
Exercises, Chapter Five

Research Influences on Public Relations Writing

■ Exercise 5-1: Web research: key words

Explore the differences in search engines by using a common search term such as “public relations writing” on three different search engines.

Now try using the terms “printer,” “printing,” and “commercial printing” on a single search engine. You should notice a great difference in the search results. What do these searches tell you about the importance of key words in searches and in creating web sites of your own?

■ Exercise 5.2: Researching the environment, client, publics and media

The basic exercises for identifying client, environment, media and publics information are included in the “Getting Started” section of this workbook. Following are supplementary exercises that will tell you more about each of these topics.

1. Researching the environment, additional information

Broadly speaking, environmental research is identifying the issues, trends, factors and institutions that affect or potentially affect your client’s ability to operate. For public relations writing in particular, these factors include the size and nature of your market, organizations that can help or compete with you, legal support or constraints and social issues relevant to your client.

In the “Getting Started” section you identified organizations that one might consider competitors to your client. List three types of information you want to know about these competitors that will affect your public relations writing

2. Researching your client

Much of the information you will need about your client has been provided in the client profile at the beginning of this workbook. You should read this profile carefully so that you are familiar with the people, places and details you will use again and again in your writing.

What information not available in the client profile do you think you will need in order to write effective copy for your client? Where do you expect to get this information?

Information

Source

3. Researching your client’s publics

Understanding publics is, arguably, one of the most important aims of the research you will conduct for any client. Sources for information about these publics will be both formal and informal. It will be based on what you know about your client and what you know about the sector and indeed, the competition. In the “Getting Started” section of this workbook, you identified many demographic characteristics of the region in which your client operates and also some

characteristics about individual publics. Following are some additional questions you may want to answer.

- What other information will you need to know about these publics in order to write effective copy for your client? Where will you get this information?

Information	Source
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

- Public image: What do these publics think of your client?

In the “Getting Started” section you identified many publics with whom your client might have or want a relationship. List the publics below. Although you have not done any formal research at this point, you can make an educated guess as to what these publics might think. What do you think is the attitude of each of these publics toward your client?

Public	Attitude			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unaware
_____	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unaware
_____	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unaware
_____	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unaware
_____	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unaware
_____	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unaware
_____	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unaware
_____	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unaware
_____	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unaware
_____	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unaware
_____	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unaware
_____	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unaware

- What do these attitudes tell you about the writing you will do for your client? For example, will writing targeted to your priority publics be primarily informative or persuasive, grade school level or college level, detailed or simple?

4. Researching messages

- Research national and local media to find at least three articles about your client’s sector. What messages are being published about this sector?

Message	Source	Type of article	
		News	Opinion
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

- How would you characterize these messages: positive, negative, educational, persuasive?

Message	Type of article		Attitude	
	Educational	Persuasive	Positive	Negative
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

- Which of these messages (if any) do you think resulted from the organization’s or sector’s public relations effort? What makes you think so?

5. Researching effects

Effects research typically comes after the project is complete. But you should define in advance what results/effects you will be seeking.

For each public you identified earlier, what do you think will be the major purpose(s) of your communications: knowledge, attitude or behavior change? At the end of a project, you will want to know whether your communication achieved these purposes. Your client’s mission and goals, and the attitudes you circled under “Publics Research” above should help you define these purposes.

Identifying the purpose of communicating with each public

Public	Communication Purpose		
	Knowledge	Attitude	Behavior
_____	Knowledge	Attitude	Behavior
_____	Knowledge	Attitude	Behavior
_____	Knowledge	Attitude	Behavior
_____	Knowledge	Attitude	Behavior
_____	Knowledge	Attitude	Behavior
_____	Knowledge	Attitude	Behavior
_____	Knowledge	Attitude	Behavior
_____	Knowledge	Attitude	Behavior
_____	Knowledge	Attitude	Behavior