, and Broom, *op.cit.*, p. 258

<sup>69</sup> Patrick Jackson, "Behavior and Relationships in Public Relations," Unpublished remarks to a professional development seminar, Public Relations World Congress 2000, Chicago, IL, October, 2000.

<sup>70</sup> "Interview With Scott McNealy," *PeopleTalk Online*, September-October 2000. Available online at: <http://www.peopletalkonline.com/en/new/peopletalk/sep2000/ceo/>. Accessed in August, 2001.

more active investigating how the new technologies are changing the roles and jobs of professional communicators.<sup>71</sup>

Although the literature currently shows a lack of empirical research studies on the Internet and relationships, there is evidence of some philosophical thought on this topic. Gergen claims the realities of postmodern life are changing the way people view themselves and their relationships, and suggests the Internet, global jet-lag, and the influence of modern media coverage, are all impacting the way people now think about themselves and the people around them.<sup>72</sup> Locke suggests the Internet has dramatically changed many relationships because so many people now transmit information to individuals they cannot see.<sup>73</sup> Using several modern communication technologies – cell phones, e-mail, and the Internet – to make the point, Locke suggests transmitting information is the secondary purpose of communication, and insists conversation and relationship development should be the primary purpose of communication. He believes this problem did not begin with the Internet, and traces its history to the development of the printing press, which introduced the possibility of communication between people who never meet. Bertman believes the accelerated pace of technological and social change has eroded the essence of American society's fundamental values, and argues for a drastic slowdown which would permit people to reassert control over the technologies that now dominate their lives.<sup>74</sup> Borgmann says the world abounds with information because the Internet and other technologies represent the most prominent layer of the current cultural landscape, and he calls for ". . . a theory and an ethics of information theory to illuminate the structure of information and an ethics to get the moral of its development."<sup>75</sup>

Some research about the Internet's impact upon relationships has appeared in social science literature, particularly in psychology. Donn, et al., suggest interpersonal relationships can be formed and fostered on the Internet.<sup>76</sup> Suler not only calls cyberspace "the new frontier in social relationships," but also says Internet relationships might be better in some ways than interpersonal or face-to-face ones.<sup>77</sup> Faloutsos

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<sup>71</sup> Jane B. Singer, "Online Journalists: Foundations for Research into their Changing Roles," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 1, No. 4, September, 1998.

<sup>72</sup> Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*, (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

<sup>73</sup> John L. Locke, *The De-Voicing of Society: Why We Don't Talk to Each Other Anymore*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).

<sup>74</sup> Stephen Bertman, *Hyperculture*, (New York: Praeger, 1998).

<sup>75</sup> Albert Borgmann, *Holding On to Reality: The nature of Information at the Turn of the Millennium*, (Urbana, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>76</sup> Jessic Donn, Richard Sherman, Christian End, Egon Kraan, J. Campbell, Zalhary Birchmeier, Jaimie Klausner, and Mark Rakausas, "Attitudes and Practices Regarding Relationship Formation on the Internet," a paper presented at the American Psychological Association, San Francisco, CA, August, 2001.

<sup>77</sup> John Suler, "The Showdown Between In-Person and Cyberspace Relationships: Some Definitions," *Selfhelp Magazine*, November, 1998. Available online at both of these locations: <http://www.shpm.com/articles/internet/definitions/html>,

reports cyberspace and the Internet are turning a lot of face-to-face and interpersonal relationships into virtual ones.<sup>78</sup> A few studies have started to surface measuring the potential impact of romantic relationships that are either formed and/or maintained through Internet communication.<sup>79</sup> Essentially these articles suggest romantic relationships carried out over the Internet have both advantages and disadvantages.<sup>80</sup>

It is our hope that this monograph, and other research it might encourage, will be a catalyst for a sustained interest in empirical research studies about how the Internet affects relationships in public relations.

## THE INTERNET AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The Internet audience continues to grow each year, and is becoming decidedly mainstream.<sup>81</sup> One of the most thorough landmark research studies examining the impact of the Internet on people's everyday lives is the annual America Online/Roper Starch Cyberstudy which has been conducted each year since 1998. Using a random sample of more than one thousand Americans, this research provides compelling evidence indicating going online is becoming an important part in many people's lives.<sup>82</sup>

The rate of consumer purchasing online is showing phenomenal growth.<sup>83</sup> Recent research results suggest the majority of Americans who use the Internet say they go online to make purchases.<sup>84</sup> The proportion of American Internet users who went online for commercial purposes nearly doubled between 1998 and 2000, and these increases were noted in all areas of commerce including making purchases, booking travel

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and <http://www.rider.edu/users/suler/psyber/showdown.html>. Accessed in September 2001.

<sup>78</sup> Michael Faloutsos, Petros Faloutsos, and Christos Faloutsos, "On Power-Law Relationships of the Internet Topology," a paper presented to the Association for Computing Machinery SIGCOM Conference, Cambridge, MA, September, 1999. Available in *Proceedings, ACM SIGCOM Conference '99*, (New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 1999), pp. 251-262.

<sup>79</sup> D.M. Thomas, "Ruminations on Romance Over the Internet," Unpublished paper available online at [http://www.csl.mtu.edu/cs320/groups1/dmthomas\\_summaries.htm](http://www.csl.mtu.edu/cs320/groups1/dmthomas_summaries.htm). Accessed in August 2001.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Patterson, Sara Kieser, Tridas Mukopadhyay, and William Scherlis, "Internet Paradox: A Social Technology that Reduces Social Involvement and Psychological Well-Being," *American Psychologist*, Vol. 53, No. 9, September, 1998, pp. 1017-1031. Also see, George Topp, "Virtual Immorality," Unpublished paper available online at [http://www.csl.mtu.edu/cs320/groups1/dmthomas\\_home.htm](http://www.csl.mtu.edu/cs320/groups1/dmthomas_home.htm). Accessed in August, 2001.

<sup>81</sup> "The Internet News Audience Goes Ordinary," (Pew Research Center, 1999). Also available online at <http://www.people-press.org/tech98sum>. Accessed in June, 2001.

<sup>82</sup> "The America Online/Roper Starch Worldwide Adult 2000 Cyberstudy," (New York: America Online, October, 2000). Accessed in June 2001.

<sup>83</sup> "The Internet News Audience Goes Ordinary," *op.cit.*

<sup>84</sup> "The America Online/Roper Starch Worldwide Audit 2000 Cyberstudy," *op.cit.*

reservations/tickets, and even online banking.<sup>85</sup> This same study reported Americans also are spending more money online each year, with the average Internet user having approximately \$500 in such expenditures every three months.<sup>86</sup> The number of people who agree they will increase the amount of purchases they make in the future also has risen considerably.<sup>87</sup>

When the first research studies investigating online use were conducted six or seven years ago the majority of Internet users were well-educated, affluent men.<sup>88</sup> Increasingly, however, women, people with modest incomes, and those without university educations have joined the ranks of Internet users.<sup>89</sup> One study found Americans with online connections in their homes during 2000 mirrored the nation's population to a greater extent than those who had home access previously.<sup>90</sup> Another piece of research suggests the Internet is having an even greater impact among younger and better-educated people, claiming more university graduates under 50 years of age go in the Internet each day than regularly watch a nightly network television broadcast.<sup>91</sup>

The Pew Research Center has extensively studied how Americans use the new communication technologies and claims the Internet, "is clearly changing the way Americans live."<sup>92</sup> This research suggest the Internet is attracting key segments of the national audience, and also points out Americans appear to have a tendency to pay attention to national news only when something of great importance is happening.<sup>93</sup>

The America Online/Roper Starch Worldwide Adult 2000 Cyberstudy said this about the adult American online audience in 2000:

- For the first time in 2000, more women (53%) than men (47%) went online in the US, and nearly as many women (49%) as men (51%) are now able to access the Internet from their homes. The 53% to 47% reflects the true gender proportions in the US' general population.
- After years of reporting most Americans who went online were university educated, results now suggest educational attainment of Internet users has shifted more in the

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> "The Internet News Audience Goes Ordinary," *op.cit.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> "The America Online/Roper Starch Worldwide Audit 2000 Cyberstudy," *op.cit.*

<sup>91</sup> "Internet Sapping Broadcast News Audience," The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2000. Available online at <http://www.people-press.org/media00rpt.htm>. Accessed June, 2001.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

direction of general public norms. Of the Americans who went online during 2000, one-third (33%) have a high school education or less, up from 22% in 1999.

- The average income level of people who go online also is changing. In 2000, 24 percent of those who went online had household incomes of less than \$35,000, up from 11 percent a year earlier.<sup>94</sup>

## THE INTERNET'S IMPACT ON AMERICAN JOURNALISM

Research suggests the Internet has become a major news source which is attracting key segments of the national news audience. Although the Pew Research Center reports more Americans get their news from television than from the Internet, regular television news viewership has fallen in recent years while use of the Internet as a news source has increased.<sup>95</sup> The only exception to this trend appears to revolve around coverage of major news events.

For example, during the first few days of the crisis following terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, 78 percent of the American public reported they followed the news very closely. Most (92%) of those seeking news about these terrorist attacks listed television as their major source of news. Only three percent listed the Internet.<sup>96</sup> And, television audiences that week were huge. Nielsen rating numbers suggest nearly 80 million people in 69 percent of the nation's television homes watched TV coverage on September 11<sup>th</sup>.<sup>97</sup> One reason for the lower than usual use of the Internet during a national crisis of this nature relates to the reality at exceptional times, when all television networks are providing live coverage of a news event, it frequently is faster for consumers to get news from television than from the Internet. *Chicago Tribune* reporter James Coates also says many high-speed Internet functions were not technologically prepared to handle the millions of requests they received for access to web sites.<sup>98</sup> This forced many news web sites to abandon color photographs, video, and other bells and whistles of high-bandwidth technology and convert into basic text messages on low-bandwidth levels that require only a small fraction of high-speed transmission capabilities.

While a number of scholars and practitioners have conducted research designed to examine how the Internet has impacted print and broadcast journalism, two of the major pacesetters in this area of study are Don Middleberg and Steven Ross. Middleberg, Chairman and CEO of Middleberg Euro RSCG, was one of the first public relations professionals to understand the impact the Internet would have on public relations.

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> "Poll Finds A United Nation," *USA Today*, September 17, 2001, p. 4A.

<sup>97</sup> Mike Brantley, "Two Thirds of Households Tuned to News Coverage," *Mobile Register*, September 22, 2001, p. 10D.

<sup>98</sup> James Coates, "High Speed Internet Technology Crumbles During Crisis," *Mobile Register*, September 13, 2001, pp. 1D and 5D.

Ross, an associate professor at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, is one of the nation's leading academic authorities on Internet and other new technologies used by journalists. Their research has chronicled journalists' use of the Internet through annual studies which began in 1995 and has explored the symbiotic relationship between the media and the Internet.<sup>99</sup> Middleberg also has encouraged public relations professionals to combine traditional and digital media relations in their communication with journalists.<sup>100</sup>

The most recent Middleberg and Ross survey, which included both print and broadcast journalists, found, "Reporters and editors' use of the Net for e-mail, article research, and finding story ideas, new sources and press releases is at an all-time high."<sup>101</sup> This 2001 report said 98 percent of the journalists surveyed check for e-mail messages daily, and spend an average of 15 hours per week sending and reading e-mail.<sup>102</sup> Other findings include:

- Journalists believe the Internet has made their jobs easier and improved the quality of their work.
- Most journalists enjoy using the Internet and predict reporters who avoid new technologies will not succeed in the future.
- The most popular uses of the Internet for journalists involve e-mail and article research. Many journalists say they use the Internet to add depth and breadth to news stories they write.
- The number of journalists who go online to conduct article research is increasing dramatically. In 2000, 81 percent of print journalists went online daily to conduct such research. In 1999 that figure was 73 percent.
- There has been a dramatic increase in Internet use for the development of news story ideas. More than eighty percent of print journalists search online daily.
- Company Web sites are gaining popularity as information sources especially when no other primary source is available.
- More than two-thirds of American journalists now read publications online.
- One-third of all broadcast journalists want to download audio files from Web sites, and one-fifth want to receive video files.

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<sup>99</sup> Don Middleberg and Steven Ross, *The Middleberg/Ross Survey of Media in the Wired World*, (New York: Middleberg, 2001). Available online at <http://www.middleberg.com/toolsforsuccess/>. The complete Middleberg/Ross Survey is available for purchase by telephoning 212-699-2738.

<sup>100</sup> Don Middleberg, *Winning PR in the Wired World*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000).

<sup>101</sup> "Journalists' Use of Internet at All-Time High." Press release from Middleberg Euro RSCG, April 11, 2001. Also available online at <http://www.middleberg.com/toolsforsuccess/surveyofmedia.cfm>.

<sup>102</sup> Middleberg and Ross, *op.cit.*

- Journalists now rate e-mail equal to the telephone as the preferred medium for interviewing news sources.
- Seventy percent participate in dialogues with readers via e-mail or in discussion groups.
- Most journalists have at least two e-mail addresses. Fewer than ten percent of American journalists say they have no e-mail address.
- Although use of instant messaging by journalists' remains low, more become familiar with this technology each year. The 1999 study reported 76 percent never use instant messaging, but that figure was down to 56 percent in the 2000 study.
- Each year more newspapers permit their Web sites to "scoop" their print product. Only 45 percent prevented this in 2000, down from 58 percent in 1999.<sup>103</sup>

Middleberg and Ross found 81 percent of US print journalists search online daily, but few use topic-specific search engines and many reporters lack knowledge about specialized Web sites.<sup>104</sup> Only 44 percent said they would use Web chat or newsgroup postings as primary or secondary sources, and 47 percent said they would report or spread a story about information that started on the Web if it could be confirmed by an independent source.<sup>105</sup> They also report e-mail and article research are the most popular online activities for journalists.<sup>106</sup>

In addition to the Middleberg and Ross study, research conducted by The Pew Research Center for The People and The Press, has found a rapid emergence of the Internet as a major news source.<sup>107</sup> It also reported a significant decline in broadcast news viewership. The Pew Research Center's report said, "Fully one-in-three Americans now go online for news at least once a week, compared to 20 percent in 1998. And 15 percent say they receive daily reports from the Internet, up from six percent two years ago. At the same time, regular viewership of network news has fallen from 38 percent to 30 percent over this period, while local news viewership has fallen from 64 percent to 56 percent."<sup>108</sup>

It might be significant that the Internet is having such a huge impact as a highly requested information source during a time when cable television and satellite receivers

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<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> "Internet Shaping Broadcast News Audience," *op.cit.*

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*

have provided the American public with access to a seemingly unlimited number of television channels. The Pew research indicates nearly 80 percent of all Americans have the capabilities to receive television broadcasts from either cable or satellites.<sup>109</sup> Other findings of this research include:

- Americans who are interested in news and go online tend to watch less network television news.
- The new technologies appear to be having less of a direct negative impact on cable television news, radio and print media.
- It does not appear Internet use is causing people to spend less time than they normally did watching cable news channels, reading daily newspapers, or listening to radio news.
- All news outlets are being impacted by a slowly declining appetite for news by the American public.
  - Less than half of the American public (45%) says it enjoys keeping up with the news a great deal.
  - Only 48% say they follow national news closely most of the time.
  - Both of these percentages represent a slight decline from surveys conducted in earlier years
- This research found huge differences based upon age.
  - Less than a third (31%) of young adults say they enjoy keeping up with the news.
  - More than half (57%) of Americans age 50 and older enjoy following the news.
  - Although younger Americans do not enjoy following news closely, they do appreciate the wide range of information sources available to them.
  - Older Americans who like following the news often feel overwhelmed by the increasingly crowded media landscape.
  - Internet news is attracting both younger Americans with only a marginal interest in news, and older people.
  - Internet news plays a larger role in the lives of those with access who do not enjoy the news than among those who do.

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

- Internet news with its headline news format and ability to deliver quick updates, is attractive to younger consumers.
- At the same time, the Internet's ability to provide more depth on certain subjects also appeals to individuals with large news appetites, such as affluent college graduates.
- As many younger Americans turn to the Internet for news, the audience for traditional media is aging.
- The growth of Internet news has impacted the way Americans get business and financial information.
  - Among Americans who regularly trade stocks, the Internet has supplanted traditional media as the leading source for stock market quotes and investment advice.
  - The ability of investors to customize their online stock portfolios definitely plays a factor in the popularity of Internet use for investment information.
  - This revolution in financial news has had less of an impact on the general American public and on less than active investors.
  - Still, 16% of all Americans said they would turn first to the Internet for news if the market were to drop 1,000 points.
- The remote control is playing a major role in how Americans, especially young people, watch television news. Three-quarters of those under 20 say they watch television news with a remote control device in hand compared with 54 percent of those over 50.
- There are apparent gender differences in terms of Internet news interests between men and women. Technology is the top draw for men, with women most often seeking information about science and health.
- Overall, the leading online news topic is weather.<sup>110</sup>

Additional research tells us newspapers also have lost ground to the Internet. In a large, national survey of media use, Stempel, Hargrove, and Bernt, found huge gains for Internet use for news and a decline for both local and network television news and for newspapers.<sup>111</sup> Flanagin and Metzger found the Internet was used by information

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Guido H. Stemple III, Thomas Hargrove, and Joseph P. Bernt, "Relation to Use of the Internet to Changes in Media Use from 1995 to 1999," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 77, No. 1, Spring, 2000, pp. 71-79.

seekers more than books, magazines, newspapers, the telephone, electronic mail, or face-to-face communication.<sup>112</sup>

When comparing those who use the Internet for news and those who do not, this research found Internet users were more likely than non-users to be newspaper readers and radio news listeners.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, this study cautioned any declines in traditional news media use should not be blamed on the Internet which appears to attract people who are more interested in seeking information, and who in many cases use the Internet to follow up on news they have received via newspapers, television and other traditional news media.<sup>114</sup>

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Public relations professionals surveyed in this study were selected through a random sample of e-mail addresses from these three sources: the 2000-2001 membership directory of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the 2001 membership directory of the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), and the roster of those who registered to attend Public Relations World Congress 2000, the world's largest ever professional gathering of public relations professionals which PRSA and IPRA co-sponsored in Chicago, Illinois, during October, 2000. The sample was designed in such a way to ensure representativeness of all PRSA and IPRA members, with listed e-mail addresses, plus those who attended the Chicago World Congress.

A web-based questionnaire was designed especially for this research project and was hosted on the web site of the Department of Communication, University of South Alabama. The web site's address is <http://www.comm.usouthal.edu>. E-mail messages were sent to every subject selected in the random sample and the message contained an invitation to participate in the survey and each of these messages contained a direct, embedded "hot link" to the survey's location on the web site. Subjects interested in participating in the study simply had to click their computer's mouse on the embedded link which would immediately lead them to the survey's location on the Internet. Although 1,264 invitations to participate were distributed, 423 of these messages were returned for a variety of reasons the majority of which were either the e-mail address was no longer valid or the recipient was "out of the office" and unable to reply. Every subject received two e-mail invitations to participate with the second one sent three days following the initial contact. Usable responses were received from 276 subjects representing a return rate of 32.8 percent.

The questionnaire contained 42 questions. Of these, 36 were of the closed-ended variety where subjects selected a answer option from a list provided, two were open-ended questions that asked respondents to type their answers, and there were four demographic questions measuring gender, age, country of residence, and a question asking about subject's current employment affiliation.

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<sup>112</sup> Flanagan and Metzger, (2000), *op.cit.*

<sup>113</sup> Stemple, Hargrove, and Bernt, *op.cit.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

Demographics of respondents suggest this research attracted a good cross section of public relations professionals with characteristics representative of the broader audience of communications practitioners. Females constituted 59 percent of the respondents with males accounting for 41 percent. There also was a good distribution across various age groups as 14 percent were younger than 30 years old, 29 percent fell between 30 and 39 years, 25 percent were between 40 and 49 years, 25 percent reported ages between 50 and 59, and eight percent were 60 years of age or older. In terms of employment affiliation, 17 percent worked with agencies, 16 percent were consultants, 27 percent were employed with corporations, eight percent worked in government, three percent were with hospitals, 15 percent came from the not-for-profit sector, 12 percent were from universities or academia, and three percent listed their employment affiliation as "other." Most (89%) of the study's respondents lived in the United States with 11 percent coming from other countries including Afghanistan, Albania, Brazil, Canada, China, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Kuwait, Latvia, India, Netherlands, Netherlands Antilles, Pakistan, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, and Turkey.

## RESULTS

Results will be presented with questions grouped into four categories: relationships with journalists, credibility and believability, the Internet's impact on specific aspects of a public relations person's job, and how practitioners use the Internet. In some instances throughout this section totals might not always equal 100 percent due to rounding.

**Relationships with Journalists:** A huge majority (97%) of the public relations professionals surveyed in this study believe recent advances in technology such as e-mail and the Internet have had an impact on relationships between public relations professionals and journalists. And most (62%) "strongly agree" on this matter. Only one percent of the respondents to this study do not think there has been any impact. Mean scores are based on five-point Likert scale items. Generally speaking, the higher the mean score the "better" (the more agreement, more positive, stronger, etc).

**Responses to the question: *Do you agree recent advances in technology such as e-mail and the Internet have had an impact on relationships between public relations professionals and journalists?***

Strongly Agree	62%	<b>97%</b>
Agree	35%	
Uncertain	2%	
Disagree	1%	<b>1%</b>
Strongly Disagree	0%	

Mean: 4.57

Most (86%) of those who believe there has been an impact say it has been positive, and only six percent suggest the new technologies have created any sort of negative impact between public relations professionals and journalists.

**Responses to the question: *If you answered “Strongly Agree” to the first question, do you believe this impact has been positive or negative?***

Strongly Positive	26%	
Somewhat Positive	60%	<b>86%</b>
Uncertain	8%	
Somewhat Negative	6%	
Strongly Negative	0%	<b>6%</b>
Don't think there has been any impact	0%	

Mean: 4.05

Nearly two-thirds (65%) indicate the increased information the new technologies have provided has strengthened the professional ties between journalists and public relations people. Some (19%) believe the technologies have weakened these ties.

**Responses to the question: *Would you say increased information the new technologies have provided has strengthened the professional ties between journalists and public relations people, or has it caused information overload?***

Considerably strengthened these ties	11%	
Somewhat strengthened these ties	54%	<b>65%</b>
Uncertain/Don't know/No opinion	17%	
Somewhat weakened these ties	17%	
Considerably weakened these ties	2%	<b>19%</b>
Has had no impact	0%	

Mean: 3.55

More than half (53%) believe increased information the new technologies have provided has strengthened the personal rapport and relationships between journalists and public relations people. Less than a third (31%) suggest they have weakened this rapport.

**Responses to the question: *Would you say increased information the new technologies have provided has strengthened the personal rapport and relationships between journalists and public relations people, or has it weakened this rapport?***

Considerably strengthened this rapport	10%	
Somewhat strengthened this rapport	43%	<b>53%</b>
Uncertain/Don't know/No opinion	16%	
Somewhat weakened this rapport	29%	
Considerably weakened this rapport	2%	<b>31%</b>
Has had no impact	0%	

Mean: 3.30

Most (85%) of the public relations professionals surveyed say they now stay in touch with more people in their personal environments than they did before the arrival of e-mail. Twelve percent disagree.

**Responses to the question: *Do you agree you now stay in touch with more people (in your personal environments) than you did before e-mail arrived?***

Strongly Agree	40%	
Agree	45%	<b>85%</b>
Uncertain	3%	
Disagree	12%	
Strongly Disagree	0%	<b>12%</b>

Mean: 4.13

A huge majority (91%) believe they now stay in touch with more people in their business and professional environments than they did before e-mail arrived. Only seven percent disagree with this statement.

**Responses to the question: *Do you agree you now stay in touch with more people (in your business or professional environments) than you did before e-mail arrived?***

Strongly Agree	42%	
Agree	49%	<b>91%</b>
Uncertain	3%	
Disagree	7%	
Strongly Disagree	0%	<b>7%</b>

Mean: 4.26

Responses differ considerably, however, when public relations professionals are asked if they believe technology teaches interpersonal communication skills. More than half (55%) disagree with this statement and 19 percent agree.

**Responses to the question: *Do you agree technology teaches interpersonal communication skills?***

Strongly Agree	6%	
Agree	23%	<b>19%</b>
Uncertain	17%	
Disagree	38%	
Strongly Disagree	17%	<b>55%</b>

Mean: 2.63

**Credibility and Believability:** Subjects were asked how believable they considered information they received from a variety of communication sources including local and national newspapers, newspaper web sites, local and national television stations and their web sites, radio, corporate web sites, e-mail, and from the Internet in general.

Results, displayed in the table which follows, clearly show the most believable information sources in the opinions of public relations professionals surveyed in this study are national newspapers, with a 4.31 ranking on the study's believability scale. Local newspapers and newspaper web sites tied for second with mean scores of 4.12. Network or national television stations came next at 4.00 followed by e-mail from business associates at 3.97.

The "Internet in general" scored 3.21 on this believability index. Business related e-mail (3.97) scored higher than e-mail from friends (3.79). E-mail "from people you do not know" was far and away the least believable on this scale with a score of only 1.88.

	Very Believable	Somewhat Believable	Uncertain	Somewhat Unbelievable	Very Unbelievable	Mean Score
Local Newspapers	24%	70%	1%	4%	1%	4.12
National Newspapers	36%	60%	2%	1%	0%	4.31
Newspaper Websites	24%	68%	6%	2%	0%	4.12
Local TV Stations	10%	65%	12%	11%	2%	3.70
Network or National TV Stations	23%	63%	6%	8%	0%	4.00
Local TV Station Websites	9%	57%	22%	11%	0%	3.63
Network or National TV Websites	19%	61%	14%	6%	0%	3.91
Radio	14%	64%	12%	8%	2%	3.82
Corporate Websites	10%	50%	20%	19%	2%	3.45
E-mail from Friends	26%	41%	19%	11%	2%	3.79
E-mail from Business Associates	26%	53%	14%	6%	1%	3.97
E-mail from People You Do Not Know	0%	5%	21%	32%	43%	1.88
The Internet, in general	3%	43%	30%	21%	4%	3.21

Mean scores on this table are based on responses to a five-point answer scale where "1" equaled "Very Unbelievable" and "5" equaled "Very Believable." Consequently, the higher the mean score the greater the degree of believability in the communication medium.

Our interest turned next to perceived differences in the credibility of information public relations professionals receive via e-mail as compared with face-to-face communication. First, subjects were asked how information they receive from a friend via e-mail compares to information received from that same friend face-to-face. Almost half (47%) reported they perceived no difference between the two delivery methods. Fifty percent said face-to-face communication was more credible and only three percent thought e-mail messages were more credible in this situation.

**Responses to the question: *How does information you receive from a friend via e-mail compare to information you receive from that same friend via-face-to-face communication?***

E-mail is considerably more credible	1%	
E-mail is slightly more credible	2%	<b>3%</b>
No difference between the two	47%	<b>47%</b>
Face-to-face is slightly more credible	26%	
Face-to-face is considerably more credible	24%	<b>50%</b>
Uncertain/No opinion/Don't know	2%	

When subjects were asked this same question in terms of information they might receive from a business associate, results were very similar. Nearly half (47%) said there was no difference between receiving business information via e-mail or through face-to-face communication. Many (46%) said face-to-face was more credible, and eight percent thought e-mail would be more credible.

**Responses to the question: *How does information you receive from a business associate compare to information you receive from that same person via-face-to-face communication?***

E-mail is considerably more credible	1%	
E-mail is slightly more credible	7%	<b>8%</b>
No difference between the two	46%	<b>47%</b>
Face-to-face is slightly more credible	29%	
Face-to-face is considerably more credible	17%	<b>46%</b>
Uncertain/No opinion/Don't know	1%	

The next question asked about information overload, and 69 percent agreed the Internet has caused information overload with 21 percent disagreeing.

**Responses to the question: *Some say e-mail and the Internet have caused information overload. What about you? Do you agree the Internet and e-mail have caused information overload?***

Strongly Agree	20%	
Agree	49%	<b>69%</b>
Uncertain	10%	
Disagree	19%	
Strongly Disagree	2%	<b>21%</b>

Mean: 3.69

There was considerable agreement when subjects were asked if they thought the ability to transmit instantaneous written communication via e-mail and to access real-time information via the Internet has quickened the pace of decision-making in news journalism. Most (90%) agreed with this statement. Only three percent disagreed.

**Responses to the question: *Do you agree the ability to transmit instantaneous written communication via e-mail and to access real-time information via the Internet has quickened the pace of decision-making in news journalism?***

Strongly Agree	42%	
Agree	48%	<b>90%</b>
Uncertain	7%	
Disagree	3%	
Strongly Disagree	0%	<b>3%</b>

Mean: 4.29

There was fairly strong agreement on the question asking if the need to disseminate information with rapid speed via the Internet has compromised the truth, credibility and believability of news journalism. More than half (53%) agreed with this statement, and 22 percent disagreed.

**Responses to the question: *Do you agree the need to disseminate information with rapid speed via the Internet has compromised the truth, credibility and believability of news journalism?***

Strongly Agree	16%	
Agree	37%	<b>53%</b>
Uncertain	25%	
Disagree	20%	
Strongly Disagree	2%	<b>22%</b>

Mean: 3.45

**Internet Impact on a Public Relations Professionals Job:** Several questions were asked under this category. First, we wanted to know whether or not the e-mail and the Internet are having any impact on how public relations professionals now deliver information to journalists. As scores on the distribution index reported below clearly indicate, e-mail has become the most popular method of delivering information to journalists. Two-thirds of those surveyed said they would be "very likely" to use e-mail if they had to deliver to a journalist information similar to what is contained in a typical public relations news release. About one-quarter (24%) said they would be "somewhat likely" to select e-mail for this purpose, yielding a distribution index score of 90 percent. Telephone and fax tied for second at 85 percent, and the only other score greater than 50 percent was given to overnight mail at 53 percent.

**Responses to the question, "If you had to deliver information to a journalist in the next few days, how likely would you be to use each of the following delivery methods? (Assume the information is similar to what is contained in a typical public relations news release.)"**

	Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	Uncertain	Somewhat Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Mean Score
E-mail	66%	24%	2%	6%	2%	4.48
Surface (postal) mail	11%	25%	5%	28%	31%	2.55
Overnight mail	14%	39%	6%	21%	20%	3.05
Telephone	49%	36%	5%	8%	2%	4.21
Fax (telephone facsimile)	49%	36%	3%	7%	5%	4.16
In person	12%	20%	7%	32%	28%	2.56
Via my company's website	19%	20%	10%	24%	27%	2.78

Mean scores on this table are based on responses to a five-point answer scale where "1" equaled "Very Unlikely" and "5" equaled "Very Likely." Consequently, the higher the mean score the more likely subjects were to use a particular delivery method.

There was virtually unanimous agreement when the public relations professionals were asked if recent advances in technology such as e-mail and the Internet have had an impact on how they do their jobs. Almost every respondent (98%) agreed with this statement, and only one percent disagreed.

**Responses to the question: *Do you agree the recent advances in technology such as e-mail and the Internet have had an impact on how you do your job?***

Strongly Agree	77%	98%
Agree	21%	
Uncertain	1%	
Disagree	1%	1%
Strongly Disagree	0%	

Mean: 4.74

**How Practitioners Use the Internet:** The average public relations professional surveyed in this study spends between 15 and 19 hours online each week, and goes online 5.8 days during an average week. Nine percent go online for 40 or more hours, 11 percent spend between 30 and 39 hours each week online, 23 percent go there between 20 and 29 hours, 31 percent are online between 10 and 19 hours, 16 percent say they are online for five to nine hours, and nine percent go online less than five hours weekly.

A huge majority (94%) of those surveyed indicate they go online at least five days in an average week. One-third (33%) say they are online seven days each week, 29 percent claim to go online six days per week, and 32 percent say they are online five days in an average week. Three percent say they go online four days per week, two percent go there three days each week, one percent go online two days per week, and one percent claim to go online one day each week.

Subjects also were asked whether they would prefer a daily newspaper, Internet connected computer, radio, telephone, or television if they were stranded alone somewhere for an extended period of time, and could have access to only one of those media. Results saw 69 percent choose the Internet connected computer, 15 percent pick a telephone, ten percent select television, six percent choose a daily newspaper, and one percent select radio.

## **RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS**

The questionnaire contained two open-ended questions, one asked subjects how the Internet has impacted how they perform their public relations jobs and the second inquired about new trends the Internet's presence might be bringing to media relations work in the public relations industry. Appendices at the back of this monograph contain 22 pages of verbatim responses to these questions. A summary is provided here.

**How Has the Internet Impacted How You Do Your Job?:** The first open-ended question asked, "If you believe e-mail and the Internet have had an impact on how you do your job, please describe the most significant aspects of this impact." Most (89%) of the study's 276 respondents answered this question, and verbatims appear in Appendix A. We will examine responses in terms of four categories: thoughts about the positive impact of the new technologies; suggestions directly related to media relations; comments pertaining to the relationships between public relations people and journalists;

and, observations suggesting the new technologies might be having a negative impact on certain parts of the public relations job.

**Positive observations:** Many of the survey's respondents say the Internet and other new technologies have provided them with opportunities to disseminate information quickly and to larger audiences than ever before, leaving them with additional time and money to do other things. Others praise the Internet's ability to help them collaborate with colleagues more efficiently, to communicate quickly with groups and coalitions of people at once, and to conduct research thoroughly with minimal expenditures.

Although acknowledging e-mail and the Internet have made the work pace for public relations professionals faster and more intense, many said the new technologies have helped them become more productive, facilitating the ability for them to get more work done faster, in part because it's now much easier to get in touch with people who can be reached instantly. Many praised the Internet for making their jobs easier, especially when they travel.

The Internet also appears to be having a tremendous impact on the amount of telephone interaction public relations professionals have with clients because e-mail makes it easier to just send short, written messages back and forth without picking up the telephone. The new technologies also have enhanced the communication loop for many practitioners and in the process have greatly improved productivity by eliminating games of telephone-tag, and making it easier to share information for review and comment.

Clearly, e-mail and the Internet have brought both advantages and disadvantages to public relations. Perhaps the greatest of all these advantages is the Internet gives public relations professionals direct and immediate access to specific target audiences, thus bypassing journalists and traditional news media. Nobody questions the value of a story in the *Wall Street Journal* or on a national television network. However, as pointed out, it is now possible for organizations to use e-mail and the Internet to communicate directly with certain strategic publics without worrying if the editors are going to accept the story and transmit it through newspapers, television, etc., and/or if they are going to change or alter the message in any way.

**Observations About Media Relations:** E-mail and the Internet appear to have dramatically altered the way many public relations professionals communicate with news reporters by allowing them, "to get information to journalists quicker and with less hassle." The new technologies have changed the way many journalists want to receive information from public relations professionals – several respondents talked about reporters who will no longer accept hard-copies of press releases. In many cases, journalists now can be directed to web sites for press releases and high-resolution photos that they can use immediately.

A strong consensus of respondents suggests more reporters want to receive information via e-mail, and many say the new channels of communication have changed the format of what public relations professionals now send to the news media. Several said they regularly communicate with journalists online – and frequently are asked questions by reporters via e-mail. However, others who acknowledged knowing journalists who preferred to communicate with public relations people via e-mail said they know of reporters who ignore many e-mail messages because the system is abused by their public relations colleagues who clutter journalists' e-mailboxes with worthless

information." The study's respondents indicate, the new technologies have permitted "better" and "faster" communication with the news media resulting in more accurate reporting.

E-mail appears to have been accepted by public relations professionals as something that is extremely useful internally in getting information from various sources throughout company when they're needed to respond to a media inquiry. To quote one respondent, "With e-mail, I can ask half a dozen people for information at the same time – without having to call each one individually (and likely get an answering machine). I can also tell if they've read my request." Another wrote, "Working for a PR firm in the heart of New York City shows many instances of how e-mail has improved our time-related projects. Every single editor, despite the technology-resistant few, prefers now to be pitched only on e-mail. It's become a wonderful tool for consistent communication throughout the workday as well as for getting information out to as many people as possible in the shortest amount of time."

Some suggest the speed and immediacy of the Internet and the 24-7 news day it has created has produced a greater need for accuracy and timeliness on the part of both public relations people and journalists. And, apparently many journalists are too busy to answer telephones and have told subjects in this study they prefer to be contacted by e-mail.

The Internet appears to have changed how some of the public relations people we surveyed now contact the media. One said, "It's made me much more efficient – I can disseminate large quantities of information to an entire audience at one time instead of one by one (i.e., I can post an electronic press kit and send out one e-mail inviting viewing versus making Xerox copies of each, stuffing them into kits and FedEx packages, filling out the FedEx labels, shipping them and then calling two days later for follow up. Electronically posting these allow me to track who has downloaded them and when)."

All of this comes with greater responsibilities, including the need to respond more quickly to negative information. And, as one subject responded, "When interacting with editors to pitch a story, it requires me to have to determine how that particular editor wants to receive the information. A lot of old school editors/reporters still prefer snail mail or fax, where newer school editors always prefer e-mail. But until use of Internet and e-mail become more the norm, it's necessary for me to ferret out those differences prior to delivering information for my clients."

Communicating with a journalist via e-mail is not always easy, however. This study had a number of respondents who pointed out many reporters have multiple e-mail addresses and said wise public relations professionals will carefully build up credibility with journalists who then might be inclined to provide them with their private e-mail contact information

**Relationships With Journalists:** Several respondents stressed they thought e-mail communication can facilitate strong personal relationships between journalists and public relations professionals. Others said communication via e-mail is a better way to enhance relationships with journalists when compared to, "A more personal relationship with the media because you are signing the e-mail with your name. You have right away responses, and not just sending an envelope with the company logo."

Other respondents issue challenges to their public relations colleagues suggesting, to quote one, "We already have less face-to-face communication and it is becoming increasingly more difficult to establish relationships with representatives of the news media when most of the contact with them is made up primarily of e-mail and voice mail."

Clearly, these new technologies are creating both opportunities and challenges for public relations professionals who are involved in media relations. These public relations people will be required to build credibility with a cadre of individual journalists, and learn how each one of these reporters prefers to be contacted – via telephone, fax, e-mail, etc. It will take the development of solid, personal relationships until most of these reporters will consider the public relations person a credible and believable source.

Some media directories have started indicating journalists' preferences for how they wish to receive information, when they wish telephone, when they want e-mail, etc. Wise public relations professionals will quickly arm themselves with this information.

**Negative Observations:** Although electronic communication seems easier, some worry that you can not always gauge a person's mood, preferences, etc., via e-mail like you can through telephone or face-to-face communication. All of these developments in technology have created a 24-hour news day and a need to feed the news media's constant demands for information. This prompted some respondents to say that since they now are easier to contact, they spend more time at work because of the need to respond to e-mail messages. And nobody we surveyed wants to work 24 hours per day seven days a week.

There is concern some public relations professionals are spending less time maintaining interpersonal and face-to-face relationships with journalists because they are too busy responding to e-mail messages. One subject claimed to be spending half of each business day, "communicating about what I'm supposed to be doing, instead of doing it." Since deadlines are shorter – because people want things faster – and since it's now possible to request things at the last minute, many people now wait until the last minute to ask public relations people for information.

Journalists experience heavy information overload and get too many messages. Consequently, credibility must be established by communicating only the most relevant, timely, and newsworthy information. To quote one respondent, "The credibility of public relations professionals who practice media relations has suffered because so many people who do PR merely send out blasé e-mail releases (often badly written releases that are non-news) to an entire universe of journalists, whether the information is relevant to their interests or not. This is a huge waste of everyone's time and contributes to the negative attitudes that many journalists have about public relations professionals. It's also incredibly poor public relations practice."

Some said that since many people write-mail messages in slang or in abbreviated fashions too many mistakes are being made. Others complained about information overload and said they frequently had to deal with far too much information, particularly unsolicited information. There also were concerns that too many clients have an unrealistic expectation of immediate response to their e-mail requests.

**What New Trends is the Internet Bringing to Media-PR Relations?**: The other open-ended question was, "What, if any, new trends do you see emerging in media-PR relations which are enhanced by the presence of e-mail and the Internet?" More than half (56%) of the study's respondents answered this question. Verbatim responses can be found in Appendix B.

The following are among the many suggestions received in answers to this question:

- "It will increase chances of getting public relations messages disseminated, and force many media outlets to be more accurate since it is becoming more and more possible to immediately post information countering inaccurate information in a journalist's story."
- "We can now reach target audiences more easily and often can bypass the media. Isn't that a wonderful thought. Not to have to talk to journalists anymore. They're such \*\*\*\*\*."
- "I think the media will become more of a pest, because the Internet has made it too easy to access various government documents, inspection reports, etc., that contain potentially embarrassing information about our company, and are easily misinterpreted. This information has always been public, but when reporters and activist groups had to physically go to public document rooms to get it, or had to know an exact document number or title to request it, few did."
- "The issue of information credibility shared fact-to-face vis-a-vis shared e-mail is a question of the perceived privacy and security of the channel; I will not put in writing what I do not expect to see on the front page of the NYT (*New York Times*). I am more inclined to share that information in a face-to-face context.."
- "We soon will see the creation of totally electronic and cyber-newsrooms."
- "The creation of too many, simultaneous information channels will make it increasingly impossible to monitor news and other information media closely."
- "The speed, technology, and pressure will create more opportunities for mistakes by both PR professionals and by journalists."
- "Ultimately, PR people will write to their websites and have minimal association with journalists."
- "There will be less reliance on the news media to disseminate information. Companies will need to have credible websites backed up by the integrity of the organization."

## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This monograph examines the impact the Internet and other new technologies are having on public relations professionals, journalists, and the American public. It also researches the perceived credibility of the Internet, and studies the impact the new technologies are having on relationships between journalists and those who practice public relations.

As the world's largest information source, the Internet provides the public relations industry with an exciting communication medium offering unlimited message dissemination potential. However, those same opportunities also are there for those interested in distributing negative public relations messages against some of the very organizations public relations professionals are hired to promote.

The Internet clearly offers possibility for great change in the way people practice public relations. Some believe special interest groups, NGOs, and a variety of anti-corporate and anti-capitalism organizations (ACOs), have taken better advantage of these cyberspace opportunities and used the Internet more effectively for public relations purposes than many corporations and most public relations and advertising agencies. Scholars say corporate and agency web sites concentrate more upon communication outputs by disseminating information. However, special interest, NGO, and ACO web sites focus on communication outcomes, and provide more interactive opportunities which enhance relationship development.

Although most research finds minimal differences between the credibility of information received from the Internet and that obtained from traditional news sources, some report web-based information is more credible. A significant variable in the perception of the credibility of Internet information is the fact information can be placed online without editorial filters so prevalent with other mass media. In fact, one of the greatest advantage of the Internet as a public relations medium is the reality it has the potential to provide direct and immediate access to specific target audiences, thus bypassing journalists and traditional news media.

The most important component in credibility and believability of information contained on the Internet is the source of the information. Some web sites are considered more credible than others, and some sources are more believable than others. All factors being equal, information delivered via the Internet has the potential to be perceived as being as credible and believable as information delivered through any other mass communication source.

Since effective public relations not only involves sending information to target audiences, but also requires forming relationships with these audiences, the building of relationships with key publics is a fundamental goal of what public relations professionals do. This monograph represents one of the first studies examining how the Internet is impacting relationships between journalists and those who practice public relations.

As the America Online/Roper Starch Cyberspace indicates, the American Internet audience continues to grow each year, and is becoming decidedly mainstream. The rate

of consumer purchasing online is showing phenomenal growth. Extensive research conducted by the Pew Research Center clearly shows new communication technologies and the Internet are changing the way Americans live.

Research also shows American journalism has been impacted dramatically by the Internet which continues to attract key segments of the national news audience. Studies conducted by Don Middleberg (Middleberg Euro RSCG) and Steven Ross (Columbia University) indicate journalists use the internet extensively, particularly to send and receive e-mail messages and to conduct article research. Middleberg and Ross say journalists believe the Internet has made their jobs easier and improved the quality of their work, and predict reporters who avoid the new technologies will not succeed in the future. They also report journalists now rate e-mail equal to the telephone as the preferred medium for interviewing news sources, and say more than half of the US newspapers now permit their web sites to "scoop" their print product.

American news consumers also are extremely attracted to the Internet. The Pew Research Center reports a rapid emergence of the Internet as a major news source, claiming one-in-three Americans now go online for news at least once each week.

The major component of this monograph was a web-based survey of a random sample of public relations professionals. Subjects came from the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), and from the roster of those who attended the IPRA-PRSA co-sponsored Public Relations World Congress 2000 in Chicago during October of 2000. There were 276 usable responses to the survey which represented a return rate of nearly 33 percent.

Results of the survey included these highlights:

- There was virtually unanimous agreement (98%) when the public relations professionals were asked if recent advances in technology such as e-mail and the Internet have had an impact on how they do their jobs.
- An equally high number (97%) of the public relations professionals surveyed believe recent advances in technology such as e-mail and the Internet have had an impact on relationships between public relations professionals and journalists.
- Many (86%) of those who believe there has been an impact say it has been positive, and only six percent suggest the new technologies have created any sort of negative impact between public relations professionals and journalists.
- Nearly two-thirds (65%) indicate the increased information the new technologies have provided has strengthened the professional ties between journalists and public relations people. Some (19%) believe the technologies have weakened these ties.
- More than half (53%) believe increased information the new technologies have provided has strengthened the personal rapport and relationships between journalists and public relations people. Less than a third (31%) suggest they have weakened this rapport.

- Most (85%) of the public relations professionals surveyed say they now stay in touch with more people in their personal environments than they did before the arrival of e-mail. Twelve percent disagree.
- A huge majority (91%) believe they now stay in touch with more people in their business and professional environments than they did before e-mail arrived. Only seven percent disagree with this statement.
- Responses differ considerably, however, when public relations professionals are asked if they believe technology teaches interpersonal communication skills. More than half (55%) disagree with this statement and 19 percent agree.
- When asked how believable they considered information they receive from a variety of communication sources, the public relations professionals surveyed consider national newspapers the most believable, followed by local newspapers, newspaper web sites, and network or national TV stations. E-mail from business associates was considered more credible than e-mail from friends. The least believable source for information was e-mail from "people you do not know."
- Subjects were asked about perceived differences in the credibility of information they get via e-mail as compared with face-to-face communication. Almost half (47%) said they perceived no difference between these two delivery methods in terms of information received from a friend. Half (50%) said face-to-face communication was more credible.
- Then subjects were asked virtually the same question, but in terms of information they might receive from a business associate. Results are very similar. Nearly half (47%) said there was no difference between receiving business information via e-mail or through face-to-face communication. Face-to-face was considered to be more credible by 46 percent.
- Most (90%) agreed the ability to transmit instantaneous written communication via e-mail and to access real-time information via the Internet has quickened the pace of decision-making in news journalism.
- About half (53%) thought the need to disseminate information with rapid speed via the Internet has compromised the truth, credibility and believability of news journalism.
- Results clearly show e-mail has become the most popular method of delivering information to journalists. Two-thirds of those surveyed said they would be "very likely" to use e-mail if they had to deliver to a journalist information similar to what is contained in a typical public relations news release. About one-quarter (24%) said they would be "somewhat likely" to select e-mail for this purpose. Telephone and fax tied for second.
- The average public relations professional surveyed in this study spends between 15 and 19 hours online each week, and goes online 5.8 days during an average week. A huge majority (94%) of those surveyed indicate they go online at least five days in an average week. One-third (33%) say they are online seven days each week.

- Subjects also were asked whether they would prefer a daily newspaper, Internet connected computer, radio, telephone, or television if they were stranded alone somewhere for an extended period of time, and could have access to only one of those media. Results saw 69 percent choose the Internet connected computer, 15 percent pick a telephone, ten percent select television, six percent choose a daily newspaper, and one percent select radio.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Donald K. Wright, Ph.D., APR, Fellow, PRSA, is an internationally known professor, author, speaker, researcher, advisor, and corporate communications consultant. In addition to teaching, conducting scholarly and applied research, and lecturing in 25 countries on five continents, Dr. Wright has worked full-time in corporate, agency and university public relations, and has been a corporate communications consultant for more than 25 years. He also has been a daily newspaper reporter, weekly newspaper editor and a broadcast journalist.

Dr. Wright has spent the past 28 years teaching at three universities continually ranked as "Top 25" programs in public relations education. He is Professor of Communication at the University of South Alabama and previously taught at the University of Georgia and at the University of Texas (Austin). He is one of the world's most published public relations scholars and is a past recipient of both the Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA) Outstanding Educator Award and the Pathfinder Award from The Institute for Public Relations. In 2000, *PR Week* magazine named him one of the Top 10 public relations educators in the United States.

This is the second monograph Dr. Wright has authored about the Internet and public relations. He also has presented research papers about this topic in the US and overseas, and has served as an expert witness in legal matters relating to the topic of this research.

An active consultant in the areas of public relations and the Internet, public opinion research, employee communications, corporate public relations research and professional development, Dr. Wright has worked with many public and private organizations.

He is a member of the Board of Trustees and Research Committee Chair of the Arthur W. Page Society, a select membership organization of senior public relations and corporate communications executives who seek to enrich and strengthen their profession. Dr. Wright previously chaired the PRSA Research Committee for three years, and recently served six years as a PRSA representative on the Universal Accreditation Board. He is a member of the Board of Directors of both The Institute for Public Relations and the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), and was co-chair of the Public Relations World Congress 2000 – the largest ever gathering of public relations professionals – co-sponsored by IPRA and PRSA in Chicago in October 2000.

Since 1992, he has served as Executive Director of the Chicago-based Public Relations Executive Forum, a highly successful, annual, professional development seminar program designed especially for high potential, mid-level corporate communications and public relations executives who report to senior corporate communications officers. More than 230 aspiring public relations executives have attended the Executive Forum from more than 90 different companies.

Dr. Wright holds a Ph.D. degree from the University of Minnesota. His M.A. is from California State University, Fresno, and his B.A. degree was awarded by Washington State University.

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Since I work for a government agency, we have acquired an entirely new workload - interpreting and preparing public information for the web environment. We are also responsible for transforming the intranet into an effective internal communication and work tool.

I am receiving inquiries from not only local and national groups, but many international individuals and groups.

Public relations is about maintaining relationships with a variety of people. For some reporters, email is the very best so we have to use it.

Eases distribution of materials, but limits personal contact with journalists

E-mail is the most useful internally--in getting information from various sources throughout the company that I need to respond to a media inquiry. With E-mail, I can ask half a dozen people for information at the same time--without having to call each one individually (and likely get an answering machine). I can also tell if they read my request. The Internet (Web) is extremely helpful in researching a subject. In addition, all of the major newspapers I deal with have Web sites, so I can scan them quickly for news about our company without having to page through lots of paper versions. What's more, I'm allergic to newsprint!

Makes research for various projects quicker and provides access to vast amounts of information.

I must deliver my messages more clearly and accurately.

It has made my job far easier. It has just about replaced the use of the fax, which was very important to me 24 to 36 months ago. It is a great research tool.

More time spent on the computer -

I can be more immediate and responsive.

It has provided opportunity to expand my marketing base.

I can do research on the Internet, from reputable organizations, saving me considerable time.

The push technology makes it too easy to push too much info on those reporters who already aren't interested or at the very least only marginally interested in what we're saying. Email/internet also makes it easier to ignore requests from us.

Confirm reports of events; verify facts and figures, access multiple news sources.

Able to keep in touch with more people faster, and able to get more information quicker.

When interacting with editors to pitch a story, it requires me to have to determine how that particular editor wants to receive the information. A lot of old school editors/reporters still prefer snail mail or fax, where newer school editors always prefer email. But until use of Internet and Email become more the norm, it's necessary for me to ferret out those differences prior to delivering information for my clients. Additionally, I do strongly feel that email and the Internet have had a tremendous impact on the amount of telephone interaction that I have with clients. Email makes it easier to just send messages back and forth without picking up the phone. While it does seem easier, I don't think that you can always gauge a persons mood, preferences etc. like you can via a phone conversation. With the invention of Email, I truly think this generation--whether we're talking about in the office or out--is going to be a generation without a record. Past generations had letters etc. to keep for posterity--this generation will have nothing--as everything that's sent via the internet just disappears with the stroke of a key!

More visibility into my market and my competitors

More and more reporters want to receive information via email. And there is less danger of a press release getting lost in the fax machine.

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The ease of research and the ability to communicate faster

Rapid communications and built-in documentation of correspondence.

Quicker action and communication

I work for a federal law enforcement agency. Sending photos of fugitives to local newspapers and television stations has dramatically increased the responses from both the journalists and the general public (due to heightened attention to the pleas for assistance from the public). Prior to using e-mail and attachments for the pictures, news organizations had to send cameramen/photographers to our office site to pick up or photograph the pictures -- cumbersome at its best, and ineffective at its worst.

You must respond quickly and react quickly. It has helped me get my message out to a larger world, especially through my web site.

Speeded up the transmission of information

I now actually spend up to half of my day communicating about what I'm supposed to be doing, instead of doing it!

Negative impact -- way too much information, particularly unsolicited information. I spend much less time maintaining relationships because I'm too busy responding to e-mail messages. Positive - I can get information to and from people I want it from or to much more quickly. But I often precede a request or a message with a phone call.

The need to get the information out quicker. Getting the information on our web site is a priority. The Internet allows me to gather intelligence quickly. I can get some newsclips quickly.

E-mail and Internet have increased the ability to perform quicker research. Professionals can now go online and research credible sites for valid information. Professionals can also monitor competitors with relative ease.

New channels of communication have changed the format of what we send to the media.

My previous job was in media relations for a health care system. I now manage marketing communications for a Web business. I made a complete change in industry due to the technology.

Some employees use it to avoid face-to-face communications. Some issues blow up because of e-mail speed. A telephone call instead of e-mail could have avoided the blow up.

Speed

I stay much more informed of news events; I find it easier to connect with business associates at any time of the day or night; I spend more time working, trying to stay up with the information that passes by me every day, including weekends. In addition, the news my company generates reaches journalists internationally, and our coverage is starting to be near-global.

More work and time involved

I am on-line (with emails coming in) all day, with no respites. I always have my email client open and accessible so I can respond to queries asap.

Ability to provide the same information to a wide range of stakeholders

Greatly improved productivity (no more phone tag), follow up, ease of sharing information for review and comment, enhanced communication loop

Rather than using the old school method of press release distribution (i.e., fax, snail mail) we now have an electronic distribution list that receives our press releases via email including pictures as .JPEG files. This is just one example of the change. A drawback is the lack of face-to-face

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exposure we have to the journalists printing our news. I know very few reporters beyond our email conversations.

Better communication and faster with the news media -- more accurate reporting as a result.

- 1) More rapid communications and exchange of written information. The fax is almost obsolete.
- 2) Access to a wide variety of sources of information any time day or night.

I was much more productive before e-mail and the Internet took chunks of my time away.

E-mail allows me to get information to journalists quicker and with less hassle.

\* I now have a new tactic to manage and implement a strategy for -- Internet site. \* Instead of memos and letters I now send e-mails. \* Before global company e-mail systems, communicating with other parts of the world was slow. Now I talk (via e-mail) with London at least 5 hours a day and Singapore 2 hours a day.

Faster to distribute news releases. Some what easier and faster to gather information and get proposed statements approved.

It has made transmission of information more convenient and more immediate, and journalists are now requesting information beyond the routine news release be sent that way or via fax.

The Internet, in general, has given me an excellent research tool. E-mail has also provided quick information. On the negative side, unless a journalist is very interested in your story, he/she rarely responds or provides feedback. You wonder 1) Did he/she receive it? 2) Did he/she open it? 3) Is he/she interested but saving it for later? 4) Did he/she pass it along to a colleague? 5) Did it fall into the great, dark e-mail hole, never to be seen again?

It has cut down on the clutter of paper flow, which facilitates getting messages out quickly to a large audience.

The immediacy of action and reaction which has multiplied far faster than management's decision making processes.

Responding to emergency situations. Technology has affected our response time to press inquiries. The press now have the ability to broadcast news instantly without all the facts leaving me in a response mode and to some degree an defensive mode.

People want things faster. Deadlines are shorter. Since it's possible to send things at the last minute, people now wait until the last minute to ask for it. I spend the first two or three hours each day answering e-mails...so I don't know that it saves time. Also...when a factual error is made, it spreads geometrically throughout the web and shows up in all kinds of strange places and stays there for a long time. Those of us who live in rural areas and small without high-speed internet access are at a disadvantage...we can't transmit really big files (like high-res jpg files) and we spend a lot of time twiddling our thumbs waiting for websites to load. And, since it's possible to re-write easily, I think we over-edit what we write. Spelling and grammar errors are proliferating, too. And since it's difficult to communicate tone in an e-mail, some e-mails are misunderstood, i.e., remarks that are supposed to be funny are sometimes interpreted as angry.

I can retrieve information or perform research 1000 times faster than before.

The most significant aspect is that it has greatly enhanced the speed with which information is exchanged.

More communication back and forth between me and my students, colleagues and consulting clients. Less delay in receiving responses to inquiries.

We get the information more rapidly to its target (media). we get the information more rapidly from

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our business partners, we are able to do more work and do it faster in given time. On the other hand, we had hard job in last two years making the journalists see, that we are belivable and professional PR agency, as almost everyone is now able to distribute the information to the media and they are overloaded with crap.

The ability to move information fast, over great distances

More time is spent on act of communicating than planning or dealing with substantive issues.

Given me an opportunity to provide/receive more feedback

Too many messages to read, especially those for which I receive a cc or bcc. Also, email lacks the ability to transmit voice tone or facial expressions or other body language. One has to be careful never to transmit anything that can be considered critical or negative, because the strength of such messages seem to be amplified via email. We need someone to screen the stuff, digest it and spit it back to us as edited content.

A major factor in my job is the development of a weekly news digest, with news that fits within a very small niche category. I conduct at least 99% of my news research on the internet. The e-mail is sent via fax and via e-mail. This capability to locate and disseminate information so rapidly has greatly raised visibility and credibility of our company.

More frequent communication, more access to information

Less time for crafting good copy or research. Constant need to respond to requests - voice mail, emails or other forms of contact - overload is the constant feeling theses days.

It provides written documentation of information that typically would be shared by telephone. It also has reduced the time to get written information to business associates. It helps to deal with quick interactions that might become unnecessarily lengthy if you were having a phone conversation instead.

Availability and speed of information contacts and interchange.

Much more use of the computer as a means of communicating, planning, and gathering and disseminating information.

Transfer of information, responsiveness, accessing information, 24/7 communication

The ability to communicate quickly and effectively is imperative to my business. I am a consultant with international clients and can reach them despite time differences or other constrains such as meetings, travel, etc.

I now keep in contact with MANY more people. This is a double-edged sword as email correspondence takes considerable time.

The ability to contact people instantly has significantly increased pace (and ease) of my work.

Clients have an unrealistic expectation of immediate response to their e-mail requests. The Web site, a behemoth of a communications vehicle, is now my responsibility.

Everything can be done faster, therefore the expectations is to do more and burn out/ over-stressed workers are all that are left today.

E-mail makes it much easier for me to communicate with students, especially those who work and have tight schedules.

Immediate access to information; quick dissemination of information to large numbers of publics.

Need to keep website current Ability to deliver photos with releases via Web Need to keep colleagues from having exaggerated expectations about rresults with mediaa becasue of e-mail and web Ability to get information to constituents directly via web and e-mail

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Distributing press releases via e-mail. Updating information and capability to meet reporters deadlines have been improved

More news sources (Internet) to track. Need to respond quickly to negative information on Internet. Ability to obtain competitor/customer information quickly via Web. Ability to send documents for approval via e-mail Ability to keep in touch with staff, executives via e-mail.

More productive; ability to communicate with many audiences at one time.

Easier access, quicker response time, higher communication expectations.

Demand for information is greater. Access to deeper information about company is available to the public and media.

The ability to reach more people faster.

Working for a pr firm in the heart of New York City shows many instances on how email has improved our time-related projects. Every single editor, despite the technology-resistant few, prefer now to be pitched only on email. It's its a wonderful tool for consistent communication throughout the workday as well as for getting information out to as many people as possible in the shortest amount of time. For example, I deal with music clients. I have a set email blast list of most important music writers, such as Top 50 Newspapers and their Popular Music Writers, along with my most imperative music publications (Billboard, Rolling Stone). I am able to send out a press release via mass email with the click of the mouse and almost immediately begin getting phone calls from interested editors that have just seen the email.

Less personal...more mistakes because people many times write emails in slang or abbreviated, less clear fashion.

Able to communicate more effectively by avoiding such things as phone-tag.

E-mail and the Internet have become critical 2-way communications tools with key audiences

I communicate with my clients and target journalists via email on a daily basis. This wasn't the case six years ago, when the telephone was used much more frequently. Also, email has added much more speed and urgency to my job.

Email and the Internet provide additional communication vehicles, which makes my job easier in a sense. But maintaining them and knowing who prefers email and who does not makes my job more challenging.

Contacting journalists, easy to transmit info to those you know, greater access to those you don't, ability to do on-line research for clients

1) People can find and contact me easier. 2) I spend more time at work because of e-mail.

the ability to reach a wide targeted audience, such as employees, with increased ease and speed, and their ability to get information about the organization rapidly and in almost real time.

E-mail and the Internet have helped expedite sending artwork and advertisements on short notice.

It speeds up all activities, communication, and decisions.

Speed of communication with others in doing everyday business. More assured that others get my message, especially longer, detailed messages, as opposed to trying to reach them by phone. Resources (enewsletters, internet resource sites, etc.) very helpful.

Information is delivered quicker, impacting decision's and turn-around time for both journalist and PR practitioner.

Much faster communications with clients. Staff telecommutes.

EMAIL - I can communicate updates and details to clients/vendors/media more often and quicklv-

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-provides me with more efficient use of my time. INTERNET - research, research, research.

Trying to figure out the new world order!

The Internet allows direct access to our target audiences, so we're not totally dependent on wooing journalists to cover our story. Just as the media is a conduit, the Internet is a conduit, but we have more control over it. Email allows quick and very brief correspondence as a way to build relationships, plus transmit information, e.g., attached documents and links to specific areas of our web site.

Everyone wants it NOW.

Speed and volume of information.

More stuff, faster, to more people. More time quashing rumors that people ought to have more sense than to pass along. On the other hand, quashing them is easier.

It's made me much more efficient -- I can disseminate large quantities of information to an entire audience at one time instead of one by one (i.e., I can post an electronic press kit and send out one email inviting viewing versus making Xerox copies of each, stuffing them into kits and FedEx packages, filling out the FedEx labels, shipping them and then calling two days later for follow up. Electronically posting these allow me to track who has downloaded them and when).

Access to industry information, research, competitive information, contacts, etc. has become immediate. This is positive because I can now have nearly everything I need at my fingertips. E-mail has allowed me to communicate more efficiently. I still talk with people over the phone, however, that's difficult to do at 7:00 p.m. If I e-mail, it will get there. Sometimes at 7:00 p.m. you can't even access voice mail.

Immediacy of response Quickness of message delivery To the point communications

As an educator, I keep in touch with students current and past, via email. Job interviews, internships, career advice, networking, all the things I do via my office, I can also do via email. I'm off for the summer, yet still in touch with my students. I even direct independent studies via email.

1/ it's much easier to get in touch with people and they can be reached instantly  
2/ gathering intelligence for a client using the Net is more efficient

Save time.

To much time spent reading and responding to email.

ability to collaborate with colleagues more efficiently. able to hold virtual office hours. ability to search the net for fresher, updated information

Increase the speed and comprehensive information in addition to increasing the global networking opportunities.

Opportunity to think and construct email pitches rather than a 30-second phone call.

Increased efficiency and productivity

Less in person meetings, reducing business travel. Time to work on deliverables, is right up to the Last minute. Ability to present reports from a laptop is a benefit.

PR professionals must be mindful that journalists experience heavy information overload because of the advent of e-mail. Therefore, professionals must establish credibility by communicating only RELEVANT information that is timely and newsworthy.

Received more useless information less time more contacts in less time

The need to immediacy. The need to provide information demanded by publications in the form of spreadsheets.

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Faster communication

Ability to disseminate press releases and other communication instantaneously to a group of journalists at the same time has had a big impact. There is a greater ability to control when news is released. Ability to communicate globally is impacted because editors can gain information without time zones or geography getting in the way.

Different channels of communication required

Clients can receive and approve projects in progress virtually instantaneously. As a result, we Produce more projects faster, but not necessarily better.

Phone rings less. Clients prefer communicating via email. Graphics are primarily sent via email now.

Ability to conduct research at my desk, instead of trekking down to the library. Enhanced internal communication. Valuable tool in pitching stories to media outlets.

Email has eliminated many face-to-face meetings with clients for approvals and has increased communications with both clients, vendors and colleagues. It also takes up a good portion of the day and keeps me tied to a computer.

Access to journalist, flow of information, access to more information and has made my job easier.

My function has become more effective because I can research, gather, analyze and distribute more information more quickly than in the past. This is especially true in the area of issues management because I can access new information much more quickly than in the past.

It has raised expectations of immediate response. Many complicated questions need research time and there is less tolerance needed for the time to respond.

Another very important tool for information search and distribution.

It allows me to quickly and accurately disseminate information, while providing a tracking and/or measuring capability.

Makes me more efficient. A lot more communications is going on.

E-mail and the Internet have made it possible to communicate more frequently with more people. And has allowed us to stay more readily connected with each other. The down side is that e-mail has created the expectation that every message will be replied to, which has had an impact on the amount of work we do, and has blurred the distinction between personal time and work time.

It has increased client communications exponentially. When e-mail usage was minimal, I could speak with a client once a week, now it is common to communicate several times a day.

Less expense to obtain journalist/publication info, broader contact database, quicker release of info

I spend much more time on line using email and research sites instead of the telephone. Email is quicker and written transcripts of communiqués are automatic. The Internet has had a tremendous impact on our ability to communicate with and motivate responses a significant portion of our most important public.

Improved access to information, research and increased number of media outlets available.

Ability to communicate to broad audiences quickly.

I can quickly refer journalists to the web site for press releases and high resolution photos which they can use immediately. I no longer have to Fed-X or send photos which are one of a kind historically and hope to get them back.

Much better. more convenient access to research: opportunity to communicate much faster w. mv

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**Responses to the question, "If you believe e-mail and the Internet have had an impact on how you do your job, please describe the most significant aspects of this impact."**

students via email

They have both increased the information flow -- both accurate and inaccurate -- and that has increased monitoring speed and time for clients. It has speeded up the delivery process allowing reactions within news cycles. The data can be delivered in a more user friendly mode for journalists.

Communications among our eight national offices is made much simpler. The Internet allows us to research to discover all sorts of business opportunities.

Communicate with reporters online. You can answer media questions in e-mail form. The biggest impact is sending artwork or photos online.

I know more about the issues facing clients and both sides of the issues as a result of the Internet.

Easier access to journalists and editors through email, Easier to disseminate information and photography to editors and journalists through electronic functions (email, websites, PDFs)

I know a lot more about a lot more things than I did prior to the Internet. Therefore, I bring more information to my daily decision-making.

spend more time communicating electronically vs. face to face; more immediate response/action expected so adds more stress to meeting deadlines/client expectations

More and easier access to information for research. the ability to accomplish a greater volume of work.

Am always expected to be on point and knowledgeable about many things at once. No excuses for not being timely and on top of all issues. Makes our work harder. Means we are constantly working.

You have to be more productive and more speedy in your production. You have to work on real-time. People know exactly when you received and opened the e-mail and want responses and actions right away.

Increasingly, clients expect computers and the Internet allow for immediate turnaround on work and immediate results, failing to consider that good communications/public relations work requires, thinking, planning and relationship building.

Demand to respond - replaces face-to-face communication and often results in unresolved issues and misunderstanding.

My daily activity is strongly influenced by incoming messages. I have learned to be more flexible and to work on x files at the same time ... I became a surfer!

The pace is faster, more intense. Deadlines are shortened, communication is instantaneous. Any information at your fingertips.

For me, the biggest impact has been the ability to communicate quickly with groups/coalitions of people at once. (Not mass blind e-mails, but communiques to known people with whom I'd have communicated via regular mail, phone or fax. This reduces the labor needed, which of course Creates more time to do more work!

The speed at which information is communicated.

1. We must have all the information about the organization ready to be put at the web site. And we have to be ready to put any changes on it, anytime. Is another specialty on the PR field.
2. We must have any news release or information ready to go via e-mail, web page and fax, because I live in Latin America. where not everybody is ready to have a computer and acces

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to Internet. 3. Is a must to know about web design. You have to study for that. Which is good.

Quickened pace, accelerated decision-making, information overload

My response is based on how disruptive it is when our Internet access is down. To pick up the phone and call someone seems much more invasive now. E-mail is selective in that the recipient can decide when to read it, respond to it or delete it.

Improved speed of information delivery, but confused all timing and planning as one never knows who demands/wants/needs what when. Senders expect receivers to react at their command, receivers cannot say no or agree a later response. Clients tend to believe that we can deliver by return mail.

- 1) Ease and speed of communication (on multiple levels)
- 2) Ease and speed of research 3) Saves time, financial and physical resources (i.e. postage, paper, etc.) It does not and will never replace the need for personal relationships -- face-to-face or via telephone.

It has quickened the pace in which work is done, created a 24-hour news day and the need to feed that constant demand for information, as well has made 24 hour accessibility for journalists and PR people alike. Also, clients demand near instant responses rather than getting answers in a day or two.

I can disseminate information quicker and to a larger audience than before. That leaves me time and money to do other things at work. Also, many journalists are too busy to answer phones. Email enables them to read my stuff at their leisure, and then we chat about it. In addition, I can get my releases in print more reliably, as journalists now can cut and paste straight from my email.

It has changed the way many media want to receive news from our company. Some electronic-based media will no longer take hard copy info. At the same time, other less up-to-date media are not yet using online transmission...so, good media relations pros have to know in which format key reporters prefer to receive their information.

I can research any topic instantaneously to bolster a news release. This is particularly helpful concerning public policy issues. I can get the public's, legislators', consumer advocates' and our own trade group's opinions and views to improve the accuracy and credibility of our communication. I also believe that the more journalists spend time on line gathering info, the more of an impact we will have simply by taking the time to do in-person face-to-face communication, which will be viewed more by journalists as a luxury they don't often take due to the speed with which they gather facts on the internet. I think they welcome the old way because it makes an impression, builds a relationship that leads to effective communication and offers more openness to ask questions and get the story straight. E-mail is a great way to send information, but shouldn't be relied on to interpret information.

Ability to do research as well as making casual communication with reporters easier, which strengthens relationships.

We now have the ability to review mentions of our company in publications that are online; we can call for corrections more quickly, respond to rumors quickly and disseminate information more. Allowing journalists to get information quickly via our website.

I can access information from my computer in my office that I would otherwise not have.

I have access to a lot more sources for information. I also am able to research and find documentation for articles or other communication pieces that I'm working on.

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- The internet and email has expanded the audiences we can reach independent of the media. Instead of having to place a story in the press, we can reach many key audiences directly. - We can send more information, much more quickly and efficiently than before. We can also track and record those transaction to ensure accuracy.

Research, fact-finding, information dissemination. Communication in general.

Information overload and frequently a feeling of being out of touch. Email lends to avoidance and procrastination.

I work in a non-profit medical association. Advances in technology present an opportunity for cost savings, particularly with sending out news releases (e-mail & posting to our web site vs. U.S. Mail). I think that the e-mail allows PR professionals to maintain, and in some cases establish, relationships with reporters. In my experience I have generated some key relationships via e-mail. E-mail has also allowed me to maintain relationships by allowing me to check in with a reporter or suggest a story idea in a rather unobtrusive manner.

The pace and volume of information has increased markedly. It is significantly easier to include more people in rapid decision-making transactions, to disseminate breaking information to groups and get their reactions, and to transmit complex information more accurately and quickly.

Since retiring from the active practice of PR, I have done a lot of free-lance writing. I file copy with the agency I write for via e-mail (sometimes faxing hard copy for review). I also do interviews via e-mail. E-mail has had such an impact on how I do my job that I don't think I could do without it!

Greater responsibility for accuracy and timeliness.

E-mail: international communications are far easier than before Internet: faster research, more informed journalists

For me personally, e-mail and the Internet have allowed me as a consultant to cover a larger territory with the same level of effectiveness, but substantially less travel. It also allows the media to retrieve more timely and accurate information without being bothered by calls from a pr person or shifting through piles of mail. E-mail has some downsides, however. Relationships with clients and media can not be built through computers. E-mail and the Internet are merely vehicles that help all of us to do our jobs more efficiently. Trying to express sensitive topics or feelings, however, must be done in person. Using the e-mail as a reliable medium in these situations is very dangerous.

Since I handle public relations for a computer products distributor, the reporters who cover this industry niche are highly technical and often on the road. The easiest/most effective way to disseminate information to them is via e-mail, and often they respond to my voicemails with e-mailed responses.

- 1) Internal communication is facilitated, resulting in fewer face-to-face meetings
- 2) More information can be disseminated in quicker time to all appropriate parties
- 3) Research (internal and external) is facilitated

Review of written materials has become much more efficient.

The Internet has increased the number of resource (credible and non). It has increased research capabilities. It has increased access to organization from key audiences.

With email, if I need anything from someone in the office, I will email them and get a response immediately. We use the Internet to do analysis of competitors and what the market is doing.

Less personal contact. Another source of messages to respond to each day. Quick responses from people at distant sites.

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Fast worldwide

They help me get press releases out faster to my entire group of press contacts.

Access to research, journals, and other data specific to issues that I may face or currently part of my work.

More attempts at communications with more people..quicker responses to inquiries

Can do more faster

Faster communications. Can reach people at THEIR convenience. Can access more relevant information quicker. Can keep more people informed of project or other status. Time zones do not hamper communications. (US to Europe to Asia)

I am expected to maintain a higher number of relationships through email. I also am required to respond more quickly and with less reflection. The volume of correspondence is extraordinary: everyone expects immediate responses to every inquiry. There is little time for strategic and proactive planning.

More productive, efficient use of time.

Scope of reach -- can reach more people more quickly decisions get made faster

Ability to adjust messages as needed... Ability to push down to employees using e-mail alerts. Ability to transmit color photos, ads and copy without leaving my office...and publications to use them without much further processing...

Instantaneous access to information has many benefits, but it also has made context a luxury.

speed - we used to use a courier to transport information, now all the information is sent via email or an FTP server.

Posting press releases on-line and making sure that site information relative to the company is accurate and constantly up-to-date.

Global fast communication

1. Research -- I can easily find and read articles by a journalist I need to work with; I can easily find background on a topic I need to understand better.
2. I can email quotes or background material to journalists and know they got an exact quote or data.
3. I can keep in touch with journalists by emailing items of interest or quick catch-up notes without interrupting their work day with non-breaking news.

Access to more information quickly

For those who thrive on knowledge, internet connectivity absorbs a disproportionate amount of time and harms quality of life. You can have fast, wide spread dissemination of undiluted messages, and at the same time have messages distorted and compromised without limit.

communicate with more people in matter of minutes

Being able to communicate to a wide variety of people quickly and easily.

It is much easier to give fast responses via e-mail...shortens responses time due to telephone tag/side conversations.

Can distribute more information faster to more people. More interaction to customize the information.

Quicker action and communication

Yes. some impact. I use internet connectivity in order to research information. stay in contact with

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key community leaders and help keep others in the organization informed.

Immediate access, efficiency, economic, easier to receive and send either simple or complex files.

Speed

ability to collaborate with colleagues more efficiently. able to hold virtual office hours. ability to search the net for fresher, updated information

The credibility of public relations professionals who practice media relations has suffered because so many people who do PR merely send out blast e-mail news releases (often badly written releases that are non-news) to an entire universe of journalists, whether the information is relevant to their interests or not. This is a huge waste of everyone's time and contributes to the negative attitudes that many journalists have about public relations professionals. It's also incredibly poor public relations practice.

1) Time economy 2) Time economy 3) Time economy 4) Very good for data dissemination

Gathering Information (from the net) has become faster but the speed to deliver information has increased too. The clients and journalists alike expect immediate delivery. And the clients think the costs have to come down too.

Easier to document things. Easier, faster way to respond. Email eliminates much phone tag.

More contacts via email and search via net plus fewer contacts via phone and face-to-face - which is a pity in some instances.

Increased speed and expectations for completed work.

Virtually instantaneous dissemination and receipt of information.

It's like the typewriter vs. the word processor. It's easier but at the same time it's impersonal. I do NOT find that I have more time to do more work---I just work a different way. The unnecessary deluge of e-mail is particularly annoying professionally. I do not want to click on to anything anyone is selling. I do however want to accommodate those journalists who use the internet almost exclusively. But I did not come into life using a computer, so I admit I'm something of a luddite. Also I complain that e-mail has taken its toll on grammar, writing skills, composition and more. Give me a pen and a legal pad!

It is a double-edged sword. It benefits us because we can communicate with audience both externally and internally much more quickly, but now those same audiences expect information to be consistently expedited.

It has made news dissemination more immediate

Allows multiple daily contacts with people on my staff who work in far flung locations

Information Overload Greater Expectations for Communication High Speed Communication

Increased the ability to communicate rapidly with a group of people, disseminate committee minutes or poll responses, particularly long distance; ability to calendar meetings without a series of phone calls.

Email has squarely placed personal responsibility where it belongs with my co-workers. They can no longer avoid my messages and phone calls when I'm waiting for them to complete their portions of the projects I head up. What's more, email provides an opportunity for their supervisors to monitor this lack of follow-up.

faster and much cheaper communication with the world: easv transfer of data: easv editing of

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attachments; fewer phone calls; more freedom - responding to emails at my convenience, not when the phone rings; much faster learning curve about new things - having the data available at a click of the mouse.

Before internet access, I spent a lot more time away from my office, in the library researching topics. Very recently, I needed to read a newspaper article for background, which had run in our local paper two weeks prior. I emailed a reporter friend of mine who almost immediately forwarded the article to me via email. That saved me hours of production time.

Faster access to research and resources online; Expect faster turnaround time from those with whom I correspond; More conscientious about sending information to journalists responsibly so that I don't take too much of their time

Takes more time to answer e-mails.

I have extensive interaction with colleagues via e-mail.

E-mail and the Internet has enabled me to contact someone and provide the necessary information much more quickly. I am also able to answer their responses and complete the process of arranging or conducting an interview or completing a story in a much quicker fashion.

Yes, some impact. I use internet connectivity in order to research information, stay in contact with key community leaders and help keep others in the organization informed.

Most business communications is via email, very few via the traditional business letter.

It makes it easier to communicate when you are away from the office on business travel. You can stay in touch and be informed regarding important issues. I still believe that people should communicate on a personal basis. There is no substitute for face to face communications.

## APPENDIX B

### Responses to the question, "What, if any, new trends do you see emerging in media-PR relations which are enhanced by the presence of e-mail and the Internet?"

E-mail of unsolicited news releases is intrusive and the writing is much more informal than in the past.

Web-based media rooms provide greater ease of access to information, but content development is still key.

I think the media will become more of a pest, because the Internet has made it too easy to access various government documents, inspection reports, etc., that contain potentially embarrassing information about our company, and are easily misinterpreted. This information has always been public, but when reporters and activist groups had to physically go to public document rooms to get it, or had to know an exact document number or title to request it, few did.

Great percentage of future work between media & PR will be done via e-mail & the internet.

More of an internet presence everywhere

I have too few dealings with media to give a meaningful answer.

less and less face-to-face contact

Newspapers can be research to see how much coverage a particular issue has had before one sends a press release or an OpEd

Reporters being able to pull information is a strength offered by the new technology. They don't have to wait to hear from us or to go through us for certain forms of basic, background information.

Uncertain

Email has made people careless about what they say and how they say it, to their later dismay or consternation. Same for Internet except that problem communication is more broadly distributed.

ability to directly reach reporters

New types economic activities

Quicker posting and updating of info on corporate websites; at the same time, more opportunities for mistakes by both PR professionals (due to hasty news releases) and by journalists (sometimes to the benefit, but most probably to the detriment of a PR client or the PR professional).

Greater use of it as more people have access to it; potential to circumvent third party agents (such as news media)

Not sure, although it's easier to find information. However, credibility of that information may be an issue since anyone can set up a web site.

Even more reliance of reporters on web sites for background information.

Ease of supplying photos, once all photo formats are compatible. Media being able to access releases and photos, as well as background information from our Web site immediately, instead of having to call.

Reporters, news sources uses various filters to sift through electronic junk mail.

Speed

More sophisticated ways of delivering information

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1) the internet has increased expectations regarding the response time of text-based communications; the internet has increased the expectation for timely news given the ability to share information quickly now via the Internet, e.g. direct media to a website which has background information, still photographs, audio and/or videostreams on-line for media outlets to draw upon.

(2) Privacy and security issues become increasingly important with technology. Right now there are not enough ways to ensure that info shared via the internet is restricted to only those intended to see it. The issue of info credibility shared face to face viz a viz shared by email is a question of the perceived privacy and security of the channel; I will not put in writing what I do not expect to see on the front page of the NYT. I am more inclined to share that info in a face-to-face context instead.

Ability to force media to stick to truth because of ability to immediately post a counter to their story

One weekly business journal to which we usually send press releases has recently begun publishing breaking news via their website on a daily basis. This increases our chance at getting our news published. I see this happening more and more, although I am not sure if these methods (online news) are getting the exposure that they deserve (compared to the printed version).

I still feel strongly that the media should not be bombarded with information overload from us. Choose what is sent to the media carefully and make sure it is important. Then we will continue to have a reputation of credibility, reliability, and of being cooperative.

- 1) Dialogue/relationships with customers or consumers.
- 2) Ability to get information out quickly and to turn within the news cycle to react to negative or inaccurate coverage.

Greater number of contacts with reporters looking for information.

\* Information transmitted via PDAs (Personal Data Assistants i.e. Palm Pilots, iPac's) require a different style of writing -- different from standard Internet style and print journalism style. We're constantly learning and refining.

Wider use of special web sites to distribute information in emergency situations to the target audiences and to the news media.

Can you e-mail it? is the most common question. It hasn't affected the decision time on placing a story, however.

I think research is going to get a lot better and easier for both PR professionals and journalists. I have no clue about e-mail.

The role of the virtual press office that makes media access to common information a 'taken for granted' rather than a service. While this may appear to distance media and corporates this will not be the case if the corporates use the freed up time to create quality relationships - both with media and directly with target audiences.

Enhanced community outreach

I now have access to info 24/7, and so does the media. Too many PR people are sending news releases via e-mail...without exception, all the journalists I deal with (both in the US and abroad) are adamant about wanting a piece of paper they can hold in their hand...either via snail-mail or fax.

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I can see journalists installing filters or content scanning applications to block the e-mail that does not contain something of interest to them.

Greater targeting of information to ever smaller subgroups of public and stakeholders.  
Accelerated need for rumor monitoring on the net. Greater use of spam and source filtering for most media folks as well as non-media folks.

Need for deeper and innovative strategies to meet the instantaneous demand for relevant decisions that affect reputation.

Span is much greater.

Direct communication with different audiences without going through traditional gatekeepers

More difficult to establish relationships with media when contact is made up primarily of email and voice mail.

I believe editors and journalists will more and more become dependent on the internet and email and that it will be our job as PR professionals to write to the web style in order to gain their attention and ultimately coverage

Not sure -- other than the obvious that it makes for quicker exchange of information.

Uses of e-based media

Wireless communication from everywhere with handheld computer devices that can send and receive email, etc. There will not be anywhere people cannot reach and be reached. Personally I see this invading personal life and make a conscious decision not to share my cell phone and other numbers with anyone outside family. I don't want to be on the job 24 hours a day. Many of the technologies and management tools meant to enhance life and give freedom to the individual actually become enslaving. I think there is grave danger here. When I go home I want to be home, not an extension of the office and organization even in my home. Many are losing that and I don't want to, won't!

Responsiveness, more frequent but shorter communications,

Many journalists are now not answering the phone, but using voicemail to screen, as well as to provide their preferred mode of communication message. The problem is that, as a PR professional, one does not know if they have received information sent and plan to act on it. Also, a quick phone call allows one to answer questions quickly, elaborate on a point, clear up any misunderstandings...email does not provide this real-time, two-way communication.

Internet-based news Email-based PR work

1. The availability of images to the media via Web sites...saves an enormous amount of cost and PR legwork.
2. Digital photography increases the timeliness, and greatly reduces the expense, of images. 3. It's easy and quick work for a reporter to find a spokesperson; it makes the PR person's work much more difficult, because it's often a race against time. Those with the biggest staffs, who can monitor Profnet continually, get the most placements in higher education media.

Less reliance on media to get out information, need to have a credible website backed up by integrity of organization

Press kits online allow the media to review what they need about your company and helps them prepare to do interviews. Also leads them to profile your company in relation to stories they are doing.

Journalists going to web sites first for information before making a call to verify; and cascading rumors quickly and globally.

International communication. Real time release of information around the globe.

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24/7 ability to promote company via Internet.

What I've noticed recently is the sending of pictures and graphics via email. I am able to send jpeg pictures that have a high enough resolution that they can be easily reproduced into newspapers or magazines. No slides, no 8x10's.

Reliance on websites for critical, up-to-date information

The length of emails - long emails tend not to get read by journalists. Keep it concise.

The pace of journalism and news delivery from PR-media is faster. But email is not ubiquitous in news rooms. Many reporters prefer it, and at the same time many ignore it because it is abused by reporters. Meanwhile, with the ability to have newsrooms on organizational Web sites and build their own email distribution networks with key publics, a future trend will be a decline in use of the media by PR practitioners, because technology in effect allows them to BE the media for their key publics. This 'narrow casting' removes the media from the communication chain.

More journalists are going to clients web sites and expecting to find contact info and archived fact sheet type info, they definitely want an electronic newsroom

The approval process within corporations will speed up to meet the instantaneous nature of Web communications.

Dealing with rumor control via the world wide web; reaching audiences directly; having a new hungry media which has a much larger news hole.

More journalists adapting this method of communication to help them meet deadlines, insure accuracy of information, etc.

More telecommuting.

Emailed releases; web site media pages and access to downloadable information for news background and coverage.

You want me to give away my hard earned secrets? Seriously, it's just learning how to do something new. Working through the strategies of what's going to get the media's attention and motivate journalists to write about a client and also communicating -- well, you asked about media, but we can now reach target audiences more easily and often can bypass the media. Isn't that a wonderful thought. Not to have to talk to journalists anymore. They're such \*\*\*\*\*. I won't compromise my good name to say it out loud.

More focus on interaction between the client/corporation/association and their target audiences, by-passing journalists altogether.

Personalized group lists

Reaction time much shorter. More competition for attention. More outlets to pitch to.

Greater online coverage and importance placed upon it. Quicker responses to editor inquiries via sending URLs instead of setting up interviews each time.

Internet distribution of feature articles and press releases. Online access to feature articles and press releases allows editors and journalists 24/7/365 access to information from anywhere in the world.

Email CAN facilitate personal relationships, if used correctly--that is, to keep in touch w. the reporter/practitioner, offer information exchange, etc. the same things a phone call or a visit used to do to strengthen the relationship. If email replaces personal contact, it will damage relationship building, however.

1/ more frequent contacts with media people & other groups via e-mail.

2/ extensive use of websites. webcasts. internet-based conferences. etc.. especially in financial

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PR and IR.

3/ better preparation % defense strategies in crisis communications due to direct access to members of interested publics

Online press rooms

Real time video transmissions of information

Able to keep channels of communication flowing - able to get the message to an otherwise very busy (hard to reach) source -- a reporter and/or editor - more conversations taking place between PR professionals and media personnel

Email and Internet increases the speed of disseminating information yet we need to be alert of the corruption in media particularly if there is something to do with reputation of a company or a person. In politics for example, a lot all emails have no independent attitude

Constantly updated media lists - real time information. Not thrilled with the idea that accuracy is sometimes compromised by the increased need to be the first, or jumping on the bandwagon.

Greater customer service

New need to create opportunities to meet in person

People are less likely to meet and discuss the big picture or look at other story possibilities. Too many PR people tell journalists to look it up on the web site, rather than helping editors cut through the clutter and provide the information they need quickly

Communicators will have to be better at communicating via e-mail, taking into consideration tone, brevity, punctuation, etc.

Targeting specific reporters via email. Sharing information via my company website to potential new clients.

Greater use of research vehicles.

I am seeing the possibility to review articles in advance of publication, and that more journalists are checking Web sites for background info.

E-mailing media kits, e-mailing infomercials, targeting e-mails with direct mail campaigns

I see a trend toward sending more support materials, such as graphics, electronic photo and avi files to catch a reporter's attention amid the clutter of electronic press releases. On the other hand, it will still be the validity of the story that will sell the story. The technology will simply support the message.

Activist sites used to attack industries and government agencies. There will a need for those institutions to develop new strategies to deal with that type of email.

Monitoring the Internet and being able to quickly respond to misinformation or disinformation that could lead to a crisis.

The need to earn and maintain credibility. I predict a return to old fashioned values where personal reputation becomes more important than ever.

A more efficient use of databased information to analyze, track and direct the efforts of PR professionals based on the relationships forged with individual reporters and the historic coverage those reporters have given to an individual, organization or industry.

Video streaming...

Niche e-publications and very targeted PR firms

The need for increasing the validity of content/senders.

I see journalists going directly to the press site for the company for information. We will notify them of newsbreaking information and refer them to the site.

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More communication with journalists, greater research into stories by local journalists and more targeted information delivery in both content and format

Most of the media I contact prefer personal phone calls to E-mail. It is an effective way to follow up with requested info.

On-line media conferences

It's much easier to get background information to reporters.

Substantially more attention will be paid to the use of websites to convey basic information to journalists.

Relationship building via casual emailing....leads to stronger story pitches later. Can get reporters what they need via Internet that instant. Including photos.

A more personal relationship with the media because you are signing the e-mail with your name, you have right away responses, and not just sending an envelope with the company logo.

As broadband technologies become more widespread, will be able to a) more easily disseminate multimedia material that media will be able to use, and b) desktop videoconferencing will allow for more badly needed face-to-face relationship building.

Speed, speed, speed!

Ability to disseminate information to a large group in a small amount of time. Enhanced research abilities.

The speed at information.

The way you communicate with people.

Impossible to monitor news and other information media closely. There are too many, simultaneous info channels. If we overlook or do not know about information, it harms our credibility in the clients' eyes.

Successful practitioners are using a combination of available communication options. Professionals relying solely upon sending out information via email without any follow-up (or heads-up) will find that their stories are lost in a sea of information. Additionally, it is still important to ask your contacts for preferred method of information delivery. Some still prefer the fax machine. I think ultimately this influx of information will lead to a way to distill the massive quantity being delivered by priority. It will be interesting to see that method of prioritization. It is also likely that journalistic errors will increase as bogus stories are mass-blasted across the Internet and news outlets clamor to break the story instead of getting it right.

The problem of getting accessibility to journalists who often have more than one email address--one that is a public site listed in media directories, but not the journalist's primary Web address and the second or more email address which the journalist gives out only to the individuals and PR people that they wish to correspond with.

Quicker response from both journalists and PR people. Also, expectation of quicker response.

More timely delivery of news and images on deadline without having to jump through hoops to get to FEDEX on time. Also, more use of media areas on company websites. If managed responsibly, corporate media sites can deliver news to reporters as it is loaded to the site. That's a good way to keep reporters informed...if...PR types don't try to send'em everything in the house. With or without the Internet, there are those that know how to work with the media and those who don't.

I don't think most new trends in media-PR relations are enhanced by email beyond the ability to get information to journalists faster. The biggest potential benefit of email and the internet is the ability to share information directly with publics without being filtered/edited by the media.

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### Responses to the question, "What, if any, new trends do you see emerging in media-PR relations which are enhanced by the presence of e-mail and the Internet?"

understanding that media reporting is still considered much more credible by most demographic groups.

More video and audio feeds online; ability for journalists to send emails (prof-net) to search for participants in a story; websites that offer substantially more info and resources for journalists.

The ability to provide the media with more information and in new formats.

- Email and websites are allowing companies to communicate with their key audiences directly. This is the next evolution of PR -- allowing direct communication without the media's filter (although, the press will never be eliminated from the equation) - I think more people take on PR roles/responsibilities because they have a website, an email account and a list of reporters' email addresses. The quality of those PR efforts is diminishing, while their frequency increases. Overall, I think it is having a very negative impact on the industry. (I get 10 junk emails a day, and I don't even write for a newspaper. Reporters are probably deleting 85% of their email boxes, just to stay sane. Pretty soon, all PR-related emails will go the way of glossy press kits -- the trash can)

Hopefully, we'll get back to meeting face to face

Reporters are turning to the web more and more to do research for their stories. In some cases, I've seen stories written with very few, if any, actual interviews conducted (they stories were based on web research). It will be important for PR professionals to ensure they create online media kits that stay up-to-date.

The maintenance of search-engine functions in specialized news-source websites is just beginning; the Worldwide Faith News [www.wfn.org] service -- created by the National Council of Churches in 1995 -- is a prime example of the pooling of similar information from a large number of collaborative organizations, with access granted to reporters worldwide, fully searchable, is proving to be a productive technique.

Sorry, but I'm not much of a trend-spotter...

More accurate and timely contact with news media in crisis situations.

Media relations pros have the greatest challenge ever to clear through the clutter. Journalists get buried with messages every hour. Therefore, this mode must be supplemented with the development of solid personal relationships that motivate journalists to click on what they perceive as a credible source. In fact, many journalists still insist on paper information. The key is to learn the preferences of each contact. The basic tenets of our profession have not changed, only the vehicles we used to get our messages out and the speed at which we are forced to respond. In addition, pr professionals must add the Internet to their list of media to monitor and understand. Ordering a set list of pubs or monitoring broadcast stations no longer is enough. We all must find ways to navigate through the Internet forest to find the information critical to our clients.

Online conferences/web seminars

continued expediency of information transfer; however, personal relationships will remain important, especially when communicating to the media re: complex issues

Yesterday an editor asked me to e-mail him news releases rather than fax or mail them. This is

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easier and saves time.

It is slow, but journalists are using e-mail more and more. This assists my communications department and me in our ability to get news and information out faster and in a timely manner.

reporters overloaded with emails will be using electronic (not personal) screening to limit messages they download, thus we in pr need to work harder at gaining their continuing attention and thereby gaining access to key reporters. Also more and more pr people (with text paging devices) will be on-call more and more hours. Reporters will expect responses in shorter timeframes. Pr people must find better ways to sort incoming emails so as to draw attention to inquiries from the media.

More web-based PR information dissemination. Webcasting. More interactive dialogue between journalists and PR professionals.

Improved accuracy of information is possible, but it is often overwhelmed by the time demands and the volume of information. Audiences are treating news releases as reporting rather than the marketing devices they are.

Viral email

Press kits, etc., on media Web sections of co. Web site

Need to continue to reinforce face-to-face to maintain open communications....

I see its increased use, but combined with more efforts to make personal contact to build confidence and relationships.

More sophisticated media materials online (on corporate web sites) such as photos, graphs, charts, etc. that journalists can pull down directly; web casting of news conferences, analyst calls, management presentations, etc.

Less personal rapport between practitioner and journalist. Greater skepticism on the part of journalist

More news and information being reported than ever before

I would have to think about this awhile. Nothing comes immediately to mind. Perhaps less leg work for the reporter--easier for them to access background information.

More customized information targeted for individual needs/requirements.

New types economic activities

Virtual news conferences

Further development of technologies and flexibility

Able to keep channels of communication flowing - able to get the message to an otherwise very busy (hard to reach) source -- a reporter and/or editor - more conversations taking place between PR professionals and media personnel

Media directories now indicate reporters' preferences for how they wish to receive information and when they wish e-mail to be used are extremely helpful; also distribution services, like Business Wire and PR Newswire, now offer web postings -- for a fee -- of a release that even will carry digital photos, logotypes, other graphics and videos. This is a cost-effective way to deliver material to print and broadcast journalists. Some sites are even password protected so they can be accessed only by qualified individuals.

I suppose the Internet is rather the source of data than a means of persuasion. If a

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company/organisation spreads through the internet (home page as well as e-mail) the data the media need and can easily find and use that is what always will be appreciated. 2) The country of my residence is Latvia not Lativa.

The quicker is the faster.

Easier to get out information quickly. Easier to update information.

The constant bombardment of email releases etc will make the personal contacts more valuable for credibility sake - journalists will favour the mail etc received from people and agencies they know in person.

Unfortunately, the continued decline in personal relationships between reporters/editors and public relations practitioners.

Quick response to requests but at the cost of personal contact. Eventually journalists won't even come tour our cities because they'll opt for virtual tours, which in my humble opinion are absolutely devoid of soul.

24-7 news cycle, more varied communication between PR practitioner and journalist, need for information portal Web site rather than static corporate brochures/contacts.

Elimination/vast reduction of mailed paper news releases quicker news cycle more quantity but less quality information more paper, not less more personalized, strategic releases easier to accomplish

Quickened response time

Greater communications among professionals and with contacts; research capabilities; ability to transmit graphics and photos;

Easy submission of support documents as attachments for a story; broadcast email with PR release to all news media;

More thorough information available more quickly.

The ability to answer questions, often before they're asked. By providing material on the company Web site, we can arm reporters more quickly with the facts they need to consider writing about my clients. Also, when faced with questions, I can usually provide the necessary response right away by attaching a document or linking to a Web page. In addition, by researching the past output of a reporter, I can better understand their interests and tailor my presentation to them.

E-mail and internet should be seen as an additional resource. I don't feel that this should in any way stop us from doing the through research required to ensure accuracy. The internet has been known to heighten the rumor mill....