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## **EDITOR COMPLAINTS HAVE MERIT**

Editors are beefing loudly these days about too many misdirected PR emails and phone calls from PR.

Joint action is needed by PR pros at firms and organizations as well as by the services that provide editor lists including BurrellesLuce, Cision, Media Distribution Services, MediaAtlas of PR Newswire, and Vocus (alphabetical order).

They have compiled hundreds of thousands of editor names and made them easily accessible by numerous breakouts.

The *Washington Post's* [Gene Weingarten](#) beefed [Nov. 25](#) about a daily deluge of voicemails and Wired editor Christopher Anderson railed against the "300 e-mails" he gets daily from PR.

A "spray and pray" mentality exists—send out 300 e-mails to a specialized audience (e.g., beauty editors) and hope that one or two will use it. The expense is so small that even if less than 1% are used it's still worthwhile.

**The media list companies are highly competitive with each other** but we think they should band together to do something about this.

VNR producers are also highly competitive but 14 of them formed the National Assn. of Broadcast Communicators when use of VNR materials came under attack.

The FCC has now declared that [five usages are "apparent" violations of the law](#) and an investigation is under way that could have a major impact on the industry. TV news editors and VNR firms are arguing that the feds have no right to force stations to identify the origin of video they use although both favor identification (but not the frame-by-frame identification that critics want).

**Proper identification and sourcing is currently a big issue.** FEMA's ["fake" press conference](#) in which staffers posed as reporters ignited a firestorm of criticism. Senator Hillary Clinton has been accused of taking questions from "plants." CNN has now been called the "Corrupt News Network" and other names by journalists who say the recent YouTube debate featuring Republican candidates was marred by "plants" who posed as "ordinary people" when several were democratic and liberal activists.

The criticism came from Michelle Malkin (11/30 *New York Post*) and Tim Rutten (12/1 *Los Angeles Times*). *Fortune* (12/10) faults banks and rating services for giving fancy names to what were really "junk mortgages."

**Weingarten's complaint about voicemails illustrates a fact of PR**—without a phone call, most releases will be ignored. Some PR juniors "dial for dollars" all day. They majored in PR thinking they were going to settle community disputes or were going into public service. They were in for a rude awakening!

Some PR/communications majors are learning that they're really being groomed for sales positions and that their every move will be tracked by computer programs that log all incoming and outgoing phone calls and e-mails.

Should they obtain placements of client material in the media, these will be analyzed by marketers who will count the number of desired "messages" that the stories contain. Poor grades will be given if not enough of the messages are used. A bushel basket of press

clippings does not impress marketers. They want sales.

Their value of PR work in terms of dollars will be calculated to the penny. Although acting as salespeople (via press placements, special events, etc.) PR pros are paid a fraction of what a "real" salesperson would earn on sales generated and certainly no commissions or equity. New York PR figure Ben Sonnenberg got rich largely because he took shares in a local bakery that vastly expanded.

As for whether PR pros are "salespeople," we accept what NBC's Beth Comstock told the Institute for PR Nov. 8: "PR people are, at the core, salespeople."

Students entering PR via a PR firm will quickly find out that winning new accounts may take up to half the time of agency principals.

A traditional route into PR, not taken by many recently, is to work for local media, build contacts with business and community leaders, and land a PR job either with one of the businesses, start a PR firm, or bring accounts into an existing firm.

**A question posed by the Weingarten and Anderson blasts,** says counselor Cyrus Afzali, is why does PR "trust junior staffers with the most important work we do?" (influencing what's in the media). Afzali, with Astoria Communications, Sloatsburg, N.Y. (astoriacomm.com) says juniors typically don't read the media they pitch.



**Cyrus Afzali**

Law firms, he notes, would never trust a junior with complicated litigation, nor would a CPA firm send a recent grad to do an audit of a big client.

He's "amazed" that PR is not questioning this model. So are we.

Corporate and agency PR chieftains opted out of media relations many years ago, dumping it on juniors while they focus on "strategy." PR has been recast from relations with individual editors to "relationships" with audiences such as potential customers, stockholders, retirees, suppliers, communities, etc.

We don't think these audiences want "relationships." They want the "straight skinny" on the subject at hand or the best possible products at the lowest prices. They will shop Google and the trade and general press to find them.

**Rhoda Weiss spoke to a chapter of the Society she heads last week but did not invite questions** from the audience nor poll members on Society matters.

Obvious questions that present themselves are why is the Society revamping its entire bylaws and at what charge by its 600-member law firm, Venable of D.C., and will the charter be switched to Delaware, which allows electronic meetings and votes by members or elected delegates, from New York, which does not?

**We see the influence of lawyers in many places in PR these days.** But lawyers are poor PR practitioners, according to a column lawyer Harold Suckenic wrote for *O'Dwyer's PR Report* magazine. Lawyers are trained in the negative—to look for violations of rules or the law, he wrote.

Their study of common law is mostly a study of "transactions that went wrong." Lawyers are used to making voluminous arguments to small audiences—a single judge, three to nine appellate judges, or a jury of six to 12 people.

They're not used to dealing with the masses. Finely-tuned arguments that work in lengthy legal "briefs" may not have traction with the public.

To this we would add that lawyers often argue guilt or innocence, black and white, up or down, with nothing in between.

The opponent in a legal case is 1,000% wrong while the lawyer's client is 1,000% right.

A legal position is adopted and the law firm never budes one micron from it. What the public looks for in the midst of controversy is not legal arguments but flexibility, whether the organization is showing "good will," has a "good heart," really cares about its audiences, is open and transparent, etc.

Lawyers make war, PR people try to make peace. The cost of legal war starts in the tens of thousands of dollars and quickly escalates to hundreds of thousands.

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**Responses:**