

To regulate or not to regulate?

That is indeed the question! The recent mooted of PRISA becoming a compulsory membership body got me thinking about the use of such an organisation. In normal circumstances, we would need it. We'd all be happy to work in a professional manner, living by a code of ethics that was embedded in our business practices and producing ROI for our clients.

By [Gavin Moffat](#) 16 Jun 2003

However this is not the case and alas the world we live in is far from ideal. There are sharks out there. There are agencies, which are somewhat far removed from a code of ethics or any other kind of ethics and are not quite sure what qualifies as being professional. We should all be allowed to run our business in whatever way we see fit. However, when what we do impacts negatively on those around us, should we not have someone looking over our shoulder to ensure that we don't queer the pitch for others in our industry?

And I guess that's what I'm getting at. Do pretty much what you like as long as you don't hurt others. But not everyone thinks like that. Not once have I been into a briefing session for a potential new client and not had them bemoan a previous agency and its inability to produce results. Now there's two sides to every story and there's certainly two sides to a client bemoaning a lack of results. It could be that they themselves are not committed to the importance that marketing plays within their business mix. It could be that they perceive public relations as being a cheaper alternative to advertising.

Just once I'd like to sit down and have a prospective client tell me how unbelievable PR is and what brilliant things it does for their business. How the previous agency produced the most incredible results, but that due to the owner winning the lotto, they have since retired. That the client desperately wants the same degree of professionalism and wants us to do it for them.

How does this ranting and raving link back to a regulatory body? Well I've been a member of one on and off for a number of years and have yet to get the value I believe I should. This could be through no fault of the body but entirely of my own making!

Let me not tell you what they don't do, but rather what I want out of a body that represents my profession, because that's what I believe public relations is - a profession - with many highly professional practitioners of high repute. I want an organisation that has a high code of ethics. That ascribes to excellent business practices and has explicit guidelines for its members. One that has teeth and that you're legally required to be a member of. One that is able to censure, in a meaningful manner, a member that oversteps the code of conduct. One that provides valuable assistance when you need it. One that helps its members set up businesses with guidelines as to what to do about contracts, UIF, VAT, a business plan, and affiliation with an international agency (big or small) should it be necessary.

I guess the part that I most want is the bit about compulsory membership of the body. I would like clients to perceive membership of this body as a necessity when looking for a communication partner and that if you are not a member, you're not worth dealing with. I would like agencies that queer the pitch for the rest of us to be expelled from the body and ostracised so that the rest of us can build and manage the reputation of PR in a manner that benefits us all.

And that's really the crux isn't it? The fact that we'd all like to be perceived as being an essential part of the

business mix. Indispensable, even when the budgets are being shaved. Adding value to business in a measurable way.

Can a regulatory body do this for us? Of course not. This is something that we have to strive to do ourselves. Everyday. In each and every facet of our dealings with the media and our clients. But a body like this would help. It would certainly be a great starting point, don't you think?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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