

Public Relations (PR) as a Career Choice

What is PR?

PR is a marketing discipline that involves opening up the channels of communication between an organisation and its target audiences. The output usually appears in one of three media 'channels' ie print, broadcast or digital. Unlike advertising, the results that appear have not been paid for, which means that a PR practitioner must communicate with opinion formers, typically journalists.

The industry is split between those working in-house, inside organisations or in agencies that supply PR services.

Famous Publicity Ltd is a boutique PR agency that was set up three years ago by a woman called Tina Fotherby, who has broad industry experience having worked for household names and brands in London.

The offices are at Redhill Aerodrome, about four miles south of Redhill and there are five employees.

What do people in PR do?

People working in PR spend a good deal of time communicating to journalists, writing news information in the form of press releases. They will write reports and typically have frequent communication with writers and broadcasters. They may organise events for their clients or support events run by their clients.

A good PR practitioner will be confident and communicate well, whether it be face to face, via Skype, phone, by email or via social media.

The role involves having empathy with all those you deal with and understanding the needs of your client. You must be aware of their target audiences and the messages they want to get across.

The results of your work can appear in newspapers, magazines, on TV, radio or on social media.

PR is about managing one of the most important intangible assets of an organisation – its reputation.

What qualifications do you need?

It is very difficult for someone without a University degree to ever reach their full potential in the PR industry. If someone has excellent A-level results and shows great aptitude, they might be considered, although they will need to prove that they can apply themselves to given tasks.

An A-level in English is mandatory at Famous Publicity for all 'account handlers' ie those who deal with the clients and the media.

The following degree subjects are considered useful: English, Economics, Sociology, Journalism, Marketing, Law and Business Studies. Any degree subject that involves plenty of essay writing is good practice for a life in PR. A degree in PR can be helpful although it is only recommended for those who feel certain that PR is their career choice.

What's the best thing about PR?

- Industry is growing (between 5 and 10 per cent per year).
- It offers variety.
- Young, focused and bright candidates can develop rapidly.
- Diversity is accepted.
- The industry is changing all the time.
- You get to understand businesses and business owners (or organisations in the case of charity and not for profit).
- You can get to meet people who are usually inaccessible eg celebrities, artists etc.
- If you're sociable, your social skills will be appreciated.
- You help make your clients famous!

What are the worst things about PR?

- Attention to detail is essential – in all kinds of communication.
- It's a competitive industry where there are more candidates than positions.
- Your own social media behaviour will be monitored. You will need to be careful what you post – even on your own social media accounts.
- Many people don't understand the importance of the industry because it is often 'invisible'. You may spend a long time telling people what you do for a living because they don't understand it.
- You will be expected to be positive and pro-active at all times.
- Unlike 'paid for' advertising, you cannot guarantee the results.
- Some people are suspicious, thinking it's about making a bad thing look good. (Don't worry – it isn't. It's about getting to the root of an organisation's 'essence' and explaining what they do as authentically as possible.)

How can you find out more?

- Visit the website for the Chartered Institute of PR that represents individuals in the industry: <http://www.cipr.co.uk/>.
- See the website for the PR Consultants Association that looks after PR agencies in particular: <http://www.prca.org.uk/>.
- Look at the website for Famous Publicity and discover how a Surrey-based PR firm gets their clients media coverage throughout the world: <http://www.famouspublicity.com/>.
- Set up a Google Alert for 'PR' and 'Public Relations' to see the latest news stories on the subject.
- Consider doing some work experience at a PR agency or in-house to find out a bit more about what's involved.

Any other tips?

- A good employer will give you coaching and training.
- A great way to start is as an intern. You will start off on a modest salary that will rapidly increase after six months.
- Some PR agencies expect interns to work for free. This is unacceptable and should not be considered.
- Do as much as you can outside of your curriculum to show your staying power and determination eg Duke of Edinburgh Awards or volunteering.
- Ask to join the mailing list at Famous Publicity. Please email Karen@famouspublicity.com and mark your email 'Career Tips'.

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