

## Does PRISA deliver on international standards?

Following on the PRISA debate raised in the last issue (*Communicate*, 5-5-2003), comments came thick and fast! A South African PRO working in the UK, *Zipphora Mothoa-Laird*, is amazed to learn that PRISA does not enjoy credibility among many communications consultants in SA, when the UK IPR markets itself aggressively within the UK to both employers and employees, bringing a range of benefits to members such as herself.

I almost fell off my chair while reading the latest *Communicate*, to learn that PRISA has turned into a hot potato and its existence, relevance and legitimacy is being questioned, says *Zipphora Mothoa-Laird*, a South African PRO working in the UK.

I have been working in a PR role for the past three years in the B2B sector for GeoPost UK, England. I am a member of the UK institute of Public Relations simply known as IPR (The Institute of Public Relations). The IPR is the largest public relations membership body in the whole of Europe and continues to grow in leaps and bounds everyday. Membership of the IPR is a must-have for any individual in the communication and PR industry of the UK. It is not questionable, debatable or doubted. The IPR has proven beyond any reasonable doubt its role and significance to the sustenance and development of best PR practice both in Europe and the UK.

I do not know how PRISA markets itself among PR professionals in South Africa and I do not know how resourceful and helpful it is to members. I can only talk about my experience with the (UK) IPR, which has proven itself to be indispensable to its members. I cannot compare the two organizations in terms of budgetary and organizational structural terms but I am 100% certain that the two organizations share the same objectives, *inter alia* the promotion of best practice and raising of professional standards in the PR industry.

The UK IPR markets itself aggressively within the UK to both employers and employees. This strategy has been successful as evidenced by the IPR's sky rocketing membership, trebling from 2000 members in 1990 to 7 500 in 2003. A clear signal that PR professionals in this country continue to recognize and not question the need for affiliation to a professional organization.

However I should mention that the IPR also enjoys tremendous support and recognition from the corporate world and government. Employers expect prospective PR employees to carry membership of the IPR and to be fully abreast with developments in the industry. The IPR also offers diploma studies (IPR Diploma and Foundation Diploma) in PR, which affords a distinct advantage to any professional looking for a PR job in the UK. Many employers recognize IPR professional qualifications and a recent IPR survey has indicated that IPR members with IPR qualifications have moved on to new and better jobs or gained promotions after completion of their IPR diplomas.

As an individual, I continue to draw a lot of benefits from my IPR membership and will not dare question its relevance to my career and professional development. Benefits associated with membership to a professional organization like the IPR includes among others:

- Being kept up to date with PR issues.
- Regular email newsletter.
- Free access to PR policy and research documents.
- Free access to IPR reference library.
- Membership of highly organized regional IPR groups.
- Participation in a wide range of sectoral groups in areas such as corporate and financial, voluntary sector and local government.
- Opportunities for debate at the annual IPR national conference.
- Access to the IPR website which offers excellent online information services.

- Access to a wide range of PR training programmes covering areas such as Effective writing skills, Internal Communications, Lobbying, Corporate Social Responsibility, Crisis Management, etc.

I do not know if PRISA offers the above benefits, but these are some of the things that may help the organization to gain credibility among its members in South Africa.

I always read about developments in the SA PR industry and hope this piece will give Communicate a glimpse of the PR world of my adopted country. It is really up to PRISA to prove its worth to its membership. The IPR is fully embraced by its members and continues to offer remarkable advice and support.

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