

Get paid to work in PR!

FabJob Guide to  
**Become a  
Public Relations  
Consultant**



**LYNNE BLISS**  
AND TAG GOULET

Visit [www.FabJob.com](http://www.FabJob.com)

# Contents

How to Use This Guide .....	3
About the Authors.....	9
<b>1. Introduction to Public Relations .....</b>	<b>11</b>
1.1 What Is Public Relations?.....	12
1.2 How Public Relations Differs from Advertising or Marketing.....	14
1.3 Benefits of a Public Relations Career .....	16
1.4 Inside This Guide .....	19
<b>2. What a Public Relations Consultant Does .....</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1 Public Relations Roles.....	22
2.2 Creating a Public Relations Plan .....	27
2.3 Media Relations .....	34
2.3.1 Media Lists .....	35
2.3.2 Writing a News Release .....	41
2.3.3 News Release Distribution.....	52
2.3.4 Pitching .....	57
2.3.5 Media Leads .....	61
2.3.6 Developing a Media Kit.....	63
2.3.7 News Conferences.....	67
2.3.8 Media Events.....	70
2.4 Writing for Publication .....	81
2.4.1 Writing for Your Client .....	81
2.4.2 Articles and Columns .....	82
2.5 Working with Websites.....	89
2.5.1 What to Include on the Website.....	90
2.5.2 Designing the Website .....	93
2.5.3 Getting Online.....	94

2.5.4	Promoting the Site .....	96
2.5.5	Email Newsletters.....	97
2.6	Social Media .....	99
2.6.1	Case Study: A Social Media Success Story .....	100
2.6.2	Case Study: A Social Media Disaster .....	101
2.6.3	Overview of Popular Social Media .....	102
2.6.4	Social Media Tips.....	107
2.6.5	Blogs .....	109
2.7	Other Online Resources.....	113
2.8	Crisis Communication .....	116
<b>3.</b>	<b>Developing Your Skills .....</b>	<b>120</b>
3.1	Writing Skills.....	122
3.2	Other Knowledge and Skills.....	122
3.2.1	Computer Skills .....	122
3.2.2	Foreign Languages .....	123
3.2.3	Presentation Skills .....	124
3.3	Personal Attributes .....	124
3.4	Education.....	126
3.4.1	Getting a Traditional College Degree .....	126
3.4.2	Other Alternatives .....	129
<b>4.</b>	<b>Getting Hired .....</b>	<b>131</b>
4.1	Gaining Marketable Experience.....	133
4.1.1	Experience While in School.....	133
4.1.2	Internships.....	134
4.1.3	Volunteering.....	137
4.1.4	Other Ways to Get Experience and Get Your Foot in the Door .....	138
4.2	Types of Employers.....	139

4.2.1	Corporate and High Tech .....	140
4.2.2	Non-Profit .....	142
4.2.3	Government .....	143
4.2.4	Education .....	144
4.2.5	Public Relations Agencies .....	144
4.2.6	What's Next? .....	148
4.2.7	Market Trends .....	148
4.3	Your Materials .....	149
4.3.1	Your Resume .....	149
4.3.2	Preparing a Portfolio .....	150
4.4	Job Hunting .....	151
4.4.1	Advertised Positions .....	152
4.4.2	Unadvertised Positions .....	155
4.4.3	Informational or Research Interviews .....	157
4.5	The Interview .....	158
4.5.1	What Employers Are Looking For .....	158
4.5.2	How to Make a Good First Impression .....	159
4.5.3	Interview Questions .....	161
4.6	Unconventional Ways to Break In.....	163
<b>5.</b>	<b>Freelancing/Starting Your OwnPublic Relations Agency .....</b>	<b>166</b>
5.1	Is Self-Employment for You? .....	166
5.1.1	Questions to Ask Yourself .....	167
5.1.2	Resources to Get You Started .....	169
5.2	Make Plans .....	170
5.2.1	Write a Business Plan .....	170
5.2.2	Create a Marketing Plan .....	173
5.2.3	Develop an Action Plan .....	178
5.3	Setting Up Your Office .....	179

5.3.1	Equipment .....	179
5.3.2	Other Startup Items .....	185
5.4	Financial Matters .....	188
5.4.1	Being Careful with Your Money .....	188
5.4.2	Setting Your Rates .....	190
5.4.3	Contracts and Letters of Agreement .....	195
5.4.4	Getting Paid .....	195
5.4.5	Increasing Your Income .....	196
<b>6.</b>	<b>Finding Clients .....</b>	<b>198</b>
6.1	Types of Clients .....	198
6.2	Marketing Your Services .....	203
6.2.1	Your Warm Market .....	203
6.2.2	Cold Calling .....	204
6.2.3	Networking .....	213
6.2.4	Promoting Yourself .....	215
6.3	Working With New Clients .....	222
6.3.1	Responding to Inquiries .....	222
6.3.2	First Meeting with a New Client .....	223
6.3.3	Preparing Proposals .....	226
6.3.4	Serving Clients .....	229
6.4	Hiring Help .....	230
6.4.1	Working with Subcontractors and Vendors .....	230
6.4.2	Hiring Help .....	231
6.4.3	Differences Between Employees and Contractors .....	231
6.4.4	Minimizing Risk .....	232
6.5	Telecommuting .....	233
<b>7.</b>	<b>Being Successful .....</b>	<b>236</b>
7.1	The Future of the Industry .....	236

7.2 How to Keep Up with Industry Changes .....237

**8. Resources.....238**

8.1 Professional Associations .....238

8.1.1 Public Relations Society of America .....239

8.1.2 International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) .....240

8.1.3 Canadian Public Relations Society .....241

8.1.4 IAPO International Association of .....242  
Professional Public Relations Consultants .....242

8.1.5 League of American CommunicationsProfessionals...243

8.1.6 Council of Public Relations Firms .....243

8.1.7 Women in Communications .....244

8.1.8 Other Groups .....245

8.2 Books .....249

8.3 Magazines and Other Publications .....250



# 1. Introduction to Public Relations

As a public relations consultant you will have an exciting job informing, influencing, and persuading people to take action. In this fast-paced job, you will use your creativity and communication skills to come up with solutions. Your employer or client will give you a challenge such as:

- We have an event coming up. How can we get people to attend?
- How can we get people to buy our new product?
- How can we persuade more people to donate money to our charity?
- How can we make our new movie a blockbuster hit?
- How can we convince people to vote for our candidate?
- We have an emergency situation. How can we quickly communicate what people should do?
- How can we get people to invest in our company?
- How do we improve our industry's public image?
- How can we get our book onto the bestseller list?

- How can we increase awareness of an important issue?

If you are up for challenges like these, then public relations may be your dream career. It's no wonder Public Relations Specialist was ranked #1 by *U.S News* in their list of "Best Creative Jobs".

## 1.1 What Is Public Relations?

At the most basic level, public relations (PR) simply means managing relations with one's public(s). A "public" is any group of people who are important to the well-being of a person, group, or business. For example, a company's publics might include customers, employees, investors, and local communities. A non-profit organization's publics might include members, donors, volunteers, and society at large.

You will find that a lot of definitions for "public relations" include words such as: influence, persuade, relationships, and mutual understanding. Some definitions are wordy, cumbersome, and downright scary for someone new to the career.

Don't let those intimidate you into thinking that PR is some magical, mystical process known only to a few privileged souls. A lot of it actually involves plain, old common sense. Effective PR simply means that an organization successfully used communication methods to achieve a goal or goals.

One of the reasons this career field is so interesting is that it includes a number of activities and roles under the umbrella term "Public Relations." There are so many sub-categories that it's easy for a PR professional to specialize. A few of them are:

- Publicity (getting a client noticed through media such as television, magazines, radio, newspapers, and the Internet)
- Promotion (attracting attendees to an event or influencing buying decisions)
- Advertising (development, placement, and timing of paid advertisements and commercials)
- Lobbying (influencing legislation)

- Development (fund-raising for non-profits and civic organizations)
- Media relations (forming working relationships with the media to accomplish publicity goals)
- Online public relations (developing and carrying out strategies for public relations on the Internet)
- Strategic planning (developing a plan of action to accomplish a pre-determined goal, objective, or outcome)
- Internal public relations (communicating with segments of the organization itself, i.e. employees, volunteers, stockholders, etc.)
- Crisis communications (managing communications during a crisis with affected publics and the media)

Within the roles listed above, a PR professional may be asked to do any combination of the following:

- Writing/editing
- Research, which includes monitoring public actions/attitudes and results of PR activities, and what the competition is doing
- Special events, such as open houses, hospitality suites, trade shows
- Public speaking to include speeches, presentations before groups, or managing speakers' bureaus
- Production of communication materials such as brochures, videos and websites
- Developing online communities, blogging, and using social media and social networking sites including FaceBook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube
- Counseling clients on the best communication approach to reach their goals
- Training executives in making presentations or appearing before a news conference

In addition, if you have your own agency, you will be required to perform all the management functions associated with a successful business operation such as budgeting, finance, personnel, planning, and self-promotion. More information about PR roles is given in chapter 2 of this guide.

## 1.2 How Public Relations Differs from Advertising or Marketing

There is a fine line between public relations, advertising, and marketing. The line is blurry because all three appear to be selling something and all three overlap in some ways. The goal is the same — all are designed to influence the perceptions, actions, and/or behaviors of a group of people.

There's a famous saying, attributed to *Reader's Digest*, that illustrates these differences.

*"If the circus is coming to town and you paint a sign that says, 'Circus Coming to the Fairground Saturday,' that's Advertising.*

*If you put the sign on the back of an elephant and walk him into town, that's Promotion.*

*If the elephant walks through the mayor's flowerbed, that's Publicity.*

*If you can get the mayor to laugh about it, that's Public Relations.*

*And if you planned the elephant's walk, that's Marketing."*



Each uses a different tactic for achieving a pre-determined goal.

*Advertising* is easily identifiable. Paid advertisements such as signs, billboards, flyers, newspaper ads, or television commercials promoting a product or service or announcing an event (e.g. the sign on the elephant) are intended to be seen by a large number of people.

*Promotion* is anything used to influence buying decisions and increase sales of a product or service (in this example, buying tickets to the circus).

*Marketing* involves coming up with strategies to influence customers to buy. Marketing would have been used in this case if the circus Marketing Director arranged for the elephant to walk through town and the flowerbed in order to increase ticket sales. As you can see from this example, advertising and promotion often play a strong role in support of marketing.

While marketing focuses on communicating with customers and potential customers, *public relations* focuses on building relationships with all the publics of an organization. Some of these publics will be customers. When a public relations program makes people feel good about doing business with a company, people are more likely to be influenced by the company's marketing program.

However, public relations consultants are concerned even with publics that are not customers. For example, while the mayor himself may not be interested in attending the circus, his involvement can help attract more people to attend. As a public relations consultant, you might convince the mayor to go along with your plans because he wants to make more tax revenue by attracting attendees to the circus or because he wants to appear to be a "good sport" for the next election.

One area of public relations is *publicity*, which means having information appear as a news item or feature story in the media (television, radio, newspapers, magazines, blogs, etc.). In this case, you could get publicity for the circus by inviting the media to report on the elephant walking through the mayor's flowerbed. When information appears as news, it is perceived as more credible than a paid advertisement. In this case, the circus would gain more publicity.

There's also the possibility for negative publicity, for example if animal rights activists protest the circus. In that case, a public relations consultant might be hired to help with *crisis communications*.

The most effective form of selling takes advantage of public relations as well as marketing and advertising. For example, a magazine that wants to build its readership may advertise on TV and radio, while its

marketing department analyzes reader buying habits, and the editor uses public relations by making speeches to community groups.

## 1.3 Benefits of a Public Relations Career

### A Growing Industry

As a career field, PR is relatively new, having emerged as a profession in the 20th century. In the 21st century, the profession has grown and evolved in response to unprecedented competition for the public's attention.

To illustrate with the communications medium of television, in the mid-20th century there were only three U.S. television networks and even fewer in other countries. Now there are hundreds of television stations competing for viewers, along with millions of videos online at YouTube. As of March, 2014 YouTube reported 100 hours of video uploaded to their site every minute, with more than a million creators from over 30 countries around the world in the YouTube Partner Program.

Of course it's not only video competing for public attention online. By 2000, Google had indexed more than one billion unique URLs. In 2008, Google passed another milestone. Software engineers Jesse Alpert and Nissan Hajaj of Google's Web Search Infrastructure Team reported in the Official Google Blog on July 25, 2008: "we saw a trillion unique URLs, and the number of individual web pages out there is growing by several billion pages per day."

With billions of pages of articles, blogs, advertising, and other online content, the public is relying less on journalists for information. Meanwhile, organizations are increasingly turning to public relations consultants to help them get their messages to the people they want to reach.

In their book, *The Death and Life of American Journalism*, authors Robert McChesney and John Nichols reported on their study of employment data which found public relations jobs have increased as journalism jobs have decreased. Whereas in 1980 there were about 25% more public relations workers than journalists (.45 public relations workers and .36 journalists per 100,000 population), by 2008 there were more than

three times as many public relations workers as journalists (.90 public relations workers and .25 journalists).

Now, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “employment of public relations specialists is projected to grow 12 percent from 2012 to 2022.”

## **Opportunity to Learn**

As a public relations consultant you will have the opportunity to learn about a lot of different companies and industries in the course of your career.

Public relations traverses all industries. PR consultants are needed by all types and sizes of corporations in such diverse industries as entertainment, fashion, financial services, high tech, manufacturing, professional sports, retail, and transportation. Public relations is also used by non-profit groups, churches, universities, politics, healthcare, and even government entities.

Part of the thrill in public relations is seeing the behind-the-scenes activities and getting the “real story.” Just pick up a “tell-all” book written by a White House press secretary to find out what I mean. The behind-the-scenes world will open up to you as you find out how different corporations, government agencies, institutions, and media function.

Public relations is also a dynamic career. There are always new issues to deal with and new players on the scene. Fifteen years ago there was no such thing as public relations specifically for high tech industries, and “crisis communication” meant someone called an ambulance. As a public relations consultant, you will have a fascinating career that allows you to continuously learn and grow.

## **Excitement and Challenge**

It will be your job, or the job of the team you’re working with, to come up with solutions to a variety of public relations problems. For example, you may write a feature article for a magazine that provides information while it also subtly promotes a concept or business, or you may plan an event that promotes awareness of an important issue while

raising donations at the same time. You will have many goals and will be required to find creative ways to meet them. If you enjoy a challenge, you will certainly enjoy working in public relations.

## **Making a Difference**

The work you do can make a difference in many people's lives. You can help a company find investors and customers. You can make people aware of products that make life easier, safer, or more enjoyable. During a time of crisis, you can help people get the information they need.

The work you do can also influence public opinion. You can help promote political or spiritual values, raise funds for charitable organizations (such as the Muscular Dystrophy Association Telethon, Alzheimer's Association Memory Walks) and increase awareness of issues such as domestic violence, the environment, and AIDS.

There is a huge sense of satisfaction in planning a PR campaign, implementing that plan, and seeing the results.

## **Low Risk to Start Your Own Business**

You can start and operate a public relations consulting business from home, without a bank loan. In fact, you probably already own the primary equipment needed such as a computer and phone. There can be some marketing costs when starting, but costs are minimal, as word-of-mouth and networking are powerful forces in this business.

You can start consulting on a part-time basis, while keeping a primary source of income. At the same time you can ease your way into the business by getting the word out that you are interested in consulting work. Then as the demand for your services grows, you can commit to consulting full time.

## **Other Benefits**

As a public relations consultant you will likely work with many interesting people – from corporate executives to journalists and members of the public. A few public relations people work closely with celebrities to promote their careers or projects they have been involved with such as movies or books.

The income for public relations professionals is another benefit. The job website Simply Hired reports that the average salary for freelance PR jobs is \$59,000. According to *The Official PR Salary and Bonus Report* prepared for the Public Relations Society of America, the average 2014 salaries for public relations professionals employed by PR firms range from \$56,100 up to \$164,500 (the latter for executive vice-presidents) while the average 2014 salary for corporate communications professionals (which includes public relations) is \$80,500.

Depending on the organization you work with, there may also be other job perks, such as health benefits, company car, and the opportunity to travel.

If these benefits appeal to you, the rest of this guide will tell you how you can break into this fab job.

## 1.4 Inside This Guide

This guide is designed to give you the information you need to get started and succeed as a public relations consultant.

Chapter 2 (*What a Public Relations Consultant Does*) covers what you need to know to get started in the field of public relations consulting. You will learn more about the career itself, starting with different roles a PR consultant may have. You will also get a quick education in media relations techniques. After reading this chapter you will know how to create a public relations plan, develop a media contact list, write a news release, and promote your clients online, among other public relations skills.

Chapter 3 (*Developing Your Skills*) introduces you to the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes employers and clients are looking for in a public relations consultant, and it explains the many options you have to learn more about the public relations field. It also covers how you can immediately get marketable experience – through internships, volunteering, and other methods.

Once you have prepared yourself for this career, Chapter 4 (*Getting Hired*) will tell you how to get a public relations job. You will discover employers who hire public relations personnel, how to find out about

job openings, how to prepare an effective resume and portfolio, and how to make a great impression in an interview. You will even discover how to create a job.

If you want the freedom of starting your own business, you will find good advice in Chapter 5 (*Starting Your Own Public Relations Business*). In this chapter you will discover how to create a business plan and set up an office. A section on “financial matters” covers everything from setting your rates to getting paid.

Chapter 6 (*Getting Clients*) will give you detailed information about finding clients, including the different types of clients that hire public relations consultants. You will also learn how to promote yourself to prospective clients including advice on preparing proposals.

The guide concludes with resources to help you succeed in your business, including a list of professional associations.

When you’re finished with this guide you will know what step to take next and where to go from there. By applying what you learn here, it’s just a matter of time before you’ll be where you want to be – in a rewarding career as a business consultant.

**You have reached the end of the free sample of the *FabJob Guide to Become a Public Relations Consultant* To order and download the complete guide go to <https://fabjob.com/program/become-public-relations-consultant/>.**