

Making an Impact:

The Role of PR, Marketing and Communications in a Global Higher Education Marketplace

SPEAKER ABSTRACTS

**The inaugural global conference of the ACU's PR, Marketing and Communications Network
Toronto, Canada
17 - 19 July 2006**

Monday 17 July

Opening Keynote Address – PR for the PR Office: Communicating the Value of PR, Marketing and Communications

Professor Bonnie Patterson, President and Vice-Chancellor
Trent University, Canada

Chair, Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada

Keynote Address on Track 1 – Strategic Planning: Market Intelligence for Competitive Advantage

Simon Oldknow, Managing Director
Heist, UK

This keynote address will discuss how market intelligence delivers competitive advantage.

Topics will include:

- Market intelligence – what is it?
- Utilising market intelligence
- Benefits of embracing market intelligence
- Positioning – what's it all about
- USPs for competitive advantage

Tuesday 18 July

Keynote Address on Track 2 – A Look at E-Communications in 2006

Tony Frost, Associate Director, Web and Graphic Services
Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada

Developments in the past few years have introduced new factors that influence how we plan and manage our communication strategies. Deadlines are measured in nanoseconds, not days. We are dealing with a world that expects instant gratification of the need for information. News becomes history in hours, not weeks. Anyone with a web browser has access to an unprecedented volume of information. Within microseconds, we are able to search the world's libraries and databases for the facts we need. The world now expects that, for any given question, the answer is instantly available. Time is no longer of consequence. Web based tools, blogs and wikis are enabling people to communicate, quickly and when they want.

This address will analyse where electronic communications are in 2006, developments in the past few years, current challenges to 'e' communications and the keys to successful 'e' communications.

Parallel Sessions I

Track 1 – Creating Customer Focus at the Royal Veterinary College

Nina Turnbull, Academic Marketing Manager
The Royal Veterinary College, UK

How does a small, old-fashioned, single-discipline university go about creating customer-focus and building customer relationships in a sector that has traditionally shunned the very idea of "the customer"? With no specific marketing team and limited resources it has been down to practical goals, creative thinking and subtle but sheer determination!

The RVC has started to overcome internal barriers towards customer-focused marketing activity through a number of small but linked developments. This presentation will provide a then and now picture of over a period of several years and identify the main challenges that have been faced and the methods which have been and are still being employed to bring the College round to seeing their students and staff as valuable customers in the HE marketplace.

Track 1 – Setting Up an Integrated Communication System: The Eduardo Mondlane University Experience

Afonso Vaz Vassoa, Director, Vice-Chancellor's Office
Eduardo Mondlane University, Mozambique

The history of Public Relations and Communication Systems at Eduardo Mondlane University (EMU), a public university in Maputo, Mozambique, is strongly linked to the history of the institution and the history of the country. These institutional and national histories have determined the kind of audiences that should be reached systematically by the EMU and, accordingly, the type of communication strategies that should be applied.

The Public Relations and Communication Systems at EMU have three phases: the first is linked to the first 20 years after the National Independence, from 1975 to 1995, when the vision and the role of institutional PR was not entirely professional, and its focus was related basically to the international cooperation with socialist and semi-capitalist countries.

The second stage of PR and Communication Systems at EMU is related to the open market policy in the country, when the university began to have the need of improving some strategies in order to be able to compete with private

institutions and other public universities, and the need of finding ways for responding to a variety of national, regional and international demands in the field of High Education. In this stage, specifically in 1999, EMU designed its Strategic Plan, which was the basis for a strategic plan of the Institutional Communication. However, due to the lack of a clear Communication Policy, the implemented strategy, which was limited basically to a press approach, could not cover the whole set of activities that should be done in order to achieve all audiences and keep a two-way communication system between the university and its internal and external publics.

After a wide-ranging internal and external “SWOT” analysis, the anomalies, among others related to the need of management and administrative reforms at EMU, were detected by experts that have recommended the determination of clear communication policy and strategies based on the vision and mission of the Institution. From that policy, it was recommended the adoption of a systematic and integrated communication system. This is the third stage, which consists of creating a Communication Sector at EMU, comprising professionals in Public Relations, Journalism, Publicity and Marketing. The philosophy of this department, which is an institutional challenge, is based on a synergetic power in the process of designing communication projects and programs through a permanent coordination, research, planning, execution and evaluation. Synergy, in this case, would mean that when all subject and organization messages are strategically coordinated, the effect is greater than when the parts plan and execute their activities independently, with each competing for budgets and power, and in some cases sending conflict messages.

From this process of evolution of PR and Communication Systems at EMU, one can understand the value of having professional workers acting in the field; the importance of a total support of top managers in the process of creating and applying efficient communication policies and strategies; the importance of building communication policies and strategies based on the institutional vision, mission and policies. Moreover, one can be aware of the power of integrated communication strategies in the process of reaching audiences of universities: by creating professional teams, perceiving what integrated communication is, understanding its advantages and disadvantages, using appropriate and contextualized means, tools and technologies, and, in conclusion, by knowing how to make integrated communication work effectively in a Higher Education Institution.

Track 2 – Web Redevelopment – The Essential Steps from a Marketing Perspective

Margaret Thursby, Director of Marketing and Communications
University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia

The Web is revolutionising the way we communicate and is providing us with an incredible amount of information – more than any one individual could ever need or absorb. The principles of “just in time” and “need to know” have rolled into one. Our customers are going to the Web when they want information, and as a result attracting attention to our ‘product’ at a time that suits us is harder than ever before.

The website, therefore, must be ready and waiting for their dial-in – always current, dynamic and absorbing. This takes understanding and commitment from a range of people within the organisation. And it takes money – but not necessarily in huge amounts.

So is the Web the answer to all marketing challenges? The short answer is ‘no’. The Web is a communications tool. The strategic planning must still be done. Only when objectives, key messages and brand differentiation have been identified will the Web come into its own, imparting information and an insight into the personality of the institution.

In 2003, it was agreed that an overhaul of the University of the Sunshine Coast website was required. The site was static and required manual updates. The IT desk had become a ‘black hole’. It was agreed that central governance of the site was essential and that the Office of Marketing and Communications should become the ‘business custodian’.

This paper looks at the way in which a small group of people with no IT background used basic project management techniques to redevelop the website. They developed a site specification, selected a Content Management System (CMS) and tendered for a company to implement. During this session such issues as governance, decentralisation of

content updates, architecture, look and feel, search engines, WC3 compliance and IT support will be discussed from a marketing perspective.

And after redevelopment comes maintenance – the training of authors and coordinators, development of a style guide and the daily ‘churn’.

Web statistics are indicating positive results and student applications are increasing in a declining Australian domestic market. And just when we’re patting ourselves on the back for a job well done, we discover its time to start the process all over again. Does that sound familiar? Then come and share your experiences and ideas.

Track 3 – Building Alliances with Higher Education Stakeholders through Public Relations, Marketing and Communications

Professor Oye Ibidapo-Obe, Vice-Chancellor
University of Lagos, Nigeria

There is an increasing need for higher education institutions in developing countries to build alliances and engage stakeholders in mutually beneficial relationships. This need is based on various reasons. One is the relatively high level of dissatisfaction with the quality of products of higher education institutions. There is a need in this regard for regular and continuous dialogue between higher education institutions and the various users of the products (e.g. employers) about their expectations and how higher education institutions can meet them. Another reason is the increasing level of competition for students. Higher education institutions operate in an increasingly competitive and global marketplace. With particular reference to Nigeria, the higher education environment is characterised by an increasing number of private universities in the country and an equally increasing number of foreign universities with satellite campuses in Nigeria, and various other local Distance Learning institutions. Furthermore, the subvention from the government for the public institutions is increasingly inadequate for the efficient operations of the institutions. Thus, both public and private institutions need to devise strategies for selling their ‘products’ in order to win ‘customers’, by engaging stakeholders and building alliances.

This session analyzes the role of PR, marketing and communications in achieving this objective, using the ‘Best Practices’ and illustrations from the University of Lagos experience. The session highlights the challenges and prospects of promoting higher education to the various stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, alumni, the private sector, the community and government agencies.

Parallel Sessions II

Track 1 – Value Added Marketing – An Interactive Marketing PR Approach

Paul GG Geswindt, Deputy Director of Marketing and Corporate Relations
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, South Africa

The establishment of strategic partnerships with internal and external stakeholder groups with the aim of offering value added services to target audiences that can help improve institutional image. The Marketing Department can play an important role in getting faculties and departments to become ‘marketers’ of the institution by getting them to render services in their respective fields as part of the overall marketing strategy. The sharing of expertise can help build relationships with specific target audiences. These activities form part of the overall brand experience and can enhance institutional image and support. This session will further explore the value of value added marketing as a marketing strategy.

Track 2 – A New School of Thought – A Challenger Brand in Higher Education

Professor Richard Carter, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education Services
Victoria University, Australia

Antoinette De-Villiers, Manager, Marketing and Communication
Victoria University, Australia

Session Learning Outcome

At the conclusion of the session participants should have the following outcomes.

1. An understanding of the nature of a Challenger Brand.
2. A clear idea of how appropriate challenger branding might be for particular institutions, including their own institutions.
3. Be able to evaluate the risk and reward elements of challenger branding.
4. Have an understanding of some of the more innovative techniques that can be used to develop a brand (especially a challenger brand) in a highly competitive higher education marketplace.

Session Outline

Victoria University is one of seven universities that compete for students in Melbourne, Australia, a city of 3 million inhabitants. On many measures it has traditionally been the 'university of last resort' for school leavers.

In 2004-05, using the opportunity presented by a legislated name change, Victoria University decided to investigate, evaluate and then implement a rebranding. Research indicated that it was critical that the University needed to establish clear points of difference in the market to its competitors and that it needed to become a far stronger and better understood brand. Challenger branding is a broadly implemented widely understood strategy however its use in the higher education marketplace is potentially risky and as a consequence, there are very few, if any examples of this strategy within the sector.

This presentation will track through the steps taken by Victoria University from an unfocussed and disparate brand to the roll out of a clear, disciplined challenger brand that offers a distinct point of difference from the advertising and branding of its competitors.

It will present the journey made through research, conceptualisation, and refinement to roll out, highlighting the key decisions that needed to be made.

The presentation will be able to show how a challenger brand can be developed to deliver key messages to the market through achieving consistency across the broadest range of brand touch-points.

Track 3 – Word of Mouth, Viral and Buzz Marketing – Alternatives to Advertising

Adrienne Jerram, Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment
University of Sydney, Australia

How much does your University spend on advertising? If you are like most institutions your total annual advertising spend could be in the millions, yet in other sectors advertising spend is declining. In this talk Ms Jerram draws on the literature to question the tertiary sectors' reliance on advertising. She also introduces the alternatives such as viral, buzz and word of mouth marketing, which are taking the advertising industry by storm. She will also cite some of the successes that the University of Sydney has had using these techniques.

Keynote Address on Track 3 – Communications Strategies – Caribbean Regional Perspectives

June Alexis-Matthew, Director of Marketing and Public Relations
College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago

Tertiary level education in the Caribbean has a history dating back to the mid 1940s, with a proliferation of various types of institutions in the 1950s to the 1970s. One of the oldest institutions on record however, is the Codrington College in Barbados which was established in 1745 by the Anglican Church, and which today offers Bachelors, Masters and M Phil degrees. This address will focus primarily on institutions in the English speaking Caribbean.

As an introduction, this presentation will provide an overview of the Caribbean region, in terms of its geography, social and economic composition. It will also provide a background to the development and establishment of tertiary level institutions in the region: their structure and focus in terms of local/national, regional and international recruitment; and types of programmes offered, as well as the qualifications awarded. The address will also show how formal and informal articulations amongst institutions operate locally, intra-regionally and internationally, and how these relationships are used to drive enrolment.

Marketing strategies will be discussed in the Caribbean context and these will be reviewed with reference to variables such as size and type of institution, affiliation and specialization, as well as funding. Characteristics of the major markets will be identified and analyzed, and strategies for marketing to specific target audiences will be reviewed.

An added dimension to this analysis is the socio-economic milieu in which many of these institutions must operate such as governmental mandates to fulfill requirements for the development of human and social capital. The presentation will therefore address some of the challenges of developing and implementing marketing strategies in contexts where changing political agendas, routinely impact stakeholders in both positive and negative ways. One such issue, which will be reviewed, is the effect on marketing strategies of the recent introduction of 'free' tertiary education, as in the case of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The potential impact of the implementation of the Caribbean Single Market & Economy (CSM&E) on the higher education landscape will also be examined.

Panel Session: Meet the Press

Chairs:

Alex Usher, Vice President, The Educational Policy Institute, Toronto, Canada, and
Donna Varrica, Public Relations Officer, Dawson College, Canada

Panel:

Ann Dowsett Johnson, formerly freelance journalist specialising in education, now Vice Principal, McGill University, Canada

Rob Steiner, formerly VP of Strategy, Bell Globemedia, now Assistant Vice-President of Strategic Communications, University of Toronto, Canada

For some universities the media represent a formidable foe to be kept at arms length. Yet for many building a positive relationship with the media is the cornerstone of their PR and Marketing strategy. This session will bring together leading journalists and PR practitioners for a panel discussion on the ways that universities can develop a positive relationship with the media. Led by Alex Usher, Vice President of the Educational Policy Institute, Toronto, Donna Varrica, PRO, Dawson College together with a group of journalists and commentators from the Canadian media, the session will examine examples of good practice and bad. It will explore the proactive and positive sides of the relationship between universities and the media and it will also take a look at what to do when things go wrong.

Wednesday 19 July

Keynote Address – The Measure of Success

David C Kistle, Senior Vice President
Padilla Speer Breadsley, Inc., USA

All professional communicators are feeling increased pressure to demonstrate the results of their efforts, including those working in higher education. This presentation will focus on why research and measurement are critical in successfully managing a communication department and how to do it. The art and science of communication measurement is becoming more complex in the 21st Century, demanding the professional communicator to understand how the internet, globalization, social networks and other trends affect not only how we communicate, but how we measure our results. The address will outline two case histories involving USA-based universities with communication challenges. In the first, the University of Minnesota has embarked on a strategic position to become one of the country's top three research institutions. This message must be successfully communicated to faculty, staff and students across four campuses; the case focuses on efforts by the Academic Health Center to measure the success of communicating this important message. The second case is about St. Cloud State University's goal to reinvestigate its alumni to build its reputation and support its efforts for fund raising and student recruitment.

Parallel Sessions III

Track 1 – Fees and Positioning: The Australian Experience

Dr. Lianne Cretney-Barnes, Director, Marketing and Development
Edith Cowan University, Australia

Session Outline

Australian Universities embarked on variable fee setting for the first time in 2004/5. This session will provide an overview of the Higher Education Environment in Australia and the role of branding, marketing and positioning in fee setting. Market research showed that price sensitivity differed for market segments and Australian universities had to plan their approach carefully. A major focus of the session will be on the research findings and the lessons learnt.

Session Structure

The session will present a case study that is adaptable to other organisations.

Topics will include:

- The Higher Education Environment in Australia
- The role of branding, marketing and positioning
- The Edith Cowan University (ECU) context
- ECU's market research findings on price sensitivity and fees
- The Western Australian experience on variable fee setting
- The Australian experience- a sample of findings
- Key lessons

Session Learning Outcomes

On completion of this session delegates will be able to:

- Understand the role of branding, marketing and positioning in universities.
- Understand the price sensitivity of different market segments
- Know how different Australian universities responded to the challenge of variable fee setting.

Track 2 – University Fundraising in a Challenging Economic Climate

Felix F. Moyo, Director of Information and Public Relations
National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe

Corporate Communication and marketing in any third world country poses hurdles and challenges that others elsewhere would not believe can even exist, let alone know where to begin to seek solutions. These hurdles require special strategies, some of which are NOT in the communication and/or marketing textbooks. The PR practitioner needs a supportive media, a forthcoming industry and a good political climate as allies.

In developing countries, the media is young and pliable. Media Staffers need “clearance” to carry any campaign – even a campaign over an obviously straightforward cause like fundraising for a university. The young journalists, most of them cadets on learner-attachments, cannot write accurate articles on universities. They are even overwhelmed by simple university terminology. They confuse department for faculty, dean for chairperson to mention a few.

Industry does not have a culture of social responsibility and it views University education as flamboyant, not basic and therefore not needy. In general, companies here do not conduct their own Research and Development (R and D) since they are subsidiaries of international companies who’s R and D is done in their countries of origin. The local universities therefore, remain ivory towers supported by governments. The harsh economic climate characterised by shortages and high inflation only serves to exacerbate the already difficult situation.

The political situation is fluid. Governments, opposition parties, civic pressure groups, NGOs, churches, world bodies and the international community all seem to compete for publicity at the expense of universities. The university communicator, marketer and fundraiser must walk this political-tight-rope and still secure funding for the university.

The fundraiser’s strategies must

- Skilfully get the media to submit to one’s supervision without making the media feel supervised.
- Educate industry and commerce, especially the emergent businessman, on the need for them to partner universities in training tomorrow’s manpower.
- Make it possible to work with the politician, civic society, NGOs and international donors without the university losing its identity and focus.
- Get internal publics (vice Chancellor to sweeper) to assist in all campaigns.

People donate to people; therefore, PR should project the university as a person – one with the community. When all the approaches hit a brick wall, PR opens those difficult doors.

Track 2 – Cooperation and Competition – Marketing Public Higher Education Nationally as a Sector

Jonathan Stead, Director of Marketing, Communication and Strategic Partnerships
University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Pieter Swart, Director of Marketing and Corporate Relations
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, South Africa

The presenters have both been Directors of Marketing at technikons (technological universities) in South Africa. Along with racial segregation in higher education, there was also a binary divide between traditional universities and technikons. The latter as career focused institutions had always been seen as “second class, second choice” institutions by many segments of the market. The presenters proposed to the Committee of Technikon Principals (Vice-Chancellors of the 13 technikons) that targeted national campaigns be developed as a strategy to create awareness of the substantial contribution the technikons were making to the South African economy.

The presentation will be a case study on marketing public higher education nationally as a sector and the great advantages in this approach that combines cooperation with the inherent competition between institutions. Three such campaigns were organized using all 13 institutions' contacts and resources at a local, regional and national level. The target audiences respectively were: prospective learners and career counsellors, political leaders and government agencies, and the national business sector.

The higher education landscape in South Africa has been completely reshaped by Government in the last 2 years and now the binary divide has in effect become a tri-nary divide: traditional universities, universities of technology, and a new creation, comprehensive universities. The latter combine both academic and career-focused programmes. The presenters are now both Directors of Marketing at comprehensive universities and are preparing a new strategy to define the place of their institutions in the public mind. The comprehensive universities are "domain-seeking" at present (as government has done little to explain what "comprehensivity" really means), and so the cycle of brand awareness and positioning has to be started again.

The presenters will share how successful national focused campaigns not only positioned the technikons advantageously in the minds of key stakeholders, but also considerably raised the professional profile of marketing and communication staff in the eyes of their governing bodies and Vice-Chancellors. They will suggest ways in which the national campaign concept can be sold to VCs, how buy-in can be achieved from the Marketing Directors, how national media coverage can be leveraged, how Chancellors and senior alumni can be involved, and what can be done on a very limited budget by working as a collective.

Track 3 – Branding of Universities: The Horizontal and The Vertical

Richard Fisher, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer
York University, Canada

Brand affects every area of university life: fundraising, government relations, student recruitment, reputation and ambassadorship. If stakeholders cannot identify your institution's brand, the status quo is not an option. Getting the message out is critical.

Branding provides clarity around a single idea. And clarity helps achieve your institution's strategic objectives by enhancing its reputation in the chosen area. In today's world with so many options presented, brand is shorthand. It is a decision-making tool. On an otherwise level playing field, brands tip the balance. Today's students see brands as badges and university brands are life-long badges.

Learning Outcomes: What is branding? How to identify an institution's brand and integrate the brand throughout the University's communications.