CHAPTER SIX

Media Relations

One of the most critical areas within any corporate communication function is the media relations department. The media are both a constituency and a conduit through which investors, employees, customers, and community members receive information about and form images of a company. Consumers, for instance, might see a *Dateline NBC* segment on a particular firm or read an article about it in *Bloomberg Businessweek* or *The Wall Street Journal Online*. With the growth of digital communications platforms, the media's role as disseminator of information to a firm's key constituencies, including the general public, has changed dramatically in recent years. Virtually every company now has some kind of media relations department that covers both traditional and new media, whether it is one part-time consultant or a large staff of professionals.

In this chapter, we look at what media relations professionals do, and also how companies should approach the different members of the now expanded "press." We examine who the media are, how firms communicate with the media through relationship building, and what constitutes a successful media relations program in today's changing business environment.

The Evolution of the News Media

The news media are omnipresent in our society. With the advent of television in the late 1940s and early 1950s and the tremendous growth of the Internet since the 1990s, what had once been the exclusive domain of the print medium in newspapers as well as radio increasingly has become part of the visual realm through televisions, connected devices, and computers.

The arrival of television moved the "headline news" that had formerly been found in newspapers to a new, nearly instantaneous medium. Newspapers adapted by taking over the kind of analysis that had previously appeared in weekly news magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*. The news magazines, in turn, took over the feature writing and photo journalism that used to appear in older monthlies such as *Life Magazine* and the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Referred to as "the press" in earlier times, the expanded media are a powerful part of American society. The First Amendment of the Constitution guarantees the right of free speech in the United States, and over the years, the media have helped shape attitudes in this country on issues as diverse as gun control and hemlines, abortion and corporate pay. A free press also makes politicians accountable for their actions in both public and private life. Even politicians would argue that the media bring the distant world of politics into the home of the average citizen.

Today, with the rise and adaptation of digital communications platforms, including blogs, social media networks, virtual worlds, and wikis, the average citizen has actually *become* part of the media. These digital platforms have empowered anyone with an Internet connection to act as a journalist of sorts, hence the term *citizen journalism*. These stakeholders can have an incredible impact on businesses, politicians, and global political events, as we shall discuss later.

Although most Americans feel strongly about the rights of a free press to say or print whatever it likes, business has always had a more antagonistic relationship with the press. This relationship stems in part from the privacy that corporations enjoyed in the early part of the last century. Unaccustomed to dealing with the news media, most companies simply acted as if the news media didn't matter. Later in the twentieth century, companies were forced to rethink this isolationist approach due to a number of developments, including laws governing the disclosure of certain information by public companies at regular intervals, a Supreme Court ruling in 1964 that required proof of malicious intent to win libel cases against the media, more public interest in business (see Chapter 1), and more media interest in business.

These last two events in particular—increased public and media interest—had a profound effect on business and its dealings with the media. Which came first? Although it is difficult to determine whether the media generated heightened interest in business or were simply responding to changes in public attitudes, what is certain is that sometime in the 1970s, business coverage started to change. Since then, the private sector has become much more public.

Part of what perpetuated this shift in attitudes was the public's realization that business had a tremendous effect on their lives. Incidents like the oil embargo, environmental problems at Love Canal, and questionable advertising on children's television programs all became enmeshed in other controversies in the 1970s, such as Watergate and the Vietnam War. People began to see companies as entities controlling important parts of their lives that did not have to answer to anyone in the way that government did to voters. Special interest watchdog groups emerged to deal with this problem and to make business more accountable.

Business leaders were used to the privacy that they had maintained for decades and were reluctant to admit that times had changed. Even today, some older business professionals resist accepting the importance of communicating through the media, and are especially wary of embracing social media. This kind of attitude is increasingly risky and less common, however, as each industry—from oil and gas, to financial services, to pharmaceuticals—has found itself the subject of some level of public scrutiny, and many companies have learned the hard way that when a crisis hits, having poor or nonexistent relationships with the media, or lacking an effective online communications strategy, will only make the situation worse.

Companies have also had to adapt to a 24/7 news cycle, and to media that include an expanded set of voices. The news media, once a powerful conduit of information exchange between businesses and stakeholders, now find themselves competing not only with other news outlets, but also with companies and their stakeholders. The ability to create content has been democratized by emerging digital communications channels, thus redefining media relations in a profound way. This new media reality doesn't just challenge news outlets; businesses that once depended on their outbound press releases to be interpreted by reporters and then communicated to stakeholders are now forced to engage directly with audiences in two-way conversations rather than one-sided monologues.

The Growth of Business Coverage in the Media

Before the 1970s, business news was relegated to a few pages toward the back of the newspaper (consisting mostly of stock quotations) and to a handful of business magazines; it received virtually no coverage at all in national and local television news broadcasts. As public attitudes changed, however, the business news sections in newspapers gained recognition and began to expand. Because the media are interested in satisfying the needs of readers and viewers, they had to meet the public's growing interest in the private sector and its participants.

Around the same time that *The New York Times* developed Business Day, a separate section published every day devoted to business issues, *The Wall Street Journal* became the number-one selling newspaper in the United States. Business magazines started to become profitable, and television networks and their local affiliates began to devote segments to business news.

Today, so many magazines and websites are devoted to business news that it is nearly impossible to find a topic not thoroughly covered by one media outlet or another. In recent years, news of corporations, the stock market, and business personalities has often become the lead story on national news television and radio broadcasts. With 24-hour business networks such as CNBC and Fox Business Network, business coverage on TV news channels and countless business articles published on the Internet, corporate news is now virtually impossible to ignore.

Compared to decades past, business news today is actually exciting. The large-format *Fortune* magazine found in doctors' offices in the 1950s and 1960s was a dull vehicle for companies to express their points of view. *Fortune* was more successful than others, however, because it allowed executives to check quotes—a practice then unknown anywhere other than this one magazine. Today its cover stories appeal to a wider audience. *Forbes* gains attention from a broad readership by publishing salaries of top entertainers; *Bloomberg Businessweek* attracts an audience through features such as its widely read rankings of business schools and corporate boards.

As coverage of business increased, however, the media industry was consolidating. Fifty corporations controlled the vast majority of all news media in the United States in 1983. By 2012, only six corporations owned and operated 90 percent of this country's "mass media."[1] Thus, economics plays a big part in what gets covered, as major industrial companies worry more about the bottom line at their media subsidiary (for instance, ComCast and its NBC Universal network). Media conglomerates, including Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, have also increasingly been accused of allowing politics to shape their coverage. According

[1] Media Reform Information Center website, www.corporations.org/media; Business Insider, www.businessinsider.com/these-6-corporations-control-90-of-the-media-in-america-2012-6.

to its critics, News Corp's Fox News has changed the old model of television news, which was pitched toward a mass audience across the political spectrum and aspired to standards of fairness in reporting, and replaced it with an aggressive drive toward partisan coverage. Fox News is the most watched cable news network in America, receiving more views than its three biggest competitors (CNN, MSNBC and HLN) combined.[2]

Most executives today recognize that the media are more likely to cover the mistakes rather than the companies. In general, the worse the news is about a company or its CEO, the more likely it is to become a major news story that will capture the media's (and the public's) attention, if only briefly. A 1997 study conducted by the Pew Research Center revealed that the public wanted more reporting on corrupt business practices by a margin of 60 to 28 percent.[3] By 2005, this impulse for more transparency and greater reporting on business had morphed into a growing movement toward making journalism more transparent and treating the public as a partner in the process rather than a passive participant. At the same time, the public became increasingly distrustful of businesses and the traditional news media that covered them. With the rise in corporate scandals, beginning most notably in 2001 with the infamous dissolution of the energy company Enron, the public developed a stronger appetite for corporate exposés. The traditional model of media as mouthpiece for corporate news seemed outdated in a time when people craved authenticity and engagement. Digital media, with its emphasis on transparancy and fast reaction time, gained influence. This trend is reflected in the results of the 2014 Trust Barometer: respondents indicated that search engines were their first choice for general information and breaking news about a company, followed by print and broadcast. This rise in news coverage from nontraditional sources in the form of online news and blogs lends further support to the need for corporations to develop a thoughtful approach to their media relations with both traditional and nontraditional media.

Building Better Relations with the Media

To build better relationships with members of the media, organizations must take the time to cultivate relationships with the right people. This task might be handled by employees within the company's media relations department (if one exists) or given to a public relations firm to handle. Either way, companies should be sure to avoid falling into some of the common pitfalls of what has historically been media relations "standard practice."

For example, most old-style public relations experts rely on a system of communication with the media that no longer works. That system sends out press releases (or video news releases) to a mass audience and hopes that someone will pick up the story and write about it. Why is this system no longer valid? The vast majority of press releases go unread by reporters in the United States—due to both the massive quantities of releases these reporters receive daily and the time constraints

[2] Pew Research, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/01/14/five-facts-about-fox-news/.

[3] "Bad News: Another Study Finds Media Really Has Problems," *PR Reporter*, April 7, 1997, p. 1.

under which reporters work. The same is true for many of the mailings, e-mails, and voicemails from public relations agencies. Overall, journalists prefer receiving emails with hi-res images and links to press/media rooms, along with relevant contact information. According to a 2014 survey conducted by *PR Daily*, 90 percent of the reporters surveyed chose email as their preferred means of being pitched.[4] Writes one respondent in a recent Pew State of the News Media survey of his or her communication preferences: "Email only. I throw out or lose 100 percent of all hard copy communication. Sending a huge press kit in a folder announces to the world: 'I'm living in the year 1978!'".[5] However, any e-mail that isn't personally addressed to the recipient is likely to be deleted or programmed to be automatically sent to the spam folder. Just as with snail mail, people are now almost programmed to jettison anything in their mailbox that doesn't seem personalized or relevant.

Part of the problem is that the measure of success in the media relations business has for years been the amount of "ink" (or coverage) that a company gets, whether aided by in-house professionals or an outside consultant. Yet few companies try to figure out what value a "hit" (as it is called in the business) in a relatively unimportant publication has in terms of a firm's overall communication strategy. Getting lots of ink, which means lots of articles written about a company, may not have any value if it doesn't tie back to the company's strategic communication objectives (see Chapter 2) it started out with in the first place.

As discussed later in this chapter, most communication measures to date have focused on the quantity or efficiency of communication output. Although the majority of communications professionals still judge success on their ability to place material in the media rather than on the impact such coverage might have on shifting opinion, awareness, or moving markets, there is evidence that this is changing. Senior executives within companies are increasingly interested in demonstrating return on investment (ROI) from their public relations (PR) and marketing efforts. The most recent *PRWeek*/Hill & Knowlton corporate survey of communications executives found that 69 percent of communications teams share metrics with their C-Suite and more than half have their own in-house team to perform regular measurement and evaluation.[6] Organizations such as Interbrand and the Reputation Institute are at the forefront of this trend.

The message to companies about press releases is thus: use mass-mailed releases sparingly. Organizations should reserve this method for stories that they are sure will have a wide audience. In such cases, the same result can be achieved by placing the story on the *Public Relations Newswire* (*PR Newswire*) or convincing *The Associated Press* to put the story out on its wire, presuming it is a major story that will have mass appeal. Most of the time, what works best is to find out who the right journalists are for a given story and then to develop a tailored game plan for connecting with them. In the era of digital information, there is no excuse for not knowing an editor or reporter's background and interests. Writes Charles Fleming, editor at the *Los Angeles Times*, "I receive more than 500 emails a day. An astonishing number

[4] PR Daily, February 2014, www.prdaily.com/Main/Articles/Despite_prevalent_social_media_use_reporters_still_16059.aspx.

[5] www.pwrnewmedia.com/2011/powerlines/february/downloads/2011JournoSurveyReleaseResponses.pdf.

[6] *PR Week*/Hill & Knowlton, "Corporate Survey 2011."

of them are pitching topics that neither I nor my staff has ever covered—sent by people who've either never read our publication, or never read our coverage, or noticed what bylines go with what stories. . . . Pitch me something that shows you know my publication and my area of coverage, and that you read it often enough to know that we ALREADY DID THIS STORY a week ago."[7]

Many PR agencies credit themselves with successfully developing media relationships by researching both personal and professional details, such as birthdays or children's birthdays, or following the practice of targeted "gifting." Companies seldom use this tactic, however, because it takes more time to conduct such research. In a field cluttered with information coming from a variety of sources, however, this is actually the best approach. The responses in the PWR New Media 2011 Journalist Survey illustrate this point: "Don't bother me if you don't know my market, my interests or my needs. Don't pretend to be my buddy if you've never met me; above all be competent."[8]

Conducting Research for Targeting Traditional Media

The way a typical media research operation might unfold for a company is as follows: first, senior managers working with the members of the corporate communication department determine what objectives they have for a certain story. Let's assume, for example, that the story is about a major company that is moving into a new foreign market. The managers' objective might be to create awareness about the move into the new market and also to discuss how the firm has changed its global strategy. Thus, this story is part of an overall trend at the company rather than a one-shot, tactical move. Given these considerations, the company would begin to search for the right place to pitch the story.

To do this, the corporate communications professionals conduct research to find out who covers their industry and the company specifically. Identifying print, radio, and TV reporters is relatively easy for most companies because the same reporters typically cover the same beat for a period of time and have established relationships with the company either directly or indirectly in that process. Some of these reporters—typically those from print journalism—would definitely be interested in the story. If the company is maintaining its records properly, it can determine at a glance which reporters will most likely cover the story and, more important, who will be likely to write a "balanced story" (code words for a positive piece) about this strategic move.

How do companies determine who is going to write a positive piece before rather than after pitching the piece? This point is where ongoing research pays off. Each time a journalist covers a firm in the industry, the corporate communications professionals need to determine what *angle* the reporter has taken. To continue with our example, suppose a look at the records shows that *The Wall Street Journal* reporter who covered the company's beat has recently written a piece about a competing firm moving into a different market as part of its new global strategy.

[7] Forbes.com, February 2014, www.forbes.com/sites/robertwynne/2014/02/24/what-journalists-really-think-of-your-press-release/.

[8] PWR New Media 2011 Journalist Survey.

Chances are, this reporter will not be interested in writing the same story again about another company.

By conducting this kind of research, companies can avoid giving reporters information that they are not interested in, and communications need only occur when a company's media audience is most likely to be receptive. Although this system is not foolproof, it generally yields better results than sending out a story to 300 reporters hoping that four or five may pick it up, with no idea who they are or what angle they are likely to take on the story.

Today, companies can easily access information about the journalists who cover them. Consultants generate computer analyses of reporters' articles, ask industry sources to provide critiques of writers they know, and find out personal information about targeted journalists. Earlier generations of PR professionals worked hard to get such information at long lunches with reporters, but new technology allows corporate communications professionals to access such information through electronic databases, such as Cision's PR software or the Bulldog Reporter's MediaPro.

In addition to figuring out who is covering a company's beat, the firm's corporate communication team needs to determine what kind of a reporter it is dealing with. For a television network, such as CNN, this determination means knowing who the producer for the piece will be. Many producers' past segments can be found online, via their own social media feeds or online newsrooms. Alternatively, a communications professional from the company can call the head office in Atlanta and purchase the producer's last two or three stories. For a business magazine such as *Forbes*, electronic databases—such as LexisNexis or Factiva—contain stories that reporters have written over a period of time. Those written in the last two years are most likely to be useful to your company.

What can corporate communications professionals learn by looking at previous stories the producer at CNN has filed and earlier stories that the *Forbes* reporter has written? An individual tends to write about things or put together reports in a particular way. Very few reporters change their style from one story to the next. They have found an approach that works for them—a formula, so to speak—and they tend to stick with formulas that work.

What this kind of analysis usually reveals is that the journalist tends to write or present stories with a particular point of view. One such analysis performed for a company on a *Forbes* reporter's work showed that he liked to write "turnaround" stories. That is, he liked to present the opposite point of view from what everyone else had written about. So, if a company, for example, is trying to make a case for such a turnaround, this reporter would be more likely to write the kind of article that would be helpful for the company despite his negative tone.

Watching the CNN producer's work could help determine how this individual conducts interviews, how the stories are edited, whether he or she likes to use charts and graphs as part of the story, and so on. Let's say that the producer, for example, seems to present balanced interviews, as opposed to antagonistic ones, and likes to use charts and graphs. Again, this makes it seem as if such a producer could easily turn out a positive story for the company—a goal that should be pursued.

Corporate communication departments should perform this type of analysis for each call that comes in. Many executives complain about the amount of time such analysis takes, but the benefits of handling an interview with this kind of preparation make the effort involved well worthwhile.

Researching and Engaging the Expanded "Press"

Imagine, as in the story above, that the company preparing for its launch into a new foreign market must go about identifying influential media in the online space. Identifying these members of the expanded "press," namely bloggers, online communities, social media outlets, and citizen journalists, is more complicated. Bloggers, unlike print journalists, comment on everything from politics to business, from entertainment to the environment. They are not governed by formal training, long-established standards, or official affiliations. While many bloggers are merely exercising their right to free speech, others offer insightful commentary about issues and, in turn, have influence over large audiences. Arianna Huffington, for example, is an incredibly influential media representative who built an empire that lives and works solely in the online space. The Huffington Post, her left-wing online news and commentary site, is the first online news outlet to win a Pulitzer Prize. Now owned by Aol, the Huffington Post receives more monthly unique visitors than the website of *The New York Times*.[9] To still be caught up in the argument of "Is a blogger a journalist?" is in many ways to have missed the boat.

Understanding which bloggers are influential to a particular company's stakeholders is the first step in research and engagement. There are strategies for identifying the bloggers who influence a specific audience, and most, not surprisingly, come in the form of online monitoring and tracking devices. The ever-growing list of applications that help executives wrap their arms around the massive volume of online conversations includes Technorati, Google Alerts, and Compete. But more than being reactive and simply waiting for a blogger to praise or pummel their company, corporate communications executives must court bloggers proactively for coverage. Best in class companies, such as HP, successfully identify the bloggers who exercise significant influence over their stakeholders by having a stable of employees charged with actively surveying cyberspace (HP has more than 50 corporate blogs alone).

HP learned early on that bloggers are the greatest sales reps they never had on payroll: In September 2008, HP made an announcement that it had increased personal computer sales by 10 percent the previous May simply by leveraging the blogging community to promote HP's recently released HDX Dragon computer system. Skeptics immediately assumed that the company had paid off bloggers to build buzz around the product, but according to HP's Vice President and General Manager for the Personal Systems Group, bloggers weren't given a cent. All HP executives did was send 31 new computer systems to 31 influential bloggers in the tech space, offering to let them give them away in competitions to their readers.[10]

[9] Businesswire.com, December 2013, www.businesswire.com/news/home/20131216005482/en/Huffington-Post-Announces-Record-Year-Audience-Growth#.U9_XTGOTGM0.

[10] Matt Marshall, "HP Announces an (Almost) Unbelievable Blogger Campaign," *VentureBeat Digital Media*, September 24, 2008.

Investing in web-based communications platforms is another way to bring bloggers and online commentators directly to you. There are many examples of companies that are successfully harnessing online tools to reach the expanded media. For example, Microsoft has built an online newsroom called "PressPass" within its main website that brings corporate information, news, fast facts, PR contact information, image galleries, and broadcasts into one central location for journalists to access. Likewise, General Motors' European arm built a social media newsroom to archive news, aggregate recommended blogs, offer multimedia downloads, and consolidate RSS feeds.

Blogger outreach is not only for the biggest, most tech-savvy corporate players; on the contrary, organizations of any size can identify influential blogger communities and effectively engage with them. The first thing any communications executive must do is resist the urge to send press releases and pitches to the bloggers they identify. True to almost all "digerati," bloggers are extremely conscious of maintaining authenticity, which means that communications executives must learn to listen if they have any hope of successfully targeting them.

As when working with traditional print journalists and TV producers, communications executives must review a substantial backlog of the blogger's posts along with the comment threads before reaching out and pitching a story. Katie Paine, CEO of communications firm KDPaine & Partners, recommends "reading as much as six months' worth of posts before ever engaging the blogger. Listen until you understand the tone and nature of the conversation."[11] This level of reconnaissance gives executives a thorough understanding of the blogger's interests, as well as the audience's level of engagement with the blog.

Pitching bloggers is in many ways more complicated than pitching their traditional counterparts: because online media are so much about customization and individual engagement, bloggers can be flippant with communications executives who "corrupt" the code of authenticity with generic press releases and hand-spooned media pitches. Beyond making sure that the approach is entirely germane to a blogger's audience, the pitch itself must be as concise as possible. "You certainly can't spin your way to a blogger's heart," claims Sir Martin Sorrell, Chief Executive of Advertising at marketing giant WPP. "Respect and engagement are essential. Handing product over to bloggers wouldn't be enough. If, however, you invite bloggers in to get their ideas on a brand, you might succeed. Get them involved; give them something of value. The prize for getting it right? The stakeholder becomes a brand loyalist and tells other people."[12]

Responding to Media Calls

In addition to doing their homework on reporters, companies can strengthen their relationships with the media through the way they handle requests for information. Many companies willingly spend millions of dollars on advertising but are unwilling to staff a media relations department with enough personnel to handle incoming calls from the media.

[11] http://painepublishing.com/blog/.

[12] Sir Martin Sorrell, "Public Relations: The Story Behind a Remarkable Renaissance," Institute for Public Relations Annual Distinguished Lecture, New York, November 5, 2008.

This refusal can be a costly mistake, as responding to such requests carefully, and timely, can make a powerful difference in how the company appears in the story. Let's say that a company has gotten negative press over the last couple of years because it has not kept up with the times, but it is now working on a campaign to change its image. A call comes in from a reporter at CNN, and another call comes in from a reporter at *Forbes*. What should the communications staff do to ensure that both of these requests are met in a timely manner and one that will reflect best on the company?

To begin with, calls should come into a central office that deals with all requests for information from important national media. Although this sounds like common sense, calls are often answered by an administrative assistant who cannot distinguish between important and unimportant calls from the media. Many an opportunity has been lost because someone failed to get the right message to a media relations expert in the corporate communications department.

Next, the person who takes the call should try to find out what angle the reporter is taking on the story. In our example, the CNN reporter may or may not have a particular point of view, but the *Forbes* reporter probably does, as that publication prides itself on taking a particular approach to its stories. The company needs to find out what that approach is before responding to the request. Let's assume that the CNN reporter wants to look at the company's activities as part of an industry trend toward more upscale positioning. The *Forbes* reporter, on the other hand, seems to imply from the conversation that she sees the company's new approach in a less-than-positive light.

The person responsible for that telephone call should try to get as much information as possible while being careful not to give in return any information that is not already public knowledge. The tone of the conversation should be as friendly as possible, and the media relations professional should communicate honestly about the possibilities of arranging an interview or meeting other requests. At the same time, he or she should find out what kind of deadline the reporter is working under.

This issue is often a point of contention between business and the media. Particularly with senior executives who are accustomed to arranging schedules at their own convenience, a call from the media at an inconvenient time can be an annoyance. But all reporters must meet deadlines. They have to file their stories—whether on television or radio, in print, or on the web—on a certain date, by a certain time. These deadlines usually have little flexibility, so knowing in advance what the deadline is allows you to respond within the allotted time. Being aware of deadlines is similarly critical when proactively pitching a story to avoid irritating reporters under deadline crunches and, by doing so, leaving them with a negative impression of the company. Responding to media calls in a timely manner is especially critical today given the speed at which news can travel online. Politicians from Eliot Spitzer to Congressman Anthony Weiner and sports personalities such as Tiger Woods have learned that in the age of texting and Twitter, not communicating is communicating. Any brand that does not have an online communications strategy in place when called on for comment, or worse, when a crisis hits, risks its reputation. (See Chapter 10 for more on crisis communication.)

Preparing for Media Interviews

Once the research and analysis are complete, the employee who will be interviewed, whether at the executive level or more junior, needs to be prepared for the actual meeting with the reporter. If the interview is to be conducted by phone, as is often the case for print articles, a media relations professional should plan to sit in on the interview. The following approach works best.

First, the employee should be given a short briefing on the reporter's or producer's prior work, using examples gathered in the research phase discussed earlier, so that he or she develops a clear understanding of the reporter's point of view. For example, if the reporter tends to write turnaround pieces, the appropriate passages from relevant stories should be shown to the employee.

One *Fortune* 500 CEO prepared for an interview with CNN by watching the last two or three major stories the producer had filed. Having done so, he was able to begin the conversation with the producer by saying how much he liked one of the stories. This positive beginning set the tone for the rest of the interview. Additionally, after learning that the producer always used a list of bullet points as part of each story, the CEO developed a list of points he wanted to communicate about the company in bullet-point form and handed it to him before he left. When the story was broadcast, it was positive about the company, and the list of bullet points was right up there on the television screen, which delighted the CEO, who had worried for days about the interview.

Once the employee has been briefed on the reporter's background and likely angle, he or she should be given a set of questions that the reporter is likely to ask. These questions can be developed from what the communications staff member working on this interview has gleaned in previous conversations with the reporter, from an analysis of the reporter's work, and from what seem to be the critical issues on the subject. If possible, the communications specialist should arrange a trial run with the employee to go over answers to possible questions. The employee also should understand that the agenda for a news story is hard to change—once the reporter has decided to write or produce a particular kind of story, it is difficult to introduce a new topic into the discussion.

In preparing for a television interview or webcast, a full dress rehearsal is absolutely essential. The interview should look as if it is totally natural and unrehearsed when it actually occurs, but the employee should be prepared well in advance. This requirement means thinking about what to communicate to the reporter, no matter what he or she asks during the interview. While the employee cannot change the agenda for the interview, as discussed earlier, he or she can get certain points across as the dialogue moves from one idea to the next.

In addition to thinking about what to say, the employee needs to think about the most interesting approach to expressing these messages. Using statistics and anecdotes can help bring ideas alive in an interview. What is interesting, however, depends on the audience. Many people mistakenly assume that the reporter is their audience, but it is the people who will watch the interview with whom they are really communicating. Communications professionals and executives must keep this in mind in determining the best approach for a television or online interview. Know your audience: the tone and tenor for an appearance on an evening news hour are different from those of a webchat with a blog for new mothers. (See Chapter 2 for more on communication strategy, especially analyzing constituencies.)

INTERVIEW TIPS

Communications expert Mary Munter suggests the following tips when preparing for a media interview:*

- Keep answers short; think in 10-second sound bites.
- Avoid saying "no comment"; explain why you can't answer and promise to get back to the reporter when you can.
- Listen carefully to each question; think about your response; only answer the question you were asked.
- Use "bridging" to move the interviewer from his or her question to your communication objective.
- Use anecdotes, analogies, and simple statistics to make your point.
- Keep your body language in mind throughout the interview.

*Adapted from Mary Munter, "How to Conduct a Successful Media Interview," *California Management Review*, Summer 1983, pp. 143–150.

Finally, the employee needs to be prepared to state key ideas as clearly as possible at the beginning of the interview. Answers to questions need to be as succinct as possible. Especially in television, where sound bites of three or four seconds are the rule rather than the exception, executives need training to get complicated ideas into a compact form that the general public can easily understand. Andrew Grant, a long-time veteran of Brunswick Public Relations, advises that a spokesperson must be able to: "distill the company into a story he or she can tell over lunch and a journalist should be able to walk away and write it down on the back of a cigarette packet."[13]

Gauging Success

Measurement has been transformed thanks to the ease with which communications campaigns conducted using digital platforms can be tracked. Although most communications professionals still believe that media placements are the strongest indicators of a campaign's success, most PR professionals agree that knowledge and insight about those placements is equally as important. To meet this demand, a wide array of analytical services and techniques have emerged. These range from relatively inexpensive basic quantitative analyses to highly customized qualitative interpretations that tell clients whether their placements are being received by the right audience, in the right places. Various other deliverables, including advertising value equivalent (AVEs), Canada's Media Relations Rating Points System (MRRP), internal reviews, benchmarking, opinion polling, and specialist media evaluation tools, also help measure success and in turn, ROI, but there is no standard system of measurement adopted by all communications professionals.[14] Digital campaigns, in particular, now come with a variety of measurement tools, including Klout for measuring levels of online influence on Twitter and Facebook, and Google Analytics. As digital communications platforms grow, so too will the tools developed to measure their reach. The debate on how to measure campaign results is continuously evolving alongside social media. The amount of ink that a

[13] Dan Bilefsky, "Join the Sultans of Spin Media Relations," *Financial Times*, July 13, 2000, p. 19.

[14] Edelman.com, www.edelmandigital.com/2013/05/24/friday-five-reasons-to-look-beyond-advertising-value-equivalency.

company gets does not necessarily indicate whether it is achieving its communication objectives. Verizon, for example, keeps records of all of its media hits, and looks not only at where the ink has landed but also at how well the company's key messages are communicated. Nancy Bavec, former Director of Media Relations at Verizon, explains, "The entire department's compensation is tied to its ability to elevate Verizon's media scores."[15] Part of elevating a media score is finding out where the media hits have landed (with which constituencies), not just determining that the media carried a story on the company.

Kmart also actively tracks its media scores. For a recent advertising campaign, Kmart decided to first test an idea online; using social media as a test platform, the brand could then decide whether or not to pursue a broader TV campaign. In April 2013, Kmart released an online video showcasing its delivery service, with a play on the audience mishearing the phrase "ship my pants." In the weeks after the release, the video garnered 13,000 social media mentions and 17 million YouTube views. Using social media measurement metrics provided by Brandwatch, Kmart was able to track the reactions of its core family market on Twitter and measure sentiment along with intent to purchase. The consumer reaction was overwhelmingly positive, and Kmart decided to run the ad in April, along with a follow-up ad featuring another play on words, "Big Gas Savings."[16]

In addition to this sort of media monitoring and analysis, more sophisticated approaches to the measurement of media relations, referenced earlier, have the power to:

- Identify which communications activities create the most value in terms of a specific business outcome.
- Evaluate how well an organization's various communications functions perform against an industry average.
- Demonstrate the total value created by a communications department in terms of one or more business outcomes.
- Drive strategic and tactical decision making in the communications function, hedging reputational risk and managing major events such as mergers and top management changes.
- Highlight actual corporate value created by communications activities.[17]

Maintaining Ongoing Relationships

By far the most critical component in media relations is developing and maintaining a network of contacts with the media. Building and maintaining close relationships is a prerequisite for generating coverage. A company cannot simply turn the relationship on and off when a crisis strikes or when it has something it would like to communicate to the public. Instead, firms need to work to develop

[15] Benchmark Global Survey of Communications Measurement, 2009.

[16] Brandwatch Report 2013, www.brandwatch.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Retail-Use-Cases-Report.pdf.

[17] Quoted in "How Do Your PR Efforts Measure Up in the Wired World?" *Interactive PR and Marketing News*, November 26, 1999, p. 1.

long-term relationships with the right journalists for their specific industry. This effort usually means meeting with reporters just to build goodwill and credibility. The media relations director should meet regularly with journalists who cover the industry and also should arrange yearly meetings between key reporters and the CEO. The more private and privileged these sessions are, the better the long-term relationship is likely to be. Most communications professionals now recognize that nothing can match face-to-face meetings when it comes to building relationships with key editors and journalists. Bloggers, as well, need to be proactively courted through press days and meetings where the company focuses on listening and engagement.

One example of a company's successful efforts to build strong media relations is Matalan Clothing Retailers in the United Kingdom. The company offers journalists tours of its headquarters, including opportunities to try on its clothing in changing rooms and, most surprising, to fully analyze its distribution network. Chris Lynch, formerly of Ludgate Communications, a representative of Matalan, explains, "We tactically avoid granting phone interviews in order to get journalists to meet us face-to-face. Otherwise it ends up being just about the numbers."[18] By taking such a personalized approach, Matalan quickly became a favorite company among journalists. This success has continued, with Matalan recently winning "Home Retailer of the Year" in the National Home Awards sponsored by the *Daily Telegraph*.[19]

Many companies take a less "integrated" approach than Matalan and use the more typical venue of a meeting between a member of the media and a company executive. Because these meetings often have no specific agenda, they can be awkward for all but the most skilled communicators. Within organizations, people assigned to handle media relations should enjoy "meeting and greeting," should be tapped into the company's top-line strategic agenda, and should be able to think creatively.

Often these kinds of meetings occur at lunch or breakfast. They should be thought of as a time to share information about what is going on at the company, but with no expectation that a story will necessarily appear anytime soon. In the course of such a conversation, the skillful media relations professional will determine what is most likely to interest the reporter later as a possible story. Without being blatant about it, he or she can then follow up at the appropriate time with the information or interviews that the reporter wants.

Media relations professionals should expect to be rebuffed from time to time. They may get turned down for lunch several times by reporters who are particularly busy, only to find them very receptive to a long telephone conversation. As is true with personal relationships, media relations professionals will find that they simply do not get along with every journalist they come into contact with. Unless the reporter is the only one covering a company's beat at an important national media outlet, this awkwardness should not be an insurmountable problem. When personality conflicts do occur, professionals can and should work around them to ensure that the overall relationship of the company with that media outlet is not jeopardized and media opportunities are not missed.

[18] Paul Argenti and Courtney Barnes, *Digital Strategies for Powerful Corporate Communications*, p. 71.

[19] Matalan website, www.matalan.co.uk/.

One hotel executive at a major chain didn't think that he needed to have any sort of relationship with the reporter covering his beat at *The Wall Street Journal*. After almost two years of being left out of nearly every major story on the industry, a consultant persuaded him to try again to establish a relationship with this reporter. The reporter was only too happy to make amends as well, as she needed the company's cooperation as much as it needed her. Nonetheless, that attitude cost the company nearly two years of possible coverage that it would not get back.

Building a Successful Media Relations Program

What does it take, then, to create a successful media relations program? First, organizations must be willing to devote resources to the effort. This rule does not necessarily have to mean huge outlays of money; an executive's time can be just as valuable.

Jim Koch, brewmaster and president of the company that makes Sam Adams beer, brought his beer into the national limelight through the skillful use of media relations with the help of one outside consultant at a fraction of the cost of a national advertising program. More recently, on a much smaller scale, two sisters who started a greeting card company that specialized in cards that targeted a gay audience were interested in building a relationship with the media. Through their own efforts, writing letters and reading the newspapers to find out who the best reporters would be for their message, they were able to get hits in both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. In both cases, the media relations effort paid off in sales, which was the ultimate goal.

For many larger companies, the media relations effort will involve more personnel and often the use of outside counsel. What follows is what is needed, at a minimum, for the effort.

Involve Communications Professionals in Strategy

In the age of reputation management, companies have increasingly realized that communications must have a seat at the table when it comes to setting strategy. In the 2013 Communications & Public Relations Generally Accepted Practices Study, more than 40 percent of the communications executives surveyed claimed to have an active role in companywide strategic planning; 60 percent reported that their recommendations are taken seriously by senior management. Companies must involve someone, preferably the most senior corporate communication executive, in the decision-making process. Once a decision has been made, it is much more difficult to talk management out of it because of potential problems with communications.

Although the communications point of view will not always win in the discussions that take place at top management meetings, having these individuals involved will at least allow everyone to be familiar with the pros and cons of each situation and decision. Communications professionals who are involved in the decision-making process also feel more ownership for the ideas that they need to present to the media.

Develop In-House Capabilities

Using consultants and public relations firms may be beneficial in some cases, but most companies choose to develop an in-house media relations staff. Companies can save thousands of dollars a month by using internal staff and investing in the right tools to conduct research for analyzing the media. Often, the best communicator for a brand is an employee; firsthand knowledge is difficult to outsource.

One problem for many companies, however, is that they do not consider media relations to be important enough to hire professional staff in this area. Lawyers, executive assistants, and even accountants often handle communications because of the unfortunate assumption that, because "anyone can communicate," it doesn't matter whom you put on this assignment. Companies must recognize that building relations with the media is a skill and that individuals with certain personalities and backgrounds are better suited to the task than others.

Use Outside Counsel Strategically

For many companies, including those with limited budgets and resources, outsourcing media relations often makes more sense than hiring an internal communications team. Companies that do decide to look externally for media relations support have a wealth of options, from industry-specific consultancies to global communications agencies such as Edelman that have in-house digital capabilities. One of the chief arguments for hiring external agencies is that PR professionals have influence with press in a given space: they specialize in maintaining relationships with specific journalists and editors and are in constant dialogue with the media.

Many companies choose to outsource only part of their media relations strategy. Many, for example, choose to outsource aspects of their digital media needs, including search engine optimization (SEO), social media measurement, and content production. Even the most experienced press release writer may struggle to capture the clipped, casual tone of a Twitter account. As media relations evolves under the influence of social media, large, integrated campaigns will become more popular, and they will require the skillsets of many different kinds of media agencies, from a team to manage the Facebook account to a production house that can produce video content.

Developing an Online Media Strategy

Until recently, media coverage—newspaper headlines or more in-depth profiles on television news shows like *60 Minutes*—has been the primary means for exposing corporate flaws. Accordingly, companies with well-managed media relations programs have had some leverage to get their own side of the story communicated to the public. Over the last two decades, however, wireless communication and the Internet have transferred an enormous amount of power into the hands of individuals. As Patricia

Sturdevant, former General Counsel to the Washington-based National Association of Consumer Advocates, explains, "The Internet is a very effective new weapon for the consumer. Before the Internet, unless you had a lot of time or money, there wasn't any way to get the public's attention to a problem. Now, you can broadcast it to the entire world in an instant."[20] We will see in Chapter 10 that one disgruntled Dunkin' Donuts customer created a crisis situation for the company by launching his own anti-company website. This same occurrence has happened on a massive level for retail behemoth Walmart, which is the target of countless sites and blogs created solely to trash its reputation. Digital communications platforms have enabled consumers to seize control of corporate messages and reputations and, in effect, have their way with them.

Thus, the Digital Age has many implications for business, including an expansion to individuals of powers that were previously concentrated in the hands of the organized media. Accordingly, companies' media strategies need to be augmented with tactics for dealing with this new dimension of coverage, including, for instance, establishing a forum for constituencies to share opinions, concerns, and complaints about the company, and a proactive effort to monitor information circulating about the company in various media channels, including blogs.

As much as digital communications platforms present the threat of the unknown, so too can they provide incredible opportunities to communicate messaging in new, more creative and effective ways. Media relations has transformed into an almost unrecognizable rendition of its former self, with much of the messaging about a brand coming not from the one-way pipeline of company to press to shareholder, but from content created directly by the consumer. Social media and instant reporting by "on-scene" witnesses with handheld devices means that much of what is being communicated about companies is actually the product of individuals in addition to the mainstream media. By creating integrated media campaigns that tie together strong online and offline channels, companies can increase visibility and brand awareness. Most already have: more than 84 percent of *Fortune* Global 100 companies use social media and blogging as part of their broader marketing efforts—77 percent have an active Twitter feed; 70 percent have Facebook pages.[21]

The most sophisticated companies understand that in the new media relations environment, control over who sees content is as much in the hands of customers as journalists, editors, and advertisers. Richard Edelman, president and CEO of the world's largest PR firm, describes the current environment as one in which "companies who wish to build relationships with potential customers must now do so on readers' terms. That means communicating meaningfully *before* selling to them. It means sharing useful and entertaining information as a primary objective, with the understanding that relationships and sales will eventually flow if done appropriately." Early adopters of integrated marketing, like Red Bull, understood this well and created creative content that focused on storytelling, not selling. According to the 2014 GAP Study, more than 60 percent of communications teams reported using

[20] Rachel Beck, "Disgruntled Voices in Cyberspace Heard Loud and Clear," *AP Online*, May 4, 1999.

[21] University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Center for Marketing Research, "Fortune 500 are Bullish on Social Media", 2013, www.umassd.edu/cmr/socialmediaresearch/2013fortune500/.

narrative storytelling techniques to engage external audiences. Many companies have taken their storytelling one step further, engaging in what has become known as stunt marketing. Red Bull's Stratos campaign is one of the most sensationalist stunts in recent years. In 2012, Red Bull sponsored world champion skydiver Felix Baumgartner to break the sound barrier with a 24-mile jump from space, which was aired live online. Millions of people watched the sponsored jump. Red Bull sold an interesting and compelling story that hit what Edelman describes as the new paradigm of communications marketing: the concept was built for consumption, emotion, and sharing, and it was supported by data and insight.[22]

One of the best integrated media campaigns of the past decade is Dove's Real Beauty campaign. The campaign started in 2004, growing out of a photography exhibit in Toronto titled "Beyond Compare: Women Photographers On Real Beauty." The show was organized by Dove and Ogilvy & Mather and featured work from 67 female photographers. It marked the beginning of Dove's brand proposition to understand how women think about beauty. Following the exhibit, Dove launched a series of ads featuring real women whose appearances were outside the stereotypical norms of beauty. The ads asked viewers to judge the women's looks and invited them to cast their votes at a Dove microsite. Dove also authored a study on women and beauty, which drove the ideology behind the campaign and lent credibility: the study found that only 2 percent of women around the world would describe themselves as beautiful. Dove established a mission to use the campaign "to challenge beauty stereotypes and invite women to join a discussion about beauty."

Ten years on, the Campaign For Real Beauty continues to be one of modern marketing's most talked-about success stories. The campaign has evolved from billboards to television ads and online videos. Dove's 2013 spot, for example, was a YouTube video titled "Real Beauty Sketches" and showed women describing their appearances to a forensic sketch artist. It became the most-watched video ad of all time, with more than 60 million views. Along with Dove's marketing efforts, the company established the Dove Movement for Self Esteem, a mentoring program. With key partners (The Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., Girls Inc., and Boys & Girls Clubs of America), Dove creates "self-esteem- building, educational programs and activities that encourage, inspire and motivate girls around the world." Dove has reached more than 7 million girls so far with these programs and set a global goal of reaching 15 million girls by 2015. The power of this campaign is that it is in keeping with the brand values, moving Dove closer to its stated vision. Based on research, the campaign also uncovers a new and interesting insight that can actually make a difference to women's self perceptions.[23]

Another example of a company that uses social media to its benefit is Southwest Airlines. The company has invested significant resources to build a completely integrated digital communications strategy into its overall communications plan. This strategy includes a blog (www.blogsouthwest.com), on which every employee—from executives to pilots to airplane mechanics—is encouraged

[22] www.linkedin.com/today/post/article/20140626210241-7374576-richard-edelman-traditional-marketing-is-broken.

[23] www.dove.us/Social-Mission/campaign-for-real-beauty.aspx; www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/21/dove-real-beauty-campaign-turns-10_n_4575940.html.

to post. Thanks to its genuine content and its pledge to transparency, the blog has become a viable way for Southwest executives to communicate with employees and consumers alike and to strengthen stakeholders' relationships with the brand. In addition to the blog, Southwest executives also count YouTube videos, a Facebook page, a Twitter application, and a presence on LinkedIn among their branded digital platforms.

Twitter and Facebook have proven to be useful channels for connecting with both customers and media, but there are many others. LinkedIn was launched in May 2003 as a "grown-up" version of Facebook, appealing to a more business-minded audience by focusing on professional rather than personal relationships. More than a decade later, LinkedIn has more than 250 million users in more than 200 countries. LinkedIn gives executives the ability to follow news-related web activity among members of their organizations, competitors, and their industries as a whole via an app that can be downloaded. The app automatically aggregates the links, news stories, and media sources that are most relevant to the user's profile, allowing individuals to track the news that their connections are consuming.[24]

Socialize Your Media Relations Strategy

Studies have shown that the public is often far more trusting of other consumers than it is of traditional institutions, including corporations. According to the 2014 Edelman Trust Barometer, 62 percent of all respondents trust "a person like yourself" to relay credible information about a company.[25] This response helps explain the phenomenal rise of social media from the 1990s to the present, as social media channels, including blogs, can be "owned" and operated by any average individual—or company, as seen by the previous Southwest Airlines example. The statistics on social media adaption are staggering: 72 percent of the world's Internet users have a presence on social networking sites. There are more than 250 million blogs, and because of their speed, bloggers can and do alter the volume and tone of any conversation.[26] For example, bloggers played a key role in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, with candidates Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, John McCain, and Mitt Romney maintaining blogs to stay connected with voters.

In addition, social media sites are an important tool for corporations and journalists alike to track consumer points of view and concerns. However, not all corporate executives took kindly to these virtual communities at first, and their companies' brands and reputations suffered accordingly. Failing to embrace the Internet as a viable communications tool has serious implications. In addition to the aforementioned critical sites created by consumers, huge multinational companies across the globe have been forced to go up against single individuals to protect their brands and get the true story out to media. Cable giant Comcast's reputation was thrown for a loop in 2014 when an irate customer posted a recording of a customer service call to his SoundCloud account. Described by Comcast's COO as "painful to listen to," the 20-minute call featured a Comcast

[24] www.linkedin.com/mobile.

[25] 2014 Edelman Trust Barometer.

[26] tumblr.com, wordpress.com, retrieved August 4, 2014.

retention agent verbally combatting with two customers who were trying to drop their service. Already considered one of the most hated companies in America,[27] the incident came at an unfortunate time for Comcast. The call struck a chord with nearly 6 million listeners, many citing their wish for a more competitive cable industry so that consumers might have better options. In the midst of a merger with Time Warner Cable, which would make the cable behemoth even bigger, the incident led many to wonder whether the merger would further hurt cable users.[28]

Tapping into the information circulating on the Internet can give companies extraordinary access to information about customer needs and complaints. Monitoring social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook can enable companies to learn about current constituency needs and tailor actions to meet those that are most vital to the company's reputation and bottom line. As leading reputation strategist Leslie Gaines Ross warns, "[C]orporations now operate in a landscape rife with new threats to their reputations. Equipped to do battle with large competitors, they may be caught unawares by small-scale adversaries in command of a surprisingly potent new-media and social network arsenal: blogs, tweets, text messages, online petitions, Facebook protest sites, and digital videos."[29] By using the Internet proactively, companies can glean valuable insights about constituency attitudes, sentiments, and reactions to which they might otherwise not have access. In many ways, a company should view the Internet as an unprecedented and ideal survey group. Without a doubt, online monitoring can help companies gauge the sentiments of constituencies, allow them to respond effectively, and help them stay on top of today's information surge. However, companies should not become so consumed by the power of the Internet that they neglect other important media channels.

Handle Negative News Effectively

Although negative news reporting has existed as long as the press itself, its frequency and severity has increased exponentially in the context of the changing business environment for all of the reasons discussed in this chapter. Now more than ever, organizations' reputations are vulnerable to the innumerable unknowns that infiltrate the press due to digital communications platforms. Corporate leaders have seen their peers crumble under the glare of unanticipated negative press and are changing their business strategies and response mechanisms accordingly.

Because of the widespread reach of the Internet, companies must keep their proverbial fingers on the pulse of the ever-changing news landscape and constantly work to build the goodwill that will help them to weather any negative press. (See Chapter 4 for more on reputation management.) Bad publicity online can legitimately threaten the bottom line. Many companies assign employees or obtain external specialists to search for negative stories about the company. Others take

[27] http://time.com/106016/comcast-time-warner-cable-lowest-satisfaction/.

[28] www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/22/comcast-earnings_n_5609755.html.

[29] HBR.org, December 2010, http://hbr.org/2010/12/reputation-warfare.ar/1.

advantage of low-cost tools, including search engines such as Google that can be used to set up free alerts or subscriptions to services like CyberAlert.

When companies carefully monitor web activity, they are better positioned to respond in a timely manner to negative comments. Oreo recently won praise as the talk, or tweet, of the 2013 Super Bowl. When power went out during the game, Oreo seized the opportunity, tweeting"You can still dunk in the dark" during the 34-minute hiatus. The tweet was retweeted almost 15,000 times, and Oreo's Twitter following increased by about 8,000. The post garnered nearly 20,000 likes on Facebook and earned Oreo more than 34,000 new Instagram followers. The positive reaction left many media analysts wondering whether the tweet had an even greater payoff than Oreo's actual Super Bowl ad, which cost millions more to create. What was seemingly a spontaneous message, however, was actually the result of months-long marketing planning. Lisa Mann, Oreo's VP of Cookies, explained that it was the result of a carefully built social-media strategy that made the brand ready to respond to whatever opportunity was thrown its way. Having already committed to a Super Bowl ad spot, "[W]e decided to have a social media command center, so that we could respond real time to buzz," Mann said. "Of course we couldn't have anticipated the blackout, but in that command center we had brand people, agency people." In the command center were representatives from all of Oreo's creative agencies—Wieden + Kennedy, Mediavest, and Weber Shandwick as well as 360i. Oreo executives were dialed in, and emails circulated between senior marketing leaders. Oreo was able to execute in real time.[30]

Many companies recognize that the best way to prevent negative news is to ensure that inside information does not leak. Companies are getting smarter about creating social media guidelines and policies that regulate the flow of sensitive information from within. Any corporate employee, whether a CEO with a blog or a recent MBA hire with a LinkedIn profile, can potentially make "news" without proper guidance. Ever the innovator, IBM was one of the first companies to introduce guidelines for social platforms. In the spring of 2005, the company created a wiki and asked employees to contribute advice and fair restrictions in terms of authoring blogs. This wiki became the first iteration of the company's blogging policy, and evolved into what is now IBM's comprehensive "Social Computing Guidelines," authored by the employees themselves.[31]

When a company does stumble upon bad news circulating about itself—be it a condemning attack in the blogosphere or a hostile op-ed article in a daily newspaper—the communications department should quickly assess the potential damage that the news might cause. Who is the person who has issued the complaint? Are the comments valid? Is the person speaking only as an individual, or does she or he represent a broader constituency, such as investors or employees? If a broader constituency, how widespread are the complaints? If a rogue website has been constructed, how many hits per day has it received, and how have people

[30] Forbes.com, February 2013, www.forbes.com/sites/jenniferrooney/2013/02/04/behind-the-scenes-of-oreos-real-time-super-bowl-slam-dunk/.

[31] IBM Social Computing Guidelines, www.ibm.com/blogs/zz/en/guidelines.html.

generally responded to the negative message? If an unflattering newspaper article has been printed, how wide is the paper's circulation?

Once these questions are answered, a company's task force or permanent crisis communication team—including members of senior management—must brainstorm some potential actions. Company lawyers should be consulted to discuss what legal stance the company might need to take. Lawyers will be able to offer advice about whether newspaper articles, websites, or blogs are defamatory, warranting a lawsuit against the perpetrator.

Conclusion

As technology develops new mechanisms for disseminating information, the media relations function will continue to evolve away from the old PR flak model into a professional group that can help organizations get their message out quickly, honestly, and to the right media.

Companies today are under constant scrutiny from many of their constituencies. A demand for instantaneous information accompanies this public watchfulness, and the pressure is increasing with each new technological innovation. Managers must be prepared to answer this demand by considering all constituencies in dealing with the media agents who inform them. By crafting messages with care and then using proper media channels, companies can tap into this powerful "conduit constituency," the media, to ensure that the best possible message is disseminated and heard.

Case 6-1

Adolph Coors Company

Shirley Richard returned from lunch one April afternoon in 1982 and found a message on her desk that Allan Maraynes from CBS had phoned while she was out. "God, what's this?" was all she could say as she picked up the phone to discuss the call with her boss, John McCarty, Vice President for Corporate Public Affairs. In her second year as Head of Corporate Communication for what was then the nation's fifth-largest brewer, Richard was well aware of the Adolph Coors Company's declining popularity—a decline that she partially blamed on an ongoing conflict with organized labor. But the conflict was hardly breaking news, and she was almost afraid to ask why CBS was interested in the company.

Richard found out from her boss that Maraynes was a producer for the network's news program "60 Minutes." Reporter Mike Wallace had already phoned McCarty to announce plans for a "60 Minutes" report about the company. Program executives at CBS were aware of accusations of unfair employment practices that the AFL-CIO had raised against Coors and wanted to investigate the five-year battle between the brewery and organized labor.

Once McCarty explained the message from Maraynes, Shirley Richard sank into her chair. She had spent the last year working hard to understand organized labor and its nationwide boycott of Coors beer, and she was convinced that the company was being treated unfairly. She believed the union represented only a small subset of Coors's otherwise satisfied workforce. But Richard also doubted whether the facts could speak for themselves and was wary of the AFL-CIO's ability to win over the media. She was well aware of Mike Wallace's reputation for shrewd investigative reporting.

On the other hand, "60 Minutes" was considered by many corporations as anti-big-business, and Richard had no idea how corporate officials would respond under the pressure of lights, camera, and the reporter's grilling questions. McCarty and Richard met with the two Coors brothers to discuss the network's proposal and to determine whether producer Maraynes should even be allowed to visit the Coors facility. Company President Joseph ("Joe") Coors and Chairman William ("Bill") Coors were skeptical of the prospect of airing the company's "dirty laundry" on national television. But McCarty was interested in the opportunity for Coors to come out into the public spotlight. Richard knew that granting interviews with Wallace and permission to film the Coors plant came with enormous risk.

Richard was frustrated by growing support for the boycott, and her own strategies to deal with the problem had been unsuccessful. She believed the interview with CBS might only exacerbate an already difficult situation. Her own public relations effort had been an attempt to portray the circumstances as she believed them to be: good management harassed by disgruntled labor organizers. She was convinced that her job was not an effort to cover up Coors's employment practices.

Richard debated how the company should handle the proposal from CBS. Any decisions about approaching "60 Minutes" also would have to be approved by the Coors brothers. Richard felt uncertain about how much control she would ultimately have over the communications strategy. Joe Coors, an ardent conservative and defender of private enterprise, would undoubtedly resist an open-door policy with the network. At the same time, Richard wondered if she should attempt to convince the management of this traditionally closed company to open itself to the scrutiny of a "60 Minutes" investigation or whether

Source: This case was prepared by Professor Paul A. Argenti, Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth.

the best defense would be a "no-comment" approach. But with no comment from Coors, anything organized labor was willing to say on camera would go uncontested.

HISTORY OF THE ADOLPH COORS COMPANY

The Coors brewery was established in 1880 by Adolph Coors, a Prussian-born immigrant who came to the United States in 1868. Having trained as an apprentice in a Prussian brewery, 22-year-old Adolph Coors became a foreman at the Stenger Brewery in Naperville, Illinois, in late 1869. By 1872, Coors owned his own bottling company in Denver, Colorado. With his knowledge of brewing beer and the financial assistance of Joseph Schueler, Coors established his own brewery in Golden, Colorado. His product was an immediate success. In 1880, Adolph Coors bought out Joseph Schueler and established a tradition of family ownership that was maintained for almost a century.

Famous for its exclusive "Rocky Mountain spring water" system of brewing, the Adolph Coors Company soon became something of a legend in the beer industry. The Coors philosophy was one of total independence. A broad spectrum of Coors subsidiaries combined to create a vertically integrated company in which Coors owned and managed every aspect of production: The Coors Container Manufacturing plant produced aluminum and glass containers for the beer; Coors Transportation Company provided refrigerated trucks to haul the beer to its distribution center as well as vehicles to transport coal to fuel the Golden brewery; Coors Energy Company bought and sold energy and owned the Keenesburg, Colorado, coal mine; the Golden Recycle Company was responsible for ensuring a supply of raw materials for aluminum can production. By 1980, the recycling plant was capable of producing over 30 million pounds of recycled aluminum a year. Other subsidiaries fully owned by Coors included Coors Food Products Company, Coors Porcelain Company, and the American Center for Occupational Health.

THE COORS MYSTIQUE

A certain mystique surrounding the Golden, Colorado, brewery, and its unique, unpasteurized product won the beer both fame and fortune. Presidents Eisenhower and Ford shuttled Coors to Washington aboard Air Force jets. Actors Paul Newman and Clint Eastwood once made it the exclusive beer on their movie sets. Business magazines lauded Coors as "America's cult beer." As Coors expanded its distribution, the mystique appeared irresistible; Coors moved from 12th to 4th place among all brewers between 1965 and 1969 with virtually no advertising or marketing.

Part of the Coors mystique was attributed to its family heritage. For over a century of brewing, company management had remained in the hands of Adolph Coors's direct descendants. Reign passed first to Adolph Coors Jr., then to his son William Coors. In 1977, Bill Coors turned over the presidency to his younger brother Joseph but continued as Chairman and Chief Executive Officer. The company's newest President, Joe Coors, was a well-known backer of right-wing causes such as the John Birch Society; a founder of a conservative think-tank, the Heritage Foundation; and a member of President Ronald Reagan's so-called Kitchen Cabinet. The family name was closely associated with strong conservatism by consumers, labor, and the industry.

The Coors Company was built on a tradition of family and, even after going public in 1975, remained an organization closed to active public relations. Bill Coors recalled that his father, Adolph Coors Jr., was a shy man, and throughout its history the company was reluctant to attract any public attention. In 1960, the sensational kidnapping and murder of brother Adolph Coors III focused the public eye on the family and the business, but Coors maintained a strict "no-comment" policy.

THE NATURE OF THE BREWING INDUSTRY

From the mid-1960s through the 1970s and into the 1980s, the brewing industry was characterized by a shrinking number of breweries coupled with a growing volume of production and consumption. In 1963, Standard and Poor's Industry Surveys reported 211 operating breweries. Ten years later that number had dropped to 129, and by 1980 there were only 100 breweries in operation. On the other hand, per capita consumption of beer rose from 15 gallons a year in 1963 to 19.8 gallons in 1973. By 1980, per capita consumption had jumped to 24.3 gallons a year.

Until the mid-1970s, beer markets were essentially local and regional, but as the largest breweries expanded, so did their share of the market. Combined, the top five brewers in 1974 accounted for 64 percent of domestic beer production, up from 59 percent in 1973. Previously strong local and regional breweries were either bought by larger producers or ceased operations.

A notable exception, however, was the Adolph Coors Company, which dominated the West. Until 1976, the company's 12.3-million-barrel shipment volume was distributed only in California, Texas, and 10 other western states. Coors's share of the California market alone was well over 50 percent in 1976. Coors dominated its limited distribution area, capturing at least 35 percent of the market wherever it was sold statewide. The Coors Company ranked fifth in market share nationally throughout the 1970s, trailing giants Anheuser-Busch, Joseph Schlitz, Phillip Morris's Miller, and Pabst, all of which had much broader distribution areas.

Competition for market share among the top five brewers was intense during the 1970s and led producers to more aggressive attempts to win consumers. According to compilations by Leading National Advertisers, Inc., advertising expenditures for the first nine months of 1979 were up 37 percent from the previous year for Anheuser-Busch, 18 percent for Miller, 14 percent for both Schlitz and Pabst, and 78 percent for Adolph Coors.

MARKETING AND DISTRIBUTION AT COORS

Industry analysts criticized the Coors Company's sales strategy for stubbornly relying on its product's quality and image rather than marketing. In 1976, the Coors mystique appeared to be losing its appeal to strong competitors—for the first time since Prohibition, Coors could not sell all of its beer. The company finally responded to competition by intensifying its marketing and development operations. Between 1976 and 1981, the company attempted to revive sales by adding eight new states to its distribution. In May 1978, Coors began to market its first new product in 20 years: Coors Light. In 1979, Coors began the first major advertising campaign in its history to defend itself against aggressive competitors such as Philip Morris's Miller Brewing Company and Anheuser-Busch. The company's 1981 annual report pictured Coors's newest product—George Killian's Irish Red Ale—along with a newly expanded package variety designed to "keep pace with consumer demand."

The Coors Company went public in 1975, but investors did not fare well as stock prices declined for the rest of the decade. Coors entered the market at a share price of $31 but by 1978 had fallen to $16—a loss of about 50 percent for the first public stockholders. Net income, according to the company's annual report, was $51,970,000 in 1981, or $1.48 per share. That figure reflected a 20 percent drop from $64,977,000, or $1.86 per share, in 1980.

MANAGEMENT–LABOR RELATIONS AT COORS

During pre-Prohibition years, breweries, including Coors, were entirely unionized. In 1914, the first vertically integrated industrial union in the country established itself at Coors. When the country went dry, Coors remained viable through alternative operations, but the workforce still had to be reduced. Coors offered older workers employment but fired younger employees. A strike of union employees resulted and remained in effect until 1933, when Prohibition was repealed. The company, however, continued to operate without a union until 1937 when Adolph Coors Jr. invited the United Brewery Workers International (UBW) into the Coors Company.

In 1953, the company experienced an abortive strike by the UBW to which a frightened management immediately gave in. In 1955, Coors's organized porcelain workers struck because their wages were less than those of brewery workers. Although the plant continued to operate, all of Coors's unionized workers engaged in a violent strike that lasted almost four months. The union ultimately lost the battle 117 days after the strike, when workers returned to the plant on company terms.

Negotiations over a new union contract in 1957 ended in a stalemate between labor and management, and workers again decided to strike. For another four months, workers were torn between paternalistic and small-town personal ties to management and the demands of the union. Bill Coors, who was then the plant manager, recalled that during the strike, management had wanted to show the union it was not dependent on union workers. Coors hired college students during the summer of 1957 as temporary replacements for the striking brewers. When the students left, the picketers were threatened by management's vow to hire permanent replacements and returned to the plant. The strike was a clear defeat of the union's demands and ultimately left international union leaders with an unresolved bitterness toward Coors. Back in full operation by the fall of 1957, Coors management believed it had won complete control.

By the end of the 1950s, 15 local unions were organized at Coors. Management tolerated the unions but claimed they did not affect wages or employment practices. The Coors family firmly believed that good management removed the need for union protection and that management could win workers' loyalty. In 1960, the plant's organized electricians went on strike but failed to garner the support of other unions, and the plant continued to operate with nonunion electricians hired to replace the strikers. Similar incidents occurred with Coors's other unions. A 1968 strike by building and construction workers ended with Coors breaking up 14 unions. By 1970, Coors's workforce was predominantly nonunion.

A contract dispute between Coors's management and UBW Local 366 erupted in 1976. Workers demanded a 10 percent wage increase and better retirement benefits. After more than a year of negotiations, union officials rejected management's compromise offer, which labor contended would erode workers' rights. In April 1977, over 94 percent of UBW workers voted to strike. Production at the plant continued at 70 percent of normal capacity, however, and management boldly announced plans to replace striking workers. In defense of the union, AFL-CIO officials declared a nationwide boycott of the beer until a new contract settlement was reached. But within five days of initiating the strike, 39 percent of the union members crossed the picket lines to return to work.

In 1978, Coors management called an election for decertification of UBW Local 366. Because more than a year had passed since the strike began, National Labor Relations regulations restricted striking union members from voting. Only workers remaining at the plant, including "scabs" hired across the picket lines, could vote on whether to maintain the UBW Local. In December of that year, Coors employees voted a resounding 71 percent in favor of decertifying the Local UBW.

Since 1957, the Coors brewery had been a "closed shop," in which workers were required to pay union dues if they were to benefit from union action. But company officials called the 1978 decertification vote a victory for the "open shop," wherein workers could enjoy union benefits without paying dues as members. Union officials, frustrated over the lack of a new contract and the decertification vote, publicly charged Coors with "union busting."

In fact, according to AFL-CIO officials, the UBW was the 20th Coors union decertified since the mid-1960s. Management consistently argued that employees simply rejected union organization because they didn't require it; good management eliminated the need for a union to protect workers. But organized labor maintained that all 20 unions had been "busted" by votes called while members were on strike and scabs were casting the ballots. By the end of the decade, only one union representing a small group of employees remained active at Coors.

NATIONWIDE BOYCOTT

The AFL-CIO was determined not to be defeated by the ousting of the UBW Local from the Golden plant. In defense of the union, AFL-CIO officials declared a nationwide boycott of Coors beer until a new contract settlement could be reached and soon began to claim that their efforts had a significant effect on sales. In fact, 1978 figures reported a 12 percent profit decline for the brewery during fiscal 1977 and predicted that 1978 figures would fall even lower. Corporate officials conceded the boycott was one factor influencing declining sales but refused to admit the drop was consistent or significant.

The defeat of the Coors local brewers' union fueled the boycott fire, but the protest focused on issues beyond the single contract dispute begun in 1977. The other issues of protest related to Coors's hiring practices. Labor leaders claimed that a mandatory polygraph test administered to all prospective employees asked irrelevant and personal questions and violated workers' rights. In addition, the protesters claimed that Coors discriminated against women and ethnic minorities in hiring and promotion. Finally, boycotters argued that Coors periodically conducted searches of employees and their personal property for suspected drug use and that such search and seizure also violated workers' rights. The boycott galvanized organized labor as well as minority interest groups that protested in defense of blacks, Hispanics, women, and gays.

The boycott's actual effect on sales was the subject of dispute. Coors's sales had begun to fall by July 1977, just three months after the boycott was initiated. Some analysts attributed the drop not to protesting consumers but rather to stepped-up competition from Anheuser-Busch, which had begun to invade Coors's western territories. Despite a decline, Coors remained the number-one seller in 10 of the 14 states in which it was sold. Labor, on the other hand, took credit for a victory at the end of 1977 when Coors's fourth-quarter reports were less than half of the previous year's sales for the same period. Dropping from $17 million in 1976 to $8.4 million in 1977, Coors was faced with a growing challenge. There was no doubt that management took the AFL-CIO protest seriously and began attempts to counter declining sales through more aggressive advertising and public relations.

FEDERAL LAWSUIT

The AFL-CIO boycott gained additional legitimacy from the federal government. In 1975, the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) had filed a lawsuit against Coors for discrimination in hiring and promotion against blacks, Mexican Americans, and women. The suit charged Coors with violating the 1964 Civil Rights Act and challenged Coors's hiring tests, which the EEOC said were aimed at revealing an applicant's arrest record, economic status, and physical characteristics. The lawsuit stated that the company used "methods of recruitment which served to perpetuate the company's nonminority male workforce."

In May 1977, one month after the initiation of the AFL-CIO boycott, Coors signed an agreement with the EEOC, vowing that the brewery would not discriminate in hiring. But according to media reports, Coors still refused to admit any past bias toward blacks, Mexican Americans, and women. Coors said it would continue a program begun in 1972 designed to increase the number of women and minorities in all major job classifications. Striking brewery workers refused to sign the agreement, although the Coors's Operating Engineers Union entered into the agreement.

DAVID SICKLER AND THE AFL-CIO

The principal organizer of the AFL-CIO boycott against the Adolph Coors Company was the former President of the company's Local UBW. David Sickler had been employed by Coors for 10 years, acting as a Business Manager from 1973–1976. Sickler left the plant in 1976 to take a job with the AFL-CIO in Montana. In April 1977, the AFL-CIO decided to put Sickler in charge of coordinating the national boycott against Coors. Sickler moved to Los Angeles, where he also served as Director of the Los Angeles organizing committee and the subregional office of the AFL-CIO.

Sickler initially resisted the AFL-CIO's request to put him in charge of organizing the boycott. He believed that his past employment at the company made him too close to the situation to offer a fair position on the issues at stake. But the AFL-CIO felt that Sickler's tenure with Coors made him an ideal choice; according to Sickler, his personal reports of abuse by the company in hiring and employment practices were shared by numerous Coors employees and were the central issues of the boycott.

Sickler contended that when hired by Coors, he had been subjected to questions on a lie detector test regarding his personal life and sexual preference. In addition, he reported the company's practice of searching individuals or entire departments for suspected drug use. Despite corporate officials' insistence that the accusations were false, Sickler was convinced that Coors employees were generally "unhappy, demoralized."

Coors management was determined to fight back against the boycott and filed a breach of contract suit against the Local 366. The company charged that any boycott was prohibited under contract agreements. Management also made clear to the public its outrage over the boycott, as chairman Bill Coors began to speak out in the national media. In a 1978 interview with *Forbes* magazine, Coors stated about the AFL-CIO: "No lie is too great to tell if it accomplishes their boycott as a monument to immorality and dishonesty." Earlier that year, Bill Coors defended the company against charges of being antiunion. A *New York Times* report on the dispute quoted the CEO as saying: "Our fight is not with Brewery Workers Local 366. Our fight is with organized labor. Three sixty-six is a pawn for the AFL-CIO; that's where they're getting their money."

CORPORATE COMMUNICATION AT COORS

The 1977 boycott forced company officials to reexamine the area of corporate communication. Because labor leaders set out to "destroy the company," Bill Coors, now Chairman and CEO of the company, believed management must relate its side of the story. "There was no lie they wouldn't tell," the CEO recalled. "No one knew about Coors, and we had no choice but to tell the story."

In 1978, John McCarty, responsible for fund-raising at Pepperdine University, was hired as the Vice President of Corporate Public Affairs. McCarty brought to Coors expertise in minority relations and set out to repair the company's damaged reputation among minority groups. McCarty established a staff of corporate communication officers. The division was organized into four branches under McCarty's leadership: corporate communication, community affairs, economics affairs, and legislative affairs.

In response to the boycott and declining sales, McCarty enlisted the expertise of J. Walter Thompson's San Francisco office to help the company improve its corporate image. Coors launched what analysts termed a strong "image-building" campaign in 1979, with messages aimed at ethnic minorities, women, union members, and homosexuals. The theme throughout the late 1970s was clearly a response to labor's accusations against the company: "At Coors, people make the difference."

Another component of the new image campaign, according to media reports, was to condition company managers to project charm and humility in dealing with reporters. Coors executives participated in a training course designed to help them overcome a traditional distrust of the media.

SHIRLEY RICHARD

Shirley Richard was hired along with McCarty in 1978 to direct the company's legislative affairs function but was familiar with the Coors Company long before joining its staff. From 1974–1978, Richard worked on the Coors account as a tax manager for Price Waterhouse. One important issue for the Coors account, Richard recalled, was the deductibility of lobbying expenses and charitable donations. As part of her job, Richard became involved in the political arena, helping Coors set up political action committees. When Richard decided to leave Price Waterhouse in 1978, she asked Coors's Vice President of Finance for a job and was hired to head the legislative affairs department, a position she held until 1981.

Richard recalled her first year with the company as a time when Coors was "coming out of its shell"; Philip Morris's purchase of Miller Brewing Company meant increased competition for Coors and a demand for more aggressive advertising. In 1975, the company sold its first public stock. The bad publicity from the 1977 strike and its aftermath combined with greater competition led to a serious decline in sales and disappointed shareholders. Clearly, the Coors mystique alone could no longer speak for itself, and an aggressive public relations campaign was unavoidable.

One year before the "60 Minutes" broadcast of the Coors story, Richard became Adolph Coors Company's Director of Corporate Communications. In that position, she managed 25 people, covering corporate advertising, internal communications, distribution communications, training programs, and public relations personnel.

CONFRONTATIONAL JOURNALISM

The challenge of CBS's "60 Minutes" to any company under its investigation was formidable. The 14-year-old program was consistently ranked in Nielsen ratings' top 10 programs throughout the 1970s. Media critics offered various explanations for the success of this unique program, which remarkably combined high quality with high ratings. A *New York Times* critic summarized the sentiment of many within the broadcast profession when he called "60 Minutes," "without question, the most influential news program in the history of the media."

The program had earned its popularity through consistently hard-hitting investigative reporting. Executive producer Don Hewitt proclaimed "60 Minutes" the "public watchdogs." In his book about the program, Hewitt recalled, "I became more and more convinced that a new type of personal journalism was called for. *CBS Reports*, *NBC White Papers*, and *ABC Closeups* seemed to me to be the voice of the corporation, and I didn't believe people were any more interested in hearing from a corporation than they were in watching a documentary." Stories revealing insurance executives taking advantage of the poor with overpriced premiums, companies polluting streams and farmlands by irresponsibly dumping, or physicians gleaning profits from unnecessary surgery had all worked to rally public support and faith in CBS as a sort of consumer protection agency.

The program's success in uncovering scandal was due in large part to the aggressive and innovative technique of Mike Wallace. Wallace had been with the program throughout its history and was responsible for shaping much of the "60 Minutes" image. His reporting was always tough, sometimes theatrical, and was commonly referred to within the media as "confrontational journalism."

Allan Maraynes was assigned to produce the Coors segment. His experience with "60 Minutes" was highlighted by some significant clashes with big business. He had produced stories on the Ford Pinto gasoline tank defects, Firestone tires, I. Magnin, and SmithKline. Maraynes was alerted to the Coors controversy when "60 Minutes" researchers in San Francisco told him they suspected bad things were happening at Coors. The research group told Maraynes that the AFL-CIO was calling Coors a "fascist organization," which sounded to the producer like good material for a story.

Maraynes first flew to California to interview David Sickler. "We said we were setting about to do a story explaining that a fascist state exists at Coors," Maraynes recalled about his conversation with Sickler. "If it's true, we'll do it." Maraynes wanted Sickler to give him as much information about the boycott as he had. Maraynes wanted the angle of the story to be a focus on case histories of the people who had experienced Coors's unfair treatment.

OPEN OR CLOSED DOOR?

With the phone call from Maraynes, all of the pressures from David Sickler, the AFL-CIO, and the boycott were suddenly intensified. Shirley Richard had worked hard in the last year to focus public attention away from the boycott, but now her efforts to project a positive corporate image were threatened. Thinking ahead to the next few months of preparation time, she felt enormous pressure in the face of such potentially damaging public exposure.

Shirley Richard was not naive about Mike Wallace or the power of television news to shape a story and the public's opinion. Richard, along with other Coors executives, believed that the company was not at fault, but that did nothing to guarantee that its story would be accurately portrayed in a "60 Minutes" report. Mike Wallace himself had voiced the reason for a potential subject to fear the program's investigative report. In a *New York Times* interview, Wallace stated: "You (the network) have the power to convey any picture you want."

Richard knew that a big corporation's abuse of employees was just the kind of story "60 Minutes" was built on, and she didn't want Coors to be part of enhancing that reputation, especially when she believed organized labor had fabricated the controversy about Coors. Given Mike Wallace's desire to get the story, Shirley Richard guessed the company would automatically be on the defensive.

"60 Minutes" was determined to do the story, with or without cooperation from Coors. Richard wondered, however, whether an interview with Mike Wallace would do the company more harm than good. On the other hand, she considered the possibility that the company could somehow secure the offensive and turn the broadcast into a final clarification of Coors's side of the boycott story.

Richard was clearly challenged by an aggressive news team, and she was uncertain about cooperation from the conservative Coors brothers. Even if she could convince them that an open door was the best policy, would corporate officials be able to effectively present the facts supporting Coors's position? The national broadcast would reach millions of beer drinkers, and Richard knew that the "60 Minutes" report could either make or break the future success of Coors beer.

CASE QUESTIONS

1. What problems should Richard focus on?
2. What kind of research should she do?
3. What would her communication objective be if Coors agreed to the interview? If the brothers did not do the interview?
4. Should Shirley Richard encourage or discourage the Coors brothers to go on "60 Minutes"?
5. What suggestions would you have for improving media relations at Coors?

Source: This case was researched and written by Professor Paul A. Argenti in 1985 and revised in 1994, 1998, 2002, and 2005.