

Book Review

Strategic Planning for Public Relations (7th ed.)

Reviewed by

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Authors: Deborah A. Silverman and Ronald D. Smith (in memoriam)

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Number of pages: 556

Anyone who has taught or taken public relations classes is probably familiar with the name Ronald D. Smith, who authored several editions of strategic public relations planning, media writing, and public relations writing textbooks. This seventh edition of *Strategic Planning for Public Relations* is, in part, an ode to Smith, who passed away in 2020. SUNY Buffalo State University colleague and friend Deborah A. Silverman is co-author, picking up where Smith left off. Both authors honed their skills as public relations practitioners and consultants and have taught core public relations classes for undergraduate and graduate students, giving them the chops to showcase how to plan strategically in a public relations career.

Strategic Planning for Public Relations has been a staple in the campaigns textbook carousel through six editions over more than 20 years. This seventh edition has grown substantially from the 344-page premier edition to an extensive 565 pages.

Of note, this book does well to address many of the recommendations by the Commission on Public Relations Education's most-recent report. Its inclusion of "Ethics Minute" – hypothetical dilemmas followed by viable solutions – in each chapter reinforces the Commission's call to "take a systemic ethical approach to the practice... from a broader world view" (Toth & Bourland-Davis, 2023, p. 3) by incorporating "course content (case studies, reports, presentations, etc.) on the ethical challenges of contemporary practice" (p. 4), including "understand[ing] DEI as an ethical social responsibility" (p. 6). Other factors in Silverman and Smith's book recommended by the Commission include opportunities to apply critical thinking in experiential learning, analyze real-world case studies, and hone writing and data analytic skills. Importantly, the book also assesses the pros and cons of artificial intelligence in strategic public relations, something that is having a significant impact on the profession.

Structure and Organization

The four-phase, 10-step format makes it easy to navigate this sizable volume. A detailed table of contents is broken down into these four well-known phases:

1. Formative research focuses on the first four campaign steps: analyzing the situation, choosing research methods, analyzing the organization, and analyzing the publics.
2. The strategy phase has three steps: creating positioning statements, goals, and objectives.
3. The tactics phase focuses on elements of the PESO Model© created by Spin Sucks CEO Gini Dietrich (2024) and devotes a chapter to each of the four types – paid, earned, shared, and owned media. The section also tackles plan implementation.
4. The evaluative research phase addresses the whys and hows of effective campaign evaluation.

The book also has three appendices – media engagement, which focuses on reputation, media relations and credibility; crisis communication, which details types of crises, strategies to respond to crises, and the necessity of having a crisis plan in place; and a content analysis example, to show how an organization might assess media coverage. A 34-page glossary includes definitions from A/B testing to zero-based budgeting, followed by a 15-page index.

In addition to the book proper, Routledge provides several online resources. Instructors must complete a registration form on the [Instructor Resources Download Hub](#) page to request access to an instructor's manual, sample syllabi, checklists, PowerPoints, as well as sample student campaigns and relevant online resources. Those looking for a test bank might be disappointed. The authors clearly note the value of experiential learning by doing, rather than by memorizing. Students may access textbook resources on the book's webpage under [support material](#). It includes the 10-step checklists, two extensive campaign documents, and a seven-pager with links to professional organizations and resources in public relations,

advertising, social media, communication, broadcasting, communication and diversity, media publications, careers, diversity, ethics, media literacy, and media criticism.

Critique

The only frustration I have with this book – and with many public relations textbooks – is the meandering approach to defining the profession, complete with what it's not, historical definitions, global definitions, comparisons to advertising, and so on. The authors' definition appears eight pages into the 21-page introduction, and on slide 14 out of 21 in PowerPoints. Setting the definition front and center may help ease the confusion and misinformed descriptions from which public relations suffers and perhaps help students whose parents wonder about the murky nature of their career aspirations.

Some of the ethics cases are fairly simplistic, focusing on right/wrong issues – lack of transparency when posting online, fake reviews, misleading bloggers, a fake social media hack, insufficient influencer disclosure, deep-fake videos, and posting false information online. Although there's value in reinforcing basic ethical expectations, it would be helpful to share ethical dilemmas as well, where students must assess competing values that can't be applied simultaneously and come up with a viable solution. For example, how does a practitioner grapple with the competing notions of disclosure while also safeguarding confidences?

In the instructor resources web page, the authors recommend graduate students work on campaigns individually, which discounts the significance of how the profession operates. No one is an island; while some grad students may excel at research and evaluation, others may have more to offer in creating effective tactics.

The instructor resources include a number of expected items – PowerPoint slides for each chapter and chapter overviews. Additionally, it provides helpful undergraduate- and graduate-level syllabi. An added plus is a sample grading rubric for critiquing a campaign project.

Audience

At 556 pages, the book could be a bit daunting for some undergraduate students, but it is packed with valuable insights that could, as the authors note, bridge more than one course. When I select textbooks, there are two key criteria I apply – can the students afford it now, and will they keep it as a resource after the class ends? Although textbooks can be notoriously pricey, the paperback and e-book costs of *Strategic Planning for Public Relations* are not outlandish. The four-phase, 10-step structure with checklists makes it a useful resource; instructors might reinforce that point with upper-level undergraduates and master’s students, particularly for those who may seek public relations accreditation through PRSA. The book is among those PRSA recommends to those studying for APR certification; both Silverman and Smith earned APR status.

Conclusion

Overall, the latest edition of *Strategic Planning for Public Relations* is packed with valuable information and offers a hands-on approach that will serve students well. The few downsides are outweighed by its legacy, not only as a textbook, but as a resource that novice practitioners should hold onto.

References

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