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**CREATIVE COMMUNICATION
IN PUBLIC RELATIONS ACTIVITIES**

CREATIVE COMMUNICATION IN PUBLIC RELATIONS ACTIVITIES

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*Publicity, publicity, publicity is the greatest moral factor
and force in our public life.*

Joseph Pulitzer



Abstract

This article discusses several approaches to new waves of public relations. Emphasis is given to the creative impulse since many public relations professionals are less familiar with it than other forms of communication. Five criteria are suggested for structuring creative communications: (1) learning how to be a good storyteller; (2) visual communication is the content that could increasingly build strong relationships with audiences; (3) the PR practitioner's challenge is to evaluate what people are discussing and identify the recurring issues in their marketplace; (4) recognizing that local is new global; and (5) predicate that PR is constantly changing.

People who work in public relations possess the skill of offering arguments that will convince the people themselves of something. However, these skills can be offered in traditional or creative forms of expression. If we define public relations as the management of an organization's communication with its public¹, then we are referring to the traditional dimension of public relations, the basis and ultimate goal of which are to cultivate relationships with the participants of the process in order to obtain support and to build trust and reputation.

Keywords: public relations, creativity, communication, ego

¹ Theaker, Alison: *Priručnik za odnose s javnošću*, HUOJ, Zagreb 2007.

What does creativity means for public relations?

Public relations as a communication discipline are distinct from the stereotypical model of interaction with an audience. Now, more than ever it depends on the development of technology and human consciousness. A model that describes creativity in public relations is still an enigma. If you ask any customer or client what they require today from PR professionals, indisputably the first thing they will say is that they need and expect a person who works in public relations to be creative and this creativity must be reflected in their work. What, therefore, does creativity mean for public relations? The word creativity is widely used and has over a thousand definitions. Creativity is something that may be easier to recognize than to define and can be treated as a personal talent, process or product, or can be recognized by others. Is creativity therefore impulse, undefined and subconsciously in us, inherited as what we call the unconscious automatic reaction? Is it something like what Sigmund Freud defined as the Id?

According to Sigmund Freud the Id is unconscious by definition: "It is the dark, inaccessible part of our personality, what little we know of it we have learned from our study of the Dreamwork and of the construction of neurotic symptoms, and most of that is of a negative character and can be described only as a contrast to the ego. We approach the id with analogies: we call it a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations. It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organization, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle."²

Being entirely honest with oneself is a good exercise

Creativity can be defined as a process that does not recognize boundaries and rules, has no inhibitions and channels the irrational and impulsive in order to meet goals. If one draws a parallel between public relations and Freud's Id, does it mean that to be creative involves covering up the truth, lying and manipulation? I would argue that a close relationship between the two does not exist, although moral values vary from person to person depending on a variety of factors. Let us go back to the definition of personality according to Sigmund Freud:

² Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* [1933] (Penguin Freud Library 2) pp. 105–106.

Freud proposed three structures of the psyche or personality³

Id: *The id is the unconscious reservoir of the energy that fuels instincts and psychic processes. It is a selfish, childish, pleasure-oriented part of the personality with no ability to delay gratification.*

Ego: *The ego acts as a moderator between the pleasure sought by the Id and the morals of the superego, seeking compromises to pacify both. It can be viewed as the individual's "sense of time and place".*

Superego: *The superego contains internalized societal and parental standards of "good" and "bad" or "right" and "wrong" behavior. It includes conscious appreciations of rules and regulations as well as those incorporated unconsciously.*

If I compare Freud's psyche or personality with the structure of an average PR personality then I would conclude the following: The PR person needs to act. This pile of urges burns inside the person and fuels all the basic behaviours: to reach out with words that send a clear and simple message. This is something like Freud's Id. The Id is that basic, inextinguishable spark of human drives that lives inside us. This set of expectations that the PR person feels obliged to meet is something like Freud's Superego. Its set of external demands develop from the moment of social awareness and it eventually takes up residence in the PR's head as a voice demanding that he or she constantly keeps up a certain appearance and meets a certain set of expectations from the public.

The Superego is the voice in our head telling us to suppress ourselves in order to look right. We find ourselves caught between this set of primal needs that sits burning in the center of each of us (the Id), and the voice that demands we keep up a neat and packaged appearance (the Superego). This conscious self that feels caught between the two is Freud's Ego. It is what one identifies as "me". It is what I define as Creative Public Relations.

Freudian Slip

There is a metaphor of great insight from the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who argued that "A man never stands in the same river twice". When faced with task of

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defense_mechanism

being creative, we are in a world that, like a river, is constantly changing.⁴ How may we encourage the creative process? The best starting point from which to approach my Freudian view is not the three-division-self, but Freud's notion of a slip. A Freudian slip, also called parapraxis, is an error in speech, memory, or physical action that is interpreted as occurring due to the interference of an unconscious subdued wish, conflict, or train of thought guided by the Superego and the rules of correct behavior.⁵ They reveal a "source outside the speech". This is a fairly well known concept. This is what we are doing most of the time when we interact publicly with others. A slip occurs when we accidentally drop the facade, break character, and reveal a thought or feeling that lies behind the act we are performing. A Freudian slip is when what is really going on inside us unintentionally breaks through the thin film of our controlled outer appearance. A Freudian slip is where you accidentally say what you mean, instead of what you meant to say. Does that mean that we do not have to slip, nor do we control the outcome? It is clear that this energy can be used for natural and honest relationships with others. In the culture in which we are living, the need for honest, "thoughtless" actions sometimes is considered to be an inappropriate way to express our feelings. If creativity cannot be measured, and if this is a process that is composed of different levels, it is inevitable that in one part of its implementation we will process it to be more socially aware and conscious and put it in a desirable framework, or in a form in which we would like others to see it.

Here I want to look back at the birth of ideas and what I would call a Freudian slip. I would define the beginning of the creative process as residing in that which is unconscious and unspoken. Creativity techniques have long been applied to commercial use in marketing and advertising, and one of the pioneers of the application was Alex Osborn who in the 1950's divided the creative process in this way: orientation, preparation, analysis, ideation, incubation, synthesis and evaluation.⁶

By recognizing that there is method in the creative process any practitioner can improve their effectiveness and identify any weaknesses in the chain. To help public relations practitioners to have an effective, comprehensive and memorable model to use in understanding and harnessing the creative process, let me identify five important trends in the PR Business that can develop from a creative slip:

⁴ Andy Green, *Creativity in Public Relations*, 3rd ed. (1958), p. 7.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freudian_slip

⁶ Alex Osborn: *Applied Imagination: Principles and Procedures of Creative Problem-Solving* (1953).

1. **Storytelling:** If you want to say a word, say it. Keep going. There is a difference between writing and telling the story. If you write, you will sit and think first; if you start telling you do not think twice. Stories are sticky, relatable, and effective; these are the reasons stories are the cornerstone of the content marketing strategies and social media programs that are becoming enmeshed within public relations. Do not tell fancy stories, do not tell lies, do not say what you do not mean, and definitely do not say what others want to hear. If you are a clever storyteller you are going to tell a life, not a fairytale.
2. **Think in pictures:** Sometimes there are just too many words to assimilate in one day, to remember, or to share. This is not the death of words, but video is increasingly smart, cost effective, and desirable to share editorially. Basic videography, photography, and design are important, as is the ability to develop visual concepts to accompany and illustrate messages. It is not all “new” news, but visual communication is the earned content approach that could increasingly separate winners from losers in the subtler channels' battle for attention.
3. **More people can make more things directly:** Learn how to use a social media dashboard to evaluate what people are discussing and identify the recurring issues in your marketplace. Get involved in social media and industry discussion groups to observe first-hand how conversations work and how ideas flow. This is very important as in the near future PR professionals will be dealing with ever more distributed audiences and influencers.
4. **See Local as the new Global:** While communications on one hand get more complex, on the other it is almost more basic in the quest for simple, shareable more “one on one” approaches. PR professionals should expect to see themselves blogging, doing content creation and content marketing. PR professionals will need to focus on having an audience, having conversations with audiences, and for that audience to be portable between different forms of media.
5. **Adaptation:** The ability to succeed in changing times is really part of the DNA for public relations. The only thing predictable about PR is change. Make time in your day to read, practice, and learn. “Public relations has not become digital, PR has become social. And you can't build your reputation on what you are going to do”

Future is bright

This crucial task differentiation is important for organizational positioning for successful PR practitioners. If you follow these new trends in public relations there is an outstanding opportunity for creative public relations practitioners to be in the centre of their organization as a major link by contributing to the definition and updating of the organization's positioning. With the increasingly rapid rate of change in the world (technology, ideology, economy) there will be scope for creative PR practitioners to help organizations not only to face the problems of today, but also to anticipate and contribute to the challenges of tomorrow by creating a better understanding of the future. Despite meaningful and useful developments, however, there is much work that needs to be done to make the body of PR knowledge more holistic and globally relevant.⁷ There is a strong need to test new waves of conceptual frameworks empirically in different parts of the world. Regarding the Freudian slip, the ultimate objective of PR practitioners is to match the structure of linguistic statements to the real structures of the world.⁸ The challenge to creative practitioners will be to identify new sources of their own creativity and connectivity with the real world so that their communications are fresh and original, notwithstanding that they must always be based on reality.

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