

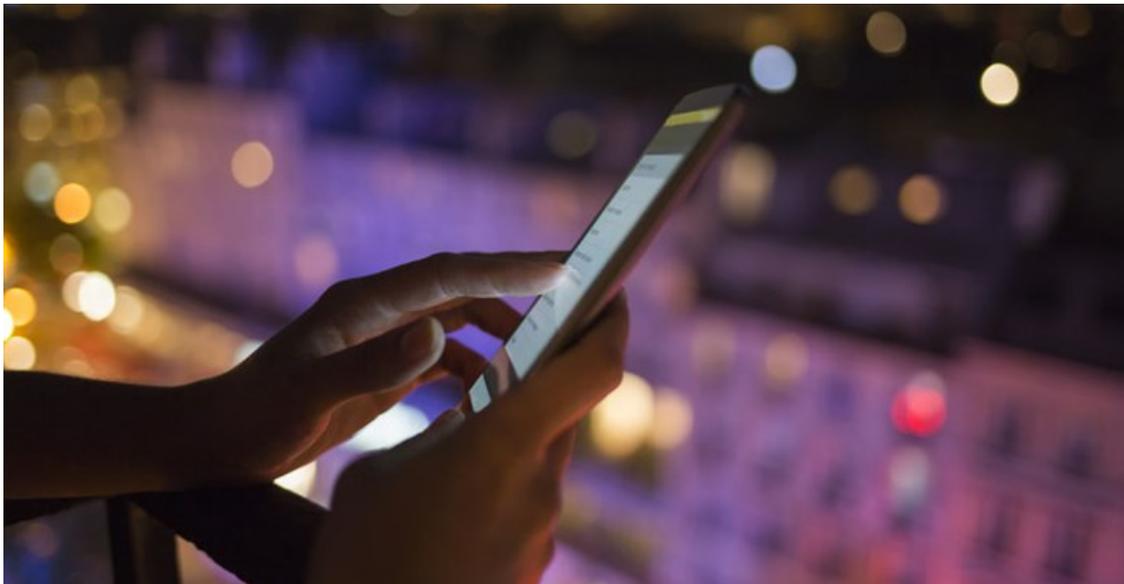
Modern PR: The evolution of communication

 By [Marisa Louw](#)

21 Apr 2016

I am old enough to remember the days when you used a sheet of carbon paper to make a copy of a document while typing it on a typewriter. If you wanted to make more than one copy you used a duplicating machine. Those were the days of sending postcards, writing letters to your pen pal, and collecting postal stamps. I even remember making telephone calls to a central operator who then transferred your call to the desired number in times before households were allocated direct telephone numbers.

Then, along came something called digital technology, and it changed the world as I knew it. I could now 'page' someone who would receive a message on a device carried on their person which notified them that I'd like to speak to them. That's how my husband and I communicated when we first met. That soon changed with the launch of the mobile phone which evolved into the smartphone we know today. My first computer had a black screen with a glowing green, bulky typeface and if I wanted to copy a folder I had to use the DOS command `xcopy c:\foldername /d`. Today the smartphone you carry around in the back pocket of your jeans has more functionality than the desktop computer of the late 90s.



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The big question is: How has PR changed over the years? The business of giving the public information about a particular organisation or person in order to create a good impression (Oxford definition) is no longer limited to the press release. I am delighted to say that I think PR has successfully been embraced as an element of the marketing mix and is no longer seen as the ugly duckling of marketing. When one looks at the winning campaigns at the PRISM 2016 Awards it is clear that PR collaborates with advertising, sales promotions, sponsorship, direct marketing, and digital communication. This means that PR is recognised as a method of reaching an organisation's business goals, which in most instances is to improve its bottom-line. It can therefore be deduced that PR is no longer simply a method to create a good impression but a method to build brand awareness and increase revenue.

In his book, *integrated marketing communication*, Neels van Heerden writes about the different types of PR: public relations (PR), corporate public relations (CPR), marketing public relations (MPR), and marketing publicity (MP). What do all of these have in common? The concept of stakeholder relations. Van Heerden further writes that "the term relations signals that these stakeholders are involved in a relationship with the organisation." As PR professionals we are the link between the organisation and its stakeholders. It is our job to keep these relationships happy and healthy.

Modern PR makes available to us an array of tools that enable us to do our job better than our pre-technology counterparts: e-mail, Whatsapp, Twitter, YouTube, blogs and even the Cloud; to mention but a few. Unfortunately, young PROs seemed to have forgotten what it means to build and maintain a relationship. Yes, the tools that are available offer support in the way two or more people connect and stay connected, but it does not replace human interaction. Us older PR folk, on the other hand, must learn to embrace modern technology and integrate it with our archaic relationship-building techniques. In essence I don't believe PR as a practice has changed much; it is and will always be about giving people information and connecting people. What has changed is the many ways in which this objective can be reached.

I leave you with my definition of modern PR: the ethical business of helping a business grow its business through effective integration of the various marketing communication elements combined with relationship-building skills par excellence.

ABOUT MARISA LOUW

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