

CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION

Course Code: EN 4519
Course Name: Public Relations Writing

Public Relations Critique:

An Analysis of the Online Newsletter by the Department of English
and Communication at City University of Hong Kong

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION

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Newsletter

PLEASE SELECT 2004 Issue#13, Oct 2004

LEADING STORIES

EN's Communication Research Productivity No. 1 in Hong Kong; Search for Six New Positions Underway

01 Nov 04

MACNM Students Online with Tsinghua University Students

15 Oct 04

- Deep Collaboration with Hong Kong Institute of Education
13 Oct 04
- EN Launches New Programme for Primary and Secondary English Language Teachers
14 Oct 04
- EN Study Tour 2004: Destination Singapore and Kuala Lumpur
12 Oct 04
- "Shiok*!!"
14 Oct 04
- "The Precious Tour"
14 Oct 04
- Asia-Pacific Internet Research Alliance Conference Held at City University of Hong Kong
14 Oct 04
- There's No Place Like Home: The Highs and Lows and Studying Overseas
18 Oct 04
- EN Staff News
14 Oct 04
- EN Student News

A Major Triumph for EN Minors New BA for the Professions Reflects

PR. Critique EN News... Department of Englis...

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Introduction

Public relations is the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its public. In the online newsletter of the Department of English and Communication (EN), texts, photos, animations, hyperlinks and news stories and feature articles are used to build up an image of achievement, professionalism and enthusiasm of not only the department itself, but also its students and its staff to the stakeholders.

For example, in the “EN's Communication Research Productivity No. 1 in Hong Kong; Search for Six New Positions Underway” published in the 13th issue of the EN newsletter, a comparison chart has been used to highlight the amount of CityU's communication research articles with that of other universities in Hong Kong. Just a simple chart here can present goodwill of the department in terms of academic research.

As public relations is an interactive process, involving research, action, communication and evaluation, the EN department has conducted research interviews with the students and the academics to generate articles (Research), and have decided to present these information online (Communication), in a newsletter format (Action) to the stakeholders. Emails have been sent to students' account informing them an updated version of the newsletter has been put up, and the newsletter has been linked with the main departmental homepage, so to a large extent, the audience has been reached and they are aware of the online EN newsletter (Evaluation).

I choose the online EN newsletter as an example because I read the newsletter and it is easily accessible. I think supporting the ‘new media’ is probably the reason why the EN does not provide a printed version of the newsletter. With graphics, links and animations, PR online maybe a better choice rather than the traditional print media.

Communication Objective

The communication objectives of the online EN newsletter are:

- To raise profile of the EN department by announcing the latest research studies of the staff in the EN department, and students' performance in their final year projects or their success in gaining scholarships. This creates goodwill of the department.
- To present assignments that the students in the EN department have done, so that the publics can feel confident about the EN programmes and the quality of its intakes and graduates. An example will be the Literacy Corner and the news stories written by students of BAEPC.
- To establish connections with overseas institutions by publicizing projects that works with them. For example in the 13th issue, the EN has done a research with the Communication Department of Tsinghua University; it provides some insights to other universities' communication departments of the feasibility of having discussions, conferences and forum together. Collaboration in future projects, a better understanding cross-culturally and feedbacks from the academics could be obtained.

Who does it work for?

The online EN newsletter is mainly working for the alumni, the staff and the students of the English and Communication Department of the City University of Hong Kong. It is published every three months. I think the EN department has chosen to do PR online because it is:

- Cost-effective: Save money from printing the expensive newsletter.
- Environmentally-friendly: Save papers and promote goodwill by saving the environment and putting the news online.
- Dynamic: Articles can be added, retrieved and updated instantly on the web.
- Interactive: Better presentations with animations and charts being used.

- Easy accessible: The publics can obtain the newsletter at home, and anywhere in the world with the Internet being connected.

It is also true to say that the online newsletter works for the university and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science as well. To some extent, it shows how successful the programmes and the courses that the EN Department are having.

The Intended Publics

The intended publics the EN newsletter is working for are:

Internal Publics:

They are the publics working inside the organisation. Here it means the students, the administrative staff and the teaching staff in the EN Department.

External Publics:

They are the publics that do not connect with the organisation. Here it means the alumni, the secondary school students, school principals, teachers, researchers, other university's professors and staff.

It is true to say that employers are also a public for the EN newsletter. For example, a PR agency in Hong Kong may want to see how well the undergraduates in BAEPC perform in the Final Year Project before considering recruiting BAEPC graduates.

Professional associations like the Hong Kong Association of Linguistics and other academics are also interested in getting the news of the research by the EN staff.

Motivational Appeals

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the EN newsletter uses the self-actualisation appeal to raise the awareness of the publics and sustain their interest. It is because the news of launching a technological communication research, developing a new

programme for language teachers, study tour to Singapore and having more scholarships symbolise the desire of “personal growth”, “living up to and maximising the potentials” and “develop more talents”. They are represent learning and achievements.

Key PR Messages

The key PR messages of the online EN newsletter is to highlight the excellent performance of EN’s communication and educational research, the excellent performance of its undergraduates, the post-graduates and the academic staff, as well as promoting a positive image in terms of academic and studying environment to the stakeholders.

The online article reporting the communication research and conference by an EN professor will certainly appeal to feedbacks, discussions and evaluations by stakeholders, perhaps in the academic circles.

The use of photos showing the multimedia lab equipped with the latest multimedia equipments and the use of video-conferencing would appeal to stakeholders who demonstrate a high desire of knowledge in multimedia communication, such as the multimedia technicians and I.T. designers.

The news stories reporting the success of the BATESL alumni and the scholarships the BATESL students gained would appeal to the stakeholders who want to enrol in the BATESL programme. The Form 7 students are typical examples.

PR Techniques

The intended PR techniques used in the online EN newsletter include having an interview with the professors and the students. Direct quotes from them are obvious in its feature articles. Sometimes, students are invited to contribute feature articles in the EN newsletter, so that the targeted publics would feel that students’ voices and opinions have been put forward by the EN department. For example, Didler Yiu from BATESL was

invited in the 13th issue to talk about his exchange experience in University of West Ontario. When more 'voices' from the actual persons are included, it enhances the reliability of the PR messages.

Photos are also being used to enhance the persuasiveness of this PR copy. In the MACNM news story for example, three photos showing how online conferencing was done have been published in the newsletter, and therefore the targeted publics could get to know how 'advanced' it is in the EN department, and the photo showing a post-graduate student asking question in the conference reflects how liberal the studying atmosphere is in the EN department. Therefore, photos are powerful agents in the newsletter showing what actually happens in an event.

Figures, comparison charts and statistics are other persuasive agents being used in the EN newsletter, yet they mainly appear in the news article related to research studies. Because numerical items show facts and actual quantities, it enhances the persuasiveness of the PR message. It makes the message look more scientific.

Medium of Communication

The newsletter was published online every two months during the academic year. Emails were sent to the publics informing them an up-to-date version of the newsletter has been uploaded to the web.

In my opinion, I think the online newsletter is appropriate for the audience, because it will cover a wider range of audience, including the alumni and those who are on leave. In addition, previous editions of the newsletter can be retrieved, and the online versions can include more visual elements. It is easy to reach the audience as well.

The use of email informing the publics that a new issue of the newsletter has been published is also sound. It is because the email itself actually contains the hyperlinks of

different sections of the newsletter. So, the publics can select the part(s) they want to read by just clicking on the link.

Personal Opinions

I think the online EN newsletter works and fulfils its PR objectives and reach its intended publics. The news stories themselves reflects different parties of interests of people. There are articles that are more academic, yet there are articles written for undergraduates which tells about their learning experiences. Therefore, different publics have been covered in the newsletter. Moreover, emails and hyperlinks have been created so that students won't miss out the latest issue of the newsletter. The newsletter can be reached by the intended publics easily through clicking the mouse.

The external publics have also been taken into account in launching the EN newsletter. There are promotional articles outlining new courses and new communication research studies. Therefore, for those interested in communication research and educational research. They just first need to find out the EN Department from CityU, and then click on the hyperlink linking to the newsletter, and they will get the information they want. It is so convenient and easy. Therefore, putting the newsletter online can attract a wider range of external publics.

However, I think that video clips and sounds should be integrated into the newsletter as well. In the MACNM conference for example, extracts from the conference can be put online so that insights and ideas can be shared around the world. In addition, perhaps a discussion forum could be added which could attract feedback from the readers about the professor's research.

PR Theories Applied

In the following, I will analyses the online EN newsletter based on the Berstein's wheel theory and the diffusion and adaptation theory.

Berstein's Wheel

1. Literature: It is obvious that the webpage and the newsletter themselves are the kind of literature that promotes the success and achievements of the EN Department. For example, news articles such as “The *Precious* Tour” and “*Deep* collaboration with Hong Kong Institute of Education” were written to convey positive messages to the publics.
2. Permanent media: The EN department logo appears in every page of the newsletter for recognition and brand image. The same format of the newsletter applies to every issue, and the design of the newsletter is of the same with the EN departmental homepage. Uniformity is obvious in the EN newsletter and therefore, reflecting to the style and image of the EN Department.
3. Wider public: The EN newsletter wants to appeal to the wider public because the EN is one of the tertiary institutions in Hong Kong that provides postgraduate TESOL and communication education. Therefore, for marketing purpose, promotional articles such as “EN Launches New Programme for Primary and Secondary English Language Teachers” is included in the newsletter. It appeals to the external publics (i.e. the potential customers and the influencers) that are interested in post-graduate education, curriculum designs and language teaching.
4. Customers: Customers’ feedbacks are published in the newsletter. This is obvious when students in the BAEPC and BATESL programme contribute articles in the newsletter about their experience in the study tour in Singapore. Real life experience from the customers can convince the publics that the EN programmes are worth to study. It is a kind of a customer feedback to the programme.

Grunig and Hunt's theories

It is obvious that the online EN newsletter reflects with the Public Information model according to the Grunig and Hunt's theories. Public Information model explains that the organisation disseminates information to one or more publics. It is one way, with a sender and receivers.

In the example of the EN newsletter, the sender will be the EN department, and the receivers will be the students and the staff (the internal publics), as well as scholars, communication professionals and in-service language teachers (the external publics).

In writing the newsletter, articles have been proofread by the editors to ensure the stories are accurate. This reflects to what the Public Information model says that truth and accuracy are very important.

Rating and Suggestions on Improvements

Categories	Rating	Reasons
<i>Clarity</i>	A	Layout and graphic are of the same as the EN Departmental Homepage. It shows consistency. Headings are clear. And the 5Ws and 1H are included in every article.
<i>Conciseness</i>	A	Articles are of acceptable length and they are readable on screens. Photo captions are written concisely too.
<i>Word Choice</i>	A	Different genres are used for different audience, jargons and technical terms more often found in research report articles, while daily English is found in stories for undergraduates.
<i>Sentence length & structure</i>	A	Sentences are concise enough to be read on screen. Short paragraphs are used instead of long paragraphs. Sub-headings found.
<i>Paragraph length</i>	A	Short paragraph means better readability and attractiveness on web.
<i>Wordiness</i>	A	No, the stories have been proofread and edited.
<i>Redundancy</i>	A	No, the stories have been proofread and edited.
<i>Active/passive verbs</i>	A	No grammatical mistake. It depends on what they want to emphasise.
<i>Use of imagery</i>	B	Some photos are animated, yet some photos in the study tour articles are too small and blurred.
<i>Use of jargon</i>	A	More commonly found in the more academic articles.
<i>Puffery</i>	A-	It is used, perhaps to attract readers and make the articles livelier and enjoyable.
<i>Stereotyping</i>	A	Not found.

If I am allowed to change something from the EN newsletter, I would consider the following:

1. Adding video clips and audio to the newsletter: This could make the newsletter more 'communicative' and can raise the awareness of the audience. Instead of reading from the text, they could see the clips so that they can experience what the situation is like in the conference. This could encourage more widespread participation from the publics.
2. Adding an alumni section in the EN newsletter: Instead of only having the students and the staff news, we could have a section with an alumni interview, which may be talks about their career experiences and giving advices to the undergraduates.
3. Using more tables and charts to show information: Instead of text, some information can be summarised and listed out in tables and charts, so that the publics can get to the information instantly. One example will be the self-financed degree programme of BA English for the Professions. The target audience may be the students who are aged 20-22 and have just graduated from the associate degree programme. So, a simple and clearer presentation may be more preferable to them.

I have included excerpts of the online EN newsletter and changes that I suggest to make.