

product trial/word-of-mouth advertising process. (Just make sure to provide an adequate supply of the new product for news media demos).

Many marketers equate news media coverage with what it would cost to fill a similar amount of airtime or space with an advertisement. It is very important to remember one cannot buy editorial coverage. It's not for sale. For that reason, its believability with an audience is far greater than the content of an ad. How many times more believable requires a lot more space than here to deal with properly, and frankly, a lot more work by the PR industry to develop academically endorsed, empirical paradigms to determine the true value of an impression. Just remember, media relations, unlike advertising, is more than counting impressions, it's a major step in building long term relationships with the gatekeepers who have access to your target markets.

### **Canadian news is somewhere in the middle with you**

Public relations (PR) professionals who practice media relations in Canada should be aware of the Canadian news media's distinct peculiarities. They are parked somewhere between media practices in the United States and the United Kingdom. While Canadian journalism has deep roots in the British scene, it is also influenced by what Canadians read and what they see south of the border.

Canadian news media are middle-of-the-road in terms of the severity of their coverage. They are also generally more difficult to deal with than American reporters, especially when it comes to corporate spin or product publicity. There is a more profound distrust of Big PR in Canada.

The British news media seem to generally hate everybody – big government, big business, celebrities, the Royal Family. Go into any Canadian newsroom, you will find oodles of Brits.

Canadian news media are far kinder to politicians, distrust big corporations and tend to ignore our celebrities unless they've made it big in the U.S. or U.K. Where else could a prime minister actually clobber a protester without a media circus? "That kind of story I think probably would have had a great deal more play and commentary in the United States and Britain if it had happened there," notes Michael Nolan, a journalism professor at the University of Western Ontario's Faculty of Information and Media Studies.

He says the personalization of news has not been as intense in Canada. A good exercise would be to "compare our Canadian news media treatment of Margaret Trudeau's behaviour during the break-up between her and the prime minister with the closer scrutiny of the Clinton-Lewinsky coverage," he notes.

One anecdote from my days as a radio reporter in Alberta stems from the inadvertent presentation of fur coats to Prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson before their honeymoon in the Far North of Canada. In fairness, Alberta's premier did not check with his protocol officer and paid for the honeymoon gifts out of his own pocket. The British press nearly

lost their minds. The American media were rather stunned. The Canadians simply did their jobs, albeit somewhat embarrassed.

The U.S. news media seem to be kinder to corporate newsmakers and relatively kind to their politicians, but they are innately inclined to destroy celebrities, whether political, corporate or otherwise, especially if they mess up or get too big for their britches. The Eagles' Don Henley had it right about their building them up and tearing them down.

And because of the U.S. entrepreneurial spirit, there is "probably more focus on the influence of corporate products and how people respond to products," says Professor Nolan. "The news media in the U.S. in the final analysis are businesses and competition is fierce. It's quite natural to focus on innovation, on invention."

"I think the U.S. media is a bit more open to corporations and a little more willing to give business the benefit of the doubt. The Canadian and British media are less likely to do so," says William Marks, APR, President, GCI Group Atlanta and Managing Director, Business to Business, GCI North America.

Marks sagely adds that it is imperative for those who work in an international public relations capacity to ensure that PR in Canada is conducted by "on-the-ground PR resources, either on staff or through an agency. It is deadly to try to execute PR with the Canadian media from the U.S."

### **The state of the news media**

One of the first rules of media relations is to know the media. When you know something about the environment in which journalists have to work you appreciate their deadlines and their perspectives, all of which helps to improve your skill in reaching them with your story or news release.

During the past decade the news media, particularly private sector newspapers, magazines, radio and television outlets, have suffered from the same economic turmoil as other private sector organizations. Globalization, recession, national and multinational mergers, and technological revolution have significantly affected the business side of the news media, which has caused upheaval in newsrooms across the country.

The computers and computer networks have enabled the same news reporting functions of 10 years ago to be performed by fewer people while the same technology has exponentially increased the amount of news available for reporting. Consequently, there is more news to be processed by fewer people. Staffing levels have been dramatically cut, roughly 75% in radio, 50% in newspapers and 25% in television.

Furthermore, a dramatic shift in advertising revenues from mass advertising to much more targeted marketing communications has drastically reduced advertising revenues available to the majority of private sector mass news outlets. The rise of direct mail, promotions and specialized media has spread advertising revenues across a much broader