

October 2001

## Building a Crisis Communications Dream Team

by Monique Chenier

*The tragic events in the United States on September 11 were an unprecedented crisis. In May Garth Rowan of Allaire Rowan Communications Counsel spoke to the CPRS members regarding Crisis Communications. Below is a rerun of his Dos and Don'ts of Crisis Communications.*

Most of us are familiar with the "Dream Team" introduced at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics as superstars Magic Johnson, Larry Bird, Michael Jordan, Charles Barkley and Scottie Pippen, among others, were combined to enter a basketball team of unprecedented talent and experience.

How can PR professionals create a Dream Team for crisis communications? Garth Rowan, of Allaire Rowan Communications Counsel, offered an animated explanation in his May 5<sup>th</sup> presentation to nearly 100 CPRS Calgary members at the Palliser Hotel. Research has shown crisis communications as one of the most valued services that communicators can provide to their organizations. Mr. Rowan, with more

than two decades of experience as a specialist in crisis, media and risk communications, offered practical skills to successfully navigate the "Dos and Don'ts" of crisis communications.

What is the difference between an average team and a Dream Team? "An average team understands their role, has an adequate briefing structure, is somewhat motivated and has an understanding of the big picture," explained Garth. "A Dream Team takes the team to a whole new level with each member being familiar with all team roles. A strong leader and very tight briefing structure make a Dream Team much more motivated and effective than an average team. The members are all flexible, aware of the needs of the other team members and are self-critical so

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### CPRS • Member Profile

David McAsey APR, BA

by Terry Beeler

For David McAsey, APR, there were no sleepless nights agonizing over what career path to choose. "I wanted to be in public relations from the time I was in high school," he states.

McAsey, CPRS member since 1966, and owner of McAsey Public Relations Counsel, has spent nearly 45 years in the business. His interest in PR may have been due to an uncle who was a journalist and PR practitioner. McAsey says a love of language ties the two professions together.

After completing degrees in philosophy and literature at

Loyala College in Montreal, McAsey accepted a position as technical writer for CIL industries. After a year spent writing engineering standards in easy-to-understand language, he transferred into the public relations department, where he rose from editorial assistant to editor, working on the internal newsletter. From there, he moved to Uniroyal where, as he put it, "I knew nothing and had



David McAsey APR, BA

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## CPRS accreditation task force - executive summary

October 8, 2001

Dear CPRS Member,

The Accreditation Task force is consulting with members on its recommendations for improving CPRS Accreditation. We need your input. Don't miss this opportunity to share your ideas on how to improve this process. Please download and complete the accreditation questionnaire posted to the CPRS National Web site by November 15. Thank you in advance for helping to make accreditation a winning part of CPRS.

### Background

The current Accreditation Task Force was formed as a result of the resolution moved by Elizabeth Hirst, APR, and Jack Yocom, APR, CPRS Fellow, and carried by the membership, after mandatory accreditation was rescinded at the 2000 AGM in Ottawa

*"That a Task Force made up of experienced accredited and non-accredited members of CPRS be struck. This Task Force is to address the issues that were brought up at the AGM, particularly around mandatory accreditation, eligibility for accreditation and the financial elements related to these activities. The Task Force is to report back to the National Board of Directors at their February 2001 meeting."*

### Process

The Task Force began its work by developing an issues table which identified both member input and existing research and recommendations. Our research also included a survey of accreditation chairs to determine current practices for promoting and supporting accreditation, and a review of IABC and PRSA accreditation practices. Based on this research, an extensive list of recommendations was developed and received by the National Board in June 2001.

During its September 2001 meeting, the National Board accepted the Task Force's principles and process recommendations and reaffirmed it had only received the policy recommendations. The National Board will not take any action on the policy recommendations until the Task Force has completed its member consultation.

Both the National Board and Accreditation Council support the Task Force's consultation strategy. In preparation for consultation, the Task Force developed a number of supporting documents, which provide additional background on our recommendations and can be found on the CPRS National Web site.

Our goal is to report back to the February 2002 Board meeting with further developed recommendations based on member input.

### Principles and Process Recommendations:

The following 'motherhood' recommendations deal with supporting and promoting accreditation. These recommendations have been accepted by the National Board and are open for member comment. It should be noted that the Accreditation Council has already begun work on some of these items.

- Clarify roles and responsibilities for accreditation
- Improve communications at all levels – develop a communication flow chart
- Review, modify and respect the accreditation timetable
- Implement an annual training session for local chairs
- Begin developing an administration binder for local chairs – living document
- Modify the exam venue, electronic template for communication plan, annotated exams and fee payment schedule?
- Develop a model marketing plan
- Review and modify the reimbursement policy
- Develop an annual training session for local chairs
- Provide special assistance to smaller member societies for those with limited number of APRs

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## Co-operative education program benefits both employer and student

by Natasha Joachim


Students at the University of Calgary are deliberately delaying their graduation to get a head start on their careers. Studies have shown that through the Co-operative education program at the University, "students are improving their GPA's and obtaining new skills through a diversity of work-related experiences," Irene Jackson, a career coordinator for the U of C, says.

This program benefits both employers and students. Students gain "experiential learning" and a "practical aspect to their degree", while employers can use work terms as an opportunity to screen for future employees. Today, there are 17 students enrolled in the Communications Co-operative program. These students are in high demand as many "employers are asking specifically for communications students for their work terms," Jackson says.

While more students are recognizing the benefits of the co-op program, not everyone is choosing to enroll. With the continual rise in education costs, some students are

turned off by the idea of adding an extra year to their degree. Jackson counters that argument, noting that paid work-terms ensure students can avoid taking out large student loans and can graduate with less debt. "The benefits are you're getting paid full-time, so you can pay for your schooling," Jackson said.

Students can also reduce the "extra" time spent in school by taking an evening or weekend class and spring and summer courses while on a co-op work-term. The program follows the CAFCE rules and guidelines, which illustrate that the amount of time a student works should be balanced with the same time spent in academic study.

After each work term the students can take what they have learned and apply it to their studies. Research shows that students who take the co-op program are more focused and have higher GPA's. "Studies have proven students who graduate from the Co-op program get into their field a lot quicker and start off at a higher salary," Jackson said. 

### CPRS • Online PR Resources

## New web site can help in search for career change

by Simon Whitfield

If you are looking for a public relations position with a new company, in a new city or in a new country, your place to look could be [www.workinpr.com](http://www.workinpr.com). Launched by Seattle-based Futureworkplace Inc. and endorsed by the Council of Public Relations Firms and the Public Relations Society of America, Workinpr.com is a new on-line community and jobsite for the PR business. It offers a customized search for both jobseekers and employers from entry level to senior executive positions.

Some of the tools and features of the Web site include 'Jobsearch' by title, area of expertise, income and location. The 'Manage Résumé' section allows the jobseeker to build an on-line résumé and post it free of charge for review by potential employers. To receive email alerts for a new PR position that matches specific criteria, the 'Personal Recruiter' section of the Web site is useful. As well, there are features for recruiters, including résumé searches and job postings for both traditional PR and freelance positions. There is a charge for employers to use these sections.

The Web site also features a valuable 'Resources' section, where visitors can do 'Industry Research' for PR articles, case studies, reports, speeches and books. Look for PR conferences and business seminars around the world in the 'Event and Seminars' section. Search for PR agency info by worldwide revenue or location. Use 'Career Services' to find job titles and descriptions, articles on PR careers, and salary information.

Although the Web site is new and lacking jobs outside the U.S., it has the potential for growth as more employers and jobseekers become aware that it is there for them to use as an alternative to traditional approaches. Already the site offers a valuable research tool for those looking for a career move or for information about the business of PR. 



## Minimizing messaging miscues

by Catherine Scheers

Public relations professionals often spend time fashioning key corporate messages and fine-tuning their companies' on-line presence. However, in the rush to perfect the "big picture" of on-line communications, one integral aspect is sometimes overlooked: ensuring e-mails coming from within your company portray the right image.

One of the first tasks mastered on the Internet was the mechanics of sending mail electronically. And while the technicalities of typing a short message and firing it off are deceptively easy, experts caution against hitting the send button too soon.


Most formal written business communication is issued on corporate letterhead. Care is taken with spelling, grammar and wording of the document, and often several members of a team will review the document before it leaves the office.

Not so with email. Its electronic nature enables us to move more quickly. It is generally a lot less formal than a letter or memo, a lot faster, and rarely reviewed by anyone other than the author and the recipient. E-mails often contain abbreviations, sentence fragments, misspellings, bad grammar or bad manners, and even "emoticons," which are icons or a combination of keys used to infuse some type of emotion into an e-mail, such as a happy face or ;->.

And, without the body language, voice tone and inflection, and eye contact that face-to-face communication offers, misunderstandings and miscommunications are becoming common between e-colleagues.

Bob Prescesky, Senior Consultant with RCR Consulting Inc., believes that people have forgotten about good business writing skills. He suggests that extra care is required to ensure that e-mails project a professional image, and points out that the both the sender and the receiver share responsibility for proper communication. Here are a few tips from Bob and the author, to help take the agony out of e-mailing.

Bob Prescesky advises that the need for clarification of the message is the most important thing to remember about written communication, particularly e-mail. He also suggests that if we learn to quickly identify our colleagues' personality and preferred communication styles, we can more easily "speak their language," which is what communication is all about.

For further information, contact Bob Prescesky at RCR Consulting Inc. 242-7792 or via e-mail [bobprescesky@shaw.ca](mailto:bobprescesky@shaw.ca). Please send your email tips to the author at [ariat@home.com](mailto:ariat@home.com), and we'll include them in future issues of *maxim*. 

## 10 tips for effective emails

### The Sender

1. Decide if e-mail is the best communication tool for the message you need to deliver. It may be faster, but perhaps a phone call or personal visit may be more effective.
2. If you decide to proceed with the email, take extra time to review what you have written. Does it accurately state your message? What is the tone?
3. Forego the sarcasm and irony—they are often misinterpreted.
4. Remember common e-mail etiquette; for example, don't use ALL CAPS as it is akin to yelling at someone. Set your e-mail software to review e-mails for grammar and spelling before sending.
5. If the communication is important, have someone else review it before sending it.
6. Follow-up with a phone call or personal visit to clarify the message with the recipient.

### The Receiver

1. Don't jump to conclusions! If an email sets your alarm bells ringing, it may very well be unintended by the sender. Remember that you are receiving and reading this in a different context and setting.
2. Remember that you share responsibility for communicating with another person.
3. Review the e-mail carefully—sometimes in skimming for "the important parts," we miss something truly significant.
4. Call and ask for verbal clarification.

## Task force...

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### Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations have *only* been *received* by the Board. These are the ideas of the Task Force, which require member input for further development and consideration.

- Accreditation should not be mandatory
- Eligibility should remain the same – five years practice in public relations, member in good standing
- Employer certification of PR employment should not be tied to the accreditation process
- Candidates will still be required to demonstrate competency through a work sample
- Establish a new membership structure/categories

### CPRS Accreditation Task Force Members

Colleen Killingsworth, APR, Calgary, Chair

Mary Barker, APR Halifax

Patrick Brownlow, Halifax


Deanna Drendel, APR, Montreal

Don LaBelle, APR, CPRS Fellow, Edmonton

David Magil, APR, Toronto

Bart Mindszenty, APR, CPRS Fellow, Toronto

Nadine Walz, Calgary

With input from: Pierrette Leonard, APR, Chief Examiner English, Ottawa 

## McAsey...

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to do everything.”

It was the “Quiet Revolution” in the early 70’s, the birth of French Canada as a political power, that convinced David McAsey to leave Montreal, where Anglophones were beginning to feel unwelcome. Relocating in Sarnia, he worked at Palmer, now Polysar, a synthetic rubber manufacturer. There, he pioneered the use of the telephone information system. Employees were kept updated on developments in the company by dialing a number that connected them to a recorded information line. He further refined the concept by allowing employees to give feedback and ask questions, a practice that McAsey found useful in quashing rumours. Interestingly, the internal tool was more popular with outsiders, who kept dialing in for the latest company news, so the phone numbers had to be changed.

Relocating to Calgary, McAsey worked for Amoco Canada, where he was involved with the evolution of another public relations tool, the crisis communications plan. McAsey made recommendations to the company for an emergency public relations plan to cope with any future disasters and was given

approval to develop it. McAsey feels the key is convincing top officials that it is in the best interests of the company that communication with outside publics is handled in as timely a fashion as possible.

McAsey has been involved in the Canadian Public Relations Society for years, serving in virtually every position, including National President. He is justifiably proud of his work to maintain the CPRS Resource Library by having it located at the Mount Royal College downtown campus in Calgary, where it is available to students and experienced professionals alike. As well, McAsey has authored a chapter of the book *Public Relations in Canada*, which was assembled by Canadian public relations practitioners to give an overview of the trade in Canada. He was also a judge and coordinator for the CPRS National Awards of Excellence, and was an accreditation examiner for five years in Calgary.

Now in his sixties, he’s still involved in public relations, but is slowing the work pace somewhat. This allows him to indulge his favourite pastime, which is flying in his glider near Black Diamond.



## Industry events

CPRS Calgary is pleased to post industry-related events, however is unable to support or endorse such events. If your organization has an event it would like to announce to CPRS Calgary members, please send a 100-word description to [webcomm@cprscalgary.org](mailto:webcomm@cprscalgary.org).

### Canadian Institute - Public Relations for the Energy Industry

December 5th and 6th, 2001  
Delta Bow Valley, Calgary, Alberta

Get critical and timely information on how industry leaders and experts are successfully tackling this sector's unique PR and communication challenges. CPRS members are entitled to a 10% discount off of conference registration. Check out the special four-day, two-conference package specifically for Energy Communicators that includes both Public Relations for the Energy Industry and Managing Community Consultations and Stakeholder Relations. Register or receive information on both of these events by calling 1-877-927-7936 or visit us online at [www.CanadianInstitute.com](http://www.CanadianInstitute.com).

### Ag-West Biotech Inc. - Biotech Communicators' Workshop

December 6th and 7th, 2001  
Delta Bessborough Hotel, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

The event offers an opportunity to:

- Meet with other professionals communicating about biotechnology
- Talk about your biotech organization's communications activities
- Learn about the programs run by others
- Identify common goals and challenges related to communications
- Discover ways to increase efficiency by working together
- Gain practical and useful advice from specialists

For registration, contact Darlene Gowans at Ag-West Biotech, (306) 975-1939, email [darlene.gowans@agwest.sk.ca](mailto:darlene.gowans@agwest.sk.ca). For more information, contact Judy Hume, Manager, Communications at (306) 975-1939 or e-mail: [judy.hume@agwest.sk.ca](mailto:judy.hume@agwest.sk.ca).

Registration deadline is November 15, 2001 

## Members on the move

### New Members

Mike Carter, Community Relations Coordinator,  
Precision Drilling Corporation  
Kelly Moon-Holden

### New Student Members

Cassandra Mcauley, Mount Royal College  
Clare Nolan, Mount Royal College  
Virginia Servage, Mount Royal College  
Desiree Magnus, Mount Royal College  
Kim Aasen, Mount Royal College  
Jill Peacock, Mount Royal College  
April Crane, Mount Royal College

### Members on the Move

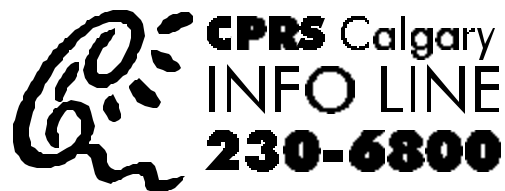
Melissa Rolfe, APR has moved to ESBI Alberta Ltd.,  
as their Communications Manager

Do you know someone who isn't a member of CPRS, but should be? This is your chance to help us inform and recruit potential new members.

E-mail potential members to  
Jim Wood, Membership Chair  
[jwood@mtroyal.ab.ca](mailto:jwood@mtroyal.ab.ca)

## Upcoming events

Contact the CPRS Info Line for all the details on upcoming events



Or visit the CPRS Calgary Web Site at

[www.cprscalgary.org](http://www.cprscalgary.org)

## Crisis communications...

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they are always looking for ways to improve."


The team members for a Dream Team will come from a variety of disciplines: executives and lawyers; operations and field personnel; human resources and environment, health and safety experts; customer, government, and community relations; and, of course, public relations and communications professionals. "The lawyer is there to ensure the company stays out of legal trouble; communications is there to manage long-term reputation," explained Rowan. One of the most proactive tips offered to communications practitioners was to build relationships with each of these groups now and involve them in the crisis communications planning process.

On a Dream Team, communications professionals serve the role of strategist and liaison between team members. The functions include media relations, telephone response, Web site and internal relations among others. Getting to know the technical people now who can provide answers for you during a crisis was a strong suggestion from the presenter.

An exercise program is critical to ensure the team is prepared to execute their plan in a crisis. The first step is to review the current plan. "Most companies have an informal manual – one that is locked up tight in someone's head," explained Rowan. "Just get it down on paper!" When the informal plan is formalized, conduct a needs assessment – start with the three worst things that could happen. After that, define the exercise scope, select the exercise type and address the costs involved. The first exercise type would be a simple orientation - provide a copy of the manual to everyone on the team to read then meet to discuss. The next step up would be a crisis drill where the team would take a case study and execute their plan. In this scenario there would be no time pressure and would involve perhaps half a day. The next level would be to execute a case but throw in unforeseen glitches to complicate the exercise. From there full scale, full-day exercises should be undertaken to assure the team has the appropriate experience to deal with an actual crisis.

An audience member asked the definition of a crisis. "A crisis is in the eye of the beholder," stated Rowan. "Often a situation may be elevated to that of a crisis with the public, more so than with the organization involved." A Level I crisis was defined as internal to the organization. Level II was a situation that has moved externally where the organization doesn't have control but control is imminent. A Level III crisis was one in which control was far from imminent for the organization and is beyond their ability to gain control.

Bottom line, according to Rowan: "It pays to be prepared to provide timely information."

Keep the vision of the Dream Team 

### SOME DON'Ts

- Wing it
- Unclear roles
- Tasks falling through cracks
- Assume understanding

### SOME DOs

- Right people in the right roles
- Plan – include stakeholders
- Strong manual
- Technical training
- Motivate
- Exercise

## maxim team

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*maxim* is distributed monthly to over 200 CPRS members and professional communications practitioners in Calgary and area.

Visit our Web site at: [www.cprscalgary.org](http://www.cprscalgary.org)

## Volunteer opportunities

### Program & Professional Development

Looking for a junior to intermediate pr practitioner to assist in the planning and execution of events.

Contact Lisa Rushka at 531-0331 or [lrushka@national.ca](mailto:lrushka@national.ca)

### Maxim newsletter – Writer

We're looking for writers to develop news articles of interest to CPRS Calgary members.

Contact: Simon Whitfield at 716-4086 or [simon.whitfield@home.com](mailto:simon.whitfield@home.com)

### Sponsorship and Promotion

No, you don't have to ask for money! We need enthusiastic people to liaise with other committees, help write promotional literature, strategize, assist in correspondence, etc.

Contact Janet Bliss APR @249-6084 or [blissj@cadvision.com](mailto:blissj@cadvision.com)

## Attention all members!

Do you have new contact information? Have you changed your job, location or your name? Please send us a note and we'll update our records so that you'll receive timely notices of our upcoming events and all issues of *maxim*.

**Contact** Jim Wood APR  
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[jwood@mtroyal.ab.ca](mailto:jwood@mtroyal.ab.ca)  
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