The PR Industry*

1 "NEWS is what someone wants to suppress. Everything else is advertising," said Reuven Frank, a former head of NBC news. So what sort of business is public relations (PR)①, which spends half its time huffing about bad news; and the rest puffing politicians, companies and celebrities?

2 The answer is that, for business, PR is an increasingly vital marketing tool — especially as traditional forms of advertising struggle to catch consumers' attention. The goal of PR is usually to secure positive coverage in the media, and the well-worn tactics include calling a press conference, pitching stories directly to journalists, arranging eye-catching events, setting up interviews and handing out free samples. But as PR profits from advertising's difficulties, it is taking up a host of new stratagems — and seeking to move up the corporate pecking order.

3 Some journalists regard PR people as a nuisance, or

huff /hʌf/ *v.* to say sth or make a noise in a way that shows you are offended or annoyed 恼怒

puff /pʌf/ *v.* to advertise with exaggerated or false praise 吹捧

pitch /pɪtʃ/ *v.* throw with force 扔，掷或抛

stratagem /ˈstrætədʒəm/ *n.* [formal] a trick or plan that you use to gain an advantage or to trick an opponent 蒙蔽他人（尤指敌人）的计谋，策略，花招

nuisance /ˈnjuːsəns/ *n.* a thing, person or situation that is annoying or causes trouble or problems 令人讨厌的事物、人、行为

* This text is taken from *The Economist*, January 19, 2006.

cutting edge the newest, most advanced stage in the development of sth; forefront 尖端，前沿

credit /ˈkredɪt/ *v.* [usually passive] to believe or say that sb is responsible for doing sth, especially sth good 相信，归功于

picky /ˈpɪkɪ/ *a.* [informal] liking only particular things and difficult to please 吹毛求疵的，挑剔的

worse. Even so, PR is surprisingly effective, at least according to a recent study by Procter & Gamble, the world's biggest consumer-products group. P&G is a firm that marketers pay a lot of attention to, not least because of its advertising budget of some $4 billion. It has always been at the cutting edge of marketing — P&G is credited with inventing the television soap opera as a new way to sell goods. But with fewer people watching television and the circulation of many papers and magazines declining, the firm has become pickier about where it spends its advertising budget. Increasingly, it wants a measurable return on investment from its campaigns.

4 In a recent internal study, P&G concluded that the return was often better from a PR campaign than from traditional forms of advertising, according to Hans Bender, the firm's manager of external relations. One reason is that in comparison with many other types of marketing, PR is cheap. In P&G's case, it can represent as little as 1% of a brand's marketing budget. That proportion could now rise, says Mr Bender, although he hastens to add that other forms of advertising and marketing would remain important for the company.

5 If P&G starts to spend more on PR campaigns it will confirm a trend. Spending on PR in America has been growing strongly and reached some $3.7 billion last year, according to Veronis Suhler Stevenson, a New York investment bank that specialises in media. It forecasts PR spending will grow by almost 9% a year. This is faster than the overall market for advertising and marketing, now worth a colossal $475 billion and growing at 6.7% a year.

6 Of course, not all PR people are selling products or services. Indeed, marketing PR — or "brand communications" as it is sometimes called — is still considered by some in the industry as something of a Cinderella business. A recent study in Britain by the Centre for Economics and Business Research found the PR industry there employs 48,000 people. More than 80% were working "in-house", for companies or other organisations. Just over half of Britain's in-house PRs work for the public sector, health organisations and charities. These organisations are also the biggest users of PR consultancies.

7 Many of the big PR firms have been consolidated into the giant groups that now dominate the advertising industry. Two of these are American: Interpublic owns Golin Harris and

Weber Shandwick, and Omnicom owns Fleishman-Hillard and Ketchum. Britain's WPP owns Hill & Knowlton and Burson-Marsteller. The groups also own a range of specialised agencies. For instance, WPP's Finsbury concentrates on corporate and financial PR — and has just gained publicity by announcing that it is taking on Tony Blair's son, Euan, as an intern. Omnicom's Clark & Weinstock does reputation and crisis management, and Interpublic's PMK/HBH looks after the entertainment business, with celebrity clients such as Nicole Kidman, Russell Crowe and Jennifer Aniston.

8 Then there are the independent PR firms, the largest of which is family-owned Edelman. Richard Edelman, the company's president and chief executive, says that Edelman's own studies show the most credible form of communication now comes from "a person like yourself", which suggests that PR firms have new opportunities to influence peer groups②.

9 Edelman, for instance, recently worked on drumming up interest amongst hard-core computer-gamers ahead of the launch of Microsoft's new Xbox games console. It also worked for a group of former executives who last year succeeded in ousting Philip Purcell as chief executive of Morgan Stanley. One of the things the PR firm did was to set up a website where employees of the Wall Street investment bank could have their say in the controversy. Such work is very different from classic public relations. "Companies can try to serve up a tight, straight message through the media by issuing a one-way press release, but that's as flawed right now as a 15 or 30-second TV ad," says Pam Talbot, Edelman's chief in America.

10 The fragmentation of media has seen an explosion in the number of ways people seek news and entertainment, with many turning to websites, cable TV, satellite radio and podcasts③. Yet a consequence of the proliferation of media is that original content becomes even more sought after. Hence crisply written or well-produced PR material can more easily get an airing. Media commentators have noted how PR material is now being published by some local newspapers virtually unedited and unchecked. Some branches of journalism have come to depend on a drip-feed of information and products from the PR industry. Journalists focusing on electronics, fashion, travel, beauty and food have a huge appetite for free samples. Gossip about celebrities is also largely mediated by the PR industry.

hard-core /ˈhɑːdkɔː/ *a.* having a belief or a way of behaving that will not change 中坚的，铁杆的

console /ˈkɒnsəʊl/ *n.* a flat surface which contains all the controls and switches for a machine, a piece of electronic equipment, etc. 控制台，操纵台

oust /aʊst/ *v.* to force sb out of a job or position of power, especially in order to take their place 驱逐，把……撤职

proliferation /prəʊˌlɪfəˈreɪʃən/ *n.* a sudden increase in the number or amount of sth 激增

mediate /ˈmiːdɪeɪt/ *v.* to try to end a disagreement between two or more people or groups by talking to them and trying to find things that everyone can agree on 调停，调解

accentuate /æk'sentjʊeɪt/ *v.* to emphasize sth or make it more noticeable 突出（某事物），强调
triumphalism /traɪ'ʌmfəlɪzəm/ *n.* [disapproving] behaviour that celebrates a victory or success in a way that is too proud and intended to upset the people you have defeated 耀武扬威，洋洋得意
spin /spɪn/ *n.* a way of presenting information or a situation in a particular way, especially one that makes you or your ideas seem good （尤指有利于自己的）导向性陈述
entitle /ɪn'taɪtl/ *v.* [usually passive] to give a title to a book, play, etc.
purveyor/pə'veɪə/ *n.* [formal] a person or company that supplies sth; supplier 提供者，供应商
sceptic /'skeptɪk/ [BrE, AmE skeptic] *n.* a person who usually doubts that claims or statements are true, especially those that other people believe in 持怀疑态度的人
dotcom /'dɒtkɒm/ *n.* a company that sells goods and services on the Internet, especially one whose address ends with ".com" 互联网公司

11 Never shy about accentuating the positive, the PR industry might be expected to be trumpeting its rise. And there is indeed some triumphalism (and spin) around. Al and Laura Ries, a father and daughter team of marketing consultants, have written a book entitled "The Fall of Advertising & the Rise of PR". "PR has credibility," they assert: "Advertising does not." Their advice is that a marketing campaign should start with publicity and shift to advertising only after the PR objectives have been achieved. Some PR firms see an opportunity to move up their clients' hierarchy — becoming not just service providers, but also purveyors of strategic advice to senior management.

12 But even within the industry, there are sceptics. Dorothy Crenshaw, president of Stanton Crenshaw, an independent PR firm based in New York, says that many of her colleagues are suffering from "consultant envy" — but that PR remains a very inexact science. There are also limits to the miracles it can be expected to achieve. She claims to have turned down a $1m commission from a client desperate to boost his business-to-business website in the midst of the dotcom boom because he had nothing much to tell the world. Sometimes a PR firm can indeed shape or create a buzz about a product, but not always. For PR to work, she says, "you have to have a legitimate story."

(Total words: 1160)

Notes to the Text

① public relations (PR): The practice of managing the spread of information between an individual or an organization and the public. Public relations is the idea of creating coverage for clients for free, rather than marketing or advertising.

② peer group: Both a social group and a primary group of people who have similar interests, age, background, or social status. The members of this group are likely to influence the person's beliefs and behaviour. Peer groups contain hierarchies and distinct patterns of behavior.

③ podcast: A form of digital media that consists of an episodic series of audio, video, digital radio, PDF, or ePub files subscribed to and downloaded automatically through web syndication or streamed online to a computer or mobile device. The word is a portmanteau of "iPod" and "broadcast".

Comprehension Check

I. Reading for general ideas

Read the text through quickly and answer the following questions.

1. In the opening paragraph of Text I, what tactics are used to engage readers' attention?

2. Is PR more effective than traditional ways of advertising?

3. Is PR an old business?

4. Why do some businesses turn to PR for help?

5. Is PR expensive compared to traditional ways of advertising?

II. Reading for specific information

Read the text again more carefully and decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F).

1. The goal of PR is usually to secure positive coverage in the media.
2. P&G is the world's second biggest consumer-products group.
3. PR often succeeds where traditional advertising fails.
4. PR firms are usually small family firms.
5. Even within the industry of PR, there are sceptics.

III. Reading and making interpretations

Read the text again more carefully. Paraphrase the following sentences from the text.

1. So what sort of business is public relations (PR), which spends half its time huffing about bad news; and the rest puffing politicians, companies and celebrities?

2. PR is an increasingly vital marketing tool — especially as traditional forms of advertising struggle to catch consumers' attention.

3. But as PR profits from advertising's difficulties, it is taking up a host of new stratagems — and seeking to move up the corporate pecking order.

4. It has always been at the cutting edge of marketing — P&G is credited with inventing the television soap opera as a new way to sell goods.

5. The fragmentation of media has seen an explosion in the number of ways people seek news and entertainment, with many turning to websites, cable TV, satellite radio and podcasts.