

South African PR practitioners can learn a lot from international PR professionals

 By [Thabiso Dlamini](#)

19 Aug 2014

Public relations in South Africa has not reached its full potential when we compare the industry to international standards...

We still encounter a wide array of PR practitioners when we should aim to have PR professionals. Those who consider themselves PR professionals do so on the basis that they have obtained qualifications that make them believe they can now be regarded as the best of the best when it is not so compared to international PR professionals.



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Quite frankly, the difference between PR practitioners and professionals lies in one's ability to be an industry leader. In South Africa we have witnessed a large number of young people enrol for PR and communications qualifications, which is largely influenced by the minimum requirements required to enrol for the diploma or degree. Many of these young people do not even know what public relations is about before completing their basic education and they enrol just for the sake of gaining university entry which is quite disastrous for the industry. These young people merely do enough to pass and obtain this qualification with the aim of obtaining a job upon

completion of their studies, a job for which they will be ill equipped.

Uninspired and lazy

I have met many PR practitioners who are now in the field working for government and private institutions yet do not want to be where they are due to the fact that PR was a second or third career choice when it should have been their first. You witness their lack of innovation when executing their tasks, you witness how they lazily execute their duties on a day-to-day basis, with a pay cheque serving as their only source of inspiration as opposed to ambitions of being industry thought leaders and movers.

In South Africa, many of our PR practitioners believe the most important feature in PR is event co-ordination. They believe it is about hosting events that will get people talking and hopefully add good recommendations when they embark on the job market. What is sad about event hosting again is the little attention to detail because the belief is that the venue should be in good condition with the program going according to plan and issues of accreditation, branding and logistics are not given enough attention. When I conducted my public relations in-service training at a government department what I noticed was that many public relations officers in that field only had ambitions of ascending to district offices for the better pay there - not the fact that they would obtain more work and have the opportunity to display their PR skills to a wider audience.

We have a problem

We have a problem when our PR practitioners believe PR is only about media relations and they try their utmost to make friends with journalists in order to cover their stories. Media relations is an integral part of public relations but we should not waste too much time being friendly with the media because as we know South African media houses will make you only to break you. Rather put a lot of emphasis on researching best practices when sending out communiqués to media houses, and use great writing skills to make them realise your story should be featured in their platforms.

I am a big fan of [PR News](#), which is a daily intellectual hub that serves the communications and marketing community at corporations, agencies, and nonprofits. The *PR News* group focuses on honing and growing PR practitioners' skills in social media, crisis management, digital PR, measurement, employee relations, media training, CSR, and writing through its flagship newsletter, webinars, conferences, awards programs, workshops and guidebooks. *PR news* is what keeps me

sane and makes me fall deeper in love with public relations. In South Africa we do not have this useful platform which could be optimised for our environment and the closest we have to such a is the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA), which represents professionals in public relations and communication management throughout the southern African region. I believe we need a strong crop of PR professionals who will work hard to change the organisation from within to turn it into a platform of which every South Africa PR industry personnel will be proud.

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