

Book Review

**On Deadline:
Managing Media Relations (6th Ed.)**

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On Deadline: Managing Media Relations is an essential text for public relations students, professionals, teachers, and scholars who are interested in learning how to conduct effective media relations campaigns. It is a comprehensive guide to media relations that covers topics ranging from strategic planning to building relationships with the media to implementing media relations campaigns both in the United States and internationally. It is written in an accessible tone and provides indispensable advice including current best practices, examples, case studies, and interviews with public relations professionals.

Content and Scope

The first two chapters of *On Deadline* cover planning for media relations. Chapter 1 provides guidance on how PR practitioners should prepare to engage in media relations with tips for developing a media policy and establishing media relations objectives to meet your organization's overall goals. The authors also provide a brief example of a strategic media relations plan, which includes goals, objectives, strategies, and tactics (p. 6-7). Other topics discussed include creating a resource library to prepare for media relations, introducing yourself to members of the news media, tips for using social media for media relations, and tips for making sure your organization's leadership team is on-board with your efforts. Chapter 2 gives a solid overview of news values, how to identify internal news stories, and how to identify news media outlets and contacts to pitch.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 build on the first two chapters by discussing how to build productive, symbiotic relationships with the news media. In Chapter 3, the authors provide a mini encyclopedia of media relations tools with entries on a range of tactics from editorial board visits to influencer media packages to talking points. This chapter also features an in-depth discussion on best practices for news releases, as well as some solid tips for pitching the media. Chapter 4 dives deep into the trenches

of media relations by providing clear, practical advice on the importance of meeting reporters' deadlines, how journalists use social media in their work, tips for using digital photos, how to handle requests for information, tips for granting and conducting interviews, how to handle reporter errors, identifying how and when to say "no" to a journalist, and the importance of keeping employees in the loop so they hear news through the PR team first. There is also a case study on the value of Instagram for reporters and a case study on the importance of being accessible to reporters.

Chapter 5 focuses entirely on media training and gives guidance on identifying and preparing the appropriate spokesperson for a media interview. It includes a discussion about the kind of information to give spokespersons and provides specific tips on how to prepare key messages, understand the audience and make good word choices. Chapter 5 also has some insightful advice on what to do if you're asked a difficult question or don't have an answer. There are even sections dedicated to tips for TV and live streaming, radio, and news conferences.

Overall, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 offer a wealth of useful tips that mirror the media relations lessons I've learned through my own professional experience. Written in a straightforward, thoughtful manner with plenty of example, these chapters alone make this book essential reading for aspiring public relations practitioners.

While Chapters 1 through 5 provide robust discussions of the everyday aspects of conducting media relations, Chapter 6 reminds readers of the importance of considering the ethical and legal issues associated with public relations. It begins by providing an overview of the codes of ethics of professional communications organizations relevant to public relations. It then offers succinct explanations of plagiarism, copyright issues, conflicts of interest, why and how to avoid saying "no comment," and of what it means when something is "off the record."

Chapter 7 focuses on media events by providing thorough step-by step advice for planning, implementing, and evaluating a media event. It also includes tips on what to include in a press kit, three case studies on successful events, and a planning model and timeline for major announcements. The advice in this chapter is clearly based on best practices and would be an excellent reference for an event planning module or course.

While the authors still offer an abundance of practical tips, Chapters 8 through 11 tend to focus on issues PR professionals face as they move toward a more strategic “counselor” role. For example, Chapter 8 explores managing international media relations and discusses the importance of being culturally sensitive. It also offers insightful tips for media relations in international markets, provides international case studies and scenarios, reviews strategic communication trends in Europe and Asia-Pacific, and features advice from communication professionals around the world. This section is a “must read” for anyone looking to practice international PR.

Chapter 9 centers on crisis planning with an overview of the basic elements of a crisis plan and ways to ensure a crisis plan remains effective. This chapter also offers three case studies and examines the power of social media during a crisis, behaviors to avoid during a crisis and advice from a professional on how to issue an apology.

In addition to providing clear guidance on the everyday practice of media relations, one of the things I appreciate the most about this book is that it continually reminds the reader of the importance of tying media relations to an organization’s measurable objectives. Chapter 10 covers this ever-important topic of measuring and evaluating the effectiveness

of media relations. In this chapter, the authors provide examples of objectives, how one could evaluate each objective, and critical reflection on each evaluative method. They also explore the types of research methods and metrics PR practitioners use in evaluative research and offer a case study of how the U.S. Coast Guard measures its media relations efforts. This chapter serves as an important reminder of how crucial it is to demonstrate the value of public relations efforts.

The final chapter of *On Deadline* closes the book with a thoughtful discussion of the practical and critical thinking skills that are required to evolve from “communicator to counselor,” (p. 201), or from tactician to strategic manager. It offers tips for building credibility and getting “a seat at the management table” (p. 203), two case studies with examples of successful PR counselors, and advice from PR professionals in their own words on how to be an effective PR counselor.

Contribution to Public Relations Education

On Deadline is an essential book that fills a major gap in current public relations textbooks, namely the fact that few public relations textbooks dive deeply into the relationship building practices between journalists and PR professionals (Pettigrew & Heflin, 2017). *On Deadline* lifts the veil on this complicated, symbiotic relationship by providing in-depth explanations, case studies, and tips on how to work with journalists and build lasting, productive relationships with members of the news media. While this alone is a vital addition to public relations education, *On Deadline* is also a comprehensive resource that will serve students well after they graduate and become professionals. It offers a treasure trove of advice that touches on every aspect of conducting media relations and explains how to do the work many PR practitioners do every day. Not only does *On Deadline* reflect the realities of my own professional experience,

but it also brings in the voices of several public relations professionals who give advice in their own words, further breaking down the wall between what we teach in the classroom and what students will experience in their careers. The discussions of ethical issues related to PR, managing international media relations, and the importance of tying PR outcomes to measurable objectives are a bonus that only strengthens the case for *On Deadline* as a must-read for PR students.

Critique

The only weakness I see in *On Deadline* is that I would have liked to see a discussion of the link between media relations and search engine optimization. If public relations professionals consider search engine optimization while conducting media relations (such as incorporating keywords in press releases or developing a link-building strategy), they can play a major role in getting their organizations highly ranked on search engines. Higher search engine rankings in turn help with media relations by positioning an organization as an industry leader. Still, this is more of an oversight than a flaw since search engine optimization practices are not as prominent in the workflow of PR practitioners as all the other topics covered in the book.

Audience

On Deadline is perfect for undergraduates at any level, graduate students looking for a more applied text, entry-level PR professionals, and journalism students who want to better understand the relationship between journalists and PR practitioners. I have used *On Deadline* (both the current edition and 5th edition) in my upper division PR Strategies and Tactics course since 2015. My students regularly comment that it helps them comprehend the everyday practice of public relations more fully and concretely.

Conclusion

Carole M. Howard, Wilma K. Mathews, and J. Suzanne Horsley

have written the definitive guide to planning, implementing, and evaluating media relations. Packed with real-world tips, examples, case studies, and advice from professionals, *On Deadline* is one of the best resources I have found on media relations.

References

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Pettigrew, J. & Heflin, K. (2017). Teaching media relationships: What's in the textbooks? *Journal of Public Relations Education*, 3(1), 36-49.

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