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MEDIA RELATIONS BETWEEN THE HOTEL CASINO INDUSTRY OF
ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY AND *THE PRESS OF ATLANTIC CITY*

by
Patrick T. Kuhlen

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
in
Public Relations
at
Rowan University
June 2004

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved 6/24/04
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Dedication

For Tanya.

My inspiration, my love, my life, my best friend.

I am the luckiest.

Always

Patrick Thomas

ABSTRACT

Patrick T. Kuhlen
MEDIA RELATIONS BETWEEN THE HOTEL CASINO INDUSTRY OF
ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY AND *THE PRESS OF ATLANTIC CITY*
2003/04

Dr. Donald Bagin
Masters of Arts in Public Relations

This study fulfills four purposes. First, it is essential to gain a perspective of public relations and public relations practitioners, specifically those in the Atlantic City hotel casino industry, from the point of view of media representatives. Secondly, how do public relations practitioners view the relationship between their organizations and similar organizations with local media? Next, what can an organization's public relations practitioners do to foster and subsequently nurture positive relationships with media representatives and public relations practitioners? Lastly, what can a public relations practitioner do to move the relationship with media representatives, reporters and editors from mere media relations to that of the more powerful and effective key communicator?

The author of this study came to several conclusion through the research conducted. He found that while public relations practitioners felt that relationship with the media is the most important element of media relations, the media representative disagreed. Also, organizations in the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City, New Jersey need to understand the value and role of an effective public relations department. And public relations practitioners should benefit from the implementation of a key communicators program.

MINI ABSTRACT

Patrick T. Kuhlen

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This study fulfills four purposes. First, a perspective of public relations and public relations practitioners in the Atlantic City hotel casino industry, from the point of view of a local media representative. Secondly, how do public relations practitioners view their relationship with local media? Next, what can an organization and its public relations practitioners do to promote effective relationships with local media? Lastly, could the implementation of a key communicators program benefit public relations practitioners in the hotel casino industry?

The author found that while public relations practitioners felt that relationship with the media is the most important element of media relations, the media representative disagreed. Also, organizations in the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City, New Jersey need to understand the value and role of an effective public relations department. And public relations practitioners should benefit from the implementation of a key communicators program.

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respect.

Patrick T. Kuhlen
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Chapter 1

BACKGROUND, NEED, PURPOSE, PROCEDURES, LIMITATIONS AND DEFINITIONS OF THIS STUDY

Background

The Public Relations Council of Greater Atlantic City was founded in 1978. During its initial years, the public relations business was in its infancy as a profession in Atlantic City. As explosive growth and development took place in the region with the casino industry, the group grew in size and professionalism. Today, Atlantic City sits on the cusp of a new wave of development, and members of the public relations community span the field of communication from advertising and public relations firms, casinos and independent practitioners, to graphic artists and high tech companies. According to the Public Relations Council of Greater Atlantic City, “we remain committed to providing our members with a forum to develop professional skills, network and promote the Atlantic City region as a fine place to work, visit and live¹.

In September of 2002, Trump CEO Mark Brown sent shockwaves through the public relations community of Atlantic City with his decision to let go of the director of public relations for Trump Properties in Atlantic City, New Jersey, Suze DiPietro². The move left many within the public relations community to question what was next for the

¹ *About Us*, (n.d.). Retrieved October 29, 2003, from,
<http://www.prcouncilofac.org/about-acprc.html>

² Klein, Dan (9/02). Two of Area's Largest Company's Let Their Two Top PR People Go...
Dan Klein's South Jersey Insider Magazine. Retrieved November 14, 2003
<http://www.acinside.com/2002-09.asp>

Trump organization in the area of public relations in Atlantic City. Not only was DiPietro terminated, the organization dismantled the entire public relations department. Some conclude it was a simple cost cutting measure, seeing new Trump CEO Brown as committed to bottom line efficiency. Others point the finger at DiPietro herself: “Brown had become disenchanted with DiPietro because she often refused to return phone calls and shouted at reporters on the telephone.”³

The Eighth Addition of the text *Effective Public Relations* defines PR as “the distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics.”⁴ Some of the elements common to many definitions of public relations are “Deals with the relationships between an organization and its publics. Establishes and maintains two-way communication between the organization and its publics. Results in new and or maintained relationships between an organization and its publics.”⁵ In short, we define public relations as the management of communication between an organization and its publics.

Failing to return phone calls and shouting at reporters over the telephone seem very different from effectively managing the communication between an organization and its publics. Though this may be an isolated incident within a particular organization, it does raise the question of management of media relations between an organization and local media outlets.

³ Klein, Dan (9/02). Two of Area’s Largest Companies Let Their Two Top PR People Go... *Dan Klein’s South Jersey Insider Magazine*. Retrieved November 14, 2003
<http://www.acinside.com/2002-09.asp>

⁴ Grunig, James E., and Todd Hunt. *Managing Public Relations*
United States: Thomson Wadsworth, 1984.

⁵ Cutlip, Scott, Allen H. Center, and Glen Broom. *Effective Public Relations Eighth Edition*.
Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000.

According to Daniel Cirucci, associate executive director of communication and public affairs for the Philadelphia Bar Association and Rowan University graduate professor, while 76 percent of public relations practitioners view themselves as professionals, a mere 10 percent of journalists view public relations practitioners as professionals. Public relations practitioners and journalists have a turbulent relationship. Each group is dependent on the other in some aspect. Public relations practitioners need the media to disseminate an organization's corporate message or identity. Journalists and other media representatives need public relations practitioners for the information that they possess.

Few can deny the media as information gatekeepers. The media set the agenda for public discussion; they do not tell people what to think; rather they tell people what to think about. The task of the public relations practitioner is to foster a healthy relationship with media to put an organization's positive message and identity in its public's agenda. This is the basis of media relations.

For many public relations practitioners the term "media" represents a segment of an organization's external public with immense power. Media have the ability to change an organization's corporate image from positive to negative and from negative to positive, as well as the power to create and or dispel crises overnight. When crisis hits, media could be a public relations practitioner's best friend or worst enemy. Fostering and maintaining media relationships makes all of the difference in these times of crisis.

On a daily basis, the task of the public relations practitioner is to make the job of the media representative easier. How is this accomplished and what must the public relations practitioner do to foster and nurture this relationship?

The Need for This Study

Knowing about the media—knowing how to work with each medium, produce content for each, meet the deadlines of each, adhere to specific style requirements, and appeal to each medium’s audience—is a major part of many public relations practitioners’ jobs. Practitioners responsible for dealing with the media and media gatekeepers must build and maintain relationships of mutual respect and trust. The relationship, although mutually beneficial, remains an adversarial relationship at its core because journalists and practitioners are not in the same business and often do not have the same communication goals. In fact, public relations practitioners operate in a mutually dependent and mutually beneficial relationship, sometimes as adversaries, sometimes as colleagues cooperating in respective self-interest. Not as frequently, but occasionally, the news media are manipulated by the public relations practitioner, who may have more resources, as well as control access to news sources. With at least equal frequency, news media frustrate public relations practitioners in their attempts to get information to publics. In short, there is a dynamic tension in the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists that is firmly embedded in journalistic culture. All too often, neither public relations practitioners’ employers nor journalists understand the practitioners’ role in establishing and maintaining media relations⁶.

This excerpt from “*Effective Public Relations*,” a public relations textbook, coupled with the case of the firing of Director of Public Relations for the Trump properties in Atlantic City, represents the need for a study of managing effective media

⁶ Cutlip, Scott, Allen H. Center, and Glen Broom. *Effective Public Relations* Eight Edition. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000.

relations between the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City and the media of the greater Atlantic City area.

The Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, it is essential to gain a perspective of public relations and public relations practitioners, specifically those in the Atlantic City hotel casino industry, from the point of view of media representatives. Next, how do public relations practitioners view the relationship between their respective organizations ,and similar organizations, with local media? The purpose of this aspect of the study is to gain a perspective of the relationship between media representatives and public relations practitioners. This will be the foundation of this study of how better to manage an organization's media relations.

Secondly, what can an organization and its public relations practitioners do to foster and subsequently nurture positive relationships with media representatives and public relations practitioners? Do public relations practitioners know how and when to write news releases and hold new conferences effectively to better accommodate the media? Again, this is from the point of view both the public relations practitioners and the media representatives.

Lastly, are public relations practitioners in the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City, New Jersey aware of the benefit of implementing a key communicator program? What can a public relations practitioner do to move the relationship with media

representatives, reporters and editors from mere media relations to that of the more powerful and effective key communicator?

The Problem of this Study

This study hopes to answer the following questions:

- 1.) How do media representatives, specifically in the greater Atlantic City area, view their relationships with public relations practitioners in the hotel casino industry?
- 2.) What can public relations practitioners learn about writing news releases and news conferences from media representatives, specifically those in the area of greater Atlantic City?
- 3.) How can public relations practitioners develop their relationship with media representatives to that of the Key Communicator?

Procedures for this Study

The procedures for this study were:

- 1.) The writer reviewed case studies, previous theses and related materials found online and in the Campbell Library at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. This review of material, coupled with the guidance of Rowan University professors Dr. Joseph Basso and Dr. Donald Bagin, developed the foundation of this study.

- 2.) The writer wrote two surveys, one for media representatives and the other for public relations practitioners, both groups specific to the greater Atlantic City area and the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City respectively. The author pre-tested the surveys in his Seminar I and II graduate classes in the Fall of 2003 and the spring of 2004.
- 3.) The author of the study contacted media representatives and public relations practitioners in the Atlantic City area and asked them to participate in the author's study of media relations in the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City with the following e-mail request:

Dear ,
My name is Patrick Kuhlen. I am a graduate student studying public relations at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. I am writing to ask for your participation in a study of Media Perceptions of Public Relations Practitioners in the Hotel Casino Industry of Atlantic City, New Jersey. Your opinions and experiences in this area will be the foundation of my graduate thesis. I ask you to complete a survey and participate in a short interview. I understand how busy you must be. I will work around your schedule in any way to gain your perspective on this topic. Upon your reply to this e-mail, I will send you a copy of the survey via email or US Mail, which ever is more convenient for you.
All results will be confidential and available to you upon your request.
If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me.
(856)-546-0604 home
(856)-297-6666 cell phone
kuhl3569@students.rowan.edu
Thank you for your time and consideration.
Sincerely,
Patrick Kuhlen
Rowan University

The author sent those that responded to the request for participation in the study their respective survey via or e-mail as per the convenience of the respondent.

- 3.) To qualify as a respondent, these professionals must fall within one of two groups:
 - a. Media representatives: editors, reporters and stringers for the *Press of Atlantic City*.
 - b. Public relations practitioners: Vice President of Public Relations, Director of Advertising and Public Relations, Assistant Vice President of Media Services, Director of Communication and Media Relations, Director of Public Affairs overseeing Media Relations Community Affairs Government Relations and Internal Communications, Director of Marketing Services.
- 4.) Following the completion of the survey, the writer conducted an interview with a media representative. The interview was conducted with the editor of the *Press of Atlantic City* via e-mail in May of 2004.
- 5.) Surveys and interviews gained qualitative and quantitative data that ultimately became the foundation for the author's study and its subsequent findings.

Limitations of this Study

- 1.) The writer wrote e-mails and telephoned various organizations and public relations practitioners in the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City to ask for their participation in the study. Between January and May 2004 the author contacted various representatives from hotel casino properties and asked for their

participation in this study. Of the seven hotel casino properties in Atlantic City, six respondents, representing all but one property, agreed to participate.

Definitions for this Study

Key Communicators—A key communicator network is a network of opinion leaders who establish solid two-way communication between an organization and its publics. These opinion leaders talk to a lot of other people, and their audiences tend to listen to what they have to say. They agree to correct misinformation and to disseminate accurate information about the school system or organizations. They also keep in touch with school officials and immediately report misperceptions and inaccuracies before they are widely spread.

Media Representative—Newspaper editor, television news editor, reporter or stringer.

PRCGAC—Public Relations Council of Greater Atlantic City

Public Relations—A.) Distinctive management function, which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics. B.) the management of communication between an organization and its publics. C.) Some of the elements common to many definitions of public relations are: “Deals with the relationships between an organization and its publics. Establishes and maintains two-way communication between the organization and its publics. Results in new and or maintained relationships between an organization and its publics”.

Public Relations Practitioners—Public relations manager, public relations associate and communications manager.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This researcher identified three areas of concern in conducting this study. The first area of concern involves a general perception of the relationship between public relations and the media. These literary examples come from textbooks used to study communications and public relations. What public relations professionals can do to better the relationship between themselves and media representatives is the second area of concern for this study. The last area of concern comes from a concept developed by Dr. Donald Bagin. The Key Communicator Concept is a communications plan with proven success. This researcher will define this concept in chapter two so the reader can understand the concept's significance in the following chapters.

General State of the Relationship between Public Relations and the Media

“The media are the physical channels that carry the message to the receiver. They may include newspapers, magazines, radio, television letters, speeches, audiovisuals, pictures, newsletters, leaflets, brochures, and the World Wide Web. (Wilcox 2001). Your job as a public relations practitioner is to “determine which medium or combination of media will be most effective in reaching a selected public. (Wilcox 2001). While it is true that public relations practitioners and media representatives can do their respective jobs separately, a greater level of communication can be achieved when the two parties realize their interdependence on one another. Knowing about the media—knowing how to work

with each medium, produce content for each, meet the deadlines of each, and adhere to specific style requirements, and appeal to each medium's audience—is a major part of many public relations practitioners jobs. Practitioners responsible for dealing with the media and media gatekeepers must build and maintain relationships of mutual respect and trust. The relationship, although mutually beneficial, remains an adversarial relationship at its core because journalists and practitioners are not in the same business and often do not have the same communication goals. In fact, public relations practitioners operate in a mutually dependent and mutually beneficial relationship, sometimes as adversaries, sometimes as colleagues cooperating in respective self-interest. Not as frequently, but occasionally, the news media are manipulated by the public relations practitioner, who may have more resources, as well as control access to news sources. With at least equal frequency, news media frustrate public relations practitioners in their attempts to get information to publics. In short, there is a dynamic tension in the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists that is firmly embedded in journalistic culture. All too often, neither public relations practitioners' employers nor journalists understand practitioners' role in establishing and maintaining media relations (Cutlip2000).” In addition to serving as the need for this researcher's study, this excerpt from “*Effective Public Relations*” sets the tone of the relationship between public relations practitioner and the media as a volatile interdependency necessary for an organization to communicate to essential publics. Knowing this relationship is mutually beneficial is key for public relations practitioners who work closely with the media to achieve the ambitions of employers and clients.

A positive working relationship with public relations practitioners can ease the job of a media gatekeeper. Journalists and editors of publications depend greatly on the activities of public relations practitioners to fill pages to increase subscription and sales with the result of increased profit through the sale of non-editorial space for advertisement.

What Public Relations Practitioners Can Do Better to Forge a Positive Relationship with the Media.

Henderson (1998) suggests 40- 50 percent of all news articles originate with the public relations practitioner (Kandik 1999). Statements like the one above suggest that the agenda setters of the group know commonly as “the media” find inspiration for their work in the relentless activities of public relations practitioners.

Understanding the needs of the other party in the relationship can help to ease the tension often described when referring to media relations. For a public relations practitioner this means understanding what news is to gatekeepers. Wilcox (2001), author of *Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques*, writes that the elements that make an event, release or feature story news are timeliness, prominence, proximity, significance, unusualness, human interest, conflict and newness.

Timeliness: Timeliness may be the most important characteristic of news. By definition, news must be current. One way to make news timely is to announce something when it happens. Any delay in conveying this information could result in its being rejected as “old news.”

Prominence: The news media rarely cover the grand opening of a store unless a celebrity is involved. The presence of movie stars, rock stars, and professional athletes at special events invariably draw crowds and the media.

Proximity: Surveys have shown that the news releases most acceptable to media gatekeepers are those with a local angle. These stories, often called hometowners, are custom tailored for an individual's local newspaper or broadcast station by emphasizing the local angle in the first paragraph of the news release.

Significance: Any situation or event that is likely to affect a substantial number of people is significant. In judging significance, you must know not only *how* many people will be affected but also *who* will be affected.

Unusualness: Anything out of the ordinary attracts press interest and public attention.

Human Interest: People like to read about other people. That is why the news media often focus on the lives of the rich and famous, and why *People* magazine is such a success. Interest in people, however, is not restricted to celebrities. A journalist may focus on the plight of one welfare family to illustrate the problems of the entire social service system. Indeed, people would rather listen to the problems of a welfare mother in her own words than view a series of bar charts showing the decline in state and federal funding.

Conflict: When two or more groups advocate different views on a topic of current interest, this creates news. Indeed, reporters often fuel the controversy by quoting one side and then asking the other side for a comment.

Newness: Any news release announcing a new product or service has a good chance of being published.

Singularly or in combination, these elements are what media gatekeepers use to judge the value of a public relations practitioner's work. A public relations professional wishing to understand the needs of the media must consider these elements when writing a news release, holding a news conference or an event.

In addition to understanding what makes news, public relations practitioners must format their message in accordance to the needs of the journalist or editor. Wilcox (2001) gives public relations practitioners guidelines for effective communication from

corporate writing coach Ken O'Quinn. "Professional communicators are in the business of storytelling so they need to know how to deftly use techniques that capture and sustain a reader's interests. Compelling leads, vivid imagery, smooth transitions, substantive quotes, effective organization—these are the elements of good writing." Public relations practitioners also need to consider the format of a news release when writing. "Of the many ways to get into the media, the most commonly known and the most often misused is the news release (Howard 2000).

"The cries of editors seem to be heard only in the wilderness as practitioners repeat mistakes under the guise of, "But, my release is different." If, indeed, that release is different, the information contained in it will appear in the newspaper or magazine, or on the radio or television (Howard 2000).

In literature review for this study, the author found tips for writing an effective news release in a book authored by Carole M. Howard and Wilma K. Mathews entitled *On Deadline: Managing Media Relations*. These are the basic components to a release.

1. *The name of the organization*. There is no need to go overboard with multicolored flashing letters and brilliant ink. A simple company or association letterhead will suffice. The name tells the reader the source of the release and gives credibility to the information.
2. *Contact name and numbers*. At the top of the release should be the name of the person to call for more information. All pertinent numbers (office, home, pager, cellular/digital, fax) should be listed (do not forget area code or an "800" listing) as well as an e-mail address. The rationale for including several lines is simple: the media do not operate in a uniform nine-to-five day; even if they did, they are not all in the same time zone or the same country.

3. *A headline or tag line.* This piece of information is not intended as a substitute for the publication's headline writer's efforts; instead, it gives the reader a capsule phrase summing up the essence of the release.
4. *A release time.* This information, also at the top of the release, says when the information can be published or broadcast. It can read "Release upon receipt" or "Release immediately" or "Release Friday December 16, 20__." A word of caution, however. Do not embargo information unless it is required. Editors know that embargoes on stories about a company open house are coy attempts at making the information seem more important than it is. There are times when embargoes must be honored; editors know and respect those times.
5. *An ending.* Of course a release ends, but editors, copyreaders and reporters are accustomed to looking for a "30" or "###" mark to say that the release is ended. Otherwise, a release that comes close to the bottom of a page could be misconstrued as only part of a longer story.

The preceding list provides a template for public relations practitioners to use when writing an effective news release. "Of equal importance is what the release says and how it says it (Howard 2000)

1. *Follow an accepted journalists style of writing.* Get a copy of *The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual* and use it.
2. *Go easy on the length.* There are no hard and fast rules about the length of a release; however, two typewritten pages, doubled-spaced, is considered the approved length.
3. *Avoid breaks.* It makes for easier reading and more accurate typesetting if you do not split words at the end of a line or split a sentence at the bottom of a page.
4. *Clear writing.* Writing a release in corporate jargon, legalese or some other alien language makes as much sense as preparing the release in French and sending it to people who speak only English.

5. *Remember the pyramid.* The inverted pyramid style of writing is not used just for news releases. The same applies in writing personal letters, memos, briefs, white papers and other material. *The important information or the conclusion is given first*, with less important information following and, finally, the least important information at the end.
6. *Adjectives are dangerous.* Avoid the temptation to use superlatives in describing you organization's latest product, service or new executive.
7. *Make it local.* One of the criteria listed for what sells a release to an editor is the local angle or "hook" it has.
8. *Attribute the news to a person*, not a company or organization. Information is more credible if "John Doe, product manager of XYZ Co., today demonstrated the company's newest product" than if "XYZ Co. today announced it has a new widget.
9. *Indent the paragraphs.* This will make it easier for the editor to read your material.
10. *Select a good typeface.* This is true for hard copy and electronic versions of a release. You want the recipient to be able to read you material easily.

The preceding tips for writing an effective news release come from *On Deadline:*

Managing Media Relations. In addition to providing tips for public relations practitioners in the writing of effective news releases, the text also provides valuable guidelines for preparing a news conference.

"First, make sure your proposed announcement is worthy of the time and effort needed to produce a news conference. It will help if you ask your self some questions:

1. Is this announcement something that will have a significant impact on the reading/viewing audience? You will need to hold news conferences during a crisis or high-impact event.
2. Is this a major product announcement? Remember: you can *announce* a product only once; after that, you *publicize* it.

3. Is this a complex issue that cannot be explained with a release? Does the issue demand a forum so that reporters can ask questions?
4. Does the occasion involve a new chief executive officer, a celebrity or major politician from whom the media would want quotes?

In short, always consider whether you can adequately give the information to the media via some other mechanism, be it news release, telephone conversation, e-mail, briefing or op-ed piece, before holding a news conference.”

Howard and Mathews give tips for holding a news conference once you have deemed that the information you wish to release to your publics is worthy of the time and effort needed to hold such a media event.

Location-- A news conference does not have to be held in the grand ballroom of the best hotel in town. Journalists will go to where the conference is if the event is worthy of the effort.

On-line conferences-- Still in its infancy but rapidly growing is the e-conference—press conference on the web. Instead of renting a room, having refreshments, renting lights and equipment, you create a Web site; instead of giving directions to get to the land site, you designate a URL; instead of copying B-roll onto video tape, you run it as a video component of the press conference; instead of copying reams of releases, bios, fact sheets and other collateral, material, you load it onto the e-conference site. An on-line conference can be archived easily and allow the host organization to determine who logged on to the conference.

Time-- Knowing your local media well means you will have no trouble determining when to hold a conference. You should attempt to have the event at the best “down” time for all media. More than likely, this will be during the late morning, after the television crews have been given assignments (one of which you hope is to cover your conference) and when there still is time for late-breaking news to go into the final afternoon edition of the newspaper.

Notification-- Alert the media a few days in advance, if at all possible. If you alert the media much before that, you take the chance of a leak. If you wait later than that, you

may be too late in that reporters and camera crews will already have their assignments. You may contact the media to remind them of the conference but, if your first notification showed the importance of the conference, a reminder contact can be misinterpreted as pushy.

Protocol-- Each member of the media should be greeted when he or she arrives at the conference, even an on-line conference. They should be shown the layout of the conference site, including where the camera crews should go, where print reporters can sit, and the protocol of the on-line, live-feed or in-person questioning. Start the press conference on time. Just as your speakers have other engagements, so do the media have other events to cover. Stay within the specified time for the announcement itself and try to not let the question-and-answer period linger beyond the point where questions become sparse. Finally, thank the media for attending the conference. Do not assume they know you are grateful for their appearance.

Available material --The press material you give to the media at the end of the news conference is critically important. The bulk of your preparations probably will center on these items; certainly, the bulk of your time will go into creating and assembling this material into a press kit.

Emergency Conferences --Clearly, you need to hold a conference if there is a crisis that demands it, such as an industrial accident or natural disaster. Equally clear is that you will not have the time to locate just the right place and prepare all the right material and observe the minute details of decorum. In these cases, you operate under the rules of crisis management—you have a plan to cover any eventuality that may occur. Your decisions will already have been made about details such as site, spokesperson and protocol. The internet has become a critical factor in the way organizations provide information and respond to the media during a crisis.

The Key Communicator Concept

The key communicator concept, developed by Dr. Donald Bagin publisher of Communications Briefings and Public Relations Graduate Program Director at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey, uses the relationship between an organization and

key influencers in the organization's publics. "It allows an institution or company to get good news out to the staff and community quickly (Bagin 1993). Faster than a news conference or a news release, the use of Key Communicators offers the organization instant dissemination of important information to publics.

"Research shows that people tend to believe their friends and neighbors more than they believe the media or publications (Bagin 1993). The concept is based on the idea of third party endorsement. When a third party outside of an organization endorses a product, service or concept offered by an organization, publics are more likely to trust the endorsement of someone removed from the organization. "Research also shows that people make major purchases based on what others tell them about a product or a service. In an article that appeared in Communications Briefings, Bagin breaks down the key communicator concept. "Key communicators are people who talk to—and believed by—lots of people. They are usually not the formal power structure people. They may be barbers, beauticians and bartenders. They are frequently dentists, gas station owners, firefighters, post office clerks and news agency owners." This researcher seeks to find out if the key communicator concept is used in the relationship between public relations practitioners and the media. To prove or disprove this point, it is vital to define the process and people needed to develop a relationship to that of the key communicator (Bagin 1993)

"Here is how the program works in a community. The chief executive officer or someone designated by the CEO (frequently the community relations director) works with staff members to identify key communicators in the community. A formal study could be conducted, but usually a committee of employees who know the community

well can identify the kinds of people being sought. Bagin promotes the power of a communications program such as the key communicators. In *Communications Briefings*, Bagin writes that the best way to answer the question “How powerful can this communications network become?” “The best way to answer that question is to report that teachers’ unions have threatened to go to court to force school board members and administrators to release the names of key communicators. The key communicators network is a powerful relationship between an organization and its publics. “Why don’t more organizations use the idea? Some feel it’s too simple. It doesn’t require elaborate equipment, and it may not seem as impressive as a multi-media presentation. But it works and works and works .

The question that this researcher raises is: can the key communicators concept be adapted to develop a positive working relationship between public relations practitioners and media representative in their immediate publics? Can public relations practitioners spread information, dispel rumors or put the word on the street through trusted and reliable channels of media representative with whom they have a trusting relationship? Finally, do relationships like this one, recognized as key communicators network or not, help to smooth over the differences that exists between public relations practitioners and media representatives?

Chapter 3

Methodologies

To gain a perspective of media relations within the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City from the point of view of both the media and public relations practitioners the writer developed and implemented a pen and paper survey and conducted an in depth interview. The author, to draw conclusions of existing media relations and the future of media relations in the industry, tabulated and interpreted the qualitative and quantitative results of the surveys.

The writer developed a separate pen and paper survey for respondents considered public relations practitioners within the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City. The author contacted the director of public relations who heads public relations for four hotel casino properties in Atlantic City, New Jersey on the advice of Dr. Donald Bagin. In addition, the author made several cold calls to six other directors of public relations activities in the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City, New Jersey. The practitioners who agreed to respond represent six of the seven heads of public relations departments. Their titles include Vice President of Public Relations, Director of Advertising and Public Relations, Assistant Vice President of Media Services, Director of Communication and Media Relations, Director of Public Affairs overseeing Media Relations Community Affairs Government Relations and Internal Communications, Director of Marketing Services.

Based on the results of the pen and paper surveys, the writer conducted a series of interviews with a local media representative. The purpose of the interview was to gain an in-depth view of media relations activities from the media's perspective. The author conducted the interview via a correspondence of e-mails.

The writer contacted the editor of the Atlantic City Press in the fall of 2003. This respondent and his experiences at *The Press of Atlantic City* represent the media in this study. In the spring of 2004, after tabulating in results of the pen and paper survey given to public relations practitioners, the author developed a series of interview questions for the media respondent aimed at gathering qualitative data.

The author used the results of the pen and paper survey of public relations practitioners and the in depth interviews of the editor of *The Press of Atlantic City* to identify issues existing in the hotel casino industry's media relationship. The author compared ideas and issues of public relations respondents and media respondents in the hopes of forming some sort of guide to public relations in the casino hotel industry.

Chapter 4

Primary Research

The follow represents the answers given by respondents who qualified as public relations practitioners in the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City New Jersey to a survey e-mailed by the author.

*See appendix for copy of actual survey.

Section I

Question 1

Please rank in order of importance the following elements of media relations. One being the most important element of media relations from the list provided and five being the least important element on the list.

- Availability for comment
- Deadline of reporter's
- Positive working relationship
- News release follow-up call
- Honesty

All respondents indicated that a positive working relationship with the media ranks as the most important element of media relations in the Hotel Casino Industry of Atlantic City, New Jersey. (**See page 41 for media representative rank order of same list)

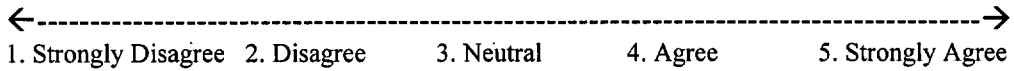
	<u>Respondent</u>					
	A	B	C	D	E	F
• Positive working relationship	1	1	1	1	1	1
• Honesty	2	3	2	n/a	2	n/a
• Deadline of reporter	3	2	3	n/a	3	n/a

Respondent

- Availability for comment 5 4 4 n/a 3 n/a
- News release follow-up call 4 5 5 n/a 5 n/a

Section II—Please type the # of you answer in the lines provided based on this

scale:



Question 1—PR practitioner’s most power tool in communicating with the media is the news release.

<u>Respondent</u>	A	B	C	D	E	F
	2	2	1	4	4	n/a

Question 2—A positive working relationship with the media is necessary for the success of a PR practitioner.

<u>Respondent</u>	A	B	C	D	E	F
	4	4	5	5	5	n/a

Question 3—Your organization has a positive working relationship with local media, such as *The Press of Atlantic City* for example.

<u>Respondent</u>	A	B	C	D	E	F
	3	4	5	5	5	n/a

Question 4—On Average, most PR practitioners in Atlantic City have a positive working relationship with local media.

Respondent	A	B	C	D	E	F
	4	4	3	5	4	n/a

Section III

Question 1—Whom do you identify as your primary audience when writing a news release (editor/reporter/reader)? Why?

Respondent	A	B	C	D	E	F
	Reporter	Reporter Reader	Reporter	Reporter	Editor Reader	Editor Reporter

The following represents the best answer for why to write for an editor, a reporter, or a reader.

Writing for an editor—“I need to make sure that the content is {in} order as such so when the editorial space is restricted and the information is literally cut from the bottom, that the pertinent details are not eliminated from the release.”

Writing for a reporter—“Regarding structure, definitely the reporter is the primary audience. Hit the who, what, where and when immediately.”

Writing for the reader—“For the content, I write for the reader in the event that a newspaper writes my information verbatim, I want to make sure that they have all clear information.”

Section III (cont')

Question 2—In your opinion, what is the most important element of a news release?

Why?

Respondent A—“Cutting through the clutter”

Respondent B—“The way the information is written. If it is written poorly and is not engaging to the reporter who is pressed for time, it will get lost.”

Respondent C—“Headline followed by a lead paragraph”

Respondent D—“The release must contain ‘real’ news and have news value to the reporter. Should not be a substitute for an advertisement/flyer.”

Respondent E—“Timeliness of the content. If your advertising hits or other information about an important matter is released early and then you issue your news release, it won’t hold as much weight. I also like to include pertinent quotes in the event an executive is unavailable for comment, the reporter still have quotable information to utilize in the article.”

Respondent F—n/a

Section III (cont ')

Question 3—How can PR practitioners make the job of media easier?

Respondent A—“Be more proactive in follow-up—verbally.”

Respondent B—“Having accessible spokesperson, one main contact person with home info included, interesting hooks. But it’s not always about making the job for media easier...especially {when} they are digging for dirt in a sandbox you’re not welcoming them into.”

Respondent C—“By being knowledgeable, trustworthy, honest and timely in responding to an inquiry.”

Respondent D—“(1) Stories and photo-ops with news value. (2) Meet their deadlines. (3) Accuracy. (4) Be accessible.

Respondent E—“By providing all pertinent {information} and/or answering all questions on one phone call. Reporters’ deadlines are imperative to know and abide by—if you are late in returning a call or supplying information, the article may not be as thorough or interesting. The more time that reporters have to complete their research and write, the better all around.”

Respondent F—“Know what you are trying to sell through research, audience analysis and accessibility.”

Section III (cont')

Question 4—What must a PR Practitioner consider when deciding to hold a news conference?

Respondent A—“Attendance vs. expense”

Respondent B—“Is it newsworthy enough for a conference? Do I have all the right players: i.e., business beat reporters at a conference with majority stockholder Mr. X⁷ versus entertainment reporters. What kind of atmosphere do we want to create –that will dictate location. I.e.: large ballroom type setting with podium /microphone to announce new building tower. Small conference room with CEO at head to have intimate conversation about the “state of the company” conference. Refreshments? Introduction?”

Respondent C—“Is it important enough to gather media together for an announcement?

Or is this something we can pitch to individual outlets for a bigger story?”

Respondent D—“Is the announcement at the press conference important enough to warrant reporters making the trip or can it be handled with a press release and phone calls. Must be considerate pf media’s schedule.”

⁷ For the sake of anonymity of the respondent and his/her organization, the name provided in the original answer has been changed.

Section III (cont')

Question 4 (*cont'*)—What must a PR Practitioner consider when deciding to hold a news conference?

(*cont'*)

Respondent E—“You must decide — What is the ultimate goal of hosting the press conference? Is the announcement important enough to host a press conference and do your invited guests (those speaking at the press conference) hold enough weight to draw in the “hard core” media. You should always make sure to have a news release, images on disc, and a speaker list available for media. If you have a business card for everyone speaking, this works out wonderfully to ensure that all names in the media will be spelled correctly. Always anticipate what their needs may be and make their job as easy as possible!”

Respondent F—n/a

Section III (cont ')

Question 5-- Many successful public relations programs use the *Key Communicators* concept as a major vehicle to help spread the word. Key Communicators are opinion leaders in the community. Public relations practitioners build a relationship with these opinion leaders, and use them to get information out quickly to the public. This study focuses, in part, on the use of key communicators in media relations. As a public relations practitioner, do you employ the key communicator concept in your dealings with the media? Why or why not?

Respondent A—n/a

Respondent B—“Atlantic City is a strange market, but yes, that type of methodology is used. AC is similar to a high school where gossip spreads quicker than the sending of e-mail. Most of the opinion leaders are casino heads, so obviously, that is not an outlet to spread positive Organization X⁸ news. However, the Presidents of Chambers of Commerce, business development organizations, etc, are effective disseminators of information.”

Respondent C—“Depending on the issue, yes we do. The individual is a proponent of the gaming industry but does not benefit from it in any way.”

Respondent D—“Yes, as long as they are on the same page with the company when communicating the message.”

⁸ For the sake of anonymity of the respondent and his/her organization, the organization name provided in the original answer has been changed.

Section III (cont')

Question 5-- Many successful public relations programs use the *key communicators* concept as a major vehicle to help spread the word. Key communicators are opinion leaders in the community. Public relations practitioners build a relationship with these opinion leaders, and use them to get information out quickly to the public. This study focuses, in part, on the use of key communicators in media relations. As a public relations practitioner, do you employ the key communicator concept in your dealings with the media? Why or why not?

(cont')

Respondent E—“There are certain media representatives that I focus on more than others just based on the relationship built over the years and target of my message. If I know that a “big” announcement is coming, I may “leak” some details in order for them to begin their article and/or research. It’s all about building relationships!”

Respondent F—Yes, this organization practices a form of the Key Communicator Concept. The example being the Organization Y⁹ Press Club.

⁹ For the sake of anonymity of the respondent and his/her organization, the organization name provided in the original answer has been changed.

Section III (cont')

Question 6-- Describe your relationship, as a public relations practitioner, with *The Press of Atlantic City*.

Respondent A—"Good"

Respondent B—"Changing. Gaming reporter Joe Weinert is leaving the paper very shortly if he hasn't already. So our main contact will be changing. Entertainment staff writers have been fair, but we need to develop a stronger relationship with our new gaming contact."

Respondent C—"We have an outstanding relationship with the beat reporters, editors and publishers of the newspaper. We may not always agree on coverage of our industry, but we can usually reach terms that benefit both of us. Generally, coverage of our industry is fair in this newspaper."

Respondent D—"I work with many different reporters with the AC Press, and treat all of them as if they are my most important contact. I view my role like a sales person.... My product happens to be the news... I treat all reporters like they are my best client."

Respondent E—"I believe that my overall relationship with The Press of Atlantic City is positive. I work directly with certain media representatives and know that I can "pitch" article ideas to others. The key is to be flexible, available and prompt. In the hotel/casino industry, we deal with virtually every media representative at the newspaper—entertainment, business, food & beverage, news desk, photography, etc."

Respondent F—n/a

Section IV

Question 1--The burden of fostering a positive relationship between media and public relations falls on

- A. Public Relations Practitioners
- B. Media Representatives
- C. Both Public Relations Practitioners and Media Representatives

All respondents agreed that the burden of fostering a positive working relationship between public relations practitioners and the media falls on both parties.

Section IV(cont')

Question 2-- Please rank order the importance of the following mediums when conducting public relations activities for your organization.

- Television _____
- Internet _____
- Newspaper _____
- Magazine _____

Four of Six respondents ranked newspapers as the important mediums when conducting public relations activities.

	<u>Respondent</u>					
	A	B	C	D	E	F
Television	2	1	2	2	2	2
Internet	4	4	4	3	3	4
Newspaper	1	2	1	1	1	3
Magazine	3	3	3	4	4	1

Section IV(cont')

Question 3— Which of the following statements best describes your relationship with *The Press of Atlantic City*?

- A. Above average working relationship (always comfortable going off the record)
- B. Positive working relationship (comfortable going off the record with certain reporters)
- C. Neutral working relationship. (no problems working together, yet not comfortable enough to go off the record)
- D. Never go off the record with any reporter regardless of relationship

Four of six respondents felt that their relationship with *The Press of Atlantic City* is a Positive working relationship where they are comfortable going off the record with certain reporters.

Respondent A— C. Neutral working relationship. (no problems working together, yet not comfortable enough to go off the record)

Respondent B— B. Positive working relationship (comfortable going off the record with certain reporters)

Respondent C— B. Positive working relationship (comfortable going off the record with certain reporters)

Respondent D— B. Positive working relationship (comfortable going off the record with certain reporters)

Respondent E— B. Positive working relationship (comfortable going off the record with certain reporters)

Respondent F— n/a

Section IV(cont')

Question 4-- In your opinion, how do local media members view public relations as a profession?

- A. Positively (necessary for a reporter to do his/her job)
- B. Neutral
- C. Negatively (not necessary for a reporter to do his/her job)

Five of six respondents agreed that members of local media view public relations as a profession necessary to complete the job of reporters.

Respondent A— A. Positively (necessary for a reporter to do his/her job)

Respondent B— A. Positively (necessary for a reporter to do his/her job)

Respondent C— A. Positively (necessary for a reporter to do his/her job)

Respondent D— A. Positively (necessary for a reporter to do his/her job)

Respondent E— A. Positively (necessary for a reporter to do his/her job)

Respondent F— n/a

Section V

Question 1— What can the Media do to build a better relationship with PR Practitioners in your field?

Respondent A—“Cover the positive news as well as the negative news is covered.”

Respondent B—“Be more willing to understand and include circumstances that may make the story less spectacular.”

Respondent C—“Give us a fair amount of time to respond to questions/inquiries,

particularly in times of crises. Be responsive when being pitched on a story – don’t just look to use us at times of need but expect reciprocating requests.”

Respondent D—“Fair + Honest + Accurate Reporting.” “When possible allow for enough response time so a PR person can respond appropriately. Unrealistic deadlines often result in missed opportunity.”

Respondent E—“Besides offering as much lead time as possible for interviews, quotes,

etc.- this would be a great question for the media (and I would love to know the answer).”

Respondent F—n/a

Section V(cont')

Question 2-- What can PR Practitioners do to build a better relationship with local media?

Respondent A— n/a

Respondent B—“Keep in contact with key media. Building a stable relationship over time is priceless.”

Respondent C—“Be Available. Be Honest.”

Respondent D—“Be honest.” “Provide information in a desired manner. Example –A reporter may prefer e-mail instead of a fax.”

Respondent E—“Continue to be available – 24/7 – to answer any questions, comments, etc. Face it – we are a 24 hour industry and the media have specific deadlines, so accessibility is a must!”

Respondent F—n/a

Section VI

Demographic Information

Sex of Respondents: Males: 2 Females: 4

Years you have worked in the Hotel Casino Industry

- A.) under one year— 0 Respondents
- B.) 1-5 years— 1 Respondent
- C.) 6-10 years— 1 Respondent
- D.) 11-15 years— 1 Respondent
- E.) 16-20 years— 3 Respondents
- F.) 21+ years— 0 Respondents

Education

- A.) Associates Degree – 1 Respondent
- B.) Bachelors Degree – 4 Respondents
- C.) Master Degree – 1 Respondent
- D.) Doctorate – 0 Respondents
- E.) No college degree – 0 Respondents

Academic major or specialization:

Respondent A--Marketing

Respondent B-- English

Respondent C— n/a

Respondent D—English/Communications B.A., Masters Degree in Public Relations

Respondent E-- Journalism

Respondent F-- Marketing

Section VI (cont')

Demographic Information

Title of your position:

Respondent A—Vice President

Respondent B—Director of Advertising and Public Relations

Respondent C—Assistant Vice President of Media Services

Respondent D—Director of Communication and Media Relations

Respondent E—Director of Public Affairs overseeing Media Relations, Community

Affairs, Government Relations, and Internal Communications

Respondent F—Director of Marketing Services

In Depth Interview of One Editor of Press of Atlantic City

Please rank in order of importance the following elements of media relations.

- Availability for comment __1__
- Honesty __2__
- Deadline of reporter __3__
- Positive working relationship __4__
- News release follow up call __5__

Comments concerning order--

“A public relations representative’s primary responsibility is to represent – hence the title. If the individual can’t be reached, he or she is useless. If he or she can’t – or won’t – comment, he or she is might want to consider quitting to do the company and the media a favor.” (***)See page 23 for public relations practitioners rank order of the same list)

1. How do you define Public Relations?

“Message/image/brand control. Putting the best possible light on a company or its products/services without deliberately misleading, misrepresenting or obfuscating.”

2. What is the PR practitioner's media relations role in a casino hotel organization?

"Same as above, plus emphasizing property advantages, differences, etc. that can improve the casino's competitive position."

3. Do you feel public relations practitioners in the casino hotel industry serve as a liaison between an organization and the public? Why or why not?

"In my experience, the PR operations at casinos tend to be (remarkably) understaffed and underfunded. Casinos' marketing and advertising decisions are generally handled by out of state agencies and as a result the local PR staff tends to have limited responsibilities, authority, budget and range of responsibilities."

4. How do you perceive the state of the relationship between media and public relations practitioners in the casino hotel industry of Atlantic City?

"Civil. Professional. Infrequent."

5. In your opinion, which areas need improvement the relationship between public relations practitioners in Atlantic City and media?

"Until the casinos ramp up their PR efforts and operations to the level one would expect of a multi-million dollar business, it's unlikely that any significant efforts can, will or should be made."

6. What mistakes do PR practitioners commonly make when sending out news releases?

“Leaving out critical information (date, time, contact numbers), sending out too many copies to too many editors (inviting editors to ignore the release because they assume someone else is taking care of it) or sending the release to the wrong people.”

7. What mistakes do public relations practitioners commonly make when holding a news conference?

“Not having the “right” people available from the company to answer questions that deserve or merit answers. Not providing useful handouts that reduce the need for anyone to ask “simple” questions that make the conference needlessly longer.”

8. Many successful public relations programs use the *Key Communicators* concept as a major vehicle to help spread the word. Key Communicators are opinion leaders in the community. Public relations practitioners build a relationship with these opinion leaders, and use them to get information out quickly to the public. This study focuses, in part, on the use of key communicators in media relations. Are you aware of the key communicator concept? If so, does this concept apply to your relationship with PR Practitioners in the Hotel Casino industry of Atlantic City?

“No. Not that I’m aware of.”

9. In what ways do PR practitioners inhibit the completion of your work?

“Attempting to manage the news by attempting to restrict or block coverage (photos or reporting) that might be unfavorable.”

10. On average, what percentage of stories in your publication are developed from PR related activities (news releases/feature article pitch calls/news conferences/invitations to cover)?

“5%”

11. What are the most important elements of media relations?

“Mutual respect, candor and trust based on professional skill and appreciation of each other’s responsibilities, pressures and priorities.”

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Recommendations from the Author And Suggested Topics for Further Study

Conclusion 1.0

The research conducted by the author found that while public relations practitioners felt that relationship with the media is vital to media relations, the media representative disagreed. The respondent representing the media felt availability for comment, honesty and respecting deadlines of reporters were all more important to successful media relations than a positive working relationship. (See respondents answer to the rank order question found on page 42.)

Recommendation 1.1

Media relations need to start with the most basic elements of the relationship. Catering to the needs of the media seems the best way to lay the foundation for a positive working relationship with the media. A positive working relationship is just that, a working relationship. Each side has a particular job to accomplish. By making the job of the media easier by being available for comment, adhering to reporter's deadlines and being honest, public relations practitioners will make their own job easier in the end.

Recommendation 1.2

Always be available for comment. Consider this quote from the editor of *The Press of Atlantic City*, "a public relations representative's primary responsibility is to represent – hence the title. If the individual cannot be reached, he or she is useless. If he or she can't

– or won’t – comment, he or she is might want to consider quitting to do the company and the media a favor.” The author’s research found availability for comment ranked as most important when he interviewed the editor of this newspaper. Public relations practitioners in the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City, New Jersey must make every effort to be available for comment, even in time of crisis.

Conclusion2.0

Organizations in the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City, New Jersey need to understand the value and role of an effective public relations department. Consider this statement from the editor of *The Press of Atlantic City* when asked which areas need improvement in the relationship between public relations practitioners in the hotel casino industry and the media. “Until the casinos ramp up their PR efforts and operations to the level one would expect of a multi-million dollar business, it’s unlikely that any significant efforts can, will or should be made.”

Recommendation 2.1

Public relations practitioners in the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City, New Jersey must show higher levels of management the importance of public relations. Using Pat Jackson’s double bottom line theory, which can be used to put a monetary value on the importance of effective public relations and how it affects the bottom line of an organization, practitioners should seek greater funding and staffing to create departments with the ability to effectively manage communication between the organization and its publics. Public relations and media relations are more than writing news releases and a

means of “free advertising” again, a quote from the editor of *The Press of Atlantic City* supports this recommendation. “In my experience, the PR operations at casinos tend to be (remarkably) understaffed and underfunded. Casinos’ marketing and advertising decisions are generally handled by out of state agencies and as a result the local PR staff tends to have limited responsibilities, authority, budget and range of responsibilities.”

Conclusion 3.0

Public relations practitioners in the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City, New Jersey that responded to the surveys the author wrote felt that their relationship with the media is stronger than the research suggests. This conclusion stems from the lack of understanding of what the media needs from public relations practitioners. Another reason for the misconception that all is well in media relations efforts is the fact that of the six respondents that agreed to participate in this study, only one has a degree in public relations.

Recommendation 3.1

Public relations must make a proactive effort to understand the needs of media they work with on a daily basis. It might be as simple as asking how a specific editor or reporter like to have information presented and sent to them and as complex as formal survey of media representatives by the casino organizations to better address the needs of media representatives.

Conclusion 4.0

Public relations practitioners should benefit from the implementation of a key communicators program.

Recommendation 4.1

The key communicators identified by the author of this study include the gaming beat reporters of *The Press of Atlantic City* and other area newspapers and television stations. Through these key communicators, representing the public opinion leaders in the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City New Jersey, the organization should disseminate information in the form of news. To their credit, one organization currently maintains a *press club* that offers information to reporters via a web site. *Press club* members must log into a secure web site to access much of the *press club's* valuable information.

Suggested topics for further study

The author of this study sees room for increased study of public relations practitioner's role in the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City, New Jersey. The following area should be addressed to gain perspective of public relations role in the similar industries around the country.

Suggested topic for further study 1.0

An author seeking similar knowledge of a public relation practitioners in the hotel casino industry should be able to complete a comparative study of organization in Las Vegas, Nevada and Atlantic City, New Jersey. The purpose of this study could include contrasting the roles of public relations practitioners in similar organizations in different markets. Should an author choose to study this topic, this author suggests contacting the University of Nevada Las Vegas Gaming Studies Research Center at <http://gaming.unlv.edu/>. This web site should prove a valuable resource for future studies conducted on the topic.

Suggested topic for further study 2.0

An author seeking similar knowledge of public relation practitioners in the hotel casino industry should be able to complete a study of the role of public relations as a management function. Are public relations practitioners in the hotel casino industry P.T. Barnum style publicist, or fulfilling Edward Bernays' legacy of counseling as an aspect of public relations?

Suggested topic for further study 3.0

An author seeking similar knowledge of public relation practitioners in the hotel casino industry should be able to complete a study of public relations crisis management in the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City, New Jersey. In the gambling industry, keeping the organization in a positive light is a challenge.

Suggested topic for further study 4.0

An author seeking similar knowledge of public relation practitioners in the hotel casino industry should be able to complete a study of the public relations efforts of the Tropicana organization of Atlantic City, New Jersey in the hours and days following the collapse of a parking garage in the fall of 2003 that killed four workers and injured 21.

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Appendix One
Survey of Public Relations Practitioners in the Hotel Casino Industry of
Atlantic City, New Jersey

The following study is being conducted to understand the relationship between public relations practitioners in the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City, New Jersey and *The Press of Atlantic City*. Thank you for your time.

Section I—Please rank in order of importance the following elements of media relations.

- Availability for comment _____
- Deadline of reporter's _____
- Positive working relationship _____
- News release follow up call _____
- Honesty _____

Section II—Please type the # of you answer in the lines provided based on this scale:

←-----→
1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

1.) PR Practitioner's most power tool in communicating with the media is the news release.

Answer _____

2.) A positive working relationship with the media is necessary for the success of a PR Practitioner.

Answer _____

3.) Your organization has a positive working relationship with local media, such as *The Press of Atlantic City* for example.

Answer _____

4.) On Average, most PR practitioners in Atlantic City have a positive working relationship with local media.

Answer _____

Section III—Please type answer in the space provided.

1.) Who do you identify as your primary audience when writing a news release (editor/reporter/reader)? Why?

2.) In your opinion, what is the most important element of a news release? Why?

3.) How can PR Practitioners make the job of media easier?

4.) What must a PR Practitioner consider when deciding to hold a news conference?

5.) Many successful public relations programs use the *Key Communicators* concept as a major vehicle to help spread the word. Key Communicators are opinion leaders in the community. Public relations practitioners build a relationship with these opinion leaders, and use them to get information out quickly to the public. This study focuses, in part, on the use of key communicators in media relations. As a public relations practitioner, do you employ the key communicator concept in your dealings with the media? Why or why not?

6.) Describe your relationship, as a public relations practitioner, with *The Press of Atlantic City*.

Section IV—Please type answer on the line

1.) The burden of fostering a positive relationship between media and public relations falls on

- A. Public Relations Practitioners
- B. Media Representatives
- C. both Public Relations Practitioners and Media Representatives

Answer _____

2.) Please rank order the importance of the following mediums when conducting public relations activities for your organization.

- Television _____
- Internet _____
- Newspaper _____
- Magazine _____

3.) Which of the following statements best describes your relationship with *The Press of Atlantic City*?

- A. Above average working relationship (always comfortable going off the record)
- B. Positive working relationship (comfortable going off the records with certain reporters)
- C. Neutral working relationship. (no problems working together, yet not comfortable enough to go off the record)
- D. Never go off the record with any reporter regardless of relationship

Answer _____

4.) In your opinion, how do local media members view public relations as profession?

- A. Positively (necessary for a reporter to do his/her job)
- B. Neutral
- C. Negatively (not necessary for a reporter to do his/her job)

Answer _____

Section V— Please type answer in the space provided.

1.) What can the Media do to build a better relationship with PR Practitioners in your field?

2.) What can PR Practitioners do to build a better relationship with local media?

Section VI
Demographic Information

Sex: A.) Male B.) Female

Years you have worked in the Hotel Casino Industry

- A.) under one year
- B.) 1-5 years
- C.) 6-10 years
- D.) 11-15 years
- E.) 16-20 years
- F.) 21+ years

Answer _____

Education

- A.) Associates Degree
- B.) Bachelors Degree
- C.) Master Degree
- D.) Doctorate
- E.) No college degree

Answer _____

Academic major or specialization: _____

Title of your position: _____

Thank you for lending your experience to my study. The information you provided will be included in my graduate thesis. You will have complete anonymity in the reporting of data.

Patrick Thomas Kuhlen

Rowan University Graduate School of Public Relations

Appendix Two

In depth interview questions for the editor of *The Press of Atlantic City*.

This interview was conducted the week of June 1, 2004 via a series of e-mails.

Please rank in order of importance the following elements of media relations.

- Availability for comment _____
- Deadline of reporter _____
- Positive working relationship _____
- News release follow up call _____
- Honesty _____

Comments concerning order--

Feel free to use as much space as you need to respond to these questions.

1. How do you define Public Relations?

2. What is the PR Practitioner's media relations role in a casino hotel organization?

3. Do you feel public relations practitioners in the casino hotel industry serve as a liaison between an organization and the public? Why or why not?

4. How do you perceive the state of the relationship between media and public relations practitioners in the casino hotel industry of Atlantic City?

5. In your opinion, which areas need to improve in the relationship between public relations practitioners in Atlantic City and media?

6. What mistakes do PR Practitioners commonly make when sending out news releases?

7. What mistakes do public relations practitioners commonly make when holding a news conference?

8. Many successful public relations programs use the *key communicators* concept as a major vehicle to help spread the word. Key communicators are opinion leaders in the community. Public relations practitioners build a relationship with these opinion leaders, and use them to get information out quickly to the public. This study focuses, in part, on the use of key communicators in media relations. Are you aware of the key communicator concept? If so, does this concept apply to your relationship with PR practitioners in the hotel casino industry of Atlantic City?

9. In what ways do PR Practitioners inhibit the completion of your work?

10. On average, what percentage of stories in your publication are developed from PR related activities (news releases/feature article pitch calls/news conferences/invitations to cover)?

11. What are the most important elements of media relations?

*Thank you again for your time. Lending your real world experiences strengthens my study. Should you have any questions, feel free to e-mail me at:
kuhlen82@students.rowan.edu*

Sincerely,

*Patrick Thomas Kuhlen
Rowan University Graduate School of Public Relations*

