

**THE EMERGENCE OF THE INTERNET AS A
VALUABLE TOOL FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS
PROFESSIONALS: A CLOSER LOOK AT HOW
THE INTERNET AFFECTS THE FIVE ROLES OF
THE PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONER**

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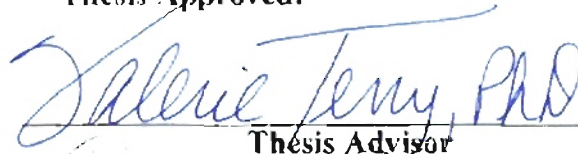
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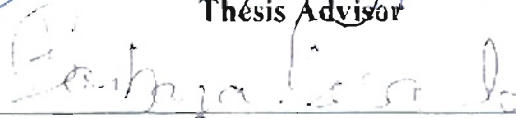
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Dean of the Graduate College

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my late grandmother, Mary A. Sellars, whose unconditional love continues to inspire me to soar to great heights. I miss you, Mimi.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For over twenty years, the roles of public relations practitioners have been defined, dissected, developed and re-developed many times. Public relations educators have published numerous articles attempting to clearly delimit the roles and responsibilities of public relations practitioners as they evolve throughout their careers. One of the first comprehensive articles on this topic was written by Glen M. Broom and George D. Smith (1979) and was published in *Public Relations Review*. Broom and Smith constructed a typology of public relations roles and, for many years, various research was conducted expand on the proposed public relations roles (e.g., Broom, 1982; Broom and Dozier, 1986, 1995; Jackson, 1982; Marshall, 1980; Terry, 2001, in press).

Since public relations practitioners typically assume many roles throughout the course of their careers, this type of research is important and necessary. The research on this topic is updated quite often to keep it consistent with the changing times. In 1993, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Foundation published the Public Relations Professional Career Guide. This guide emerged as a major source for defining the evolution of public relations roles all through a practitioner's career. The five levels of professional growth, as defined by PRSA, are technician, supervisor, manager, director and executive. PRSA divides the first two levels of technician and supervisor into two parts ("entry-level technician," "technician 2," "supervisor 1" and "supervisor 2"), giving the profession a total of seven levels of professional growth. Each level of the public relations profession outlines general job responsibilities as well as commonly used titles and descriptions. In 1993, this Public Relations Professional Career Guide was a direct

and exhaustive way to present the levels of the public relations profession not only to practitioners but also to public relations educators and to public relations students.

About two years later, in 1995, the emergence of the Internet began to shake the foundation of the public relations profession. The use of this new technology had an enormous impact on the field of business public relations in that it began to change the way that individuals and companies communicated with one another. As the general public began to embrace the new technologies offered by the Internet in particular, public relations practitioners began to integrate technological responsibilities into their everyday jobs. It wasn't long before both the scholarly world and the Public Relations Professional Career Guide were noticeably missing something important: the inclusion of the Internet and other technology-oriented practices within practitioners' defined skills at certain levels of professional development. Now, as the Internet continues to become integrated into society and into the public relations profession, it seems significant to determine where a technologically-savvy public relations professional fits into PRSA's ladder of growth for a practitioner as well as in academe, where public relations roles are taught and researched. It is also important to reveal the importance placed on the Internet at each practitioner level as a public relations communications tool.

Significance and Rationale

"As we enter the new millennium, more than 90 million individuals and businesses are connected to the Net. That figure, reached from a virtually motionless start less than five years ago, represents a rate of growth more than five times as fast as the acceptance of television two generations ago." (Howard, 2000, p. 10)

As the Internet continues to reach more and more people, its significance in the profession and research of public relations becomes increasingly important. For this reason, it seems crucial to incorporate this new medium into the levels of professional role for public relations practitioners. Not only will practitioners benefit from classification of the Internet among professional's required skills, but educators and businesses will profit as well.

The inclusion of the Internet within all public relations roles and growth research would be invaluable for public relations practitioners. Those public relations practitioners who are considered technologically-savvy would gain the most from such an inclusion. If a public relations practitioner can clearly identify the responsibilities and skills that would define him or her as a technologically-savvy practitioner, then the practitioner would know what to expect from twenty-first century jobs. The practitioner would be better able to assess his or her skills so to present them in a job interview, advancing a better understanding of his or her contributions to a prospective employer.

If public relations educators have a better understanding of exactly when it will become important for a public relations practitioner to have Internet-related skills, then they can better prepare their students to acquire these skills. Currently, PRSA does not require the inclusion of classes aimed at Internet expertise, such as Web page design, classes within a public relations curriculum. Perhaps if the Internet is included as part of PRSA's defined professional roles, these kinds of classes will become a standard requirement for all public relations students, thus preparing them for a career in public relations in the new millennium as well as providing productive new scholarly research opportunities.

If businesses employing public relations practitioners can see the value and skills that a technologically-savvy professional brings to a company, it is possible that practitioners with Internet-related skills will have a better chance of getting and keeping jobs. Also, if businesses realize how important Internet-related skills are to the growth of the public relations profession, then companies might begin to pay to send employees to classes that would help them acquire these skills. Of course, it is possible that if technologically-savvy professionals can be classified with job skills, then the salaries of these people might increase based on the importance of their acquired skills.

Research Questions

In examining the role the Internet plays and will continue to play in the public relations profession, several questions helped to determine the Internet skills used by public relations practitioners and or the expertise they need to acquire. These were:

1. At what level – technician, supervisor, manager, director, executive – are public relations practitioners regularly engaging in Internet-related activities?
2. Are Internet-related skills often desired for an entry-level technician position?
3. Where do public relations practitioners learn how to use the Internet?
4. Is pay higher, or should it be higher, for public relations practitioners who have computer, especially Internet, skills?
5. Will it be necessary to expand one specific level of professional growth – likely the technician role - to incorporate the Internet to further advance our understanding of all public relations practitioner classifications?

Methodology

By examining the opinions, responsibilities, relevant roles, titles and skills of practicing public relations practitioners, sufficient answers to the posed research questions surfaced. A two-part study was employed in this examination, involving both quantitative and qualitative primary research.

To be able to provide some basic useful statistics within the study, it was important to conduct some quantitative research. In this instance, the survey method was chosen. A survey was designed, using semantic differential, open-ended and forced answer questions. The purpose of the survey was to question public relations practitioners about Internet-related skills that apply to their jobs. Several points were emphasized in this type of survey. First, practitioners were asked about their current job titles and where they think they fit into the PRSA levels – technician, supervisor, manager, director, executive – based on their job responsibilities. Second, practitioners were asked to identify computer skills and software that they deem necessary to work in public relations. Third, practitioners were asked specifically about the Internet and the role it plays in their current jobs. Lastly, practitioners provided their opinions about whether or not – and to what extent - they think entry-level positions should require some sort of Internet knowledge as we enter the twenty-first century, and whether or not practitioners should be paid more for having this kind of knowledge.

The purposive sampling technique was used to draw a population of subjects to participate in the survey. The current president of the Tulsa chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) was contacted about compiling a list, complete with e-mail addresses, of public relations practitioners in the Tulsa, Oklahoma,

area. The same procedure was followed with both the Tulsa chapter and the Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, chapter of PRSA. Realizing that there was some overlap in members of these organizations, for additional respondents. I used the OSU alumni cards in the School of Journalism and Broadcasting to find former public relations students and current practitioners to survey. To achieve a goal of 100 completed, I conducted surveys with approximately 300 participants. I used two methods to distribute these surveys to practitioners, e-mail and regular mail.

To receive more richly descriptive information about roles from public relations practitioners, qualitative research also was used in this examination. I interviewed practitioners from different facets of public relations – corporate, sports, non-profit, agency and government – to aid in determining the role that the Internet plays in today’s profession and exactly what role a technologically-savvy practitioner would play. A cursory narrative analysis was used to interpret the responses given by the interviewees as it was seen to complement the data gathered from the surveys.

Again, the purposive sampling technique, as well as the convenience sampling technique, was used to build a population of interview respondents. Several people were immediately identified as possible candidates, based on my contacts through internship experience and membership in various public relations-related professional organization. Also, since I traveled to New York City for Spring Break 2001, I took advantage of that situation and interviewed a practitioner who works at an agency in New York. Dr. Terry recommended individuals I could interview for the government portion of the interviews.

The interviews lasted about thirty minutes in length. When it was possible, I conducted them in person. However, when a convenient time could not be arranged, then the interview was conducted via telephone.

Participants were asked about their roles and responsibilities at their current jobs. They were asked about their computer skills; where they acquired them, how often they use them and how important they think the Internet is to the public relations profession. The interview also focused on how the Internet relates to the participant's facet of public relations, and what level of public relations the participant feels he or she works in.

By compiling all of the information received from both the surveys and the interviews, I was able to more clearly define how the Internet fits into PRSA's various levels of professional growth and to provide a starting place for more scholarly research on this topic.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Public relations roles research began in 1979 when Glen M. Broom and George D. Smith's article, "Testing the Practitioner's Impact on Clients," was published in *Public Relations Review*. Since that time, many studies have been conducted on public relations roles. These studies have explored primarily the tactical skills practitioners employ in their job every day, including writing, researching and designing publications. There are two key areas often overlooked in this skills-based research. One is the role of the Internet. The other is the practitioners' perceived importance of the Internet to the public relations profession at the various levels of roles. This exploratory study begins to address these oversights.

Glen Broom and David Dozier have been the authors of most of the significant articles published concerning public relations roles research. For over twenty years, they have conducted studies to try to define a specific set of roles that exists in the public relations profession. Broom and Smith's (1979) initial research identified five roles that characterize the public relations practitioner. By 1986, the collaborated efforts of Broom and Dozier resulted in the four public relations roles of expert prescriber, communications facilitator, problem-solving process facilitator and communication technician (Broom and Dozier, 1986). As I will illustrate, although these four roles have been criticized and dissected by others conducting role research, Broom and Dozier have not proposed any new changes to their definitions.

In 1993, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) published the Public Relations Professional Career Guide that used Broom and Dozier's four roles to develop a hierarchy of professional development for practitioners. While Broom and Dozier's (1986) four roles were altered somewhat, PRSA still used Broom and Dozier's foundation of ideas to develop its pyramid of roles. PRSA proposed that practitioners begin their profession at the technician level and then move up a ladder that ended with the executive level. The focus of PRSA's publication, however, was more on the skills needed to succeed in various public relations roles rather than on the roles themselves (PRSA, 1993).

Around 1998, the world witnessed the growth of a new communications medium known as the Internet. Since this new medium had an effect on the public relations profession, researchers began to become concerned with the effects of the growing technology on the profession. Shel Holtz, the author of Public Relations on the Net: Winning Strategies to Inform and Influence the Media, the Investment Community, the Government, the Public, and More! was one of the first to acknowledge that public relations departments should redefine their roles to include the Internet (Holtz, 1998).

I would assume that Broom and Dozier or PRSA would explore the impact the Internet would have on different public relations roles. To date, however, nothing has been published specifically on this topic. The early roles research pioneers have not yet incorporated this dimension into their current research.

This exploratory study is a continuation of the many studies that have been done on public relations roles over the past twenty years. This study, however, will focus on the Internet's ever-growing presence in the public relations profession.

Two Decades of Public Relations Research

For the past two decades, journalism professionals and educators have been examining public relations roles and their related skills. Numerous articles have been published that have attempted to clearly define the responsibilities and roles of public relations practitioners. The cross-section of these articles is reviewed next.

Glen M. Broom and George D. Smith (1979) authored the first and most comprehensive article written on this topic. Broom and Smith were the first to outline that “practitioners approach their jobs differently and have different types of relationships with their clients” (Broom and Smith, 1979, p. 47). They defined the five separate roles practiced by public relations practitioners as expert prescriber, technical services provider, communications process facilitator, problem-solving process facilitator and acceptant legitimizer.

Broom and Smith (1979) said that a public relations practitioner in the expert prescriber role was noted as the “best informed person in the organization” (p. 48). Broom and Smith acknowledged that past research on the expert prescriber role found that a person with the title would be familiar with researching a problem and then diagnosing a solution for a client.

Those classified in the technical services provider role have a plethora of communication and technical skills. They typically have skills in “graphics, photography, publication and broadcast production, public opinion research, special events planning, fund-raising, and exhibit planning and production” (Broom and Smith,

1979, p. 49). Often, technical services providers are hired externally by an organization to fulfill a needed service.

In the communications process facilitator role, public relations professionals supervise the “exchange of information so parties involved have adequate information for dealing with each other and for making decisions of mutual interest” (Broom and Smith, 1979, p. 50). An important part of this role is the maintenance of a two-way flow of information between an organization and its publics.

The problem-solving process facilitator role defines the process by which a practitioner helps a client “apply a systematic problem-solving process” to implement a public relations program (Broom and Smith, 1979, p. 51). With the problem-solving process facilitator’s help, the client can “understand and participate fully in the program” implementation (Broom and Smith, 1979, p. 51).

The role of the acceptant legitimizer originated in the psychology field (Broom and Smith, 1979). A practitioner in this role is “employed in a business as a means of legitimizing client decisions” (Broom and Smith, 1979, p. 53). In other words, an acceptant legitimizer is expected to listen and provide support to clients.

Broom and Smith’s 1979 research served as the groundwork for all the other public relations roles studies that were to come. However, the originally proposed five public relations role did not remain the same as more research was conducted. The roles transitioned as the profession grew and changed.

In 1982, Glen Broom continued to research public relations roles. He identified what he thought were the four most important roles occupied by a practitioner. In his later research, Broom did not mention the acceptant legitimizer role. However, this could

be due to the fact that public relations practitioners were expected to be an acceptant legitimizer in all roles. In other words, every practitioner at any point in his or her career should support a client by listening.

Without the acceptant legitimizer role, Broom (1982) referred to the role concepts as expert prescriber, communications technician, communications facilitator and problem-solving process facilitator. In this second study, Broom changed his reference from a technical service provider to a communication technician. He did not, however, change the description of job duties and skills associated with this public relations role. He may have done this because the addition of the word “communication” to the technician role makes the job sound more like that of a public relations practitioner than that of a computer specialist. Broom did not make any changes to the expert prescriber, communications facilitator or problem-solving process facilitator roles. The overall purpose of his study was to survey professionals about which roles they felt they played in the profession (1982).

Broom’s survey research in 1982 revealed that public relations practitioners see themselves as working in two primary roles – the communications technician role and a combination of the other three roles. This is important to note because later research indicates that the majority of public relations practitioners work in the technician role, and those who work in higher positions still do many of the same tasks as technicians.

Five years after Broom’s initial research on public relations roles, David M. Dozier (1984) published an article that re-examined and re-defined the communications process facilitator role and the technical service provider role (which was called the communications technician role by Broom in 1982). From his analysis, Dozier noted that

there existed two major roles that he called the communications manager role and the communications technician role.

The communications technician role incorporated into it those public relations professionals who had just entered the profession (Dozier, 1984). The description of the responsibilities of a professional at this level closely resembles the responsibilities included in Broom's technical services provider role. Dozier noted that communications technicians did not play a part in the decision-making process of the organization. They simply performed technical tasks.

The communications manager role, on the other hand, was encompassed by professionals who were regarded as the "expert" on solving public relations problems within the organization (Dozier, 1984). Practitioners in this role were responsible for implementing a public relations planning process.

Dozier's 1984 study was an attempt to simplify the amount of roles that were initially proposed for public relations practitioners. By suggesting that all practitioners work in only two roles, Dozier presents the idea that roles research may not need to be so complicated. This idea seems to disregard the human complexity of public relations practitioners are people and what motivates them (Terry, 2001, in press).

In 1985, Acharya's role research seemed to ignore Dozier's (1984) studies on public relations roles. For his research purposes, Acharya referred only to Broom and Smith's 1979 data. Perhaps Acharya did not agree with Dozier's idea that practitioners typically operate in only two roles. Acharya did find, however, some variation on Broom and Smith's original research. He identified five public relations roles. He called them the expert prescriber, the communications technician, the communications facilitator, the

problem-solving process facilitator and the acceptant legitimizer. Although Acharya did not use the exact titles as Broom and Smith did, his descriptions of professionals working in the five roles were comparable. The fact that Acharya brought back the acceptant legitimizer role could suggest that he did not believe or find evidence to support that all public relations practitioners should play this part regardless of role title.

The next year, Broom and Dozier (1986) teamed up to continue to study public relations roles. Their first collaborated effort built upon public relations roles research and set the standard for roles research still to come.

With Broom, Dozier strayed from his 1984 research in which he identified just two key roles for public relations practitioners. Instead, with Broom, Dozier returned to a description that included four roles: expert prescriber; communications facilitator; problem-solving process facilitator; and, communication technician. These were the same roles mentioned by Broom in 1982 (Broom and Dozier, 1986). This is important because of the other role researchers who criticized or simply ignore Dozier's 1984 research. When working with Broom, Dozier may have agreed that roles do need to be more explicitly defined.

Broom and Dozier (1986) referenced the PRSA National Professional Development Committee that had defined a hierarchy of public relations career levels in 1979. This was the first reference to PRSA's role definitions in other role research. The four levels defined by PRSA were senior professional, professional managers, staff professionals and beginning professionals (Broom and Dozier, 1986).

The senior professional has worked 17 or more years in lower-level roles and holds a top management position. As senior advisers and policy-makers, these

practitioners run the public relations unit. They are recognized experts on public affairs, public opinion, and issues management. Below these practitioners are professional managers. With about seven years of professional experience, these practitioners occupy middle management positions. They direct operations in public relations, conduct research and evaluation, plan programs, develop budgets, and manage personnel. Below these practitioners are staff professionals – junior managers with about two years’ experience. They have mastered basic craft skills and perhaps a specialty. This is their first supervisory role. At the base of the career ladder is the beginning professional. These practitioners are new to public relations, with less than two years’ experience. They work under the supervision of others, applying basic skills to narrowly define problems. (p. 38)

By combining the PRSA career levels and the four public relations roles, Broom and Dozier (1986) concluded that all practitioners were either public relations managers or public relations technicians. Later research would reveal that PRSA needed to expand their definitions of roles, and Broom and Dozier would discover that there are roles higher than public relations manager positions.

Broom and Dozier’s 1986 research was extremely significant to this current study because of the inclusion of PRSA with their research on public relations roles. This 1986 study was the foundation for many others that would attempt to use more skills to define various public relations roles, as is highlighted next.

IN 1995, after including the PRSA roles in their research, Broom and Dozier decided to closely examine the manager role of the public relations practitioner. For this

research, they settled on the use of the same four public relations roles mentioned in their 1986 research: expert prescriber; communications facilitator; problem-solving process facilitator; and, communication technician. From this point on, these four roles seem to become the standard for public relations roles research.

One of the key foci Broom and Dozier (1995) addressed in their later study was the fact that there did exist a hierarchy of public relations roles. For example, the technician role is usually reserved for entry-level public relations practitioners, while professionals in the manager role usually supervise the technician's activities. Broom and Dozier (1995) recognized that managers still possess the same skills as technicians, even though they often have progressed to a higher level in the PRSA hierarchy of roles:

In role research, the concept of predominant role has proved useful. If a practitioner enacts activities of the manager role set with greater frequency than activities of the technician role set, then the practitioner can be categorized as a manager. By the same logic, technicians are so classified because they enact technician role activities more frequently than manager role activities. As conceptualized and operationalized, however, each public relations practitioner enacts activities of both the manager and technician role. Enacting one role does not preclude enacting the other role; the two role sets are independent. Manager and technician role activities are different but neither mutually exclusive nor in opposition to each other. (pp. 5-6).

Broom and Dozier (1995) indicated that practitioners are categorized by the role that they perform most often. It was noted, though, that a practitioner could execute both the technician and the manager roles. This was the first time that it was acknowledged

that, even though a practitioner would inevitably move up the PRSA hierarchy, he or she would still continue to perform many of the same tasks as technicians. I expect that the same results will occur in this current study.

Greg Leichty and Jeff Springston (1996) disagreed with some of Broom and Dozier's (1995) results concerning the public relations manager and technician roles. The first point made by Leichty and Springston was the same point that was made by Broom and Dozier in their 1995 study. Leichty and Springston noted that the manager and technician roles are not mutually exclusive. They acknowledged that many professionals believe that they are either a technician or a manager, when in actuality they could be acting in both roles (Leichty and Springston, 1996). This was different from Broom and Dozier's suggestion that practitioners move up a hierarchy and, thus, out of a new role and into a new one. Leichty and Springston seem to ignore the fact, however, that Broom and Dozier mentioned that practitioners at a higher level will still perform some of the same tasks as technicians.

Leichty and Springston (1996) proposed that Broom and Dozier's (1995) research into the manager role, in particular, was incomplete. Leichty and Springston observed that the activities involved in the manager role should be explored. Broom and Dozier, according to Leichty and Springston (1996), defined the activities in the manager role as "everything other than technical activities" (p. 468). Their research revealed activities such as gatekeeping, research and training as activities performed by a public relations manager. This revelation was significant to role research because it made more specific the tasks performed within each role.

Practitioner Roles and Public Relations Textbooks

In 1978, Glen Broom, along with Scott Cutlip and Allen Center, published a public relations textbook titled, Effective Public Relations. The book has been continuously updated to new editions as was needed. In the eighth edition of the textbook, four public relations roles were defined (Cutlip et al., 2000). These were the same ones used by Broom and Dozier in their 1986 article: communications technician; expert prescriber; communications facilitator; and, problem-solving facilitator. However, in the 2000 edition, Internet skills are mentioned for the first time as a responsibility of a communications technician. The mention of Internet skills is meaningful to this study because the purpose of this study is to examine the importance of and the effects of the Internet to the public relations profession.

That same year, Doug Newsom, Judy VanSlyke Turk and Dean Kruckeberg (2000) published another public relations textbook, this one titled This is PR. Public relations roles were defined here by the facet of public relations in which a practitioner works, such as agency, non-profit and corporate. The book describes three distinct public relations practitioner roles. They are the staff member, the firm/agency employee and the independent practitioner/counselor. There was not any mention of technician or manager roles anywhere in this book (Newsom et al., 2000). This is interesting because the book seems to ignore all of the research done by Broom and Dozier (1986, 1995) and by PRSA (1979, 1993). It seems the authors may have defined their own roles based on their own experiences and not necessarily on scholarly research.

It appears to be widely accepted that Broom and Dozier did set the standard for defining public relations roles. The literature used in this reference shows that, over time,

Broom and Dozier (1986, 1995) have devoted the most time to studying public relations roles. Other authors, such as Acharya (1985) and Leichty and Springston (1996), have added to the studies of public relations roles, but Broom and Dozier have dominated the field. Something that was missing from even Broom and Dozier's research was the inclusion of very specific and detailed skills involved with each role. PRSA became the most widely accepted publication to define these skills.

The Public Relations Professional Career Guide

In 1993, even before Broom and Dozier (1995) began to closely examine the key differences between primarily public relations managers and technicians, PRSA published the Public Relations Professional Career Guide. The purpose of the guide was "to illustrate that it is necessary to continually acquire additional skills and knowledge throughout a career in public relations" (PRSA, 1993, p. 1). PRSA was the first to outline, in detail, the skills that were needed for a public relations practitioner to climb a hierarchy of roles. Many years earlier, in 1979, Broom and Smith had listed a few basic skills that fit with each of their proposed five roles of practitioners, but the PRSA information was more in-depth.

Initially, PRSA (1993) illustrated five levels of professional growth: technician; supervisor; manager; director; and, executive. Eventually, each of the first two levels was divided into two sections (technician 1/technician 2 and supervisor 1/supervisor 2). As a result, PRSA defined seven levels of professional growth altogether. PRSA expected that a person entering the public relations field would begin at the technician level and then move up the hierarchy, possibly reaching executive status at some point in his or her career.

PRSA's Professional Career Guide (1993) outlined a total of 131 skills that public relations professionals should have obtained by the time he or she ends a career at the executive level. A practitioner entering the field at the technician level usually only has seventeen of those 131 skills. Most of the skills utilized at the technician level involve writing. At the entry-level technician role, public relations practitioners "typically begin their careers writing. They write news articles for employee publications and news releases, text for brochures, scripts for audiovisual or video presentations, letters, memos and many other types of communications materials" (PRSA, 1993, p. 3). Entry-level technicians "also develop skills in data gathering, photography, design, layout, desktop publishing and other areas" (PRSA, 1993, p. 3). Although a practitioner may move up the hierarchy to a supervisor position, he or she will still have and use the skills acquired and used as a technician.

According to the Professional Career Guide (1993), the difference between a public relations technician and a supervisor is that a supervisor is more prepared to oversee projects and publications. However, supervisors often continue to work closely with technicians and supervise many of their projects. Supervisors often are responsible "for supervising staff activities, planning and coordinating workflow, preparing budgets, writing and implementing various action plans, working with the media, interpreting policies, staff training and reporting business results" (PRSA, 1993, p. 4). Supervisors also might "reconcile differences between staff members" and "interact with higher management" (PRSA, 1993, p. 4).

When a practitioner leaves the supervisor level to progress to a manager position, "interpersonal communication, conceptual, problem-solving, counseling and teaching

abilities” become more important than technical skills (PRSA, 1993, p. 4). Often, managers assume all responsibilities for an entire department. They are known to conduct meetings, to make presentations and to formulate plans of action (PRSA, 1993).

In the Professional Career Guide’s outline (1993), practitioners at the director level may assume positions as company officers. Directors often “become involved in the design and implementation of research programs, strategic planning, and governmental and political action or advocacy programs. Directors often plan responses to evolving issues and develop organizational policies, in addition to directing the efforts of managers and their departments” (PRSA, 1993, p. 4).

At the top of the public relations role hierarchy is the executive position. When a practitioner reaches the executive level, he or she applies all of the skills acquired during the climb up the ladder (PRSA, 1993). However, at this level of professionalism, PRSA (1993) found it is more important for the executive to guide, motivate and reward others for their performances, than to personally work on tasks:

The types of skills and knowledge needed by a public relations professional continues to evolve throughout one’s career. Almost everything learned will be utilized throughout the person’s career. However, the way a person applies skills and knowledge previously acquired continues to change as his or her responsibilities broaden in the move up the organizational ladder.

Because of the changing nature of skills and knowledge needed throughout a public relations career, continuing education is not only desirable, but essential. (p. 4).

The Professional Career Guide (1993) also notes that the largest number of public relations practitioners is at the bottom two levels of the hierarchy, at the technician and

supervisor levels. PRSA acknowledges that organizations will typically employ larger numbers of people at these bottom two levels. The reason for this seems to be that only a select few of public relations professionals will move up to director and executive positions because there are not as many jobs at these higher positions. A practitioner must put in time at the technician and supervisor levels to be considered for jobs in these higher ranks (PRSA, 1993).

The most important thing about PRSA's (1993) study compared to this current research study is that computer skills were not mentioned as skills at any of the levels in the hierarchy. This research explores this aspect in detail. Even though computers were not as important to the public relations profession in 1993 as they are today, they still had some importance. As desktop publishing, e-mail and especially the Internet began to grow, it seems that PRSA would have revised their publication to include skills relating to these technologies. So far, however, a new edition has not been published.

The Emergence of the Internet in Public Relations

The growth of the Internet has exploded into a new phenomenon especially in the way that it has improved at least the speed of communication. Some articles have been written about the impact this growth will have on the public relations profession. Here, a representative sample of these articles will be reviewed to illustrate how this current study continues to build on this important line of inquiry.

In 1998, for example, G. A. Marken predicted how the public relations practitioner would handle this new medium. Marken (1998) said that public relations professionals would inevitably have to "develop a totally new tool and skill set" to be able to incorporate work with the Internet (p. 47).

That same year, Shel Holtz 's (1993) book Public Relations on the Net: Winning Strategies to Inform and Influence the Media, the Investment Community, the Government, the Public, and More! addressed the fact that the world was evolving to accommodate the Internet. Holtz pointed out that corporations and public relations departments had to redefine their roles to include the Internet and its use. However, critics of Holtz believed he failed to explore how senior management would adjust to the new technology and how that lack of adjustment might affect their organizations as a whole (Marken, 1998). It is possible that Holtz's critics saw that entry-level technicians would be more likely to adapt to using the Internet in business, assuming that entry-level technicians would be younger, having learned about the Internet in their college experiences.

Nearing the end of the twentieth century, the issue of the Internet and its effect on the public relations profession seemed to become a prominent concern. For example, Suzanne FitzGerald and Nicole Spagnolia (1999) predicted that the new millennium would bring major changes to public relations. The most important of these changes to this current research concerns the growing technology that is the Internet. FitzGerald and Spagnolia (1999) see the Internet providing many benefits to a public relations practitioner, including:

- the opportunity to present unfiltered positions to customers and the media, bypassing the traditional agenda-setting conducted by editors and producers;
- self-selection of information rather than using the agenda-setting provided by customers;

- increased two-way communication through ease of feedback;
- reduced reliance on traditional print media, increased information clutter;
- a focus on more active, information-seeking publics; and,
- the opportunity to conduct crisis management, research and employee recruitment on-line (p. 12).

In 1999, Michael Ryan's research predicted that public relations practitioners would have to get involved in using the World Wide Web to stay effective in the profession. He disagreed with those practitioners who argued that "the Web and its sites should be the exclusive province of computer information specialists; that the Web cannot be used effectively to support public relations objectives; or, that practitioners need not be involved in Web site development" (Ryan, 1999, p. 29). Even with his assumptions, Ryan stated that he could not predict the impact the Web would have on the profession, although he predicted that it would be significant.

Ryan's (1999) research included a survey of 150 PRSA members about their beliefs concerning the Web competency of public relations professionals. His research revealed some important facts. First, practitioners were found to be heavy users of a computer, relying on one more than three hours each day. Most practitioners also described themselves as competent to use a computer. However, they also confirmed that most public relations professionals are not technical people but rather practitioners with basic knowledge of a computer. Thus, if public relations practitioners reveal that they can use a computer, how are they using the Internet specifically? My current study will delve this question where other research has not.

Ryan's (1999) research also found that public relations professionals use Internet skills in two different ways. First, they monitor others' Web sites for surveillance reasons. And, secondly, they are usually involved in some aspect of their own organizations' Web sites. Since part of this current research is to determine the extent to which the Internet is used within various public relations roles, it is important to understand how practitioners are using the Internet in their jobs.

Practitioners believe that an organization's Web site is extremely useful in supporting public relations objectives. They are so important, in fact, that, according to Ryan (1999), practitioners are getting more involved in constructing and maintaining the sites.

Public relations practitioners in the twenty-first century must have traditional public relations skills as well as technological skills. According to Ryan (1999):

[They] must integrate all that knowledge about technologies with those traditional public relations skills and values that made them successful in another era, and they must redefine public relations so that it encompasses more than sales and service, as many practitioners already have done.

Practitioners who do not redefine their roles will not succeed (p. 31).

In the April/May 2000 issue of *Communication World*, PRSA and the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) joined together to publish a study highlighting important factors affecting public relations professionals. The research revealed that a major new change in the public relations field deals with senior management. Entering into a new century, it is more common for senior management to be more involved in public relations activities, particularly those involving the Internet

and their company's home Web pages (PRSA/IABC, 2000, pp. A-5). Earlier research conducted by PRSA (1993) revealed that the largest number of practitioners is at the bottom two levels of the hierarchy of roles, at the technician and supervisor levels, indicating that the bottom two levels, made up of younger practitioners, would know more about the Internet, assuming they learned Internet skills in college. In 2000, if PRSA and IABC suggested that senior management would soon get involved in the Internet, then where is senior management obtaining Internet skills? My study may help to reveal at least part of the answer.

The PRSA/IABC (2000) study also mentioned that e-mail has become the most accepted form of internal communication within organizations. The study found that a company's home Internet page is the second most useful tool for communicating internally. However, the study found that, when communicating with an external audience, the exact opposite occurs. The most common form of external communications is a home Internet page, while-mail is the second most important tool for external communication.

Further research reiterates the importance of e-mail as a communications instrument (Anonymous, 2000). Apparently e-mail is especially important for an organization to use to communicate with international publics. However, it seems that the benefits of e-mail may not outweigh some problems with using it frequently. Too many public relations practitioners are letting their relationships with their clients occur strictly by e-mail (Jarvis, 2000). Some public relations practitioners suggest that this is a negative, and that practitioners should continue to make face-to-face contact with clients (Jarvis, 2000, pg. 7). It appears that the Internet is a good tool for communicating, but it

should not take the place of building personal relationships. After all, public relations is built on relationships with people.

The use of Internet pages may greatly affect public relations practitioners' daily work routines (Jarvis, 2000). A public relations practitioner can control the content of a message that is posted on a home Web page, whereas that control is lost when a newspaper prints an article using facts from a practitioner's news release (Jarvis, 2000). The downside to using a home Web page to communicate, though, is that practitioners cannot avoid becoming "on-line editors" (Jarvis, 2000, p. 7). The use of a home page can be beneficial to the practitioner, but it can also be a hassle as well if more time is spent editing on-line than on other public relations tasks.

Summary

Certainly, role research in the public relations profession will continue to be important. A practitioner needs to know where he or she fits into a hierarchy of levels to understand what skills must be obtained and honed in order to advance to the next role level. It is also important for past research about public relations roles to be updated as technology grows and the public relations field changes. Broom and Dozier (1986, 1995) laid the foundation so that public relations roles research can continue into the twenty-first century. But now is it up to PRSA to update the hierarchy of professional roles, or up to scholars or individual practitioners? Where does the Internet fit into these roles? Should a new role be formulated that will involve a public relations practitioner who deals specifically and/or exclusively with the Internet? This current research study attempts to address each of these questions and identify other worthwhile for future studies.

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of the Internet on the various roles of public relations practitioners. This research will help discover the Internet skills that are being used in the public relations profession, and at what level. The investigation is expected to help us understand how the growth of the Internet has affected the public relations profession.

Research Questions

In examining the effect that the Internet has on the public relations profession, several questions helped to determine the Internet skills used by public relations practitioners and the expertise they need to acquire. These were:

1. At what level – technician, supervisor, manager, director or executive – are public relations practitioners regularly engaging in Internet-related activities?
2. Are Internet-related skills often desired for an entry-level technician position?
3. Do public relations professionals think it is important for practitioners to have computer and Internet skills?
4. Where do public relations practitioners learn how to use the Internet?
5. Is pay higher, or should it be higher, for public relations practitioners who have computer, especially Internet, skills?
6. Will it be necessary to expand one specific level of professional growth – likely the technician role – to incorporate the Internet to further advance our understanding of all public relations practitioner classifications?

Research Approach

To provide more insightful results, two different research methods were used. This study involved both survey measurement as well as in-depth interviews, a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research approaches.

There are many advantages to using quantitative research for data collection. Quantitative research measures variables. This type of research is beneficial because it allows the researcher to use mathematical methods of analysis (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000) to quantify or count research findings. Quantitative research results in data that is measurable.

The purpose of this study, a descriptive survey was used. Descriptive surveys research attitudes and opinions of people (Rubin, Rubin & Piele, 1996). This kind of survey method is advantageous because it allows the researcher to collect an assortment of data from a variety of people with some ease (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000).

The use of qualitative research also has many advantages. One advantage is that qualitative methods are flexible and provide the researcher with the opportunity to explore. It also allows the researcher to observe certain behavior, which survey research does not. Qualitative research is interpretive and it helps to answer the question "why". It also allows the researcher to become intimately involved with his or her subjects, resulting in an increase in the researcher's in-depth understanding of the topic (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000).

There are several qualitative data-gathering research methods, such as focus groups, field observations, in-depth interviews and case studies (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000). For this study, the in-depth interview method was used. This method was chosen

because it allows the researcher to gain more detailed background information from the subjects, more explanatory depth to answers specific questions. This information complements the survey results, helping to add breadth to its depth.

Surveys

Pilot Study

A pilot study with the survey was conducted before it was fielded as the primary data-gathering method for this study. A draft of the survey questions was submitted to two faculty members in the Paul Miller School of Journalism and Broadcasting at Oklahoma State University before the final survey was sent to selected respondents. The pilot survey was also completed by a sample of six public relations students at OSU to determine how long it would likely take professional respondents to complete the survey. It was determined that the professionals should allot 15 minutes to complete the survey.

Selection of Subjects

Subjects were selected to participate in the fielded survey using purposive and convenience sampling methods. Public relations professionals were the target of the study. Since all public relations professionals in the United States could not be surveyed due to resource limitations, a sample was chosen from professional organizations and journalism alumni associations. Surveys were sent to 39 members of the Tulsa chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), 71 members of the Tulsa chapter of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), 34 members of the Oklahoma City chapter of PRSA, 15 officers from the Kansas City chapter of PRSA, 45 sports information directors from the Big 12 Conference, 18 select journalism alumni from the University of Oklahoma and 115 journalism alumni from OSU. Schools

represented in the Big 12 Conference are OSU, OU, Nebraska, Kansas, Kansas State, Iowa State, Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, Missouri, Colorado and Baylor. All of the respondents were allowed three weeks to complete and return the survey. After two weeks, a reminder was e-mailed to those respondents who had not yet returned the survey.

Research Instruments

To save on costs, to measure comparatively the rate of response and to test the impact of the Internet on the public relations professional, some surveys were mailed by traditional mail and some received an e-mail version. Subjects who had provided an e-mail address received the surveys by e-mail. Those subjects who were "snail" mailed surveys were provided with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to facilitate response.

Three hundred and thirty surveys were e-mailed; twenty surveys were sent via regular mail. It was hypothesized that more professionals would respond to an e-mail survey due to the convenience of sending it back instantly.

Survey Questions

Both the e-mail survey and the regular mail survey contained the same questions. Both surveys contained twenty-seven questions, plus four basic demographic questions. The demographic questions were listed as optional for the respondents (see Appendix A).

Twenty-seven questions were asked. The first two questions focused on the hierarchy of public relations roles as defined by PRSA. Eight questions were written using a Likert scale to measure the intensity of the respondents' opinions about specific Internet skills. Ten forced answer questions focused on the abilities of the respondents' organizations to apply Internet skills to their workforce. The remaining seven questions

were open-ended and aimed at determining where the respondent acquired Internet knowledge in relation to his or her job.

Data Analysis

Respondents were asked to determine their roles as public relations professionals according to PRSA's definitions. The surveys will be categorized by the different roles. Common themes will be sought regarding various Internet skills at different levels of the public relations profession. Since respondents were also asked the facet of public relations in which they work, it may be detrimental if different facets require different types and amounts of Internet usage.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that the results cannot be generalized to an entire U.S. population or even of all public relations practitioners. Since survey respondents were chosen using a purposive and a convenience sample, their responses represent only their specific experiences. Another disadvantage to the sampling method is that surveys were e-mailed to a list of people belonging to a professional organization or an alumni association. Subjects who are members of PRSA or IABC could work outside of the public relations profession, in education, for example. Since the survey was tailored to professionals working in sports, corporate, agency, non-profit and government/public affairs public relations, those respondents working in education, for example, would not be qualified to complete the survey. Also, the surveys sent to members of journalism alumni association members might have been sent to alumni working in other areas of journalism besides public relations. They, too, would not have been qualified to complete the survey.

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Another possible disadvantage of the survey method is that the researcher can create bias because of inappropriate wording or the particular placement of a question (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000).

Using the two means of sending the surveys to respondents could be a limitation as well. There were more surveys sent via e-mail due to cost considerations. While sending the surveys by e-mail allowed testing of the professional's use of the Internet, sending surveys by regular mail did not. Those respondents who received the survey in the regular mail could be proficient in Internet usage, but not "measured" as such because they received a non-electronic instrument. Further, "snail" mail recipients might be less likely to return the survey because of the time and resource constraints; however, e-mail recipients may return a more hastily-completed survey, taking less time for considered answers. Limitations aside, this survey project is useful because it studies the usage of the Internet at various public relations professional levels.

In-depth Interviews

Pilot Study

Pilot studies of the in-depth interview were not conducted. However, a list of questions was reviewed and critiqued by a OSU journalism faculty member and by a professional public relations practitioner before the actual interviews were conducted. Several changes were made, such as the re-wording of certain questions to avoid bias, accommodating the reviewers' suggestions.

Selection of Subjects

In-depth interview subjects were selected using the convenience and the snowball sampling methods. First, a convenience sample was drawn up as public relations

professionals familiar to the researcher were asked to participate in the survey. Several of those professionals also recommended other qualified individuals to participate in the interviews, therefore employing the snowball sampling technique.

Seven interviews were conducted. The researcher talked to professionals working in five different facets of public relations: sports; corporate; agency; non-profit; and, government/public affairs public relations.

Research Instruments

When possible, the in-depth interviews were conducted in person. When it was not possible for the researcher to travel to the respondent's geographic location, the interviews were conducted over the telephone.

Whether the interviews were conducted in person or over the telephone, each conversation was tape-recorded. Hand-written notes were taken, too, as a back-up. The researcher asked each person for permission to tape the interviews. Each individual interview lasted an average of thirty minutes.

Questions

A list of initial questions to ask each respondent was drafted prior to the interviews. However, as the interviews progressed, the researcher asked other appropriate questions to the topic as the opportunity arose. Although each professional was asked the questions on the list, different people were asked different questions based on the direction each individual interview took. All questions were open-ended and focused on the respondent's daily job and involvement with the Internet. Each respondent also was asked to talk about how, in his or her opinion, the Internet had

changed the public relations profession in his or her tenure as a public relations practitioner (see Appendix B).

Some of the questions asked in the interviews were the same as the questions asked in the survey. The primary difference between the answers provided, however, was that the interviewees gave longer, more descriptive answers than the survey respondents were allowed due to space considerations and format constraints of a written vehicle.

Data Collection and Analysis

Since each of the seven interviews were recorded using an audio taping device, the conversations were transcribed by the researcher. The data was arranged into a preliminary category system (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000, p. 107). The researcher looked for common themes in the respondents' answers to individual questions. The researcher also looked to see how long each respondent had worked in public relations, and what his or her specific job included. It was important here, just as it was with the survey analysis, to determine the role of the respondent according to PRSA's definition of roles.

Limitations

One possible limitation to the qualitative aspect of this study is that several of the interview subjects knew the researcher. When conducting interviews, bias can occur when the respondent is able to learn a good deal of information about the researcher (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000). In this instance, several of the respondents already had an established relationship with the researcher before the interviews were conducted. Therefore, bias could have occurred. On the other hand, familiarity between an

interviewer and interviewee can avoid distrust and result in more accurate and probing response data.

Generalizability also is a problem sometimes associated with in-depth interviews. Since interviews are typically conducted with a non-random sample of respondents, the sample is not able to be generalized to a larger population (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000). In this case, respondents were chosen using a convenience and a snowball sampling technique, therefore creating a sample that cannot be generalized to the entire population. It should also be noted that the small sample size could also skew results. However, "given the emphasis on detail and depth of information, qualitative studies normally involve small numbers of respondents" (Hakin, 1987, p. 27), as was the case in this aspect of this study.

Another limitation of the in-depth interviewing method involves variation on questions. Since conducting interviews is usually a lengthy process, sometimes the respondents are asked variations of the same questions (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000). This can create skewed results. On the other hand, it is this variation that results in richly descriptive data valuable for that reason.

Finally, it is not uncommon for interviews to be sensitive to the researcher's personal bias (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000).

Summary

A study of the impact of the Internet on various public relations roles is important because no research on public relations roles has been updated to include the growth of the Internet and its usage. Despite some limitations, the data provided from this current studies should provide useful insight to the Internet skills used at each level in the

hierarchy of public relations professional growth, to improve practice and contribute to the scholarly literature on the subject as well.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter four includes results obtained from the descriptive data surveys and in-depth interviews. The primary goal of the project was to explore the impact of the Internet on the various roles of public relations practitioners. The findings of this study provide some conclusions to the research questions that were stated in Chapter one. Survey questions and working transcripts of the in-depth interviews can be found in the Appendices A and B .

Survey Findings

In a survey sent to subjects via traditional mail and e-mail, subjects were asked to define their role as a practitioner, based on the hierarchy of public relations roles defined by the PRSA Professional Career Guide. They were also asked various questions about their involvement with computers and the Internet in their daily jobs. Respondents also provided opinions on the importance of the Internet to the public relations professional. Some demographic data was obtained in the surveys. Answering demographic questions was optional for the respondents.

A total of 350 surveys were sent to subjects, 330 via e-mail and 20 via regular mail. Tables 1-14 show the breakdown of the descriptive data received from the professionals who responded to in the survey.

TABLE 1

Response Rates:
Responses Based on Practitioners' Roles

<i>Respondent Role</i>	<i>Surveys Returned*</i>	<i>Distribution Percent (%)</i>
Technician	29	8.29
Supervisor	11	3.14
Manager	25	7.14
Director	17	4.86
Executive	19	5.43
<i>*N = 350</i>		
TOTALS	101	28.86

Table 1 shows that an overall response rate of nearly 29 percent was attained. Of the 350 surveys that were distributed, 101 were completed and returned to the researcher. Those subjects who identified themselves as public relations technicians accounted for the largest number of surveys returned. Technicians had a response rate of 8.29 percent, with a total of 29 surveys completed. Public relations managers made up the second largest group to return the surveys with 7.14 percent, or 25 completed surveys. Public relations executives returned 19 surveys, accounting for 5.43 percent of those returned. Public relations directors were next with a response rate of 4.86, or 17 completed surveys. Public relations supervisors accounted for the smallest number of surveys returned. Supervisors had a response rate of 3.14 percent with 11 completed surveys.

TABLE 2

Response Rates:
E-Mail vs. Traditional Mail Surveys

<i>Survey Type</i>	<i>Surveys Returned</i>	<i>Distribution Percent (%)</i>
E-Mail	91*	28.0
Mail	9**	45.0

*N = 330
**N = 20

Twenty surveys were sent to potential respondents by regular mail. Only nine subjects returned the surveys that were distributed by regular mail. Surveys that were sent via regular mail accounted for 45 percent of the surveys that were returned (Table 2).

A total of 330 surveys were distributed by e-mail. Exactly 91 surveys were returned by e-mail. Completed e-mail surveys accounted for 28 percent of all surveys that were returned.

TABLE 3

Response Rates:
Responses Based on Respondent Professional Membership Categories

<i>Respondent Category</i>	<i>Surveys Returned</i>	<i>Distribution Percent (%)</i>
Tulsa IABC	29*	74.0
OU Journalism Alumni	03**	38.0
Kansas City PRSA Officers	05***	33.0
Big 12 Sports Information	12****	25.0
OSU Journalism Alumni	29*****	25.0
Oklahoma City PRSA	07*****	21.0
Tulsa PRSA	16*****	23.0

*N = 39
 **N = 8
 ***N = 15
 ****N = 45
 *****N = 115
 *****N = 34
 *****N = 71

As mentioned in Chapter three, surveys were sent to people who are members of various professional organizations and journalism alumni associations. Table 3 shows the breakdown of surveys returned by the respondents' various professional membership categories.

Members of the Tulsa chapter of the IABC had the highest return rate. They accounted for 74 percent of completed surveys with 29 surveys returned. Respondents who are journalism alumni from the University of Oklahoma accounted for 38 percent of returned surveys with 3 surveys completed. Officers from the Kansas City chapter of PRSA returned 5 surveys, accounting for 33 percent. Sports Information Directors in the Big 12 Conference returned 12 surveys, accounting for 25 percent. Journalism alumni from Oklahoma State University also had a return rate of 25 percent with 29 completed

surveys. The 16 surveys returned by members of the Tulsa chapter of PRSA accounted for 23 percent of completed surveys. The group with the lowest response rate was the Oklahoma City chapter of PRSA. They returned 7 surveys, accounting for only 21 percent.

TABLE 4

Perceived Importance of Computer and Internet Skills for Public Relations Professionals
as Rated by Practitioners in Various Roles
(Means)

<i>Computer Skill</i>	<i>Technician</i>	<i>Supervisors</i>	<i>Manager</i>	<i>Director</i>	<i>Executive</i>
Using a computer	4.79	4.82	4.86	4.80	4.63
Word processing	4.96	4.73	4.95	4.93	4.75
E-mail	4.96	4.82	4.95	4.93	4.75
On-line information searches	4.92	4.64	4.76	4.47	4.63
Desktop publishing	4.00	3.73	3.76	3.13	3.50
Web site design and maintenance	3.00	2.91	3.43	3.07	2.50
Web site conveying an organization's external image	4.68	4.45	4.62	4.53	4.31
Web site conveying an organization's internal image	4.04	4.09	4.14	4.00	3.94

1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree

Table 4 shows how practitioners in various public relations roles perceive the importance of using computer and Internet skills in the public relations profession. Opinions were calculated based on Likert scale responses from the survey. An answer of five meant that the respondent strongly agreed with the statement; a response of one meant that the respondent strongly disagreed with the statement. The numbers shown in Table 4 are a calculated average response for each question. The responses were scattered across the different roles of public relations practitioners.

Public relations managers had the highest average opinion about the importance of using a computer everyday for their jobs (4.86). Public relations supervisors were next with an average of 4.82. Public relations directors reported an average of 4.80. Public relations technicians' average opinion calculated to 4.79. Public relations executives had the lowest average opinion with 4.63.

Public relations technicians reported that they strongly agree that public relations practitioners should know how to use word processing software (4.96). Public relations managers and directors were next with 4.95 and 4.93 respective averages. Public relations executives reported an average of 4.75, and supervisors were last with an average of 4.73.

Public relations technicians also reported that they strongly agree that public relations practitioners should know how to e-mail (4.96). However, public relations managers (4.95), directors (4.93), supervisors (4.82) and executives (4.75) also ranked e-mail as an important skill.

Public relations technicians also reported that they believe public relations practitioners should be able to conduct on-line information searches (4.92). Practitioners in the other roles also found this skill important, but did not have an average as high as the technicians. Managers reported an average opinion of 4.76. Supervisors' average opinion was 4.64. Executives reported an average of 4.63. Directors were last with an average opinion of 4.47.

Public relations technicians also had the highest opinion about the importance of desktop publishing in the public relations profession. They reported an average of 4.00, indicating that they believe practitioners should know how to use desktop publishing

software. Managers were next, reporting an average of 3.76. Supervisors and Executives reported averages of 3.73 and 3.50 respectively. Directors were last with an average of 3.13, indicating an almost neutral opinion concerning desktop publishing skills.

Public relations managers reported the highest average opinion about the importance of Web site design and maintenance skills for the public relations practitioner. Their average of 3.43 did not indicate that they strongly agreed these skills are important. Directors and Technicians reported nearly neutral opinions on this topic with averages of 3.07 and 3.00 respectively. Supervisors and Executives indicated that they do not agree that Web site design and maintenance skills are important with averages of 2.91 and 2.50 respectively.

However, public relations practitioners at all levels seem to agree that it is important for an organization to use a Web site to convey its external image. Technicians reported the highest average opinion at 4.68. Managers (4.62), directors (4.53), supervisors (4.45) and executives (4.31) also indicated that this is important.

An organization's use of a Web page to convey its internal image is also important, but not as important as using a Web page to convey an external image. Managers reported the highest average opinion at 4.14. Supervisors (4.09), technicians (4.04) and directors (4.00) also rated this as important. Executives reported an average of 3.94, which falls between a neutral opinion and the belief that this is important.

TABLE 5

Focusing on the Technician:
Organization and Public Relations Practitioner Involvement
in Internet-Related Activities

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Yes* (%)</i>	<i>No* (%)</i>	<i>Not Applicable* (%)</i>
Using the Internet	27 (96.4)	1 (3.6)	0 (0)
PR Dept. responsible for organization's Internet site	16 (57.1)	12 (42.9)	0 (0)
PR Dept. responsible for organization's Intranet site	10 (35.7)	16 (57.1)	2 (7.1)
PR Dept. responsible only for Web site content	13 (46.4)	15 (53.6)	0 (0)
PR Dept. responsible for answering Web site inquiries	13 (46.4)	13 (46.4)	2 (7.1)
Practitioner written Web site content	24 (85.7)	4 (14.3)	0 (0)
Organization has on-line newsletter	12 (42.9)	16 (57.1)	0 (0)
Organization has Intranet site	16 (57.1)	12 (42.9)	0 (0)
Organization looks to hire practitioners with Internet skills	17 (60.7)	11 (39.3)	0 (0)
Practitioners with Internet skills make more money than those who don't	16 (57.1)	12 (42.9)	0 (0)

**frequency of answer. N = 28*

Table 5 shows how public relations technicians are involved in Internet-related activities. It also shows the extent to which the technicians' organizations are using the Internet as a public relations tool.

Nearly 97 percent (96.4) of technicians said they use the Internet everyday at their current jobs. Fifty-seven percent said their organization's public relations department is responsible for building and updating the organization's Internet site. Only 35.7 percent of technicians said their organization's public relations department is responsible for building and updating the organization's Intranet site. And only 46.6 percent said their organization's public relations department is responsible only for writing Web site content. Forty-six percent of technicians also reported that their organization's public relations department answers inquiries received through the Web site. Nearly 86 percent (85.7) of technicians reported that they have written content for a Web site. But only 42.9 percent said their organizations have an on-line newsletter for employees. Yet 57.1 percent indicated that their organization have an Intranet site.

Nearly 61 percent (60.7) of technicians believe their organization would hire a public relations practitioner with technical skills over a practitioner who does not have these skills. And 57.1 percent of technicians said a practitioner with technical skills is likely to make more money than a practitioner who does not have technical skills.

TABLE 6
Focusing on the Supervisor:
Organization and Public Relations Practitioner Involvement
in Internet-Related Activities

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Yes* (%)</i>	<i>No* (%)</i>	<i>Not Applicable* (%)</i>
Using the Internet	10 (90.9)	1 (9.09)	0 (0)
PR Dept. responsible for organization's Internet site	8 (72.7)	3 (27.3)	0 (0)
PR Dept. responsible for organization's Intranet site	3 (27.3)	5 (45.5)	3 (27.3)
PR Dept. responsible only for Web site content	2 (18.2)	9 (81.8)	0 (0)
PR Dept. responsible for answering Web site inquiries	9 (81.8)	2 (18.2)	0 (0)
Practitioner written Web site content	10 (90.9)	1 (9.09)	0 (0)
Organization has on-line newsletter	5 (45.5)	6 (54.5)	0 (0)
Organization has Intranet site	4 (36.4)	7 (63.6)	0 (0)
Organization looks to hire practitioners with Internet skills	5 (45.5)	6 (54.5)	0 (0)
Practitioners with Internet skills make more money than those who don't	5 (45.5)	6 (54.5)	0 (0)

**frequency of answer. N = 11*

Table 6 shows how public relations supervisors are involved in Internet-related activities. It also shows the extent to which the supervisors' organizations are using the Internet as a public relations tool.

Nearly 91 percent (90.9) of supervisors indicated that they use the Internet everyday in their current jobs. Seventy-two percent said their organization's public relations department is responsible for building and updating the organization's Internet site. Yet, only 27.3 percent of supervisors said their organization's public relations department is responsible for building and updating the organization's Intranet site. Only 18.2 percent said their organization's public relations department is responsible only for writing Web site content. Eighty-one percent of supervisors also reported that their organization's public relations department answers inquiries received through the Web site. Nearly 91 percent (90.9) of supervisors reported that they have written content for a Web site. But only 45.5 percent said their organizations have an on-line newsletter for employees. And only 36.5 percent indicated that their organization have an Intranet site.

Forty-five percent of supervisors believe their organization would hire a public relations practitioner with technical skills over a practitioner who does not have these skills. And 45 percent of supervisors also said a practitioner with technical skills is likely to make more money than a practitioner who does not have technical skills.

TABLE 7
Focusing on the Manager:
Organization and Public Relations Practitioner Involvement
in Internet-Related Activities

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Yes* (%)</i>	<i>No* (%)</i>	<i>Not Applicable* (%)</i>
Using the Internet	18 (85.7)	3 (14.3)	0 (0)
PR Dept. responsible for organization's Internet site	14 (66.7)	6 (28.6)	1 (4.70)
PR Dept. responsible for organization's Intranet site	8 (38.1)	11 (52.4)	2 (9.50)
PR Dept. responsible only for Web site content	9 (42.9)	11 (52.4)	1 (4.70)
PR Dept. responsible for answering Web site inquiries	12 (57.2)	8 (38.1)	1 (4.70)
Practitioner written Web site content	18 (85.7)	3 (14.3)	0 (0)
Organization has on-line newsletter	8 (38.1)	12 (57.2)	1 (4.70)
Organization has Intranet site	12 (57.2)	8 (38.1)	1 (4.70)
Organization looks to hire practitioners with Internet skills	11 (52.4)	10 (47.6)	0 (0)
Practitioners with Internet skills make more money than those who don't	10 (47.6)	11 (52.4)	0 (0)

**frequency of answer N = 21*

Table 7 shows how public relations managers are involved in Internet-related activities. It also shows the extent to which the managers' organizations are using the Internet as a public relations tool.

Eighty-five percent of managers indicated that they use the Internet everyday in their current jobs. Nearly 67 percent (66.7) said their organization's public relations department is responsible for building and updating the organization's Internet site. Yet, only 38.1 percent of managers said their organization's public relations department is responsible for building and updating the organization's Intranet site. Forty-two percent said their organization's public relations department is responsible only for writing Web site content. Fifty-seven percent of managers reported that their organization's public relations department answers inquiries received through the Web site. Nearly 86 percent (85.7) of managers reported that they have written content for a Web site. But only 38.1 percent said their organizations have an on-line newsletter for employees. And 57.2 percent indicated that their organizations have an Intranet site.

Fifty-two percent of managers believe their organization would hire a public relations practitioner with technical skills over a practitioner who does not have these skills. Nearly 48 (47.6) percent of managers also said a practitioner with technical skills is likely to make more money than a practitioner who does not have technical skills.

TABLE 8

Focusing on the Director:
 Organization and Public Relations Practitioner Involvement
 in Internet-Related Activities

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Yes* (%)</i>	<i>No* (%)</i>	<i>Not Applicable* (%)</i>
Using the Internet	12 (80.0)	3 (20.0)	0 (0)
PR Dept. responsible for organization's Internet site	10 (66.7)	5 (33.3)	0 (0)
PR Dept. responsible for organization's Intranet site	9 (60.0)	5 (33.3)	1 (6.67)
PR Dept. responsible only for Web site content	7 (46.7)	8 (53.3)	0 (0)
PR Dept. responsible for answering Web site inquiries	8 (53.3)	7 (46.7)	0 (0)
Practitioner written Web site content	13 (86.7)	2 (13.3)	0 (0)
Organization has on-line newsletter	9 (60.0)	6 (40.0)	0 (0)
Organization has Intranet site	10 (66.7)	5 (33.3)	0 (0)
Organization looks to hire practitioners with Internet skills	12 (80.0)	3 (20.0)	0 (0)
Practitioners with Internet skills make more money than those who don't	7 (46.7)	8 (53.3)	0 (0)

**frequency of answer. N = 15*

Table 8 shows how public relations directors are involved in Internet-related activities. It also shows the extent to which the directors' organizations are using the Internet as a public relations tool.

Eighty percent of directors reported that they use the Internet everyday in their current jobs. Nearly 67 percent (66.7) said their organization's public relations department is responsible for building and updating the organization's Internet site. Sixty percent of directors said their organization's public relations department is responsible for building and updating the organization's Intranet site. Nearly 47 percent (46.7) said their organization's public relations department is responsible only for writing Web site content. Fifty-three percent of directors reported that their organization's public relations department answers inquiries received through the Web site. Nearly 87 percent (86.7) of directors reported that they have written content for a Web site. But only 60 percent said their organizations have an on-line newsletter for employees. Sixty-six percent indicated that their organizations have an Intranet site.

Eighty percent of directors believe their organization would hire a public relations practitioner with technical skills over a practitioner who does not have these skills. Nearly 47 percent (46.7) of directors also said a practitioner with technical skills is likely to make more money than a practitioner who does not have technical skills.

TABLE 9

Focusing on the Executive:
Organization and Public Relations Practitioner Involvement
in Internet-Related Activities

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Yes* (%)</i>	<i>No* (%)</i>	<i>Not Applicable* (%)</i>
Using the Internet	13 (81.3)	3 (18.7)	0 (0)
PR Dept. responsible for organization's Internet site	8 (5.00)	5 (31.3)	3 (18.7)
PR Dept. responsible for organization's Intranet site	4 (25.0)	7 (43.7)	5 (31.3)
PR Dept. responsible only for Web site content	5 (31.3)	8 (5.00)	3 (18.7)
PR Dept. responsible for answering Web site inquiries	5 (31.3)	6 (37.4)	5 (31.3)
Practitioner written Web site content	13 (81.3)	3 (18.7)	0 (0)
Organization has on-line newsletter	4 (25.0)	9 (56.3)	3 (18.7)
Organization has Intranet site	5 (31.3)	8 (5.00)	3 (18.7)
Organization looks to hire practitioners with Internet skills	10 (47.6)	6 (37.4)	0 (0)
Practitioners with Internet skills make more money than those who don't	7 (43.7)	9 (56.3)	0 (0)

**frequency of answer. N = 16*

Table 9 shows how public relations executives are involved in Internet-related activities. It also shows the extent to which the executives' organizations are using the Internet as a public relations tool.

Eighty-one percent of executives reported that they use the Internet everyday in their current jobs. Only five percent said their organization's public relations department is responsible for building and updating the organization's Internet site. Twenty-five percent of executives said their organization's public relations department is responsible for building and updating the organization's Intranet site. Thirty-one percent said their organization's public relations department is responsible only for writing Web site content. Thirty-one percent of executives also reported that their organization's public relations department answers inquiries received through the Web site. Eighty-one percent of executives reported that they have written content for a Web site. But only 25 percent said their organizations have an on-line newsletter for employees. Thirty-one percent indicated that their organizations have an Intranet site.

Nearly 48 percent (47.6) of executives believe their organization would hire a public relations practitioner with technical skills over a practitioner who does not have these skills. Nearly 44 percent (43.7) of executives also said a practitioner with technical skills is likely to make more money than a practitioner who does not have technical skills.

TABLE 10

A Summary:
Comparing “Yes” Responses Based on Practitioner Roles

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Technician</i>	<i>Supervisor</i>	<i>Manager</i>	<i>Director</i>	<i>Executive</i>
Using the Internet	27 (96.4)	10 (90.9)	18 (85.7)	12 (80.0)	13(81.3)
PR Dept. responsible for organization’s Internet site	16 (57.1)	8 (72.7)	14 (66.7)	10 (66.7)	8 (50.0)
PR Dept. responsible for organization’s Intranet site	10 (35.7)	3 (27.3)	8 (38.1)	9 (60.0)	4 (25.0)
PR Dept. responsible only for Web site content	13 (46.4)	2 (18.2)	9 (42.9)	7 (46.7)	5 (31.3)
PR Dept. responsible for answering Web site inquiries	13 (46.4)	9 (81.8)	12 (57.2)	8 (53.3)	5 (31.3)
Practitioner written Web site content	24 (85.7)	10 (90.9)	18 (85.7)	13 (86.7)	13(81.3)
Organization has on-line newsletter	12 (42.9)	5 (45.5)	8 (38.1)	9 (60.0)	4 (25.0)
Organization has Intranet site	16 (57.1)	4 (36.4)	12 (57.2)	10 (66.7)	5 (31.3)
Organization looks to hire practitioners with Internet skills	17 (60.7)	5 (45.5)	11 (52.4)	12 (80.0)	10(47.6)
Practitioners with Internet skills make more money than those who don’t	16 (57.1)	5 (45.5)	10 (47.6)	7 (46.7)	7 (43.7)

Table 10 displays a summary of responses given by practitioners in the five different roles in Tables 5-9. The table shows the percentage of “yes” answers given by technicians, supervisors, managers, directors and executives based on personal or organizational participation in various Internet-related activities.

TABLE 11

Demographics

<i>Demographic</i>	<i>Technician</i>	<i>Supervisor</i>	<i>Manager</i>	<i>Director</i>	<i>Executive</i>
Learned to use the Internet at:					
• Work	11 (39.3)	08 (72.7)	19 (90.4)	08 (72.7)	15 (100)
• College	16 (57.2)	03 (27.3)	01 (4.80)	03 (27.3)	00 (0.00)
• Other	01 (3.50)	00 (0.00)	01 (4.80)	00 (0.00)	00 (0.00)
Age:					
• 18-25	09 (3.22)	01 (9.10)	03 (14.3)	01 (9.10)	01 (6.70)
• 26-32	11 (39.3)	06 (54.5)	03 (14.3)	06 (54.5)	01 (6.70)
• 33-40	03 (10.7)	03 (27.3)	07 (33.3)	03 (27.3)	07 (46.7)
• 41-50	02 (7.14)	00 (0.00)	07 (33.3)	00 (0.00)	04 (26.7)
• 51-70	02 (7.14)	00 (0.00)	01 (4.80)	00 (0.00)	02 (13.3)
• N/A	01 (3.50)	01 (9.10)	00 (0.00)	01 (9.10)	00 (0.00)
Income per year (\$):					
• 21,000-40,000	18 (64.4)	05 (45.5)	05 (23.8)	05 (45.5)	02 (13.3)
• 41,000-50,000	04 (14.3)	03 (27.3)	04 (19.0)	03 (27.3)	04 (26.7)
• 51,000-70,000	01 (3.50)	01 (9.10)	07 (33.3)	01 (9.10)	05 (33.3)
• over 70,000	00 (0.00)	00 (0.00)	01 (4.80)	00 (0.00)	03 (20.0)
• N/A	05 (17.8)	02 (18.1)	04 (19.0)	02 (18.1)	01 (6.70)
Highest Level of Education Completed:					
• High School	03 (10.7)	00 (0.00)	00 (0.00)	00 (0.00)	01 (6.70)
• College	18 (64.4)	08 (72.8)	12 (57.1)	08 (72.8)	10 (66.6)
• Masters	06 (21.4)	02 (18.1)	07 (33.3)	02 (18.1)	04 (26.7)
• Doctorate	00 (0.00)	00 (0.00)	01 (4.80)	00 (0.00)	00 (0.00)
• N/A	01 (3.50)	01 (9.10)	01 (4.80)	01 (9.10)	00 (0.00)
<i>Technicians - N=28</i>					
<i>Supervisors - N=11</i>					
<i>Managers - N=21</i>					
<i>Directors - N=15</i>					
<i>Executives N=16</i>					

Data reveals that public relations technicians generally learned how to use the Internet in college (Table 11). Thirty-three percent of the surveyed technicians indicated that they learned to use the Internet at work, and only 3.5 percent said they became acquainted with the Web at some other place.

The surveyed technicians were generally younger. Thirty-nine percent responded that they were between the ages of 26-32. Three percent said they were between the ages of 18-25. The remaining 24.98 percent indicated that they were older than 33 years old. Again, 3.5 percent refrained from revealing their age.

According to the survey results, technicians are the lowest-paid of all public relations practitioners. Sixty-four percent of the surveyed technicians said they receive salaries between \$21,000-\$40,000 per year. Fourteen percent said they are paid between \$41,000-\$50,000 per year. Only 3.5 percent responded that they receive between \$51,000-\$70,000 per year. Nearly 18 percent (17.8) refrained from revealing their yearly salary.

Sixty-four percent of technicians have completed a four-year college degree. Twenty-one percent of the surveyed technicians said they have a master's degree. Only 10.7 percent said they are practicing public relations with only a high school degree. And 3.5 percent did not specify the highest level of education completed.

Unlike the technicians who responded that they learned to use the Internet in college, 72.7 percent of supervisors said they learned to use the Internet at work. Only 27.3 percent of the supervisors said they learned to use the Internet in college.

The survey results indicate that supervisors are typically under the age of 50. Fifty-four percent said they are between the ages of 26-32. Twenty-seven percent

responded that they are between the ages of 41-50. Only 9.10 percent said they are between the ages of 18-25. Nine percent chose not to reveal their age.

The survey results also reveal that 45.5 percent of public relations supervisors earn between \$21,000-\$40,000 per year. Twenty-seven percent make between \$41,000-\$50,000 annually. Only 9.10 percent said they make between \$51,000-\$70,000 per year. Eighteen percent chose not to reveal their annual salary.

Seventy-two percent of the surveyed public relations supervisors have four-year college degrees. Eighteen percent said they have a master's degree. Only 9.10 percent chose not to reveal their highest level of education completed.

Ninety percent of the public relations managers who completed the survey responded that they learned how to use the Internet at work (Table 11). Only 4.8 percent said they learned how to use the Internet while in college. Four percent chose not to respond to the question.

Sixty-six percent of the managers said they are between the ages of 33-50. Only 28.6 said they are between the ages of 18-32. Nearly 5 percent (4.8) chose not to reveal their age.

Thirty-three percent of the managers who responded to the survey said they make between \$51,000-\$70,000 per year. Twenty-three percent said they make between \$21,000-\$40,000 annually. Nineteen percent said they make between \$41,000-\$50,000 per year. Only 4.8 percent make over \$70,000 per year. Also, 4.8 percent of the surveyed managers chose not to reveal their annual income.

Fifty-seven percent of the surveyed managers have a four-year college degree. Thirty-three percent have a master's degree, while 4.8 percent have a doctorate degree.

Only 4.8 percent chose not to reveal their highest level of education completed. All of the public relations directors who responded to the survey revealed that they learned to use the Internet at work (Table 11).

Nearly 47 percent (46.7) of the directors who responded to the survey said they are between the ages of 33-40. Almost 27 percent (26.7) said they are between the ages of 51-70. Only 13.4 percent of the directors are under the age of 32. Thirteen percent chose not to reveal their age.

Thirty-three percent of the surveyed directors earn between \$51,000-\$71,000 per year. Nearly 27 percent (26.7) make between \$41,000-\$50,000 annually. Twenty percent are paid over \$70,000 per year, and only 13.3 percent make between \$21,000-\$40,000 per year. Almost 7 percent (6.7) of the directors chose not to reveal their annual salary.

Sixty-six percent of the surveyed directors indicated that they have a four-year college degree. Nearly 27 percent (26.7) said they have a master's degree. Almost 7 percent (6.7) said they are practicing public relations with only a high school diploma.

All of the public relations executives who responded to the survey indicated that they learned to use the Internet at work (Table 11). The results of the survey indicated public relations executives are generally older. Thirty-one percent of the surveyed executives said they are between 51-70 years of age. Twenty-five percent said they are between the ages of 41-50. Nearly 44 percent (43.7) did not reveal their age.

Almost 44 percent (43.7) of the surveyed executives said they are paid between \$51,000-\$70,000 per year. Thirty-one percent said they make more than \$70,000

annually. Only 6.3 percent said they are paid less than \$51,000 per year. Nearly 19 percent (18.7) did not reveal their annual salaries.

Eighty-seven percent of the surveyed executives said they have four-year college degrees. Only 6.30 percent, however, said they have master's degrees. Another 6.30 percent said they have received doctorate degrees.

In-Depth Interview Findings

For purposes of this exploratory study, eight open-ended questions were asked during each in-depth interview. These questions provided the following results:

1. What do you do on a daily basis?

Respondents who participated in the in-depth interviews provided a variety of answers to this question. The reason for asking this question was to see if the job descriptions provided by PRSA's Professional Career Guide (1993) for each practitioner role are actually routine in the public relations profession. Two technicians, one supervisor, one manager, one director and two executives participated in the interviews. These respondents work in various facets of public relations, including sports, corporate, agency, non-profit and government and public affairs, respectively.

For the most part, all of the respondents' daily job responsibilities were correctly defined by PRSA, excluding any Web-related activities, however. There were differences in the responsibilities reported by the one director who was interviewed and the definition of a director's job by PRSA.

2. How does the Web affect your daily job?

The majority of the participants said they use the Web to stay up-to-date on the news that is important to their industry sector. Three of the seven respondents said they use the Internet to look for news about their potential or current clients. One respondent said, "I am constantly getting clips from the Dow Jones Interactive site. These clips cover news about my clients." Three of the people interviewed said they use the Internet to look for news specifically written about their companies or just about their specific industry sectors. For instance, one respondent reported, "I use the Internet a lot, mostly to scour

the news outlets for articles about our company. Every morning, I prepare a report for hundreds of executives across the company and across the world that highlights the days events about this company.” Two of the respondents said they read news that does not pertain to their clients on-line as well.

The public relations practitioners I spoke to also use the Internet to conduct research. One interview respondent said he uses the Internet to conduct research on a client before meeting with that client face-to-face. Another respondent said she writes a lot of articles for her company’s Web sites and newsletters and that she uses the Internet to conduct research on the topics about which she is writing.

3. How do you use e-mail as a communications tool?

The majority of the respondents said they frequently use e-mail to communicate with clients, co-workers and the media. Several said their companies use e-mail to send organizational announcements to employees. Only one respondent said he preferred to communicate using the telephone rather than using e-mail. He said, “I think the personal contact is more important than electronic contact.”

Four of the seven people who were interviewed said they use e-mail to communicate with an internal audience. Several said they used e-mail to communicate with their co-workers. Two of the respondents who said they do not use e-mail to communicate internally work in offices with fewer than eleven employees. One said he preferred to use e-mail to communicate internally rather than externally.

Four of the seven respondents said they use e-mail to communicate with an external audience. Two mentioned that they spent a lot of time faxing clients and talking on the phone with clients until they began using e-mail. Two different respondents also

mentioned that they use e-mail to contact the media or to provide media members with needed information. One said he e-mails a weekly news release to his external publics, such as the members of the media, as well as to internal publics, which includes his clients.

Two of the respondents mentioned that using e-mail can be advantageous because it allows both parties to have something in writing to keep on file. One practitioner, in particular, mentioned that this is a good way for public relations practitioners to document every conversation, internally or externally.

4. Does your organization have an Internet site? If so, what responsibilities do you have regarding this site?

All seven of the practitioners who participated in the in-depth interviews said their organizations do have Internet sites. Five of the seven respondents said their Internet sites are designed and maintained by a Webmaster who works outside of the organization. One respondent said her organization's Internet site is maintained by the company's information and technology department. Another respondent said "We have a Webmaster who posts for us. This person is in the marketing department."

Only three of the respondents said they actually are responsible for writing content for the Web site. One practitioner noted that she does not write for the Internet site because she is on an internal communications team and the Internet site is aimed at external publics.

Both of the technicians who participated in the interviews said they do not usually write Web content. The supervisor who was interviewed pointed out that she sometimes has her news releases posted on the Internet site, but not usually. The manager noted that

he is responsible for writing Web content for the Internet site, while the director said he writes some content for his organization's Internet site. Of the two executives who were interviewed, only one said he writes Web content. Both, however, confessed that they are responsible for controlling all non-technical aspects of their organization's Internet sites. The manager, who works in sports public relations, indicated he is responsible for controlling all of the content that is posted on his organization's Internet site with reference to his particular sport of men's basketball. Two of the interview participants mentioned that they, or someone in their public relations department, sometimes acted as "on-line editors."

5. Does your organization have an Intranet site? If so, what responsibilities do you have regarding this site?

In contrast to responses regarding the Internet site, only four of the seven respondents said their organizations have an Intranet site. Two of the three respondents who said their organizations do not have an Intranet site said the reason they do not is because the organization is too small to support such a site.

Two of the respondents who said their organizations do have an Intranet site said the site is designed and maintained by an external Webmaster who does not work in the PR department. Only one respondent reported that her organization's Intranet site is actually maintained by the public relations department. She said, "we do have an Intranet site and the public relations department is totally responsible for all aspects of that site." Another said the company has a Webmaster who is responsible for posting content on the Intranet site. He said, "This person is in the marketing department."

The respondents who said their organizations have Intranet sites said that the information on these sites is aimed at employees. Some mentioned that their organizations post general news, information on training and information on benefits on the Intranet site.

6. Since you have worked in public relations, how have you seen the Internet affect the profession?

The practitioners who participated in the interviews acknowledged several effects that the Internet has had on the public relations profession. For example, four of the seven respondents mentioned that the Internet has allowed public relations practitioners to send and receive information instantly. One respondent said this change was especially advantageous when dealing with the media because it permits a practitioner to meet the demands of the media immediately. He noted, "It has also been a great tool for reporters who need instant information at their fingertips 24 hours a day. We're trying to meet reporters halfway by making sure that we have the information that they need on our site."

One practitioner said that the Internet has changed the way that public relations professionals communicate both internally and externally. She acknowledged that the Internet has become "the primary way that an organization communicates internally and externally." Another said the use of the Internet to communicate makes the whole process of communication easier. Before the Internet, he said, public relations practitioners spent "a lot of time on the phone or faxing." One respondent said the use of the Internet cuts down on the amount of paperwork within an organization.

Two of the respondents interviewed noted that the Internet has also had a negative effect on the public relations profession. One said that public relations professionals have become “lazy” since the adoption of the Internet as an acceptable communications tool. He said that practitioners will use the Internet to conduct research instead of actually going out and talking to people. Another respondent agreed and also said that public relations professionals need to continue to maintain personal contact with their clients, despite the convenience of the Internet.

7. How do you think the Internet will affect future public relations professionals?

All seven of the practitioners who participated in the interviews mentioned that it is beneficial for future public relations practitioners to have basic Internet skills. It was mentioned that it is expected for practitioners to know how to turn on a computer and access e-mail. One respondent said, “practitioners should know how to write Web content, to outline what is needed for a Web site, and to post a story on-line.” Another respondent added that practitioners should be able to conduct basic searches in Web sites, and that they should know how to update a Web site. Some of the participants mentioned that the Internet is “just a tool” for practitioners.

Two respondents said that it is not necessary for future practitioners to know how to design and maintain a Web site. However, two different respondents said that, although it is not currently necessary, it may become more important in the future. Two respondents said practitioners who know how to design and maintain a Web site are going to have an advantage when it comes to getting a job.

Four of the seven respondents said that writing skills are the most important skill for future public relations practitioners. Two of these respondents were the executives who participated in the interviews.

8. Should practitioners with these technological skills make more money?

The majority of the interview participants said they do not think practitioners with Internet-based technological skills should make more money than practitioners who do not have these skills. Only two respondents said they think these practitioners should make more money.

Four of the participants, however, said they think practitioners with these skills should have an advantage when interviewing for a job because these skills make them more marketable. One practitioner said, "I definitely think someone with these skills will get the job over anybody else." Another practitioner said he believes that all public relations professionals will have advanced technological skills in five years, and, therefore, no one will be paid more for having these skills. It will just be expected that all practitioners will have them.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The Five Practitioner Roles Conclusions

Overview

Findings from the descriptive survey data and the in-depth interviews reveal that the Internet is a tool used by public relations practitioners at every level within the hierarchy of their roles, which were elaborated in Chapter one. The purpose of this current study was to examine the significance of the Internet to the public relations profession. It was discovered that the Internet has an arguably profound effect on the public relations field.

Public relations practitioners use the Internet to communicate with their clients and with their co-workers. They also use the Internet to conduct research and to stay on top of daily news. Some public relations practitioners' organizations have Intranet sites that simply communicate news to the organizations' internal publics; they also have Internet sites to convey organizations' external image. Many public relations practitioners are involved in different aspects of building and maintaining these Web sites, although many sites are constructed and kept up only by external Webmasters.

Most public relations practitioners learned to use the Internet at work or while in college. The majority of public relations practitioners seem to feel that it is important for public relations professionals to know how to use the Internet as well as to have various computer-related skills. However, there is a disagreement about whether or not practitioners with Internet skills should be paid more money than practitioners who do not have these skills.

At all levels within the PRSA (1993) hierarchy of roles, public relations practitioners are involved in some aspect of Internet activities. This study sought to determine, however, the effects of the Internet on the various specific public relations roles of technician, supervisor, manager, director and executive, respectively.

Technicians

Results from the descriptive survey suggest that public relations technicians have worked in the profession for an average of six years. However, both technicians who participated in the in-depth interviews voiced that they had only been working in public relations for less than four years. The survey results also reported that technicians are relatively young, most falling between the ages of 18-32. PRSA (1993) does not suggest a time frame in which public relations practitioners would move from level to level within the hierarchy of roles. It is simply stated that a practitioner will start at the technician level and then move up the hierarchy by working as a supervisor, manager, director, and, possibly, an executive. This suggests that a practitioner working as a technician will have the least amount of years in the profession, while an executive will have the most. Therefore, it is not surprising that my research revealed that technicians had only been in the field for an average of six years or less.

In less than four years, though, the technicians who participated in the interviews remarked that they have seen some of the effects of the Internet on the public relations profession. The results of the survey also revealed that the majority of technicians learned how to use the Internet in college. This seems reasonably logical because it has only been within the past decade or so when the Internet has become prevalent in a college environment. Therefore, it can be understood that technicians who have worked

in public relations for six years or less entered the public relations field expecting the Internet to be a part of this profession because they were taught this in college. Still, technicians seem to realize that the Internet has changed the public relations profession, even though it has always been a part of their public relations jobs. One technician even remarked to me, “I think [the Internet] is the single most important invention of the decade. I think it provides a tremendous advantage because it allows you to communicate instantly with anyone.”

Since public relations practitioners who are just entering the profession start at the technician level (PRSA, 1993), it is not surprising that survey data revealed that the majority of technicians earn an annual salary of between \$21,000-\$40,000. This was the lowest salary range that was provided as a choice on the survey (Appendix A). It is logical, then that technicians would make less money than a practitioner who has been in the profession longer and has moved up the hierarchy of roles.

The findings of both the descriptive survey and the in-depth interviews revealed that technicians are using a computer every day for work-related activities. The technicians who participated in the interviews said they use a computer to write stories and to give presentations. PRSA’s Professional Career Guide (1993) implies that most of the activities performed on a daily basis by technicians - writing, data-gathering, desktop publishing, design and layout – require the use of a computer. This could explain why survey data reported that technicians believe it is very important for practitioners to know how to use word processing software and desktop publishing software, and that they should know how to conduct on-line information searches. These computer tools are used every day by technicians to perform their jobs.

Technicians also suggest that it is very important for practitioners to know how to use e-mail. One of the technicians who participated in the interviews said she uses e-mail to communicate with people she works with as well as with external clients. She indicates that using e-mail to communicate is beneficial because it is a way to provide documentation of conversations between practitioners and clients. This could be beneficial if higher management ever required documentation of conversations between a client and a practitioner, especially if there was a disagreement between the two.

The other technician who was interviewed voiced that she did not like using e-mail to communicate with external clients as much as she did to communicate with co-workers. She sees it as more important for public relations practitioners to maintain personal face-to-face or telephone contact with external clients. She could base this opinion on the belief that public relations is about building relationships with people. This practitioner suggests that it would be more difficult to build a relationship electronically than it would be to build one face-to-face. Jarivs (2000) also said that practitioners should not let their relationships with clients occur strictly by e-mail. However, considering that technicians are the youngest group of practitioners who, for the most part, learned about e-mail and the Internet in college, it was expected that they would consider communicating by e-mail a form of personal contact. However, this obviously is not the case with all technicians. It could be that most public relations practitioners advocate using e-mail to communicate, but have not lost touch with the fact that the foundation public relations is built on maintaining relationships (i.e., in-person contact) with various publics. It would be interesting to research further if technicians think practitioners should use a combination of communications tools with clients, such

as telephone, face-to-face and e-mail conversations. Despite all of this, though, e-mail is still obviously very important to technicians, so much so that one interview respondent said she receives more than 100 e-mails a day, from both internal and external sources.

Data from the descriptive survey show that technicians seem to believe that an organization must have an Internet site to convey its image to its external publics. The majority of the technicians responding to the survey said that their organizations' public relations departments are responsible for designing and maintaining the organizational Internet site. The two technicians who participated in the interviews, however, said their organizations hire external Webmasters to handle all technical aspects of their organizations' Internet sites. Both did say, though, that the public relations department is responsible for dictating what goes on both of those sites. Therefore, there are good indications that even if the site is not built and maintained in the public relations department, the public relations departments within organizations are usually responsible for the content of those Internet sites.

In light of this finding about PR's responsibility for Internet site content, it is somewhat strange that the survey data revealed that technicians are unsure as to whether or not public relations practitioners should know how to design and maintain a Web site; this contradiction is further confused by the fifty-seven percent of technicians whose survey results reported that their organizations' public relations departments are responsible for building and maintaining the organizational Internet site. If the public relations department is responsible for building and maintaining these sites, but it is not important for practitioners to know how to perform these tasks, then who will do it? Further research could help explain this.

Technicians responding to the survey said they are responsible for writing Web site content for these sites. Ryan's (1999) research stated that practitioners are usually involved in their organizations' Internet sites. However, the technicians participating in the interviews said they have little to do with the organizations' Internet sites. Yet, when Ryan published his article, he did not elaborate if writing Web content meant that practitioners were involved in a Web site. If involvement consists of simply writing Web content, then perhaps the technicians would believe that they are more involved in their organizations' Internet sites.

Data from the descriptive surveys also reported that technicians believe it is important for an organization to have an Intranet site. The majority of the technicians responding to the survey said their organizations have an Intranet site, but only thirty-five percent said the Intranet site is controlled by the public relations department. Only one of the technicians participating in the interviews said her company has an Intranet site; however she does not have any responsibilities regarding that site. The other technician who was interviewed said her agency does not have an Intranet site because it has few employees, and thus, the need is not really present for an Intranet site. Therefore, the size of a company seems to influence whether or not an Intranet site is present. And, even though most companies' public relations departments have some responsibility for their Internet sites, as well as their external images, they do not expect the public relations department to convey the internal image to employees. If the public relations department is not handling the internal relationship-building and communications management of the company, then who is? This question is disturbing for the public relations profession

because public relations practitioners are trained to handle this task, but are obviously not allowed to do what they are trained to do.

Technicians appear to believe that Internet skills are very important skills for public relations practitioners and future public relations practitioners to acquire. One of the technicians who participated in the interviews said practitioners should know “how to use e-mail, how to look for Web sites and how to do basic searches in Web sites.” She also stated that practitioners who know how to build and maintain a Web site are going to have a competitive advantage when it comes to getting a job. The other technician who was interviewed agreed that Internet skills are an important tool for public relations practitioners. The technicians who participated in the survey seemed as concerned about practitioners having Internet skills as they were about practitioners being able to write and research. Obviously, then, many technicians view the Internet as a large part of the public relations profession, so much so, in fact, that they think practitioners with Internet skills should make more money than those who do not have these skills. One technician who was interviewed said, “The more skills that you have in general, the more you can bring into a company and the more you are going to be worth.” It is possible that technicians believe practitioners should be paid more for having Internet skills because most of them learned about the Internet in college and, therefore, have always expected the Internet to be an integral part of public relations practice.

Supervisors

Findings from the descriptive surveys reveal that public relations supervisors have worked in the profession for an average of nine years, only three years more than the technicians’ average of six years. The majority of supervisors are between the ages of

26-32. Therefore, many technicians and supervisors are actually the same age. The supervisors are just one level higher than technicians in the hierarchy of public relations roles (PRSA, 1993).

It seems, however, that those three years between the technician and supervisor levels can make a significant difference. While the majority of supervisors said that they learned how to use the Internet while they were in college, twenty-seven percent said they learned to use the Internet while at work. This is important to note because supervisors are not entry-level practitioners, whereas technicians are entry-level and at the first stage in the hierarchy. As practitioners move up the hierarchy, they tend to be older and have spent more time in the profession, and therefore, have been out of college longer. Computer and Internet use really only has become prevalent on college campuses within the last decade or so. In the remaining three levels of the hierarchy, it was expected that practitioners will not have learned about the Internet while in college and this expectation proved to be accurate.

Supervisors, considering that they have been in the field longer than technicians, have had the chance to see the Internet have more of an effect on the public relations profession than technicians have. The supervisor I interviewed said that when she entered the public relations field, no one was even talking about the Internet. She watched as her company began to use "cc" mail, which is e-mail that can only be sent and received internally. Then, she finally witnessed her company get an Internet and an Intranet site. Technicians, most of whom learned how to use the Internet while in college, entered the public relations profession after practitioners and companies were already incorporating the Web into their jobs.

PRSA (1993) defines the activities of a supervisor significantly differently from those of a technician. According to PRSA, supervisors are responsible for preparing budgets, writing action plans, working with the media, reporting business results and sometimes even interacting with higher management. The results of my in-depth interviews challenge PRSA's definition of activities for a supervisor. The supervisor who was interviewed said her job requires her to write articles for newsletters and the various organizational Web sites, to write content for brochures and posters, to plan special events and to provide communications counseling to employees. These responsibilities are not much different than the responsibilities of a technician. This could explain why the survey results reported that the majority of supervisors earn the same annual salary of between \$21,000-\$40,000 as the technicians. It also indicates that the 1993 PRSA information needs to be updated to be more in touch with the actual current practice of public relations.

The one job responsibility that seems to be given to supervisors but not to technicians is employee communications counseling. Supervisors reported that they are often responsible for working with internal clients to solve their communications problems. This was one of the first public relations roles defined by Broom and Smith (1979). Their "expert prescriber" practitioner was responsible for "researching a problem and then diagnosing a solution for a client" (Broom and Smith, 1979, p.48). Twenty-two years later, this original role is now a job responsibility for practitioners working in the supervisor role, the second level in the hierarchy of roles (PRSA, 1993). Of course, PRSA did not include this responsibility as a job performed by supervisors. Perhaps this

was eliminated from PRSA's definition because it was Broom and Dozier's 1986 roles that were adopted by PRSA, not Broom and Smith's 1979 roles.

Since supervisors are performing many of the same tasks as technicians, it is not surprising that survey results revealed that they do use a computer every day.

Supervisors also indicated they think it is important for practitioners to know how to use word processing software and desktop publishing software and to be able to conduct on-line information searches. Again, these are computer skills that would help both technicians and supervisors perform their job duties.

Survey data revealed that supervisors, like technicians, think it is important for a practitioner to know how to use e-mail. The supervisor I interviewed said she uses e-mail every day to communicate with co-workers and with other people within the company. She also said her company often sends internal announcements by e-mail. She did not comment as to whether or not she thought practitioners should use e-mail to communicate with external clients. It is possible that this idea of external communication is not relevant to her job because she is responsible only for internal public relations for a large company.

Apparently, supervisors also think it is important for an organization to use an Internet site to convey its external image to its external publics. Seventy-three percent of the supervisors responding to the survey said their organizations' public relations departments are responsible for maintaining the organizational Internet site. However, supervisors agreed with technicians, reporting that they do not know if practitioners should know how to design and maintain a Web site. Again, if public relations departments are responsible for building and maintaining these sites, but practitioners do

not know how to perform these tasks, then who will be responsible for these duties? Is it possible that the youthfulness and inexperience of many technicians and supervisors prevent them from seeing this discrepancy? To prevent this discrepancy from continuing to future generations, I suggest that public relations education include classes that would teach future practitioners the skills needed to build a Web site. Also, accreditation programs could require that practitioners have these skills.

Supervisors tend to agree that it is important for an organization to have an Intranet site, but sixty-four percent of the supervisors who responded to my survey said their organization does not have one. The supervisor who was interviewed, however, said her company does have an Intranet site and that her internal public relations team is completely responsible for that Intranet site. She said she often writes content for this site. This is opposite from the information that was reported by the technicians. The technicians who said their companies have Intranet sites said they are maintained outside of the public relations department, while their Internet sites were the responsibility of the public relations department. However, data from the supervisors show that public relations departments are often responsible for both Internet and Intranet sites. PR responsibility for Internet and Intranet sites may just depend on each individual organization and the capabilities of its public relations practitioners. Since ninety percent of supervisors said they have written content for a Web site, we know that supervisors do have some Web-related skills and that these skills affect supervisors' jobs to some degree.

The supervisor interviewed said it is vital for practitioners to have some Internet skills. She believes that it will eventually be hard for a practitioner to get a public

relations job if he or she does not know how to build and maintain a Web site. However, unlike the technicians, supervisors reported in the survey data that they do not believe public relations practitioners with Internet skills should make more money than practitioners who do not have these skills. The interviewed supervisor said that Internet skills were just a tool but that writing is still the foundation of the public relations profession. It seems rational that supervisors would expect practitioners to have some knowledge of the Internet, even if they are not experts on the subject. Supervisors seem to know a lot about the Internet and, since a lot of supervisors learned about the Internet in college, they expect younger practitioners to know something about it as well.

Managers

The public relations managers who participated in this current research study reported that they are older than the technicians and supervisors. Results from the descriptive survey reveal that managers are between the ages of 33-50 and that they have been in the public relations profession for an average of eleven years. Ninety percent of the managers said they learned to use the Internet while at work, not in college. This is different from the technicians, who learned to use the Internet in college, and the supervisors, who had seventy-four percent report that they learned the about Internet at work. Of course, these results might have been expected since managers are older and were likely already in the profession, not in college, when Internet usage began to grow. Managers also reported in the surveys that they make more money than technicians or supervisors. An average annual salary for a public relations manager is between \$51,000-\$70,000.

Managers have seen the Internet change the public relations profession.

Technicians, for the most part, said they entered the profession after the Internet was already established as a public relations tool. Supervisors saw the Internet make some changes to the practice of public relations, but many supervisors also entered the profession with the same knowledge of the Internet as technicians. Managers, however, have been around longer to witness the profession embrace the new medium. In the in-depth interviews, one manager said that he spent a lot of time faxing and on the phone before the Internet. He said that the Internet has made it easier to communicate with both internal and external clients. However, like one of the technicians pointed out, he said the acceptance of the Internet has decreased the amount of in-person contact between public relations practitioners and their clients. For me, this observation seems easier to understand from a manager who has been in public relations for eleven years than from a technician who is relatively new to the profession. I expected that managers would have more of an appreciation for traditional public relations activities, such as building and maintaining in-person relationships, because they were in the profession before the growth of technology became a prevalent issue.

Managers also report that they use computers every day for job-related activities. They also said that they are involved in many of the same tasks as technicians and supervisors, such as writing and research. This varies from Leichty and Springston's (1996) definition of manager activities, which were summed up to be "everything other than technical activities" (p. 468). The manager interviewed reported that he is involved in media relations for men's basketball in the Big 12 Conference. Most of his job revolves around the publicizing this sport. However, he is also responsible for directing

and influencing the sports information directors in charge of men's basketball for the Conference's twelve schools. Considering this aspect, his job does resemble PRSA's (1993) definition that says managers are responsible for organizing, directing and motivating staff. It is possible that whether or not PRSA's definitions of roles will fit practitioners' actual jobs may have something to do with the facet of public relations in which they work (e.g., sports public relations versus corporate public relations).

The managers who responded to the survey indicated they believe that it is important for practitioners to know how to use e-mail. They also reported that it is very important for a practitioner to know how to use the Internet to conduct on-line information searches and to know how to write content for a Web site. The manager I interviewed said that eighty percent of his job revolves around e-mail and the Internet. He uses e-mail to communicate with the media and with sports information directors at the Conference's twelve schools. He uses the Internet to find stories that have been written about the Conference and to research men's basketball statistics. Jarvis (2000) said the Internet would change public relations practitioners' daily jobs. The manager interviewed confirmed that the Internet has had a profound effect on his daily work routine. Before the Internet, he said he used a fax machine, regular mail and the telephone to complete his job responsibilities. He said the Internet has made his job much easier.

Findings from the surveys reported that managers believe organizations should have an Internet site. Sixty-six percent of the managers said their organizations' public relations departments are responsible for the organizational Internet site. However, the manager interviewed said his company has a Webmaster and this person is not in the

organization. This Webmaster controls all technical aspects of the Internet site. Still, according to the manager, the public relations department controls the content of the Internet site. He also said that he is personally responsible for monitoring the site to make sure that all of the information on it is correct and up-to-date. Jarvis (2000) said practitioners may eventually become on-line editors, which may consume a large part of their days at work. This manager did indicate that he just considers monitoring the Web site to be another part of his job. Indeed, the results of my survey revealed that managers believe practitioners should know how to build and maintain a Web site. The interviewed manager agreed that future practitioners should have these skills and that he would like to take classes to learn how to perform these technical tasks. Managers seem to understand that practitioners will have to have these Internet skills if public relations departments are going to be responsible for maintaining Internet sites.

Also reported in the surveys was that managers think an organization should have an Intranet site. Fifty-seven percent of the managers said their organizations have an Intranet site. Survey results showed that managers also agree that organizations should have Intranet sites as well. The manager I interviewed said his organization did not have an Intranet site, but he did not feel that it was necessary because of the small number of employees working within the organization.

Apparently at least some managers think that it is important for future public relations practitioners to have Internet skills. The manager who was interviewed said that he believes that practitioners should learn how to design and maintain sites because, eventually, all Web sites will be the responsibility of the public relations department. Five years from now, he does not think companies will hire external Webmasters to

provide technical services for a Web site. However, according to my survey findings, the majority of managers do not think practitioners with Internet skills should make more money than practitioners who do not have these skills. The manager I interviewed said everyone is going to be expected to have Internet skills and should not get paid more for having them.

Directors

Findings from the descriptive survey reported that every public relations director who responded learned to use the Internet while at work, not in college. What is interesting about this is that public relations directors have only worked in the profession for an average of twelve years, which is only one year longer than the eleven years that managers have worked in the profession. The director level is the fourth level in the hierarchy of public relations roles (PRSA, 1993), even though there does not seem to be much difference between the manager and director activities, as I will discuss next.

Like managers, directors who participated in the survey reported an average annual salary between \$51,000-\$70,000. They also reported that most directors are between the ages of 33-50, which was the same age range reported by the managers.

Directors revealed in the survey that they think it is important for a public relations practitioner to know how to use a computer. Survey data also revealed that directors tend to believe practitioners should know how to use word processing and desktop publishing software and that they should be able to conduct on-line information searches. These responses reflect similar findings from technicians, supervisors and managers.

PRSA (1993) said that public relations directors sometimes hold positions as company officers. PRSA also defined directors' activities as developing research programs, strategic planning, governmental action, developing organizational policies and directing the efforts of a public relations department. However, data gathered from interviewing do not correspond with definitions. The director who was interviewed said he is responsible for media relations for his company. His whole job, he said, revolves around writing news releases, arranging news conferences, posting items of interest to the media on the Web site and media relations counseling for his company. All of these tasks are similar to those described by the interviewed manager, and more similar to the responsibilities of technicians and supervisors as defined by PRSA.

The director who was interviewed has worked in public relations for twenty years, much longer than the technicians, supervisors and managers who participated in this current research. Still, the changes the director has witnessed that the Internet has made in the public relations profession are similar to the effects witnessed by the manager. The director said he, too, depended on faxing and the telephone before the acceptance of the Internet. The director also observed that the Internet has improved the public relations profession because it has allowed practitioners to send and receive instant information to reporters and to clients.

Findings from the survey reveal that directors tend to believe that practitioners should know how to use e-mail. The interviewed director said he uses e-mail to communicate both internally and externally. He also mentioned that it is advantageous for practitioners to use e-mail to communicate because it allows the sender and the

receiver to document conversations. One of the technicians who was interviewed also made this point.

Directors also reported in the survey results that an organization should have an Internet site. Sixty-six percent said their organizations' public relations departments are responsible for designing and maintaining the organizational Internet site. However, directors were unsure as to whether or not a practitioner should know how to design and maintain a Web site. Directors, as well as technicians and supervisors, have presented the idea that it is not necessary for practitioners to have technological Internet skills, yet they all tend to report that public relations departments are responsible for building and maintaining Internet sites. Again, this raises the contradiction I have discussed previously: if practitioners do not have these technological skills, then who is going to be responsible for designing and maintaining the Internet sites that communicate to external publics? The director I spoke to said his company has a Webmaster in the marketing department who designed his organization's Internet site, but the public relations department is responsible for posting their own news releases on that site. The director that he writes content for the Web site and that he posts this content on the Internet site, but he does not necessarily work in conjunction with the marketing department.

Survey results also revealed that directors believe it is important for an organization to have an Intranet site. Sixty percent also said the public relations department is responsible for building and maintaining the organizational Intranet site. The director who was interviewed said his company does have an Intranet site that is managed by the marketing department. He said his company is so large that an Intranet site is beneficial because it provides employees with information regarding training and

benefits as well as other news that might be relevant to them. The director said he does not have any responsibilities regarding the Intranet site because his primary responsibilities are to the media, external to the organization. Again, it seems that the larger the company, the more there is the need for an Intranet site. Smaller companies do not seem to rely on an Intranet site to communicate to employees.

Directors convey that future practitioners should know as much as possible about the Internet, even though they think writing will continue to be the most important skill for a public relations practitioner. The director who was interviewed said he expects there to become a "special function in public relations that combines technology skills for Web communications with the other basic skills for public relations." Obviously, directors give high importance to Internet-related skills. However, many apparently do not think that practitioners should make more money for having Internet skills. The director who was interviewed did say, though, that he thinks a practitioner with Internet skills would probably be more marketable. The fact that directors do not think practitioners with Internet skills should make more money, while managers think they should, is the main difference between these two practitioner levels found in this current research. For the most part, though, directors' and managers' responsibilities are very similar.

Executives

Public relations practitioners who work as executives are at the top of the roles hierarchy (PRSA, 1993). Therefore, it is not surprising that survey results revealed that executives have worked in the public relations profession for an average of twenty-one years, longer than technicians, supervisors, managers and directors, and are between the

ages of 51-70, older than practitioners at the other levels. In theory, executives began their public relations careers as technicians and then moved up the ladder to be supervisors, then managers, then directors and, eventually, landed in the top spot as an executive. For this reason, it also makes sense that executives make more money than practitioners in the other four roles. Forty-three percent of executives said they make between \$51,000-\$70,000 a year. Thirty-one percent reported an annual salary of more than \$70,000.

Since they have been in the profession for more than two decades, it is not surprising that 100 percent of the executives who responded to the survey said they learned to use the Internet while at work. The Internet has only been an integral part of the public relations profession for about the past five years (Jarvis, 2000). However, this is not to say that executives do not have an understanding of the importance of the Internet to the public relations profession. One executive who participated in the in-depth interviews said the Internet “has changed the way that we work and the way that we need to think about our business.”

In 1993, PRSA published that public relations executives are more responsible for directing the performance of others than for accomplishing tasks themselves. Later research conducted by PRSA and IABC (2000) revealed that executives in the new century would be more involved in public relations activities, particularly those involving the Internet. The results of this current research support the results of that PRSA and IABC study.

According to my descriptive survey, executives use a computer every day. The executives who responded to the survey said they are responsible for some tasks that

would normally be considered tasks for a technician, but they are also responsible for running an entire public relations department or company. The survey revealed that executives believe it is important for practitioners to know how to use word processing and desktop publishing software and to be able to conduct on-line information searches. It should be considered that executives view these computer skills as important because they are sometimes necessary for public relations tasks to be accomplished. For instance, most practitioners would use word processing software to write an article or content for a Web site. Executives rely on the practitioners in their departments to have these skills so that all jobs are accomplished.

Results of the survey reveal that executives also think that it is important for practitioners to know how to use e-mail. One of the executives who participated in the interviews said he often uses e-mail to communicate with clients as well as with co-workers. He said that, although he likes using e-mail as a communications tool, he believes that face-to-face interaction is very important for building and maintaining relationships in the public relations profession. The other executive who was interviewed said he prefers to use the telephone to communicate with clients but that he does use e-mail as well. It is interesting that executives realize the convenience of using e-mail as a communications tool but that they still prefer to speak with people face-to-face or on the telephone. This could be due to the fact that they worked in public relations long before e-mail was an accepted form of communications. Therefore, even though they do use e-mail, they still prefer the "old" way of doing things.

Survey data also revealed that executives use the Internet on a daily basis. Both of the executives who participated in the interviews said they use the Internet to read the

news about their clients and about their particular facet of public relations (i.e, public relations agencies and public affairs and governmental public relations).

Executives tend to believe that organizations should have an Internet site, but results of the survey report that they are not sure if public relations departments should be in control of the technological aspects of the organizational Internet site. Executives also reported that they do not think practitioners should know how to build and maintain a site. However, the interviews revealed that executives believe that public relations departments should control the content of a Web site and that practitioners should be responsible for writing Web content. Both executives responded that they are in charge of deciding what is contained on their organizations' Internet sites and that the public relations practitioners under their leadership help to write the content of these Web sites. Perhaps this reflects the leadership capabilities of an executive who has been in the profession for a long time. Executives seem to understand that, in order for a public relations department to build and maintain a Web site, practitioners are going to have to have the technological skills to do so.

Executives see the utility of organizations having an Intranet site, according to the results of the survey. One of the executives who was interviewed also said that he is responsible for overseeing all of the content for his organization's Intranet site, while the practitioners under his leadership write all of the content for the site. The other executive who participated in the interviews indicated that his agency is too small to support an Intranet site. This is consistent with the findings obtained from practitioners at other levels who work for small companies. If a company is large enough to have to use a medium to communicate with its employees, then an Intranet site is useful. Otherwise,

smaller organizations seem to depend on face-to-face communication, telephone conversations or e-mail.

Only forty percent of the executives who responded to the survey said they look to hire practitioners with Internet skills. The executives who responded in the survey said they do not think practitioners should have advanced Internet skills, such as knowing how to build a Web site. However, they said they do think that all practitioners should know how to turn on a computer and access e-mail. Executives believe that the Internet is a tool that is helpful to have in the public relations profession but that it will never be the foundation of the profession. Executives look to hire practitioners who are strong writers and who can speak effectively. Therefore, it is not surprising that executives do not think practitioners with Internet skills should necessarily be paid more. Since executives are at the top of the hierarchy of roles, if they do not think that practitioners with Internet skills should be paid more, then these practitioners probably will not get paid more.

Summary

Respondent practitioners at all levels in the PRSA (1993) hierarchy of roles – technician, supervisor, manager, director and executive – are regularly engaging in Internet-related activities. These practitioners use the Internet to communicate with internal and external clients, to do research for articles, to research background information about a client and to stay up-to-date on news that concerns their facet of public relations practice.

Respondent practitioners seem to agree that it is important for an organization to use an Internet site to convey its image to its external publics. They also agree that an organization should use an Intranet site to pass on information to its employees.

However, if an organization does not have a large number of employees, these practitioners see the use of an Intranet site as unnecessary.

Today, many public relations departments are in charge of designing and maintaining Web sites. However, my respondents do not seem to think that it is important for public relations practitioners to know how to build and maintain Web sites. This is confusing because, for a public relations department to perform these technological tasks, practitioners working in the department would have to know how to build and maintain a Web site. My respondent public relations executives seem to understand that practitioners do not know how to perform these technological tasks, and they do not believe that practitioners should have these skills. Therefore, respondent executives concur that the technical aspects of maintaining a Web site should not be the responsibility of a public relations department. The public relations department, according to the executives, should only be responsible for Web content.

Most of my respondent practitioners agree that future public relations practitioners should have basic Internet skills, including knowing how to use e-mail and knowing how to conduct an on-line information search. However, the practitioners do not see that a practitioner with these skills should make more money than a practitioner who does not have these skills. Public relations managers seem to believe that practitioners should learn how to build and maintain Web sites because the future of the profession is moving in a direction where practitioners will be expected to have these skills. This could be important because, if managers continue to move up the hierarchy, and eventually replace the executives who will retire, these managers will look for

practitioners to have these skills. Lower-level practitioners lacking these skills could be overlooked for a job.

Public relations practitioners who are at the director and executive levels reported that they learned to use the Internet while at work. The majority of the public relations professionals at the manager and supervisor levels responded that they learned to use the Internet while at work, but a small percentage reported learning the Internet while in college. Practitioners at the technician level were the only group to report a high percentage of learning the Internet while in college. This is understandable because technicians have been in the profession for the least amount of time, having still been in college during the emergence of Internet use.

When reviewing Table 4, it seems apparent that managers, directors and executives are in positions that require strategic thinking. This is in contrast to technicians and supervisors who appear to focus daily on the more technical aspects of public relations, such as writing and designing brochures, pamphlets, etc. However, what is interesting about the survey results that are displayed in Table 4 is that managers seem to be the most knowledgeable about the importance of technical skills to successful strategic management. Managers allotted the most importance to desktop publishing skills and Web site design and maintenance skills. If practitioners have these technical skills, then strategic goals of the company or public relations department will be more attainable.

It is also important to this current study to consider the application of mass communication theory. The field of public relations is still developing its own theory.

However, it seems relevant to discuss the possible application of the adoption of innovation theory to this current study.

Within a changing society, there exists a constant flow of innovations. Every part of today's mass media, such as newspapers, radio, television and motion pictures, were once a new innovation that remained new and relatively unused. Each of these innovations followed a curve of adoption and eventually became widely used throughout society. This is the same idea behind the adoption of innovation theory (Lowery and DeFleur, 1995).

Just as the adoption of innovation theory was applied to society's acceptance of newspapers, radio, television and motion pictures, so it can be applied to practitioners' adoption of the Internet. The Internet is being embraced differently by the various levels of technician, supervisor, manager, director and executive. Technicians, who learned to use the Internet in college and thus have always expected to be a part of the public relations profession, adopted this new innovation and consider it to be vital to their daily work. Executives, on the other hand, entered the profession long before the growth of this new media and therefore do not consider the Internet to be as important to the public relations profession as the ability to write. As suggested by the theory, the Internet will continue to follow an adoption curve and eventually will be equally important to all levels of practitioners.

In sum, it does not seem necessary to expand one specific professional role to incorporate the Internet to further advance our understanding of all public relations classifications. Instead, it is more relevant to expand all five levels of professional roles to include Internet skills. The results of this current research have revealed that the

Internet is important to practitioners at all levels within the hierarchy of public relations roles and has a direct impact on the performance of these roles.

Survey Response Rate Conclusions

An overall survey response rate of nearly twenty-nine percent was achieved with this study. This means that 101 of the 350 surveys that were sent out were returned. According to O'Rourke (1999), there is not a specific definition as to what is a good survey response rate. He said the "higher the better, since those findings are more likely to be representative and therefore more generalizable to the population" (O'Rourke, 1999, p.109). However, the fact is that most Americans today refuse to be surveyed (Edmondson, 1997). If someone does not want to participate in survey research, then the researcher can only do so much to persuade that person to cooperate. This fact can help to explain my response rate of twenty-nine percent.

The two methods of e-mail and regular mail were used to send the surveys to potential respondents. A total of 330 surveys were sent via e-mail (Table 2). The remaining twenty surveys were sent by regular mail (Table 2). Since the topic of this exploratory study revolves around public relations practitioners' perceived importance of the Internet, it made sense to send most of the surveys by e-mail to observe whether or not practitioners would actually respond better to an electronic survey. Still, a small number of surveys were sent by regular mail to compare the return rates of the two methods. Sheehan and McMillan (1999) found that researchers often have difficulty determining a sample size when using an e-mail survey. This is due to the fact that there is not much information on e-mail response rates. This fact alone made choosing an

appropriate sample size for this current research difficult. Ultimately, a sample size in keeping with limited time and human resources was selected.

Twenty-eight percent of the e-mail surveys that were sent to public relations practitioners were returned. Forty-five percent of the surveys that were sent to practitioners by regular mail were returned. These results were not surprising. Even though it seems natural to assume that public relations practitioners would be more inclined to return a survey using e-mail, the fact is that electronic surveys are a new phenomenon and their effectiveness has not yet been determined (Sheehan and McMillan, 1999). Despite this previous research regarding e-mail surveys, public relations practitioners' perceived importance of e-mail as reported in the survey data indicates that they would respond better and faster to an e-mail survey. At all five levels in the public relations hierarchy, practitioners strongly agreed that e-mail is an important tool in the public relations profession. However, the relatively small response rate with the e-mail survey does not support the practitioners' opinion of e-mail, but does follow Sheehan and McMillan's caveat.

Sheehan and McMillan (1999) also found that response rates tend to be better with regular mail surveys than with e-mail surveys. One of the reasons for this is that the inclusion of cash incentives tends to increase response rates with regular mail surveys. Cash incentives, obviously, cannot be included with electronic surveys without some kind of follow-up mechanism that could compromise anonymity, for example. Sheehan and McMillan also observed that the length of a survey can influence response rates. When using an e-mail survey, respondents usually measure the length of the survey by the number of screens they have to use to view the survey. This type of measurement can

make a survey actually appear longer than it really is when it is printed on paper. And, it has been found that the longer the survey, the less likely a respondent is to complete and return it (e.g., Sheehan and McMillan, 1999).

While only twenty surveys were sent to respondents using regular mail, 330 were sent by e-mail. Only nine surveys were actually returned by regular mail, but, since only twenty were sent, this results in a fairly high return rate percentage. Future researchers might consider sending more surveys by regular mail and less surveys by e-mail to make a more accurate comparison between the two methods.

The members of the Tulsa chapter of IABC accounted for the highest return rate percentage of the descriptive survey (Table 3). Seventy-four percent of Tulsa IABC members returned the surveys that were sent to them. This could be because I am a student member of Tulsa IABC, and, therefore, many of the chapter's members know me personally and so might be more motivated to help me by participating. Perhaps public relations practitioners are more prone to participate in research that is being conducted by someone they know or someone with whom they can identify.

Considering this, though, it would then be expected that OSU Journalism alumni would do a fairly high return rate percentage since I am an OSU journalism student. However, this was not the case with this research. OSU Journalism alumni actually accounted for only a response rate of twenty-five percent (Table 3). This may be because surveys were sent to a listserve of OSU journalism alumni. Many journalism alumni on that listserve received degrees in areas of journalism other than public relations. Therefore, if they do not work in public relations, they would not have been qualified to complete the survey and probably did not return it for that reason.

O'Rourke (1999) suggests some general principles for improving survey response rates. The researcher should:

1. Identify with a known organization or entity
2. Inform the potential respondent
3. Offer a tangible reward if possible
4. Keep the length reasonable
5. Follow-up (p. 108)

I used most of the methods to attempt to increase my response rate of the descriptive survey. Several of the practitioners who were asked to complete the survey had connections to my school or to many of the organizations of which I am a member. The survey instrument provided a brief explanation as to the purpose of the research that was being conducted. A follow-up e-mail or mailed letter was sent to potential participants not responding after two weeks of the initial e-mail and mailed survey.

Recommendations

Results of this current research suggest that public relations practitioners at all five levels (PRSA, 1993) use the Internet and perceive it to be an important tool for public relations practitioners. Since the results seem to show that there is not much distinction between the two public relations roles of manager and director, for example, further research needs to be conducted to determine what does separate the two roles in the twenty-first century, if anything tangible or useful. The same research methods of descriptive surveys and in-depth interviews could be used. However, I recommend that the surveys be re-designed to include questions focusing more on the specific Internet skills performed by the practitioner rather than the importance that the practitioner

assigns to the Internet skills. I also recommend that more in-depth interviews be attempted because of the helpful descriptive dimension they provided to the collected survey data.

Subjects who were chosen to participate in both the descriptive surveys and the in-depth interviews were chosen based on purposive and convenience sampling. For a sample that is more generalized to the entire population, I recommend that future research be conducted by using the systematic sampling procedure to choose a population. I was unable to go this route due to time and financial limitations. Respondents also could be selected from a more diverse geographical area, instead of focusing on the Midwest area of the United States, which I did for the convenience utility.. It is also recommended that further research be conducted using a more equal number of practitioners from the five levels of technician, supervisor, manager, director and executive, respectively, than I was able to accomplish with my particular limitations.

Future studies concerning public relations roles and the Internet might focus on the impact of an organization's culture. It became increasingly evident throughout the course of this current study that the use of Internet and Intranet sites depended largely upon various cultural factors within an organization, such as the size of the organization and the industry sector. This idea of organizational culture could possibly direct a whole new study on public relations roles.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
DESCRIPTIVE SURVEY

1. The Public Relations Society of America's Professional Career Guide defines five levels of professionalism for public relations practitioners. After you have read each description, please circle the one that **best** reflects your role as a PR practitioner. Please circle only one answer.

- A. Technician – typically follows others' directions; does a lot of writing; writes articles for employee publications and news releases, text for brochures, scripts for audiovisual or video presentations, letters, etc.; gathers data; take photographs; and performs desktop publishing tasks.
- B. Supervisor – often responsible for supervising staff activities, coordinating workflow, preparing budgets, writing and implementing action plans, working with media, and reporting business results; sometimes has to reconcile differences between staff members; may interact with higher management.
- C. Manager – is often responsible for an entire department, including planning, organizing, directing and motivating staff; has counseling, teaching and problem-solving abilities; may conduct meetings, make presentations and develop plans of action.
- D. Director – sometimes attains position as a company officer and becomes involved in the design and implementation of research programs, strategic planning, and governmental and political action or advocacy programs; develops organizational policies; directs efforts of managers and their departments.
- E. Executive – more responsible for providing leadership to direct, motivate and reward the performance of others than for personally accomplishing tasks; still applies all of the skills previously acquired, but the scope of responsibility expands to the entire organization and beyond.

2. What other responsibilities do you have that you feel were not reflected in your answer to question #1?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3. I consider myself capable of using a computer.	5	4	3	2	1
4. It is important for practitioners to be able to use word processing software.	5	4	3	2	1
5. It is important for practitioners so know how to e-mail.	5	4	3	2	1
6. It is important for practitioners to know how to conduct on-line information searches.	5	4	3	2	1

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|-----|---|----|
| 7. It is important for practitioners to know how to use desktop publishing software. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. It is important for practitioners to be able to design and maintain a Web site. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9. Internet skills are just as important to a practitioner as traditional public relations skills. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. It is important for an organization to use a Web site to convey its image to its <i>external</i> publics. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 11. It is important for an organization to use a Web site to convey its image to its <i>internal</i> publics. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 12. I use the Internet every day in my current job. | | | Yes | | No |
| 13. My organization's public relations department is responsible for building and updating our organization's <i>Internet</i> site. | | | Yes | | No |
| 14. My organization's public relations department is responsible for building and updating our organization's <i>Intranet</i> site. | | | Yes | | No |
| 15. My organization's public relations department is responsible only for the Web site content, but not Web site building and updating. | | | Yes | | No |
| 16. My organization's public relations department is responsible for answering any Web site inquiries or e-mails. | | | Yes | | No |
| 17. I have written content for a Web site. | | | Yes | | No |
| 18. My organization has an on-line newsletter for employees. | | | Yes | | No |
| 19. My organization has its own Intranet site for employees. | | | Yes | | No |
| 20. If my organization was hiring a public relations professional, would someone who has technical Internet skills be more likely to get the job than someone who does not? | | | Yes | | No |
| 21. Someone with Internet skills, specifically Web page design skills, typically makes more money than a public relations practitioner who doesn't have these skills. | | | | | |

22. Where did you learn to use the Internet? (Check One) Yes No
College At work
Other: Please describe _____
What computer skills, if any, were you taught in college? _____

23. Do you have a degree in public relations? Yes No
If not, what is your degree field? _____

24. On average, how many hours per workday (8 hours) do you spend using a computer?
a) 1-2
b) 3-4
c) 5-6
d) 7-8

25. How many years have you worked in public relations? _____

26. In which facet of public relations do you work?
a) Sports
b) corporate
c) non-profit
d) agency
e) government/public affairs
f) other: _____

OPTIONAL
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS (Please circle one):

27. Gender: male female

28. Age: 18-25 26-32 33-40 41-50 51-65

29. Income per year: less than \$20,000 \$21,000-\$40,000
 \$41,000-\$50,000 \$51,000-\$70,000 over \$70,000

30. Highest level of education completed: High School College Degree
 Master's Degree Doctoral Degree

APPENDIX B
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

Q 1: What do you do on a daily basis?

- I have a portion of U.S. media responsibilities. That means that I serve three primary internal clients. One is merchandising and marketing. Another is government relations. The third is the Wal-Mart foundation. On a daily basis, I work with those clients to provide whatever news and media relations assistance is needed. That includes responding to calls from the media, drafting news releases, arranging news conferences, posting items of interest to the media on our Web site, and provide some counsel of media relations issues for those clients.
- I am responsible for community relations. I post meetings, give presentations and network with clients. I write a lot of content for newsletters, although I am not personally responsible for producing them.
- I am responsible for all media and public relations aspects of my clients who have hired my agency to support their needs. I am also responsible for running this entire public relations agency.
- My job involves virtually all aspects of internal public relations for a large corporation. I write articles for newsletters and various company Web sites. I write content for brochures, posters, etc. I plan special events for the company. I also provide communications counseling to employees.
- I am responsible for tracking bills and knowing what is going on in Legislature and in Congress. More or less, I am the Mayor's right-hand person, and I am the boss to lots of people in this City.
- I have several clients who I work with. One thing that I do is track journalists and see what they are writing about, and if they would be interested in my clients.

- I am responsible for all media aspects involved with men's basketball for the Big 12 Conference.

Q 2: How does the Web affect your daily job?

- I use the Internet a lot, mostly to scour the news outlets for articles about our company. Every morning, I prepare a report for hundreds of executives across the company and across the world that highlights the days events about this company.

- The only reason that I use the Internet for my job is to research a client before I meet with them face-to-face.

- I am always wired to the Web. I am constantly getting clips from the Dow Jones Interactive site. These clips cover news about my clients. For the most part, I use the Internet for research purposes. I monitor chat rooms and Web sites for information or news that might appear about my client. I also use the Internet to read the news on-line.

- I use it every day. I don't know how to go in and post stories, or how to design a site, but I am constantly writing content for Web sites. I think the Web is great for public relations people because we are constantly doing research. The Web allows us to have quick access to information.

- My day actually begins on the Internet. Before I had this job, I was a very good newspaper reader. I would read four newspapers a day. Now that I am working 65-70 hours a week, time is my most important commodity. So, I've cancelled all of my subscriptions to newspapers and I now read them on-line. I also have a program set up with certain keywords, so if a story comes up through the wire with that keyword, it is e-mailed to me. I have to read the news everyday to know what is going on with Congress and with the Legislature. The Internet helps me stay on top of the news.

- Every single aspect of what I do is somehow related to either the Internet or e-mail. I have a laptop and my whole life revolves around that laptop. Every morning, I spend an hour surfing news and technology Web sites, checking to see if anyone had written about my clients or about my clients' industries.

- I use it constantly. I use it as a reference mainly. I get on the Internet to find stories that people have written about our athletic conference. Our schools use the Internet as their first point of reference, so I use it as mine. The schools post all of their information on their Web sites, so I use those Web sites to do research.

Q 3: How do you use e-mail as a communications tool?

- I use e-mail a lot. It is very effective to use e-mail to communicate internally, as well as externally. We deliver 90 percent of our news to reporters by e-mail. We discourage faxing, unless a reporter insists on it. I spent a lot of time on the phone before e-mail, and I faxed a lot of stuff too. E-mail has so many advantages because it is very convenient. It is also advantageous because it gives the receiver something in writing, something to keep on file. Employees receive a lot of company announcements by e-mail.

- Sometimes I use e-mail to contact my clients, but I usually try to meet with them first, and have initial phone conversations with them. I prefer to use e-mail to communicate internally than rather externally.

- I use e-mail a lot to communicate with clients. It's calmed down the office. The phone doesn't ring as much and we don't even have as much interaction. So, it's nice, but I think we still need more face-to-face interaction.

- E-mail is very important. This company uses e-mail to send out internal announcements, which direct a lot of employees to links on the Intranet site. I also use e-mail to communicate with my co-workers and with other people within the company.
- I sometimes use e-mail to communicate with people, but I spend more time on the phone than I do actually e-mailing people I need to talk to. I think the personal contact is more important than electronic contact.
- On average, I get about 100 e-mails a day. We e-mail within our office, between the account team and the client. We also e-mail within the agency. Summaries of publications are also e-mailed to use everyday, so that we wouldn't have to read the entire publication. I also e-mail a lot of the people who I work with. Even if they sit five feet away from you, it is good to e-mail them because that way everything is documented. The pace of working is so fast that I have to check my e-mail constantly.
- E-mail is vital. It is probably about 80 percent of my work. I use it to gather information and to make contacts. I send my weekly update on men's basketball in this conference to about 250 people by e-mail. This list includes members of the media. Most of my contact with the sports information directors who are in charge of men's basketball at each of our schools is done through e-mail.

Q 4: Does your organization have an Internet site? If so, what responsibilities do you have regarding this site?

- We have an Internet site that is aimed primarily at journalists. This is where we post news releases that could be of interest to them. I write Web content for the Internet site, but we have a Webmaster who posts for us. This person is in the marketing department.

But, we are in the process of having software installed where anyone in the public relations department will have the capability to post on the site.

- We have an Internet site that is managed by a Webmaster who is contracted outside of the organization. The communications director is responsible for controlling all of the information on this site, but I personally do not write any content for it.

- Yes, we do have an Internet site. It is maintained by a freelancer that we have worked with in the past. I'm in the process of updating it right now. I'm responsible for every aspect of it, except for the technological aspects. I write all of the content for it and I conceptualize the whole thing, and then I direct our Webmaster to do the rest. For us, a Web site operates only as an on-line brochure for our agency.

- Yes, we have an Internet site. It is geared toward customers and shareholders. I do not ever contribute to it because I am part of an internal relations team. However, the public relations department does have an external team that does provide content for this page. Every once in a while, if something I write internally is important to an external audience, it will be posted on the Internet. This site is not designed and maintained from the public relations department. The information and technology department is responsible for the technological aspects.

- Yes, we do. And it is like any Web site because it continues to grow and develop. I have completely gotten way from writing Web content, but I used to do it all of the time. I tend to be the arbitrator of disputes regarding this site. Each City department has an "editor" that is responsible for their own content regarding their department. I am the "publisher." I delegate responsibilities for the Web site. Our Webmaster, who is not in

the organization, is responsible for building and maintaining this site, but he doesn't write the content. Our "editors" do that.

- Yes we have an Internet site. But we have a Webmaster who is not in our office who is responsible for updating that site. I do not write Web content for it or anything. Our public relations department does dictate what should be on the site, however.

- Yes, we do. I'm supposed to monitor the site to make sure that everything is going up, but we have contracted the technological aspects of our Web site outside of this organization. But I do have a lot of say because this is our page. I tell them what to do with it. Both media and our sports fan use this page to stay up to day on statistics and news regarding our sports conference. In a way, we serve as on-line editors for this on-line publication.

Q 5: Does your organization have an Intranet site? If so, what responsibilities do you have regarding this site?

- Yes we do and it provides a lot of information for associates - news, information on benefits and information on training. The site is managed by the marketing department. The public relations department only gets involved with this site when we feel that any of the external information that we have would be useful to employees. Then we will have it posted on this site. The Intranet site seems to be cutting down on the need for public relations departments to produce hard copies of newsletters, but we still have several newsletters and I don't see them disappearing anytime soon.

- We do have an Intranet site that links employees across the state of Oklahoma. This site is managed by a contracted Webmaster who is not specifically with our organization. I do not have any responsibilities as far as this site goes. I wish that I had time to write

content for it, but our communications director does control the content of this site. We also have an internal newsletter that is aimed at employees, and I do write content for this.

- No, we only have five people in our agency so we do not have a need for an Intranet site.
- Yes, we do have an Intranet site and the public relations department is totally responsible for all aspects of that site. I, personally, only write Web content for this site, but we have a full-time person who is responsible for designing and maintaining it.
- We do have an Intranet site for our 4,000 employees. We post anything on this site that would be important to these employees. As with the Internet site, I am responsible for overseeing this site, but I don't write for it. We have a Webmaster who does not work for the City who is responsible for the technological aspects of the site. The Intranet is a good thing. It helps us save a lot of paperwork.
- No, we don't have an Intranet site within our agency. But we do aid our clients by sometimes writing content for their Intranet sites.
- No, we don't have a need for an Intranet site since there are only 25 people working here. We have great communication between this staff with our inter-office e-mail. But that is pretty much the extent of it.

Q 6: Since you have worked in public relations, how have you seen the Internet affect the profession?

- I have worked in PR for 20 years, and I have found that the Internet is a great tool in terms of pushing important news and information out to a broad audience. It has also been a great tool for reporters who need instant information at their fingertips 24 hours a

day. We're trying to meet reporters halfway by making sure that we have the information that they need on our site. It's a great tool to use to get accurate and important information out to journalists. This is especially important for International companies.

- I have only worked in PR for three years, but the Internet is changing the profession. It seems like there is less paperwork because everything is going on the Internet.
- I remember the days when a client would ask you to write a release and mail it within a week. Then fax came along and a client wanted to see a release in an hour. Now, with the Web, a release is expected immediately. It has changed the way that we work and the way that we need to think about our business.
- When I started working in PR, I was working for a very small company. We didn't even have access to the Internet. It wasn't even something that we talked about. When I took my second PR job, we had what is known as "cc" mail, which is e-mail that can only be sent and received internally. We didn't have an internal or an external site on the Internet. It was really interesting to watch the Internet become something that everyone uses to communicate. I've been in the profession for almost eight years now, and I would say that it has been in the past three years that I have really started to see the impact that the Internet has on this profession. I think it is the primary way that an organization communicates internally and externally.
- I have worked in public relations for 30 years. The Internet has helped the entire journalism industry become lazy. The Internet is just another tool to be lazy with instead of actually going out and talking to people. The good side of it, though, is that it is instantaneous. It makes the world think about the fact that they have to get their information out faster, but not necessarily better.

- When I started in college, I didn't know about e-mail or about the Internet. But before I got out of college, I knew a lot about it. Since then, the entire world has become dependent on the Internet. I think it is the single most important invention of the decade. I think it provides a tremendous advantage because it allows you to communicate instantly with anyone. Even though I've only been working in pr for a couple of years, I know that it allows us to work quicker and less expensively. Plus, it is good that e-mail allows us to track our work. That keeps pr people safe.

- I have worked in this industry for ten years, and we have had a Web site here for five of those years. With the advancing of computers and with the Internet in general, people use it as a constant resource now. It keeps a lot of practitioners off of the phone. Before the Internet, we spent a lot of time faxing and on the phone. It is so much easier to use the Internet to get in touch with everyone. However, pr people should still try to maintain personal contact. That is the downside, that there is less personal contact now.

Q 7: How do you think the Internet will affect future public relations practitioners?

- I do not know how to build and design a Web site, and I'm still learning how to post releases on our site. But I do think that these skills could be beneficial to someone coming into the profession. I think there will eventually be a special function in public relations that combines the technology skills for Web communications with the other basic skills for public relations. I still think that writing will continue to be the foundation of the profession no matter where the technology goes.

- I think practitioners should know how to use the Internet, but Internet skills will not ever be a huge aspect of non-profit public relations. It depends on which aspect of public relations you are going to pursue as to what extent you need to know how to use the

Internet. But, for me it is more important for a public relations practitioner to be seen as a person instead of just a name hidden behind a computer. The Internet is just an extra tool.

- I think that everyone needs to know how to turn on a computer and access e-mail. I don't think it's important for future practitioners to know how to build a Web site. These technological skills might help, but they don't seem necessary. I think the basic pr skills have always been to be able to present yourself well orally and in writing. The Internet is just a tool and it's important to know how to use it, but it's not critical to be a public relations professional.

- Internet skills are very important for future pr practitioners. If journalism schools aren't teaching classes on how to build and maintain Web sites, then these students are going to be behind. It eventually will be hard for someone to get a job without these skills. Today, practitioners should know how to write Web content, to outline what is needed for a Web site, and to post a story on-line. However, writing is still the most important skill for public relations practitioners.

- I think that writing and research will always be the two most important skills for public relations. But this isn't to say that Internet skills aren't important because they are a big deal, but they will never be the foundation of this profession.

- Practitioners should know how to use e-mail, how to look for Web sites, and how to do basic searches in Web sites. They should also know how to go in and update a Web site. Companies have to have Web sites, and practitioners should know about these Web sites. Practitioners who know how to build and maintain a Web site are going to be very valuable, and they are going to have an advantage when it comes to getting a job.

- Eventually, someday we will hire someone to build and maintain our Web site in-house. Right now, practitioners can get away without having advanced Internet skills. They need to know a lot about the Internet, but they don't have to know how to build and maintain a site. I think, though, that everything is moving in a direction where practitioners need to know how to do these things.

Q 8: Should practitioners with these technological skills make more money?

- I don't know if they should make more money, but I think they are certainly more marketable within the company and outside of the company as well.
- No, but I do think that we will eventually hire someone who will produce our Web sites internally.
- As the president of the agency, I wouldn't necessarily pay someone more for having these skills.
- I do not think that they would initially get paid more, but I definitely think someone with these skills will get the job over anybody else. I think if they can exercise those skills, they're going to be able to come off as someone who is more knowledgeable and more strategic. But, then again, I'm not sure they should be paid more. The Internet is just another part of the skill set that they should be coming out of school with.
- No, I do not think they should be paid more.
- Yes, it is very possible. I don't have any hard-core evidence to support why I think that. But I think the more skills that you have in general, the more you can bring into a company and the more you are going to be worth. Certainly, the most important skills to have these days are related to technology.

- Right now, yes I think they should make more money because not everyone has those skills. Five years from now, everyone should have these tasks and they won't get paid for having them.

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD STUDY APPROVAL FORM

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 3/12/02

Date Friday, April 13, 2001

IRB Application No AS0143

Proposal Title: STUDYING THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN PUBLIC RELATIONS: THE
EMERGENCE OF A TECHNOLOGICALLY - SAVVY PRACTITIONER

Principal
Investigator(s)

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Reviewed and
Processed as Expedited

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) : Approved

Signature:



Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance

Friday, April 13, 2001

Date

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modifications to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

VITA

Shannon E. Nolte

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: THE EMERGENCE OF THE INTERNET AS A VALUABLE TOOL FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS: A CLOSER LOOK AT HOW THE INTERNET AFFECTS THE FIVE ROLES OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONER

Major Field: Mass Communications

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Fort Smith, Arkansas, on February 12, 1977, the daughter of Stephen J. and Diane S. Nolte.

Education: Graduated from Greenwood High School, Greenwood, Arkansas, in May 1995; received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Public Relations from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, in May 1999. Completed the requirements for the Master of Science degree with a major in Mass Communication at Oklahoma State University in May 2001.

Experience: Staff Writer, *Daily O'Collegian*, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 1995-1997; Sports Information Director, Oklahoma State University Athletic Media Relations, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 1997-2001; Advertising & Public Communications Intern, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Oklahoma, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1998; Strategic Marketing Intern, Williams Communications, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1999; Teaching Assistant, Paul Miller School of Journalism and Broadcasting, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 1999-2001; Leadership, Learning & Performance Intern, Williams Communications, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2000; Corporate Communications Intern, Williams Companies, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2001; Communications Specialist, Williams Companies, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2001.