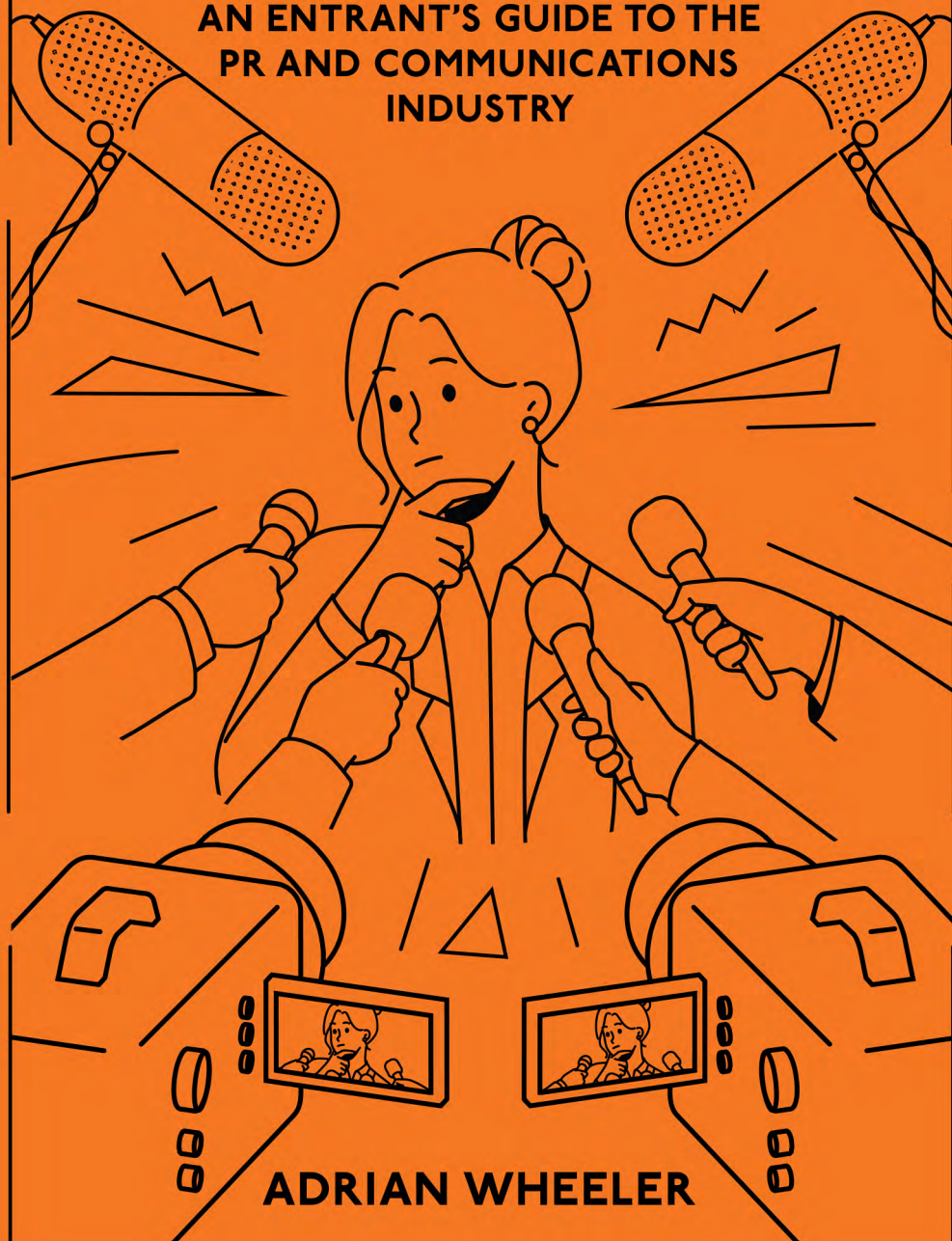


ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PUBLIC RELATIONS

AN ENTRANT'S GUIDE TO THE
PR AND COMMUNICATIONS
INDUSTRY



ADRIAN WHEELER

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Communications Industry

BY

ADRIAN WHEELER



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

This book is dedicated to Annie Wheeler

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I didn't really know what PR was until I started working for a public relations company.

—*Brennan Drake, Best Communications*

We used to think PR was all about fashion and celebrities, but it's much more interesting than that.

—*Dara Nacheva, RMS PR*

A good PR story is infinitely more effective than a front-page ad ... we put enormous weight on our PR people.

—*Sir Richard Branson, Virgin Group*

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PREFACE

I meet a lot of public relations people in my working life. Colleagues, clients, competitors and trainees.

We often get talking about how we started out in PR.

Very few of us set our sights on a PR career when we were at school, college or university.

Most of us say things like: 'I just stumbled into it' or 'an opportunity came up' or 'it just happened'.

At the same time, we all say we can't imagine doing anything else.

This made me wonder: how many people are there who'd be happy and successful in PR but just don't know enough about it when they're choosing their future career?

This book contains my own opinions plus advice and ideas from many other PR people who remember how hard it can be to find out what working in PR is like.

We all hope you'll find this book useful. We want thousands of people with different ideas, talents, backgrounds, attitudes, knowledge, experience, perspectives and convictions to come and work alongside us. *Diversity* really is the heart and soul of successful PR and communications.

We can make you a promise: if you set out on a career in PR, you'll never regret it.

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PR AND COMMUNICATIONS – A GREAT CAREER CHOICE

If you're looking at this book, you've probably heard something about public relations (PR) and think it might be the right career for you.

If so, you are almost certainly right.

From small beginnings only 50 years ago, PR has grown like topsy. There are now nearly 100,000 of us just in the United Kingdom. This country's annual PR budget is estimated at £15 billion.

As an industry, PR and communications is still growing. We have big, global firms with thousands of employees; medium-sized firms covering several industry sectors, regions or countries; and smaller firms specialising in specific areas (like healthcare or financial services) or specific services (like Environmental, Social, Governance (ESG), social media, crisis management or internal communications). These days every company, charity, public sector organisation – and celebrity – has its own PR team.

A FAST-GROWING PROFESSIONAL SERVICES INDUSTRY

What is driving the growth of PR and communications? The simple answer is that it works.

We all need information and advice about what to do with our money and time. Which is the best car for someone like me? Where will our family get the best holiday within our budget? Do I want

to live in Edinburgh – or Glasgow? Work for GSK – or Novartis? Support Greenpeace – or Friends of the Earth? Put savings into a pension now – or later? Buy an air fryer – or not?

Advertising used to be the only way for normal people to find out. But *you* never really believed advertising, and nor did anyone else.

Then came PR – journalists and other independent experts, first in print, on radio and on TV, then on digital platforms and social media. We trusted them then and we still do. We know that they are paid to get things right and tell us what we need to know in an entertaining way. The media hate getting things wrong and there are sub-editors, editors, legal departments and watchdogs to make sure they very rarely do.

PR AND THE MEDIA WORK HAND-IN-HAND

Where do the media get their information from? Much of what's published in the media today comes from PR agencies and PR departments. Us. That's one reason for PR's growth: the media demand news, stories, content, material – and PR people supply it.

Employers and clients care about 'ROI – return on investment'. The ROI of PR surpassed the ROI of traditional advertising 20 years ago. That's another reason for PR's growth: it often performs the same function as advertising (sales) but it works much better and it costs much less.

PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION

But what exactly is PR?

Ask 10 different PR people and you'll get 10 different definitions (I've done this). Some people call it 'a mixture of art and science'. Others think of it as 'a combination of maths and magic'. But there's a common thread: PR is a form of *persuasive communication*, often – though not always – with the aim of selling products, brands and services in competitive marketplaces.

Working in PR lets you get a deep understanding of various different industries and other areas of human activity. You learn a lot about a lot. As a career, it offers amazing opportunities – including the chance of working in other countries. It stands out because there really is plenty of ‘fun stuff’ – but there’s also a good deal of sheer hard work.

*Ann-Marie Blake is a well-known consultant,
advisor and trainer in communications*

THIRD PARTIES GIVE CREDIBILITY

PR usually works – though not always – through ‘third parties’. Reporters, journalists, broadcasters, editors and presenters are good examples of third parties whose independent judgement and experience make us all pay attention to what they say.

But a trusted third party could also be a university professor who’s written books and appears on TV ... or an influencer whose channel attracts half a million followers ... or it could be Eva on the fourth floor, who knows everything there is to know about gardening ... or childcare ... or luxury cruises ... or trainers.

Trainers – that’s a good example. Was there a sports star at college who always had the latest from Nike (or Adidas, or Puma or Reebok)? We may have watched his or her performance with admiration and bought the same brand of trainers. Did we know that he or she was a ‘Brand Ambassador’ for Nike?

PR was the first job I ever had. I love everything about helping organisations tell their story: the planning, the writing, the creativity, the engagement, the reporting ... Everything. Fantastic.

*Mark Adams co-founded Text 100, the world’s
biggest tech PR firm (now Next 15)*

PR CHANGES PEOPLE'S BEHAVIOUR

Trying to pin down what PR is and isn't can get boring. We hope you'll get a fuller picture as you look through this book. One more common factor before we get going: PR is always about *changing people's behaviour* – choosing this new restaurant rather than the one we've always gone to for special occasions ... switching to Samsung from Apple after five years ... deciding on Sardinia rather than Tenerife ... buying a flat in Greenwich after living north of the river since we were born...

How does this happen? Isn't it all about receiving information which attracts our interest, arouses our curiosity, makes us think and then provokes us to change our minds?

How does that work? Isn't it mostly about creativity – ideas that surprise us, catch our attention, amuse us or entertain us, draw us in, satisfy our curiosity and make us wonder?

We'll be hearing more about *creativity* as we go through the book. For now, let's just say that it's the key talent for successful PR people.

Here's the good news: *we are all creative*. Psychologists and neuroscientists can prove it, even though some of us *know* we're creative and others don't think they are. But creativity isn't the whole story. In the next chapter, we'll think about why some people are well-suited to a career in PR and others less so.

A GREAT CAREER CHOICE

There are other reasons why PR and communications is a great career choice. Yes, I admit I am biased, and so are the other people whose advice is quoted in this book. But we are also right.

You can advance very rapidly – you don't have to wait years to get promoted.

You can earn good money while you are still young enough to enjoy it.

You can set up your own PR firm and become wealthy. In some cases, seriously wealthy.

You can learn a lot about something that interests you (in fact, you'll have to).

You can learn a lot about what's going on in the world (again, you'll have to).

You can become a close and trusted advisor to your clients or employer.

You can see the work you do making a difference before your very eyes.

You will have more sheer fun than anyone you know in other professions.

PR is one of the most exciting career choices. You work with senior people at a young age. If you enjoy fun, pressure and a bit of chaos from time to time, you'll feel at home in PR. There are literally no two days the same. It's a broad church, there are no barriers to entry, so there's a place for almost everyone – the industry is big and growing, and is hungry for diverse talents. If you like routine, PR might not be the best choice for you ... but if you enjoy challenges, learning and finding out about new things, there is simply no better career.

Rich Fogg, CEO of CCGroup

IS PR THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR EVERYONE?

But is PR *really* heaven on earth? *I* think so, and so do most of my friends, but we must be realistic. As you will discover in the following pages, PR is the *perfect* career for some people, a *great* career for a lot of people and the *wrong* career for other people. For instance:

It's not a profession, it's a business. The correct definition is 'professional business service'. No-one *has* to hire a PR firm or a PR person – people only pay us because they think we will deliver the results they are hoping for.

It's an insecure career. If your client or your employer decides they're not getting what they hoped for, that's it. At least, in that particular job or that particular agency. PR is also full of opportunities to move on somewhere else. Most PR people (though not all) have had two or three jobs by the time they are 30.

PR PEOPLE AND JOURNALISTS ARE SIMILAR IN MANY WAYS

As it happens, PR people are – in this way – on the same wavelength as their media customers. *If you want to know more about the life and work of journalists, there is no better guide than 'My Trade' by Andrew Marr.*

Most people in PR work long hours. We are always trying to please, surprise and delight our clients or employers. We always feel that we need to prove our worth – we feel we are only as good as what we delivered yesterday, last week and last month. Here again, we resemble people working in the media.

Obviously that's not the full picture ... relationships, reputations and track-records matter ... though if you want a safe and solid career with a gold-plated pension at the end of it, you might want to think about something else.

But if you love enjoy tension and excitement ... not really knowing what comes next ... feeling confident but *not certain* that things will work out well ... if you can deal with a certain amount of stress and come up smiling ... then PR could be just the thing for you. If you are good at 'keeping a lot of balls in the air' and get a buzz from unexpected challenges, the world of PR – where no two days are ever the same – could be exactly the right career.

The great thing about PR is the variety, the different types of projects and sectors you work in, the interesting people you meet, the freedom and creativity you have, and the appreciation you can receive for your skills. Another is the fact that you can start out either with an agency or with an

in-house department – and switch later on. Each have their plus and minus factors, so it's mainly a question of personal preference. But you have the choice. I'd have to agree with the author that PR is the best career in the world – but, of course, it's not for everyone.

*Luke Blair, Director of Communications at an NHS
hospital group*

THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF PR

As a professional business service, PR doesn't have the reputation it deserves. We are 'cobbler's children'. If you are thinking about PR as a career, you may be slightly concerned by the way some people talk about PR – particularly journalists (it's a love-hate relationship).

A lot of ink and electrons have been wasted by people trying to portray PR as a dark art. The term 'spin doctor' may be familiar to you. But the Peter Mandelsons and Lord Bells are very rare and are usually found in political PR – *public affairs*. There is something not-quite-right about high-profile PR people: it's our clients who are meant to be famous, not us.

You may have seen or heard about 'Absolutely Fabulous' (*Ab Fab*), a BBC hit comedy in the 1990s. Jennifer Saunders' character was said to be based on Lynne Franks, a very successful PR person specialising in fashion and celebrities, with an outsize personality. Saunders and Joanna Lumley, her co-star, were so funny that their caricature of PR made a lasting impact. But it was a comedy.

Lynne Franks is a rare example of a PR person who became well-known outside the PR community. There are a few others – Mark Borkowski, for instance, who is a true creative genius and a much-quoted public figure – but there aren't many. This is, I think, as it should be: when PR people become the story, something has gone wrong.

So if you really want to be famous (rather than rich or happy), PR might not be for you.

Students' Impressions of the PR Industry

We asked six people on humanities and business studies courses for their impressions of PR and if they thought of PR as a possible career.

Fiona: PR is controlling how the public views a product or a person. Yes, PR could be a career choice for me – all my internships have been involved in marketing, which is close.

Tomas: If you take football as an example, PR means popularity – whether or not the player is on good form. Some footballers have terrific PR, no matter what happens on the pitch. For myself, I think it's important to know how PR works, whatever you do – but it's probably not ideally suited to my personal skills.

Mai: PR is the art of disseminating information about products and people – changing public opinion. Yes, PR could be a career path for me – but only if it's for musicians or artists, because that's the area where I want to spend my working life.

Peter: PR is about impacting how something or someone is seen by the general public. It's not an option I have seriously considered as a career: I've had internships in marketing, but my personal goal is to work in the film industry.

Louna: It's being able to change the way something is viewed. Yes, it could be right for me, but at the moment I am very interested in learning how advertising works, so that's where I hope to start my career.

Philip: If you work in a PR agency you have to make sure your client is happy about their image. I wouldn't consider PR as a career, but I will definitely need to use PR in what I plan to do, which is music and fashion.

EARLY ORIGINS IN THE UNITED STATES

The origins of modern PR go way back to the early 1900s in the United States. There are two recognised 'godfathers' of our industry. Ivy Lee was an author and public figure who – 100 years