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The Travel Industry Communicators
QUIZ: SOME BASIC QUESTIONS TO PEOPLE WHO DEAL WITH THE MEDIA

* How many of you have any kind of working relationship with the Press?

* How many of you have conducted a background briefing?

* How many of you are ex-journalists?

* How many of you have been burned by the Press?

* How many of your trust the Press?

* How many of you think the Press trusts you?

* How many of you think the Press should trust you?

* How many of you like your daily newspaper every morning?

* What are your perceptions of the Press?

* Why do you prefer one publication over another?

* How many of you have ever gone to a reporter and asked him "How can I help you do your job better?"
How many of you have researched the magazines available in the market, established what their major objectives are and how you can help them achieve those objectives?

These questions are the foundations of all relationships between journalists and the people they write about. The way you answered them will have provided a good yardstick of the state of relations between you and the media.
WHY HIDE IT?

This is known as the Information Age. If someone decides to do a hack-job on your company, he or she does not even have to step into your company to do so. ‘The Hunt for Red October’, one of the most fascinating books about US-Soviet naval submarines was written by Tom Clancy, a former insurance salesman who had never been on a submarine. Kitty Kelly wrote a biography on former US first lady Nancy Reagan without ever once having interviewed her.

These are alternative sources of information that a journalist can tap:

++ The newspaper archives;

++ Other publications;

++ Cocktail parties;

++ Conferences and seminars;

++ Your competitors and product suppliers;

++ Public information disseminated by industry groups;

++ Banks; consultancy companies; stockbrokers;

++ Profiles;
+ + International associations;

+ + University research;

+ + Government bodies, especially the tax department;

+ + Former employees of your company, one of the biggest and best sources of information, especially if they have frustrations to pour out.
THE MEDIA AS A BUSINESS

What is the primary function of a publication?

Answer: To make money, whether as corporations or individuals, we have to make money, the most important man-made means of survival. The media is a business first and a medium of information second. If it does not make money, it does not survive. That is what industry communicators have to keep in mind first and foremost. But the following train of thought should help you better understand ways to take advantage of the media's search for profitability:

What do we have to do to make money? We have to sell.

How do we sell? By ensuring that our product is better than that of the competition, or convincing the buyer that it is. When the buyer buys, he's getting what he considers to be value for money, the best quality for the price he is prepared to pay.

If you all like quality business, what makes you think the media is any different. As publications, we like quality news. As individual journalists, we all like stories that will help us get an edge over our fellow journalists.

Ask yourself how many hotels, airlines and tour operators there are in the region? If they are your competition for business, they are also competing against you for space in publications. The same principles and strategies that apply in tapping business also apply in getting your material into the media.
WHY COMMUNICATE

Oscar Wilde once said that the worst thing next to being talked about is not being talked about. Tourism is a business that thrives on communications -- to publicise, to boast, to sell, to make an impact. Many in the industry have, of course, survived for years without so much as a mention in the media -- and done very well, thank you very much, perhaps because, rather than inspite of it. But those with any desire to get ahead, to grow, to stand out among the crowd, to make an impact, need the media to carry them that extra mile. Take art, for example. I have seen what appear to be superb paintings but heard nary a word about the artists. Yet, I have heard a lot of about famous painters whose work I cannot understand but who no doubt have considerably better communication skills than their unknown colleagues. To gain regular media attention, especially in a favourable light, is a sign of respect, achievement, acceptability. Former US President Ronald Reagan was described as the Great Communicator for his abilities to use his acting background and play to the TV galleries. People claim he was old, hen-pecked, forgetful, prone to napping at Cabinet meetings and that he pushed the United States into the biggest budget deficit it has ever known. Yet, he was one of the most popular Presidents the US has ever had. Even the tourism industry acknowledges that he presided over the longest period of economic growth in peacetime history. His was a victory of style over substance. If you’ve got style, the substance either follows, or does not matter. Some have got a natural flair for it, others acquire it.

Although many hate to deal with the media, look at some of the pro and con forces pulling within the industry.
Everyone needs to advertise once in a while. Ads are usually placed in "good" publications. Publications cannot be "good" unless they have a certain degree of respect and are true to their profession -- which sometimes means being disliked.

Industry leaders often criticise the media for being excessively cynical. Yet, they need the media to act as a pressure group and vent frustrations over "big picture" problems -- for example, a need for government action to curb sex tours in some countries, build new airports in other countries, improve infrastructure or tackle environmental problems, etc. The media cannot exert any pressure if it has no influence. And it cannot gain influence if it is not read and respected.

Properly used, good public relations is probably the most cost-effective means of communications ever devised. It is a necessary supplement to advertising and marketing. It is certainly more believable and credible than others.

In Bangkok, The Oriental is known as one of the World’s Best Hotels. Why? From the early 20th century, it has featured in the writings of famous authors like Somerset Maugham and Joseph Conrad. The legend was made. Coupled with superb public relations and quality service delivered by a team led by a veteran general manager of 25 years, The Oriental lives more on mystique even though it is essentially an old hotel, with a not very modern structure. People stay there just to say that they have stayed there. By contrast, The Raffles Hotel in Singapore was recently renovated and has taken a considerable image-bashing. It looks ‘old’ but it’s really ‘new’. The candle of ancient charm went out.
THE MACRO ASPECT OF THE BUSINESS

This section will focus on the importance of understanding:

The Travel Business

Your Own Companies

The Needs of Journalism.
UNDERSTAND THE TRAVEL BUSINESS

If you do not understand the travel business, how can you intelligently deal with the media? How can you understand what makes news and what makes noise? How can you package a properly-targetted media kit? Social chit-chats with visiting journalists are all very well but some intelligent conversation about the ins and outs of travel and tourism will do much to enhance the sales, marketing and/or P.R. executive’s standing and hence reflect on the credibility and positioning of the product that the executive represents.

How well do you know the travel industry?

Here’s a nomenclature test: What do the following initials stand for: EIA, OAA, GDS, SWOT analysis, MTP?

Answers:

EIA - Environmental Impact Assessment study;
OAA - Orient Airlines Association;
GDS - Global Distribution System;
SWOT - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis;
MTP - Minimum Tour Price.

Moreover, be very aware of the concerns of tourism:

- Environmental degradation.
- Social problems.
- Automation.
- AIDS.
- Market research information.

There are umpteen other issues that journalists will ask about. Be prepared to hold an intelligent conversation in most of them.
UNDERSTAND YOUR COMPANIES

How many sales, marketing and public relations executives are considered inherent parts of your company’s decision-making process?

How well do you know your companies? Do you know when your company was founded? Who owns it? And when was the last time you interviewed your finance director to find out the impact of a new tax?

What credit cards does your hotel take - Look at the story potential of the following, check out which credit card usage is showing a big growth and tip off someone you trust in the media so that he can develop his or her own story? What percentage of your overall business is Japanese?

Knowing your companies is one of the most fundamental aspects of good communications. Many of these brasstacks details should be available at your fingertips. You never know when you have to take a question about them.
UNDERSTAND AND KNOW THE PEOPLE WHO WORK IN IT

Everyone says we’re in a people business, that people are our best resources. But how can any communicator do a job unless they understand the people who are working with them?

There lies within the hundreds of people in your company a wealth of talent and experience that can and should be tapped. Though most communication packages are designed to glorify the achievements of senior management, especially in the area of sales and marketing, the real story lies lower in the hierarchy. Knowing and communicating with those middle and junior level employees will unearth a treasure trove of information that can be creatively packaged to tell stories about common-folk. Try it, I assure you it will win a few plaudits.

On the other side of the coin, knowing your people also allows communicators to respond promptly to some commonly-asked questions, thus conveying the impression of a well-informed communicator. For example: How old is your general manager? Is your Chinese chef an expert at Szechuan or Cantonese food? How many languages does your assistant speak?

The more you know your people, the better you will be able to communicate.
UNDERSTAND THE NEEDS OF JOURNALISM

Here’s a little story:

Several months ago, I got a call from the manager of a European airline. Let’s get together, he said. Anything special, I asked. No, he said, just an overall state of the industry appraisal. Fine, I replied. We met for breakfast. He was late and apologised for it. We sat and talked - in the beginning it was pleasantries but 10 minutes later we were into it. Do you know how this Value Added Tax is going to impact on the airline industry? I told him I’d done a bit of work on it but that I was not totally up to date. He told me some of the background details behind it, how it was coming together, what the potential pitfalls were. All my queries were answered to the best of his abilities. We then exhausted the issue -- that was halfway through the meal. Then he said there was another thing he wanted to talk to me about, the Bank Settlement Plan, another hot issue. We spent about 25 minutes going over that. There was some documentation that he wanted to show me which he promised to send. Similarly we went over about three or four other issues facing the airline business. At the end of it, he gave me copies of his airline’s newsletter and suggested I go through it. If there was anything worth publishing, that was okay by him.

When I presented this story at a recent course, some participants claimed the airline manager had acted improperly. If so, what did he do improperly? I happen to believe he behaved very ethically and appropriately. What did he do right?
Several things: He was not pushy. He built relations by giving me information on other industry issues and helping me improve the quality of my articles. He never made it conditional that I should print anything -- as it turned out, there was nothing worth printing in the newsletter but that's not stopped us from having many more breakfast meetings since. But if one day, I get a chance to print something worthwhile, I'll give his material priority.

How many know how a newspaperman works? Most of the time, I am covering industry news like association meetings, the activities and policy statements of the NTO and airlines, people movements, Press conferences and announcements, conferences and seminars, statistical trends and analysis, research papers, gossip. Journalists spend most of their time covering these because it is their job. We rely on communicators to take the first step in helping fill the rest of the space.
THE MICRO ASPECT

IDENTIFYING YOUR MEDIA TARGET MARKETS

The media at whom a Press release is targetted can be more safely and cost-effectively used if it is broken down like the following chart. This way you can fine tune the target market and use it to better support the overall sales efforts.

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Each publication must be listed by:

Name, Address, Phone, and Fax Number.

Name of Editor and/or the relevant editor at whom your communications package is targeted.

A brief synopsis of the publication’s profile and what kind of news/features it is interested in.

One suggestion would be to add a clause that describes the state of your relations with that publication, in other words, how well you know its key people -- good / bad / normal. This will help you establish market gaps and plug areas of weaknesses.

A breakdown by primary and secondary publications might be helpful. As everyone tends to focus on the primary publications, the secondary publications might be more receptive to your efforts to pay attention to them and thus give greater coverage to your Press releases (no doubt, they will also expect a little advertising to follow, but that’s a risk you have to take).
THE PRESS RELEASE

Where does the word news come from. Most people think it is a derivative of the word ‘new’. What about North East West South?

Communicators need to become reporters within and about their own companies. You are all familiar with the Who, What, When, Where, Why and How of journalism. Apply it. But remember that there is no way of writing a news release in a way that satisfies everybody. Different journals have different needs, which is precisely why they are different. You have to give each of them what they want. Just like your own hotel, airline or tour operating company. You have a market niche and you go after them.

The Press releases I get usually fall into three categories: People appointments, dignitaries visiting your properties, travel agents and media on fam trips. Is this quality information? Is this a sales tool? Or is it image-making material?

Questions to ask yourself when sending to the travel trade media:

1. Will this help the newspaperman lift the quality of his publication? Is it important for the travel agent to know this? Will this help generate sales for my company? If yes, does it have all the relevant information to help generate those sales, prices, facilities, etc.

2. What is the first thing you have to do, after compiling your facts, but before writing your release?
You have to decide the objective you want to achieve and compile the media it is aimed at. If you don’t do this, you are adopting what is known as the scattershot approach in marketing, rather than a targeted approach.

3. Analyse what is the newsy factor in each release. This depends on whom you are targeting this release at.

4. Don’t spare the information - break it up into two parts, one just giving the newsy part of it and the rest giving background.

5. Don’t follow up with the editor about whether or not it’s going to get in.

6. Leave out the adjectives - they are for ads.

7. Don’t bullshit, be available, return phone calls.

8. KISS - Keep It Short, Stupid. Maximum information in minimum number of words. The longer the time it takes to edit your release, the less the chance of it getting in. The more long-winded it is, the less chance of it getting in. The better the picture, the better the chance of it getting in.

9. Follow-it up with background information.

10. Don’t try too hard to sell your company/property. Be subtle. Hard selling to us is no use. Make your newsletter contain specific details of the hotel’s operating performance.
11. Why not put the name of your general manager or your managing director there? I have often called up a PR manager only to be told to wait to have something checked. Takes years to do so.

TIPS

1. Good photographs are vital.

2. Always study the publication you are aiming at - what kind of material they want. And focus only on those that you think may be interested.

3. Always do something different.

4. Use easy language and a relaxed, easy writing style - focus on the opening and make sure it is attention-grabbing.
THE NEWSLETTER

Internal newsletters are one of the most fabulous sources of information about a company. Many people I consider good communicators send out these newsletters to the media in the hope that they will pick up a lead or two and follow them up to produce some positive publicity. Properly produced newsletters are also good sources of background data and reference material. Unfortunately, very few people in the tourism industry understand their worth and how to use them.

The primary advantage of newsletters is that it allows a company management to express its views IN ITS OWN WORDS, not something that is the result of an interview that appears in the reporter’s words. They can be used as source of information and communication within the company, as means of education and explanation of company policies. Two of the finest internal newsletters I have seen in the region are those of Cathay Pacific and Singapore Airlines. They provide a fine combination of:

Background

Policy Statements

New Company Developments.

Performance Figures

Social Chit-chat and ‘Fun’ Pictures.
By contrast, hotel newsletters are among the most boring. They never give performance figures, are usually full of pictures of general managers shaking hands with visiting dignitaries and food festivals. They are too social and recreational in content and character. In order to provide leads and information for journalists to pick up on, they have to become more 'business-oriented.' Unfortunately, hotel public relations officers double up as guest relations people, social directors and media relations officers. Their identity crisis is reflected in the quality of the newsletters they produce. And a valuable opportunity to communicate is lost.
PRESS CONFERENCES AND BACKGROUND BRIEFINGS

Press conferences are usually called to generate a large amount of news publicity about major developments in the least possible time and at the least possible expense. Industry big-wigs gather together to announce new air-routes, hotel expansion projects, buy-outs, cooperative deals, etc. Sometimes, they are also used to vent frustrations, like industry groupings protesting an unwanted tax.

In preparing for a Press conference, organisers must make sure that their

- Positions are clear;
- Statements are well-rehearsed;
- Facts are in order;

They must also be prepared to field questions on other issues. Usually, the formal part of Press conferences do not yield half as much news as the informal parts, i.e., when the cocktail party begins afterwards. People are usually guarded in their statements and reporters do not want their competition to get the benefit of their questions. But they achieve a certain objective.

Personally, I prefer BACKGROUND BRIEFINGS for at least two good reasons. They are private (I have the interviewee all to myself for an hour or so); and the information can be distributed between on- and off-the-record sessions with full confidentiality assured. This way, I walk out of the briefing having got what I wanted and the interviewee has the satisfaction of building a good relationship with a journalist. I hasten to add that background briefings are not commonly
given to newcomer journalists, and usually confined to select groups of individual journalists who know the industry, the issues and the people. By taking journalists 'behind the public announcements,' I think they perform a most valuable role, much more so than Press conferences.
THE PRESS KIT

The Press kit must be packaged in such a way that a journalist can build an entire story just based on its contents.

A checklist of what good Press kits should normally contain:

- Names and titles of speakers and other key participants.

- Copies of the speakers’ statements.

- Profiles and photographs of the speakers, along with contact addresses and numbers.

- Company background.

The Press kit should ideally contain answers to the questions most likely to come up at the Press conference. Good public relations professionals usually take their clients through this routine before most Press conferences so why not just include the answers in the Press kits. This way, the kits can also be sent out to other journalists who could not make it to the Press conference.

If a Press conference is called, I see no need to skimp on information in the Press kit. Anything that gives the journalist an impression of an ‘open,’ well-managed and professional company is good for that company. By giving the information up-front, the company is doing so in its own words and saving the journalist the trouble of making a follow-up phone call. That can only be a
good thing. The rest of the Press conference can then be used to highlight a bit of drama and action-appeal for the TV cameras.
WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A GOOD COMMUNICATOR

When the magazine 'Air Transport World' gave out its 1991 annual airline awards, it gave the best media/public relations award to Japan Airlines. These were the winning criteria: "JAL's PR department relies heavily on publishing to provide the essentials of the JAL story for the media. The PR staff is involved in the publication of no fewer than seven periodicals, including a monthly and a quarterly in English. In addition, the staff maintains a stock of fact sheets covering more than 50 topics relating to the airline's operation. These, too, are published in several languages.

The ATW editors' selection of JAL for this award is based partly on our own personal experience with the airline's PR department. The airline has to deal with our lack of Japanese language skills and we want to pay special thanks to JAL for Morris Simoncelli in the New York office, and Geoffrey Tudor in the Tokyo office, who have been so helpful to us over the years. Together, they have 40 plus years of airline PR experience. And it shows as they assist us in understanding the intricacies of Japan Airlines and its dealings with its vast and complicated international markets. And so, for JAL's willingness to commit its resources to its media and public relations over the years, and its people's willingness and ability to assist the media, we salute JAL and its public-relations effort."

That was at the corporate level. Individuals are also known to be good communicators. The same year, ATW also gave an award for Industry Service to American Airlines CEO Robert Crandall. It hailed him for being "among the airline CEOs (who have defended) the pricing strategies of the industry before
the U.S. Congress and the business community. He has broached 'untouchable' subjects, such as the high costs brought to the airline industry by 'social-cause' legislation. Unlike most of his peers in the U.S. airline industry, he will speak forcefully, in detail and 'on the record' about the things that he believes in."

Does that sound anything like your general manager or chairman?

Some qualities I personally admire in good communicators:

- Believer in the public’s right to know.

- Self-confidence.

- Usually, but not always, "clean" with relatively few skeletons in the closet.

- Clear, concise ability to express themselves.

- Good people manager.

- Good grasp of figures and details, coupled with an ability to convert complicated scenarios into simple syntax.

- Available at all reasonable hours, including home phone numbers and direct line office phone numbers (by-passing nosy secretaries).
Willing to go off the record and brief journalists on background information.

TIPS

1. Tell the truth.
   If you don’t know, say so and promise to find out. If you can do so with a simple phone call or two, so much the better.

2. Have the facts in hand.
   Statistics and background are particularly important to prove a point. Journalists also like people who are sharp enough to have this data in their minds; it conveys the impression of someone who is in command, incisive and good at both strategic and tactical matters.

3. Be prepared and be convincing.
PROBLEMS JOURNALISTS HAVE WITH COMMUNICATORS

Problem 1)

Consistency and efficiency are two of the most basic pre-requisites for good communications. Both come naturally from soundly-managed companies. A company that is badly managed will invariably produce no information at all (in order not to attract attention) or, if it does, the information will be incomplete, inadequate and usually incomprehensible.

Problem 2)

Job-changing in the industry. This is certainly not peculiar to the travel industry only but if people in the direct line of communications change too often, so too do policies and philosophies. New people often try and find what was wrong with the way their predecessors were handling things in order not to repeat the mistakes. That is an inherently correct approach except that it’s a bit confusing to the receiving public. Excessive job changing does nothing to enhance your personal or a company’s individual credibility. A rolling stone gathers no moss.
MEETING THE MEDIA’S NEEDS

In order to be clear about what the media wants, one needs to be clear about what the media perceives as its strengths. These strengths are what editors have to keep in mind when "producing" the publication and what the marketing people have to highlight when selling it. In order to ensure a better chance of getting into the media, your material has to come as close as possible to meeting these strengths.

What are the media’s strengths? Like any product, every publication has its Unique Selling Proposition (USP).

Look at the way this USP is played up in the following direct mail letter sent out by a prominent business publication to get more subscribers. The publication’s name has been changed to "The Authority" and references to its circulation policies have been edited out.

OPEN TEXT

In today’s world of business, you have an unfair business advantage if you’re well-informed on both local issues and world affairs.

But you need to have more than basic information. You need thorough analysis and definite opinions that will give you an edge on your competitors. You need "The Authority".
"The Authority" is read by a select group of business leaders in Asia. What they have is an unfair advantage over other business people who just aren't as well-informed. And what they have, you can have too.

So how does "The Authority" give you an unfair advantage?

"The Authority" provides thorough analysis and definite opinions on which to base your business decisions. It is not afraid to draw conclusions from its careful analysis of world issues and will voice its opinions strongly when necessary.

"The Authority" presents a truly independent perspective that all top leaders count on. Our publication remains editorially free from outside financial and political control because the editor is appointed by four independent trustees, not by a proprietor. This is how we preserve our editorial integrity and ensure that the information and opinions in every issue are balanced and soundly based.

"The Authority" is written in a style that's refreshingly different - concise, vigorous and uncompromising. Our perceptive headlines and captions will help you understand complex issues at a glance.

"The Authority" makes valuable information and useful opinions accessible. Not only do we have an unyielding respect for facts, we believe in good organisation and clear presentation. Every issue of "The Authority" begins with a comprehensive contents page. Articles are listed geographically and in specific categories of leaders, business, politics,
finance, science and technology. This helps you find the information you need quickly.

"The Authority" has a broad coverage which is carefully selected and clearly presented. To be a business leader you need to understand global issues fully. You need to know what's affecting every region of the world. Each week, "The Authority" carefully selects and clearly presents a broad range of topics from business to the arts. Within its 60-plus editorial pages, you can always find useful information concerning or affecting your business.

"The Authority" provides you with a unique international insight into business in Asia. It has editorial offices in Tokyo, Bangkok and Hong Kong keeping it in close touch with the region and your information needs. Our correspondents are experts in their fields, based in countries whose cultures they understand. This ensures you get relevant information to guide you in your work.

"The Authority" is printed in Asia for Asia, so you get vital information faster. While being the only international publication to carry the same editorial content in each edition, "The Authority" is printed in Singapore for regional distribution. This means you get timely delivery of each issue to help you plan for the week ahead.

"The Authority" - the ultimate tool to help you reach the top.

END TEXT
Pay attention to the words and phrases used in this letter and you have a superb checklist against which to evaluate your communications packages.

The same message goes out to journalists to evaluate their writing. Do both editorial material and promotional/marketing messages dispatched to editors and journalists meet the standards this publication has set for itself? Do they offer, as the letter says:

- thorough analysis and definitive opinions that will give you an edge on your competitors;

- truly independent perspective;

- editorially free from outside financial and political control;

- written in a style that’s refreshingly different - concise, vigorous and uncompromising;

- good organisation and clear presentation;

- broad coverage which is carefully selected;

- useful information concerning or affecting your business.

If not, back to the drawing board.
CONFERENCES AND SEMINARS

Conferences are goldmines of information, a massive convergence of people, all authorities in their fields who have spent time and effort, carefully preparing their papers. For the journalist, they are an opportunity to get a ton of information without asking a single question. Under one roof are spot stories, news features, analytical information and most important, access to contacts, most of whom are eager and willing to talk about their projects and activities. The papers presented provide insights into research-based material either for instant use or for quoting later. They are also educational for journalists who don’t know enough about a subject but want to find out.

The tragedy is that 80 per cent of information presented at these conferences is wasted. Communicators miss out on great opportunities to provide this goldmine of information to journalists who do not have time to cover all the conferences going on in all the hotels but would like to get the material just in case there is some small nugget of information there that is worth following up.

How to do it:
The PR department approaches the conference organiser and asks

Question One:
Would you like to get a bit of publicity for their function? If yes, then
Question Two:
Is the information being presented proprietary or a matter of public record? If proprietary, then conversation ends. If public record and, moreover, of public interest, then

Question Three:
Would the organiser mind if the PR department arranged for some of the media to be alerted to the conference in order to attract some coverage. Mention that the publicity value as being good for the conference organiser.

If the conference organiser does not mind on all counts, then could the PR department please have

1) Name of the organising body/association/company;

2) List of the speakers;

3) Objective of the conference; and

4) Copies of the papers, if any, or abstracts, if possible?

Circulate that to the appropriate media, and you have:

1. A satisfied bunch of journalists who notice that you have the media’s interests at heart.
2. A satisfied customer who is happy that you followed the proper procedures and arranged for them to get proper coverage of their function;

3. A satisfied boss who can then be shown examples of the resulting publicity, hopefully with the name of your hotel mentioned somewhere there.
HOW TO HANDLE FREELoadERS

Freeloading journalists are one of the scourges of the travel industry. Though it is an accepted part of the business practise, it has obviously gotten out of hand, and is threatening to get worse as the industry grows. The criteria under which freeloading journalists should be 'entertained' is really the same as that which applies to freeloading travel agents and wholesalers:

* Of how much use are they likely to be?

* How important is it to build relations with them?

* Are they asking for it, or are you prepared to extend the courtesy of your own accord?

* Are they making a habit out of it?

* Should you give it to them on the express understanding that they give something in return?

As a rule, freeloading should be discouraged. Hotels and airlines normally give 50 per cent off to journalists which should be quite enough, especially if they are not going to get anything back in return. Only problem is that most journalists know that 50 per cent off a rack rate or published air fare is not even worth asking for as they can get a better rate from a regular travel agent. One of the problems is that unlike with travel agents, for whom a set discount formula is in place, nothing applies to journalists. If something practical and
sensible can be worked out between the two sides, at least the journalists will know where they stand and what to expect when they walk up to a hotel counter or make an airline booking.
PRINT AND ELECTRONIC MEDIA

I must confess I'm biased towards print media. But I'm not blind towards the power of the electronic media. Here are some main differences between the two:

PRINT

1. Can be retained for future reference

2. Can be read whenever and wherever, in the toilet even

3. More detailed (huge amounts of information in a relatively small amount of space)

4. Broader cross section of opinion and news

ELECTRONIC

1. Faster with the news

2. Provides visual impact

3. Much bigger audience

4. More effective in reaching target markets but requires harder work in arranging the required audio-visual 'drama'.
For various reasons, however, print is under siege. Newspapers and magazines are closing down all over the world as advertising shifts from print to electronic media. But one of the finest examples of the differences and strengths of the two media emerged in an advertisement published in the International Herald Tribune in June 1992. The copy said, "Since people usually watch television to be entertained and read magazines and newspapers to be informed, doesn't it make sense to inform them about your products in print?"
ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS

There is an inherent distrust between public relations companies and the media. Seeing themselves as independent defenders of the faith, journalists are always suspicious of people who pander to the vested interests of a moneyed few. PR companies do have a crucial role to play in terms of providing background information, giving leads, preparing proper documentation and visuals, providing a one-stop shop, paving the way for access to information, arranging trips, etc. But they are inherently in the game of ‘managing the media.’ Those words have a certain sinister ring to them, even though the PR companies like to say they are doing nothing but providing other side of the coin, or ‘helping the media.’

Yes, they do help the media, in some important ways:

1. Professional preparation of media kits, including background information, profiles of speakers and companies, photographs, statistics, etc

2. Arranging for translation help, where needed

3. Arranging interviews and photograph sessions.

4. Giving tips to the clients on what to focus on.

But on the other hand, their ‘help’ to the media is specifically aimed at producing a certain objective set out to them for their client. What they call ‘good organisation’ the media could well call ‘stage-management’. They have a sophisticated arsenal of well-financed equipment; several of them have
studios in which they conduct 'media training' for corporate and government spokespersons on how to respond to difficult questions, how to act before cameras, how to speak in 'sound-bites,' how to deal with 'media packs,' and so forth so on.

My personal experience with PR professionals and companies has been good. They play a key role in providing journalists with information that we do not have time to cover ourselves. But, like with all businesses, there are good and bad PR companies who will deal with the journalists proportionate to the relative importance of that journalist and the publication he/she represents. That's only natural.

I have the greatest of respect for PR professionals who will mix overt 'stage-management' with a dose of 'background briefings' off the record so that journalists can have some idea of what's going on behind the scenes. This way, journalists known up-front to what extent they are being used and therefore, can decide to what extent they are willing to allow themselves to be. Needless to say, PR consultants will not do this with all journalists, only those they know and trust. The worst thing for them would be to be quoted inadvertently in public by journalists they don't trust and then be fired by their clients.
TIPS ON DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

1. Make friends with the media -- scratch their backs and they will scratch yours. Successful communications always consists, like anything in daily life, on whom you know and how well you can work out a modus vivendi with them. When they see your release on the desk, they will give it priority because you have taken the time and trouble to keep them informed about what’s going on. That’s our livelihood. If you feed us, and develop a relationship based on no-nonsense trust, we will under no circumstances betray that. And you will have media friends for life.

2. The worst enemy of a PR department manager is his or her boss many of whom like to skimp on information. I can assure you that is the fastest way to getting a complete media blackout. The less information you impart, the less coverage you will get.

3. When a media group comes for an educational trip, don’t just take them around your hotel and show them your sights, that’s useless to them. Prepare a market brief. Say if they are from Italy - what are the trends from Italy, in the view of your marketing director? What kind of traffic do you have? What new marketing strategies are being pursued? Do you have any Italian-speaking person on your staff who can escort them around? Have you taken any special actions within your hotel to cater to Italian-speaking groups? Give them names of the closest representation that they can contact. And then pump them for information about conditions in their country and pass that on to media -- are travel agencies closing down, what is the new impact of technology, etc.
4. Forget the possibility that the way to a newsman or woman’s heart is through his stomach -- it’s through his or her notebook. You fill that up and I assure you will get more coverage than you can handle.

5. Send out speeches made by your key executives to the media.

6. How many of you have prepared small history books about your companies for easy reference by you, your staff and the media.

7. Respond to questionnaires.

8. Track down supplements of the various magazines and ask how can be of help. Tell us about product improvements - aim these at supplements and special reports.
TROUBLE-SHOOTING: HANDLING PROBLEMS

Let's go on the premise that perfection in the Press, just like any profession, system or society, is impossible. So there will always be problems with the Press. The immediate tendency is to brush off problems as another bad piece of journalism but like most problems, they can be fixed.

People often like to bitch about the Press. But exactly what's wrong with it? Would you like it to be less analytical? Less controversial? Less fiery in usage of language? Is the problem worth correcting? Is the editor good and responsible?

PROS
1. Decision-making tool
2. Entertains through arts and lifestyles columns
3. Sports updates
4. Means of information
5. Human interest and success stories
6. Analytical
CONS
1. Misguided
2. Prone to exaggeration
3. Sensationalist
4. Often misquotes
5. Editorialises
6. Has poorly trained, badly informed reporters
7. Apologises sparingly.
8. Speculative

Though the list of cons may be longer, if you study each of the Pros and Cons, there is an even chance you will find that the value of the pros outweighs the cons by a long shot. Usually, the cons only tend to apply when an individual has a bad experience with the Press.

So, is the fear of the Press exaggerated? Are people over-generalising the power and influence of the Press? Are exceptions being treated as norms? Is the Press really as bad as we think it is? If yes, how would you like the Press to behave?
The Press cannot be all things to all people. Any story that appears will always run up against someone quibbling about misrepresentation, inaccuracies. Stories cannot be written like superpower communiques. They are subject to the vagaries of time and space as well as the flaws in the journalistic system. If the story has not done excessive damage, perhaps it's best to settle the whole thing by writing a letter of clarification and leaving it that.

RECTIFYING THE PROBLEM

Analyse the problem. How can it be rectified? How often has it happened? Is it with a particular reporter or a particular newspaper? Is there something else that is bothering them? Are you a major advertiser? Can you afford to ignore that newspaper (translation: Do they need us more than we need them?)

On that basis, analyse what exactly is the problem.

How serious is it?

How was it caused? Was it deliberately and maliciously intended?

Who did it hurt, and to what extent?

One of the major problems from the readers’ perspective is that they have no means of recourse except writing letters to the editor and leaving it to the discretion of the editor to print or not to print. This is inherently unfair to the reader because it shifts the balance of power towards the media. This is a serious media problem -- hopefully one day it will be rectified.
TO SUE OR NOT TO SUE

A delicate question. Sue, if you feel you have nothing to lose. Try and find another alternative if you wish to maintain relations.

Checklist:
1. Is the editorial problem part of a campaign? Or is it an isolated incident? Chances are it will be the latter. I personally do not subscribe to the ‘campaign’ theory.

2. Do you wish to maintain relations with that newspaper in the future? Don’t forget, that newspaper has got dozens of other things to write about and could very well choose to ignore your stories or downplay them. On the other hand, you’ve got dozens of other media you could tap?

3. What is the status and standing of the media in question? Do you need them more than they need you?

4. Is it going to be worth it?

5. Was there really any damage caused?

On the publication’s side:
1. What was the cause of the problem?

2. What was the extent of the problem?
3. Did we learn anything from the event?

4. Did the reporter have anything personal against the person or company written about?

5. Could it have been avoided?

6. Are our reporters and editors well versed with libel laws?

7. What policy do we adopt against the suing party in future?
CONCLUSION

There are two words that are at the heart of any human relationship, and dealings between travel industry communicators and the media are no different.

TRUST AND RESPECT.

Communicators need to know whom in the media they can trust. And the media wonders whether it can trust you. When that trust is established, based on a mutual respect for each other’s professions and jobs, you’ve got successful communications. It takes two to tango. These words do not often come across in textbooks and manuals but they are the keys to successful communications just as they are the keys to running a successful business.

The media is not a multi-headed hydra. Journalists are ordinary human beings with careers to pursue, bosses to please, colleagues to molly-coddle, families to support. They are usually hard-working and well-intentioned. But they face the same competitive and other pressures that tourism people face in their jobs: Low pay, lack of career opportunities, etc.

Like in any endeavour involving more than one person, like marriage or money-matters, trust is established through a long process of getting to know each other. It comes when both sides work at being credible, faithful, caring and respectful, seeking long-term rather than short-term gain. There are no easy, ready-made answers but this manual hopefully will play some role in building that trust.
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MEDIA

From the beginning of time, communications has been central to the growth of civilisation. Human intelligence has no practical use unless it can be transmitted through whatever means possible. First came the art of speech, then the art of the written word and then the art of communicating these words through longer and longer distances. Words were the first real "cargo" of the postal system.

Discoveries in the world of communications hold their own among the best of discoveries in science and medicine. The Egyptians discovered papyrus. Gutenberg is celebrated for the printing press; the Morse Code, the fountain pen, the typewriter, the telegraph, the wireless radio transmitter, the TV set, the computer, the satellite. In the old days, the American Indians had the smoke signals, the Africans the jungle drums; the Middle Ages had their town criers. What would societies be like today if our prophets had not written the greatest books of all time -- the Bible, the Quran, the Torah, the Bhagvad Gita, etc.

With the coming of age of newspapers and radio, the carriage of words became less important than the shape and form in which they were being carried and presented to the public. The power of the written and spoken word assumed an importance all of its own, giving rise to sayings like the pen being mightier than the sword. Freedom of the Press became enshrined in the US constitution. The Press became referred to as the fourth estate after the legislature, executive and judiciary.
In recent years, the Press and assorted other media have become major players in world events. Some examples:

* The overthrow of the Shah by smuggled tapes of Khomeini sermons;

* The Vietnam war;

* The Watergate episode;

* The Gulf war;

* China and the Tiananmen massacre of June 1989;

* Developments in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

VISIT THAILAND YEAR

From a tourism perspective, take the case of 1987 Visit Thailand Year, the springboard for the tourism explosion in Southeast Asia.

Many believe that Visit Thailand Year was the single-handed achievement of the Thailand's national tourism organisation, the Tourism Authority of Thailand. Here are the real reasons:

Visit Thailand Year succeeded because it brought together the entire Thai tourism industry in marking the auspicious 60th birthday of King Bhumibhol Adulyadej, the completion of the 5th 12-year cycle held in high esteem by
Eastern cultures. It was the right promotional campaign at the right time. The world was at the tail-end of the Reagan era, a decade of incredible economic growth and relative peace. People in the major tourist-generating markets had money to spend. Into that market stepped Thai International, the national airline, with a worldwide marketing budget of 4,355 million baht (about US$217 million at the then exchange rates), the first time the airline spent more on marketing than flying its aircraft. The campaign blanketed the world and impacted on people’s minds. "Something special must be going on there," people thought. "Let’s check it out."

But there is another reason, one that provided the infrastructure support for the promotion campaign to click. For years, Thailand has had an image. After speaking at the Malaysian Tourism Council in 1988 about Visit Thailand Year, I was asked what were the reasons for Thailand’s "image". What did Thailand have that Malaysia didn’t? The answer was quite simple. Since the days of the Vietnam war, Bangkok has been the base of numerous foreign journalists, all armchair correspondents covering Indochina from the Thai capital because they were restricted access. When these correspondents came to town, sooner or later they wrote about the sex-spots, traffic jams, and environmental problems. But they also wrote about other positive things. Together, they helped abet the exotic image of Thailand as written about in the novels of Somerset Maugham and played out in movies like the King and I. Some publicity was better than none. So when the Thai International campaign broke, backed by the latent image that the country already had, the tourists came flooding in. Even today, the Indonesians acknowledge that many people think Indonesia is in Bali, because the island is better known than the country. That is the power of image. And it is the writers and movie-makers that create it.
DIFFERENT KINDS OF TRAVEL MEDIA

Before starting to pursue a career in travel writing, it might be worthwhile to check out the kind of articles for which there is a market. A good way to start is to go to an advertising agency and speak to a media director about the kind and quality of travel publications in the market, and what kind of articles they like about the Asia-Pacific. Here's a broad sample of the types of publications and media available.

- Destination writing (inflight magazines, hotel publications, consumer travelogue publications, business travel magazines, etc).

- Travel trade publications (incentives, conventions, agents, airline and hotels)

- Electronic media (national geographic programmes, documentaries, lifestyles of the rich and famous).
GETTING INTO TRAVEL WRITING

Before getting into travel writing, you have to decide what you want to be.

Do you want to write for destination magazines? Or write for the travel trade?

The diversity of the travel and tourism industry has allowed journalists to establish their own market niches. Many are choosing to become specialist writers about conventions, or hotels, or airlines, or airports. And there are magazines or newspapers that cater to all these. Destination magazines like the publications of airlines or hotel chains or credit card companies are also good outlets.

In the beginning, however, it is best to feel your way through the entire industry and understand how it all functions so that you get a better grasp of the big picture. After about two or three years of experience, you should be better positioned to decide which side suits you best. Also, you yourself may have a certain educational background that might endear you to writing say, about airlines and airports.

Many journalists don’t like writing about destinations because they are newshounds rather than artists; they enjoy chasing stories rather than doing descriptive articles that are usually one shade better than advertising copy. Often, destination writers also have to be creative photographers. On the other hand, destination writers also travel a lot more. Their job is a lot more easy, and certainly a lot less controversial.
Either way, work your way up to becoming a specialist. This is the age of specialisation and specialist writers are always in great demand, especially in Asia.
FREELANCE WRITER VERSUS FULL-TIME EMPLOYEE

There are pros and cons on both sides. Here's a listing of some.

FREELANCE

PROS

1. Master of your own time
2. More freedom to pick and choose stories
3. Freedom to research and focus on stories more in detail

CONS

1. Takes long time to establish reputation
2. Have to be good at 'selling' yourself
3. Need to keep in touch with editors regarding stories and payments (and what happens if the editor quits?)
4. Poor payments and hassles with book-keeping

FULL TIME

PROS

1. Comfort of a regular paycheck (ultra-important if you have a family).
2. Training and other educational programmes necessary for advancement
3. Insurance and employment benefits
4. Support of a major organisation in case things go wrong.
5. Name recognition of company for credential purposes
6. Chance to learn from peers, especially about other aspects of the job like printing, production, editing which are important if you wish to do more than just write in future.

7. Ability to network with other correspondents in the field.

8. Availability of inhouse databank, filing and archives facilities.

CONS

1. Internal competition with other reporters/writers

2. Not master of your own time.

3. Company politics

4. Have to take orders from superiors
LOOKING FOR NEWS AND FEATURES

1. The world abounds with ideas -- books, people, magazines, every day experiences. There is no shortage. Just focus your mind on your reader and see what kind of questions you would need to ask about a particular subject and away you go. The real clue lies in the way you go after a story, the angles you pursue and the way you present, package and write it.

2. Follow-up other people’s stories. Ask yourself - what’s missing; what else would my readers like to know about; the impact of particular developments on your readers. In this global village of today, a strike, stock market crash or corporate buyout in one part of the world will have a clear effect on businesses in another. Your readers will be interested to know that.

3. Attend cocktail parties, they are a great source of information and ‘networking.’ People are more relaxed and free in the evenings, and with a couple of drinks in them....
KNOW YOUR READERS

1. Identify who would be interested in it and why?

2. What aspect of the story would they be interested in?

3. How much would they need to know?

4. Report the guy's comments accurately.

5. Make him comfortable that you are not going to do a lynch job on him - he's got his rights and views, too.
GENERAL RULES OF INTERVIEWING

1. Start with the easy ones first.

2. Win the guy’s confidence.

3. Don’t venture opinions.

4. Do your homework - know what you are talking about.

5. Be polite. Never lose your temper - the guy’s got no need to respond to you.

6. Know that you are not elected or hold any public office, you’re only an employee of a profit-making corporation with the self-assumed right to ask questions. You are not owed any answers.
WRITING THE STORY

1. Decide at the outset how much the story is worth to your readers so that you do not over-write nor spend more time on it than it deserves.

2. Read the material carefully and get to the main point.

3. Choose words carefully, don't overstate, inform and interest without exciting. It is often not what is said but the way it is said that makes the difference.

4. Write the story in a way that allows it to be simply cut from the bottom. Write the main points and body first and reconstruct later, much simpler that way.

5. Use technology - the word processing programmes of today allow use of spelling checkers, outlining capabilities, etc, that considerably expedite the writing of a story.

6. Avoid using inflammatory language.

7. Try to consider the implications of what you write: Particularly when writing controversial and "sensitive" stories. If the story is written in such a way that you can confidently face the subjects the next time you see them, you're on good grounds. If you feel you have to run from them, there's an even chance the story needed work.
8. Always keep the reader in mind: Don't insult the reader's intelligence by producing rubbish. Today's readers are well-informed and well-educated, and by dint of their positions, know their jobs better than any travel journalist. Your job is to help them do their job better by giving them something they don't know. That's a tall order, but it's also the thrust of your challenge.
HOW PEOPLE READ ARTICLES

On any given day, an executive’s desk is heaped with about 26,000 pieces of information, from magazine articles to memos and feasibility studies and reports. All are important in one way or another. Many executives have taken speed-reading courses to help them beat the information explosion by absorbing the maximum amount of information in the minimum possible time. Learning the way people read or are training to read can be an invaluable asset in learning to write concisely, carefully and comprehensively.

Executives are taught to read by setting goals for each article so that they can extract the guts of it. A manual circulated to its subscribers by the US magazine Business Week, based on an original speed-reading course prepared by ACCEL Communications said, "Knowing what you want to get from what you read is the single most important element of effective business reading."

Executives are trained to look whether the articles:

- Are relevant to their jobs?
- Contain information about the competition and customers?
- Affect their personal business?
- Contain data about future trends in the industry.
- Discusses details about the competition's strategies and customer attitudes.

Executives do not read everything. Many of them already know a good deal about the subject matter. Others rely on the accompanying charts, blurbs and captions to capture the gist of the story. Most of them just try and get a mental map of the story to help them find ideas and details. Considerable interest is focussed on the first and last paragraphs as well as the sidebars. All the more reason why writers need to adapt to the way people read these days.
INFRASTRUCTURE

Having a good infrastructure is perhaps the most important part of journalism.

Checklist:

1. Do you have the proper writing tools? A proper desk, computer, calculator, etc.

2. Is your filing system and databank in order? This is necessary to check background, dates, developments. Adding a historical touch to the story lifts its value as a reference source and improves your standing as an authoritative, well-informed journalist. If your filing system is not in order, you’re going to be wasting valuable time looking for information.

3. Are your working surroundings okay? Are you working in a hole in the wall? Or is your office roomy, clean, organised and well-ventilated, preferably with a good view?

4. Are you physically fit and alert? Some writers may dispute the necessity of this but I think it’s absolutely vital. Fit people are more productive, mentally and physically. Your mental state will also have a bearing on your output. If you are bogged down with debts, marital problems or assorted other flim-flam of daily human life, the greater the chance it will affect the quality of what you write.

5. Are you well-organised?
6. How much do you know about the industry?

7. Have you got a good list of potential sources?

8. How are your relations with sources?

9. Are you respected in the industry - this depends on your past record.

10. Will your boss back you up in case things go wrong?
COVERING CONFERENCES AND SEMINARS

Properly covered, conferences and seminars are great hunting grounds for news stories -- where the world comes to you instead of the other way around. Many people participating in these conferences are actually anxious for publicity and more than happy to express views. They are a great collection of egos looking for outlets.

But covering major conferences, exhibitions and association meetings is not an easy job. Before you set out, have a very clear idea of what you expect to achieve and what you think your mainline readers will want to read about.

1. Look at the programme, presentation subjects and list of participants.

2. Find out what you want to focus on (be careful about rejecting what might seem to be boring subjects, very often they yield the most interesting nuggets of information).

3. Identify the key players

4. Understand the structure of the organisation

5. Get someone to brief you on background.

6. Focus on what you think the readers will want to know about.
There will most likely be an even mix between conference politics, spot news developments and feature story material which your own journalistic experience will help sort out. But aside from the sessions and the Press conferences, considerable news is generated at the cocktail party circuits when people loosen up and begin to say what they 'really' think. Ordinarily, three days spent covering a conference can yield enough material to take up at least another three days worth of writing. They are also great educational experiences for young reporters.
ROLE OF THE EDITORS

An editor's role is basically to decide what stories go into the newspaper, where and in what shape or form. It is also to work with the reporters in assigning stories and working with them to improve stories. These decisions are reached on the basis of what the editors feel will make the "best read" or have the best visual impact. They are also made on the basis of the beats that the editors themselves have covered in their reporting days and how well they know the subject matter. Sometimes, of course, human relationships also enter the picture. On smaller newspapers, an editor may give some prominence to a story done by a cub in order to give the reporter a morale-boost. On bigger newspapers, where cub-reporters do not exist, this is not a problem.

The editor-reporter relationship is one of the most crucial aspects of any newspaper, subject to all kinds of vagaries like office politics and personal friendships. It forms that vital link between the "man in the field" and the "man behind the desk." Because all reporters tend to assume that the story they worked on is the most important, they feel personally slighted when editors do not give their stories the prominence they feel they are due. Other reporters learn to live with it. To suggest that editors should explain to reporters why certain stories were treated the way they were is ideal but impractical. Based on a ratio of one editor to say, four reporters, editors have got more important things to do than give daily explanations to reporters. When bad treatment results in inaccuracy, then an explanation is required. If it happens too often involving an editor, then it's time for a staff change there somewhere.
One of the most thorny areas of journalism is the re-writing of stories. I have found some of the most horrendous mistakes being made in story re-writes, causing untold embarrassment and problems for reporters, editors and publishers alike. Personally, I believe, all re-written stories should be verified by reporters before printing as reporters best know the issue being covered and are best placed to decide whether the re-write accurately reflects the development. If reporters have to go home after writing the stories, they should be equipped with fax machines at home to which the stories can be faxed for their approval. Some reporters like to go out drinking or socialising after work. No problem with that, but if they prefer to be unreachable, they should then be prepared to trust the judgement of their editors beyond all doubt -- and take the heat from their sources in case things go wrong.
CHECKLIST OF EDITORIAL JUDGEMENT WHEN SELECTING STORIES

1. Is it important for the readers to know this?

2. Will the stories lift the quality of the newspaper and make it more respected in society?

3. Will the lead story appeal to the maximum number of readers?

4. Does the headline accurately reflect the story?

5. Is the story well-written?

6. Is the story balanced? Or does it need more work?

7. If the story has been re-written, do the changes in wording accurately reflect the original version?

(Note: See annex paper by Mike Sullivan, editor of Travel News Asia, for detailed instructions, page 214.)
MAJOR PROBLEMS FACED BY JOURNALISTS

1. Time, time in getting to contacts in checking stories, in getting to the finer details of an event, in researching the background.

2. Poor pay and working conditions: long hours are often involved and compensation is not enough.

3. Excessive competition, all journalists chasing stories at the same time, even chasing the same decision-makers.

4. Insufficient knowledge about the industry they cover.

5. Poor leadership within companies. i.e., editors who have different perceptions about the way things should be handled and who are good editors but not good motivators or managers.

6. A generally poor image of the media.

7. The danger of getting too close to sources - Journalists need to get close to sources to get the benefit of their knowledge, experience, contacts and trust, yet run the risk of being biased in your reporting if the sources or their friends seek you out for favours.
CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN THE MEDIA AND ITS PUBLICS

The media justifies its existence by claiming that it is servicing the public’s right to know. But who gives the media that right? Most important, who gives the media the right to decide what the public should know and in what shape or form. This issue has been the subject of some very long-standing and thorny debates. Remember the great debate of the 1980s in the UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation, stemming from the MacBride report, about the licensing of journalists? Its basic presumption was that journalists of the ‘developed’ countries were foisting their views and values on the ‘developing’ countries, thereby portraying the developing countries in a negative light and harming their prospects for socio-economic progress.

Perhaps the most complicated thing is that the journalists and those whom we write about are in a potentially adversarial role. The public at large is interested in publicising only good news; it is not in their interests to have anything negative or embarrassing laundered in public. Journalists, on the other hand, do write quite often about the good news but we are also keen on chasing the bad not only because bad news is often good news for us but also because there is a certain amount of thrill in the chase and that is what editors want us to write about. That is a fact of journalistic life, as much a reality as manpower problems, training.

In spite of all its wrongs, I am a great and firm believer in the freedom of the Press. There is no alternative to information being provided by a neutral body. How else can it be provided:

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ADVERTISING

* When information is provided through paid means, it is called advertising. Advertising is subject to even more stringent ethics rules than journalism. Advertising works because of the same message being banged home time and again. If cigarette manufacturers would be allowed to say whatever they want in ads, they would claim that it's not a health hazard -- which is what they probably believe. But does anyone else believe it? So, who believes anything that's paid for?

Companies spend fortunes in trying to protect their public images. Some of the most notoriously paranoid companies that I have come into contact with are American Express, IBM, Visa, Singapore Airlines and Cathay Pacific. No company likes to have its laundry washed in public. All the more so because they are public companies with responsibilities to the public and their shareholders. But the news that emanates from these companies is guarded, calculated and one-sided. They have the power of big advertising budgets and extensive public relations machineries to ensure that no news about management conflicts, losses or anything that could be considered damaging to the public image gets out. They are usually companies that like to have journalists' questions delivered in advance and channelled through their public relations departments.

PROPAGANDA

* When information is provided by governments, it is called propaganda, intended to uphold the interests of a narrow few -- usually politicians
looking only as far as the next election. The trustworthiness of this information is up to individual journalists to decide. The former Soviet Union had a newspaper called Pravda (Truth).

But my faith in the freedom of the Press does not blind me to the fact that the news-gathering process is not without its flaws and that Press, the world’s most influential image-maker, has got serious image problems of its own. We’ve all heard references to the arrogance of the media, to journalists being called "a pack of baying hounds". Let’s face it. People don’t generally like dealing with the media. One basic reason is that they have no control over what they say or do and the way it eventually appears. The media’s preference for bad news gives it the image of a purveyor of bad news, messengers of gloom and doom. The public thinks that the media thinks that bad news is good news and the more the better.

Though I do not agree with that perception, one has to agree that there is a grain of truth in it. When was the last time you saw a great medical discovery hitting the front page? Or a good human interest story? Or a travelogue? Or a story about a great work of art (except when it’s been slashed in a museum or sold at an exorbitant price at a Sotheby’s auction)? Or an environmental success story? An editor’s reaction to this is that it’s boring; it does not fall into the neatly packaged, stereotype description of news. Yet, if one analyses a newspaper objectively, you will notice that the number of "good-news" stories outnumber the bad-news stories by about two to one. Only problem is that the good news is buried in the back pages while the bad news is up front.
There are certain parallels to the movies. While sex-and-violence movies like 'Terminator II Judgement Day' or 'Last Tango in Paris' or 'Godfather' certainly attract the most attention and make the most money, other family drama and fairy-tale movies do not do too badly. 'Home Alone' is one example. 'Hook' is another. I'd like to put 'Robin Hood' in some box but there is enough violence in that. Interestingly, The 1992 Almanac and Book of Facts says that the 1982 blockbuster 'E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial' heads the list of All-time Top 50 American Movies with a rental figure of US$228.6 million, well ahead of second-placed 'Star Wars'. Amongst the media, Readers Digest is an example of how success stories can be properly packaged and sold. In 1990, it had a total average paid circulation of 16.2 million in the US, dwarfing Time magazine (4.09 million). Bookstores abound with magazines about health, living, fashion, diets -- all good news material. This shows there is a market for both forms of communication.
RESPONSIBILITY IN JOURNALISM

How many publications or TV stations have you come across that have a mission statement? What is the mission statement of a publication? Ask a newspaper publisher or an editor and there’s an even chance they’ll talk about service to readers, keeping the public informed, etc. Ask a reporter, and there’s an even chance he or she won’t know.

The Rotary Club Four-Way Test of what we think, say or do.

1. Is it the truth?
2. Is it fair to all concerned?
3. Will it build goodwill and better friendships?
4. Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

Rules 3 and 4 are not necessarily applicable as building friendships is not an inherent part of the media’s job. Still, it doesn’t hurt to keep it at the back of the mind somewhere.

The media is more than just a medium of information. It is a catalyst of change, a shaper of events, a guide, an entertainer, a provocateur, a trend-setter. And because of that, it wields a tremendous power. But there are two sayings relating to power that I wish to cite here:
WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY.

POWER CORRUPTS AND ABSOLUTE POWER CORRUPTS ABSOLUTELY.

Journalism can ruin people's careers, ruin companies, trigger speculation. People and companies want to run their affairs in private, without the fear of public disclosure. Marketing is war and in a war, the combatants do not want their plans disclosed before they've had the chance to strike first. Of course, once the plans are done people don't mind talking about it, often bragging about it. Unfortunately, the media has to present this 'what are you going to do next?' question and is often quite disappointed if they don't get an answer. Also, once they do get an answer, they have a yardstick against which to measure the announcing company's performance later -- a follow-up that they can pursue (regarding that campaign, what happened to it? Was it a success or a failure?) Either way they have a story. There is a very inherent clash in journalism: Failures are the kind of things the media loves to print, they are the attention-grabbing stuff. Failures are the kind of things that people and companies want to keep under wraps.

The failings of one company is usually the kind of thing that a competing company will be only to happy to leak to the media. Which raises some question of ethics and propriety. The journalist, while appreciating the news value of that story, must also take into consideration the possibility that he or she is being bluntly used to advance the interests of one company at the expense of the other. In politics, it would be called 'waging a smear campaign.' The journalist must by all means work on the story, but it must be reported and written in a way that does not compromise his own personal ethics nor be
insulting or derogatory to the 'victim'.

People movements are one of the most interesting aspects of any newspaper. In the travel industry, everyone knows mostly everyone, especially among the old-timers, and people who change jobs are the subject of tremendous gossip. But careers can be ruined if a story appears in print about people possibly leaving their jobs before they do. The person may change his or her mind, or may not want the boss to know until a final letter of resignation is submitted. Either way, it gets extremely embarrassing if a boss finds out that a subordinate or trusted lieutenant is about to move, through the media. This is one area I feel very strongly about, and where I urge journalists to be very wary.

Another problem area: headlines. They have to be short to fit in the available space, catch attention and thus occasionally wrong. Yet, headlines grab 50 per cent of the attention, and no matter what a story says, a bad headline can cause the bulk of the damage. I once worked for an editor who would refuse to change headline type-faces or point size even if there was no way of getting an accurate headline to fit.

The finest way to write a story is to treat it like a piece of history that will remain as gospel truth in the morgues and archives for years to come. Accurate to the best of your abilities, well sourced, fairly and objectively written. Don’t let emotionalism cloud your sense of rationality.
JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

The media wants to be respected but is it willing to give it? The word ‘respect’ for people’s lives, property and privacy does not crop up in any media lexicon. The subject of ethics is barely touched on in most journalism courses. Yet, it is at the heart of the problems that many journalists find themselves in.

There are some very simple rules to follow in observing ethics:

- Don’t set out to ‘get’ someone. Pursue a story because it will do a certain degree of wider public good.

- Don’t use the information you have to blackmail or threaten people.

- Don’t hint at bribes or freebies to give someone positive publicity.

- Don’t lie or use deception to get access to information.

Total independence in journalism is impossible, just as total objectivity. You are often invited to give opinions on various things and because journalists are in the unique position of being jacks of all trades and masters of a few, one’s view of things is often coloured by the things one experiences and sees, the people one interviews, the access to sources, etc.
In an interview published in the Regent magazine, the inhouse publication of the Regent group, actor Rod Steiger was asked about his selection of movies. Note that Stieger is an artist, the screen equivalent of a writer or a journalist, a performer, a talented person who is out in the spotlight all the time. He admitted elsewhere in the article that he had a craving for respect, dating back to his young days as the son of an alcoholic mother.

The paragraph said, "Rod Steiger has made some movies just for the money. "I’m 60 per cent virgin and 40 per cent whore," he says. "Basically, 60 per cent of my work has been some kind of artistic endeavour, and 40 per cent has been commercial so I could eat. If I made it 50-50, then you could tell me, ‘You’re a whore.’ But as long as as I keep even 10 per cent differential, you can’t give me your opinion."

Unless they are working for companies that take extremely good care of them, or they have had other lucky breaks in life, I think journalists should try and keep that margin at 80-20, or less; that is, 80 per cent independence and 20 per cent prostitution.

Getting too close to sources in this industry, or any, is one of the problems of journalism. One depends on a handful of sources for 90 per cent of your news -- the influential chief executives of the various associations and companies -- but how do you handle it if these sources themselves get involved in controversies or are attacked by their detractors?
Many travel journalists also write advertising and editorial copy for people in the industry. Though I personally I find that loathsome, I can appreciate it for family and other reasons. Journalists, too, have to eat and pay bills.

We're the people that people love to hate. Yet they cannot do without us, for can you imagine a world without newspapers.
CONCLUSION

Reader’s Digest is one of the most successful magazines in publishing history. My mother used to urge me to read it when I was a kid. What makes it tick? What is the secret of its success? In the May 1992 issue, I was fortunate enough to find its philosophy printed in the publication itself, signed by its editor Kenneth Tomlinson. I’m reproducing it here because it provides a beacon for journals and journalists to have a cause to aspire to, and to stick to it.

WHAT IS READER’S DIGEST?

What makes Reader’s Digest the most successful magazine in publishing history?

Beneath the fun and excitement that fill our pages, we are, above all else, a serious magazine. Our readers are serious people. The Digest never loses sight of the fact that each day all of us confront a tough, challenging world. To millions who know our record of viewing this world, we are not a luxury; we are a necessity.

Basic to our magazine is a steady focus on the power of the individual. We show that man’s greatest ideas and accomplishments, his often stunning faith and courage and hope, can be seen in the conduct of ordinary men and women. We reflect the universal skepticism that government can solve our problems; we herald the unending promise of self-determination and individual enterprise. Readers depend upon us for truth and accuracy, logic and common sense.
Our stories come from the grit of human experience - the tough, the tender, the funny. These stories - always told in a powerful narrative style - spring from love and caring, from a sense of right and the human spirit. We are at the forefront of major issues of medicine, health, environment, human rights. We take readers behind the headlines to the cause and meaning of world events. We celebrate courage, champion adventure and always seek to expand the mind, and to enrich the spirit and the body. It is this clear voice - never preaching, always showing - that has made readers set us apart from all other magazines.

Deep within our widely varied package of humor, drama, and helpful information, there hums a subtle power that guides people in every aspect of their lives. They listen because what we put forth rings true. They are comfortable with our clear, concise words that inform them, entertain them, and remind them of those eternal values that fortify all decent people as they seek clarity and coherence in a confusing world. Our readers recognize that our compass is good for the long haul - that our principles are good for all seasons, good for all ages, good for all those who wish to play role in making their world a better place. So long as we never lose sight of these powerful principles that are at the soul of our magazine - and so long as we remain at the cutting edge of life in our world - then we are prepared to lay claim to a future as brilliant and as exciting as our past.

Kenneth Y. Tomlinson
Worldwide Editor-in-Chief