

BARKS & BITES

PR Forecast—Eight Trends and Predictions to Watch (and Plan) for in 2007

Op-ed by Howard J. Rubenstein, Founder, Rubenstein Associates

The New Year and weeks following represent a natural time to reflect on the changing dynamics of our industry, and to anticipate future trends. Here are some of the things that I think we can look forward to seeing in 2007:

1. Greater importance will be placed on the public relations professional. As we recently saw, *Time* and *AdAge* both named the consumer as the “Person of the Year” because of the greater role individuals play in how information is disseminated and used. Figuring out how to reach people who are more empowered and more engaged in getting information through multiple channels is complicated. PR professionals will continue to have an increasingly important role in helping businesses, non-profit organizations and public officials navigate the many outlets for communications and successfully get their messages out.

2. Greater emphasis on high ethical standards will become the norm. So many high-ranking people in the fields of business, entertainment, government and education have been ousted recently. These once-prominent individuals have not only been forced out of jobs, but also sometimes even put in jail for their actions. Today's world demands a greater standard of ethical behavior. As a consequence, PR people will need to think twice before floating a negative, inaccurate or harmful story.

3. Globalization of communications will continue. India and China represent enormous new marketplaces. While local PR firms don't necessarily have to establish offices overseas, they will need to know the cultures that they are targeting, and how their PR activities and messages will translate into those cultures.

4. U.S. cities will start to feel the strain of a weakening economy. Businesses across the country, as well as mayors and governors, will not only turn to economists for help, but also to PR professionals as they begin to realize their programs for improvement won't be effective if they can't explain them clearly to their constituents.

5. More students will study communications and PR. Industry leaders are seeking out smart communications professionals to help strategize their companies' overall images and positions. Communications, and specifically PR, is a growing field and there are wonderful opportunities for young people entering the profession.

6. Blogging will continue to win PR attention and resources. The influence of bloggers has brought about a tremendous impact on storytelling in the world. This is a new horizon for PR people and we had better be comfortable with it and know how to use it to our advantage.

7. Face-to-face networking will thrive despite online advances. In this day of instant electronic communication, some people belittle the value of *personal contact*. I believe that personal relationships and contacts and the professional respect these relationships help to build are as important as ever. I don't see this changing in the coming year or years from now.

8. PR will enjoy new opportunities to help restore our national image. Finally, I think 2007 will see a surge of nationalism both here in the U.S. and overseas. As we begin to enter a presidential campaign, and as the House of Representatives and Senate face the president on major issues such as the war in Iraq, taxation, and welfare reform, I think politicians will seek PR professionals more to help them gauge public reaction and to help them find the best way to present their messages to the public. PR people could be instrumental in helping to restore America's prestige and reputation—both here and abroad. Projecting the real strengths of America and telling the true story of American integrity will be our challenge in the coming year.

Howard Rubenstein founded Rubenstein Associates in 1954. The agency has an extensive list of over 450 clients, including the New York Yankees, The New York Post, the Guggenheim Museum, BMW, the Mt. Sinai/NYU Health System, the Bowery Mission, Rockefeller Center, Columbia University and the Empire State Building.

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