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Periodical

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On the Write Track

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Why Writing Should Be the Most Sought-After Skill in PR

By Hanna Porterfield

Heading into entry-level jobs, many new PR pros' line of sight is straight on standard industry skills. And that's expected, especially if they study communications in school. But as many employers are looking to hire, being a writer as much as a PR practitioner can set you apart from the competition. Strong writing skills provide a foundation for all aspects of public relations, particularly the following:

Media relations

In traditional public relations, strong writing translates to media results. When you can craft a pitch that grabs the attention of journalists inundated with messages, you're invaluable to your team. Pitches are often most successful when the writing mirrors the style of the outlet you're pitching — whether that's making your subject line like a headline or outlining your story in the format of published articles. Write so that the media can envision your story.

This should go without saying, but as a Cision blog post by Susan Payton puts it: "The more effort you put into your pitch, the more successful you'll be at getting a journalist to write about your brand."

Good writing is beneficial for more than just pitching, too. How many times have you written a byline, op-ed, speech, media statement, press release or other material

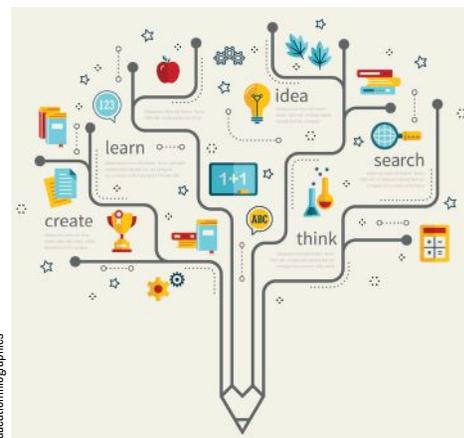
for publication? All of these editorial pieces are often written in different styles. For example, a media statement may be brief and provide only the facts, while a speech can be longer with more repetition and examples to stay in the audience's memory.

Digital marketing

Whether you're creating social media content or drafting new website copy, writing for digital is the modern twist on an age-old skill. PR pros who frequently write for social media must write concisely so that it fits within set character limits, and to catch the attention of readers on the go. If they are handling a large account with other team members, then it is also important that they keep the same brand voice, no matter who is posting.

Writing for websites also requires a unique set of skills, using SEO keywords that focus on readability. Whether you're drafting a regular blog or a static page for a website, writing online often requires more subheads and shorter sentences than you may be comfortable with. Additionally, as online media is ever changing, it is important to make sure that the writing style can be quickly and easily updated with current SEO keywords.

Best practices for writing with SEO in mind are constantly evolving, so try



to stay up-to-date. "Without making any concessions to the quality of your text, you should tweak and fine-tune your text to the specific demands of search engines," Marieke van de Rakt says on Yoast.com.

Client communications

You can't forget about client communications when looking to stand out in your career. When writing emails, you must be concise, clear and credible. It's crucial that new PR professionals learn to communicate transparently, free of misinterpretation and succinctly for busy executives. Especially if you are a new public relations professional, your emails need to show credibility so that the client is not

questioning any approval or next steps.

"No one likes to send long, convoluted emails, and no one likes to receive long, convoluted emails either," Polina Marinova wrote for *Fortune*. "So do yourself and the person you are emailing a favor by keeping your responses short and to the point."

Writing emails to clients should always include details on what project you're emailing about and clearly state what you need from them — whether it's a simple answer, approval or acknowledgement. Your tone should be warm, yet authoritative. Also, writing to or for clients will vary, so learn what style of writing and communication each client prefers, just as you would within an internal team.

If you're looking to become a better writer, then you also must be a reader. Write as often as you can, even outside of the office, and read a variety of publications to learn. For what other areas should new pros hone their writing skills? I'd love to hear from you. **T**



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state of independence

Interim Communicators Fill an Organization's Leadership Void

By Tim O'Brien, APR



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Independent communications professionals tend to bestow a range of titles on themselves, from "president" and "owner" to "principal" or "consultant." But every now and then, the word "interim" is thrust on them.

Whether the client is new or existing, they need someone to run their communications function until the communications chief can return to work or the client can hire someone on a more permanent basis.

Independent Anthony Harrison, principal at Sprauve-Harrison Communications in Oakland, Calif., currently serves as the interim chief communicator at a former employer that is having difficulty "replacing my replacement," he says. This isn't his first time as an interim

communications chief.

"Previously, I was brought on at another firm to manage the launch of a new product, which lasted six months, where I worked with no internal staff, but managed external PR agencies," he says.

Harrison says it's important for an interim role to be clearly scoped and supported, so both sides have clear expectations of priorities and what success looks like.

Maura Campbell, APR, principal at Campbell Maegdlin in Detroit, has served in interim roles four times. She had offices at each organization and was embedded much of the time, while serving other clients, which ranged in size. She had staffs three times; one time, she didn't have any direct staff. In most instances, Campbell reported directly to the C-suite.

In each case, she found that "Culture eats strategy for lunch every time," she says. "Keeping that in mind going in is important. It helps to be quick at picking

up on culture clues and adaptable to using different systems and adjusting to different styles while still adding that trusted adviser perspective and professionalism. You have to build trust quickly and be flexible."

Ellen Werther, principal at Ellen, Ink, in New York, has served in an interim communications position for one client since January 2016.

"Over time, my role has expanded from public relations to anything brand-related: creating packaging; overseeing marketing; developing the website; researching, developing and launching new products; and entering new markets, including Canada, Mexico and Singapore."

Werther says she has been able to serve other clients as time has permitted.

D. Elaine McEachern, APR, principal at McEachern Communications in Atlanta,

was hired by a client to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of communications, and then served in an interim position to develop and implement a strategic branding plan.

The value that she provided



is the ability to leverage her depth of experience honed through working with clients, combined with her focus on results-driven communications.

"Organizations have the opportunity to hire a professional with senior-level expertise to create a brand and implement a plan that can then be turned over to staff members who are able to

continue executing the plan on a day-to-day basis," she says.

If you're an independent considering an interim role with a client, then Campbell advises that you have a strong on-site presence to build rapport, and that you constantly communicate your whereabouts when not on-site. Throughout each engagement, she has had one simple objective: "I tried to leave each organization after every assignment in a better place than when I started," she says.

"Interim roles can be very exciting and satisfying," Harrison adds. "You come

in, solve a problem and move on. It's a great opportunity for someone who is a quick study and has the ability to hit the deck quickly and work independently." **T**

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