

CAREER GUIDE

PRSA Public
Relations
Society of
America
Oregon

ADVANCING THE PROFESSION
AND THE PROFESSIONAL

About PRSA

Chartered in 1947, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) is the world's largest and foremost organization of public relations professionals with more than 22,000 public relations and communications professionals, in addition to more than 10,000 university and college students through the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA).

PRSA provides professional development, sets standards of excellence and upholds principles of ethics for its members. We also advocate for greater understanding and adoption of public relations services, and act as one of the industry's leading voices on pivotal business and professional issues.

With support from thousands of PRSA members, The PRSA Foundation, an independent, 501(c)(3) charity, raises funds to fuel the passion, dreams and futures of a diverse range of ambitious and promising students. PRSA is also a founding member of the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management. – from <http://www.prsa.org>

About the Oregon Chapter of PRSA

We started this guide in 2015, under the auspices of the Portland Metro Chapter of PRSA. It took two years of research and writing to finish it, then almost another year to work through copyright issues when our chapter became much larger and more inclusive, and changed its name.

After decades of serving the different communities within our region, the Greater Oregon, Oregon Capital and Portland Metro chapters of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) joined forces to become PRSA Oregon in 2017. Dedicated to serving all communicators at every stage of their career across the state of Oregon and Southwest Washington (including Longview, South of Centralia and West of Yakima), our membership represents businesses of all types, counseling firms and professional service firms, government, associations, hospitals, schools, non-profit organizations and more.

PRSA Oregon strengthens, unifies and advances the public relations profession and the local practitioner through a unique combination of service, advocacy and professional development activities, including educational programs, skills training, networking, information exchange, leadership, training for APR certification, and more. We encourage members to use their membership to be fulfilled, to gain credibility and to grow as they build their strategic communications career. Those who do find immeasurable value through continued career growth and advancement as a result of our programs and networking opportunities.

The Oregon Chapter is led by an all-volunteer board of professionals from across the region. Signature events include the annual Spotlight Awards, held in October, honoring excellence in public relations, and the Communicators Conference, held in May. We also hold professional development events and networking events throughout the year. We have a mentoring program helping both new and experienced professionals navigate the various stages of their careers.

PRSA Portland Metro Chapter
PMB #111, 5331 SW Macadam Ave.
Suite 258, Portland, OR 97239

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Introduction

We are pleased to share the newest version of the PRSA career guide. This updated version contains all the timeless professional development wisdom present in the previous guides but also includes important information on emerging trends that have reshaped the public relations profession in the last decade.

The advent of the internet drastically changed how we communicate. With dizzying speed, social media became an integral part of public relations, and the disciplines of PR and marketing began to merge. Individuals and companies could become their own media outlets, even as they worked closely with reporters, news directors and bloggers. Importantly, today's age of the internet has given everyone and anyone a voice, and people are using their voices, sometime vociferously.

Traditional roles and paths have also shifted with societal and generational changes. Many people forgo the straight vertical 20-to-30-year career trajectory, and are instead moving laterally every few years. They are experimenting with different communications specialties or moving in and out of jobs depending upon their personal circumstances, looking for more flexibility at work.

Millennials came into the field with different values than the previous generations. For example, the first generation of digital natives tends to value creativity and innovation. They are quick to move on if employers do not satisfy their needs. They are also less loyal to employers, as many Millennials feel employers are not loyal to their employees. Millennials also tend to value a work/life balance and want to work for employers whose corporate

social responsibility reflects their own values (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011).

Generations X and Y began to hit midlife and started reviewing their careers, wondering if they should stay or start making different decisions. The biggest concern for Generation X, as stated in a New York Times op-ed piece a couple of years ago, is economic: "When their working years end, Gen-Xers might have to live on just half of their pre-retirement income, compared with 60 percent for the Baby Boom generation ... And while younger people saw their income drop more, those between 35 and 44 saw the biggest drop in net worth of any group" (North, 2014).

Meanwhile, Baby Boomers started looking at the challenge of recreating careers as highly experienced seniors now facing age discrimination and negative public perceptions of what seniors have to offer. Many Boomers are unable to retire or are simply not ready to retire, causing some friction with the generations following them.

Rather than being organized in a hierarchical manner according to the different job levels of public relations and strategic communications, this guide is organized by a practitioner's stage of career (not necessarily the same thing as the age range of the practitioner).

The first section introduces the types of jobs in public relations and the skills needed. The second part deals with new college graduates about to embark on a communications career. The third part deals with those making midlife decisions, whether they are experienced public relations practitioners or people transitioning into the field from some

other profession. The fourth and final part deals with senior practitioners, who may not be ready or able to retire, and whose employment options have changed over the years.

This guide does not assume a person will go straight from Point A to Point B at any particular point in his or her career. Instead, it examines a few byroads along the way.

Along with references for further reading, we have provided the summaries of three student focus groups held in 2015. The three focus groups were with traditional-age college students at the [University of Oregon in Eugene](#); graduate students at [UO's Turnbull Center in Portland, OR](#); and older, non-traditional students at [Marylhurst University in Lake Oswego, OR](#).

The goal of this updated guide is to create a resource valuable to new professionals seeking to find their way in a new career as well as to help orient midcareer and seasoned PR pros who must continue to adapt to the changing communications world of the 21st century.

Acknowledgments

The authors are greatly indebted to the following people who gave advice and guidance as this Career Guide was in development:

Gerard “Gerry” Corbett, APR, Fellow PRSA, Chair and CEO, Redphlag LLC, The PR Job Coach, Instructor, University of California, Extension

Donna Davis, Strategic Communications Program Director and Assistant Professor at the Turnbull Center, University of Oregon

Jeneen Garcia, Vice-President of Education, PRSA

Betsy Hayes, Former Chair, North Pacific District of PRSA, Professor at Fresno State University

Jim Haynes, APR, Fellow PRSA, Adjunct Professor, Southern Methodist University

Barbara Kerr, APR, Fellow PRSA, Chief Communications Officer at Sisters of St. Mary of Oregon Ministries Corporation

John Mitchell, APR, Fellow PRSA, Instructor, University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication

Dr. Joseph V. Trahan, III (LTC-US Army-Retired) APR, Fellow PRSA; Pres./CEO/Media Trainer Trahan & Associates

Tom Unger, APR, Fellow PRSA, Regional Communications Manager, Wells Fargo Bank

Board of Directors 2016, Portland Metro Chapter, PRSA, including:

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- **Beverly Brooks** – Dir. Development
- **Becca Sterbenz** – Dir. Events
- **Prapat “Jojo” Nujoy** – Dir. Recognition
- **Julie Williams**, APR – Dir. Service

Co-authors: Baby Boomer **Kathryn Hubbell**, APR, Fellow PRSA, Owner, AdScripts, LLC

Millennial **Aaron Sewall**, Independent Public Relations Consultant/Account Supervisor, Image 3D

Graphic layout and design: Millennial **Nicole Early**, Account Manager, Pac/West

Defining public relations a changing field

This guide relies upon the PRSA definition of public relations: “Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” ([PRSA, 2016](#)). Public relations has always been defined as a strategic communications process which starts with upper management and branches out to include everyone in the organization and all of the organization’s publics, whether friendly or adversarial.

With the advent of social media, public relations has become more closely aligned with marketing. Social media has made it possible to form relationships on an individual basis, always something at the core of good PR efforts; and it has also made it obvious that if a company wants to sell anything or grow in any way, it needs to work on those relationships and on its reputation. Mutual trust is always the goal.

Media intelligence becomes a primary consideration. In the article, “What pros should know about how PR is changing,” by Peter Granat, media intelligence is one of three primary considerations to take into account in this fast-moving world. Because stories in traditional journalism outlets now cross over to social media and reporters scour social media for story leads, it’s imperative that this intelligence be shared throughout an organization and not be isolated. Everyone has a stake in a data-driven final outcome, i.e., an outcome that includes measurable, qualitative and quantitative data that goes beyond the numbers to describe the effect on the intended audience.

Secondly, PR pros have many more tools available to reach their intended audiences, including paid, earned and owned media. Paid media, of course, means advertising. This is one of the areas where an integrated communications program is crucial. Earned media has always been public relations’ greatest strength, but now every company has the opportunity to own its own media and become a publisher of its own content, and every individual (and PR pro) can take on the role of citizen journalist. Traditionally, journalists and news directors served as “gatekeepers,” through which a PR practitioner’s work had to pass before it was published. The opportunity to produce content directly makes it easier to reach target audiences but also adds the further responsibility of assuring accuracy, honesty and the free flow of information in reporting. In becoming citizen journalists, PR practitioners should adhere to the [journalism code of ethics](#) in addition to their own [PR code of ethics](#) if they want full credibility.

Finally, Granat emphasizes that new developments in technology are having major impacts on the role of communicators. Although he does not mention specific developments, many are obvious from media monitoring companies to those supplying specialized wire services, web development and more. These new technologies and tools provide both advantages and challenges in the profession (Granat, 2015).

Types of employment in public relations

Agency Work

Public relations practitioners may work in any of several types of organizations. Many start out in a public relations agency or a combined PR and advertising agency. Others gravitate to nonprofit organizations. Some head to the corporate world to work with major businesses. Others find jobs in the government and public policy sector or with educational institutions. As time draws in on their careers, a number of PR professionals decide to become self-employed independent consultants or start their own agencies. In short, PR practitioners work almost anywhere most people work. The need for good communication and good relationships remains paramount to the success of any organization.

Agency work is a great training ground for the new practitioner but is also a rewarding and ongoing challenge for the midcareer or senior professional. Agencies run on deadlines and tend to be fast-paced, pressured environments. They aren't for everyone, but for those who like an interesting, ever-changing environment they can be stimulating and rewarding. The positions below can vary from firm to firm and from organization to organization.

1. Intern

An intern is there to learn and to do whatever basic task is assigned. These tasks might be as simple as archiving media clips or filing information on behalf of a client.

2. PR coordinator

Account coordinators do a lot of the grunt work of PR: compiling media lists, media monitoring, compiling reports and gaining a general

understanding of the inner working of PR. They often learn to write press releases and media advisories at this stage.

3. Account executive

Account executives generally have two-three years of experience and are often the ones who write press releases and social media posts. AEs generally maintain relationships with journalists, influencers, publishers and clients. Account executives are the tacticians of the field.

4. Account manager

Account managers start to take a more managerial approach in delegating work to their junior account executives and coordinators. Senior account managers work with two or more account teams and develop strategies with clients and their teams.

5. Account director

Account directors have proven their ability to manage multiple accounts, teams, and clients. Directors also take a role in bringing in new clients and generating revenue for an agency. Directors may also start to take a role in mentoring junior practitioners.

6. Vice president

VPs have a lot of responsibility. They essentially run their own agency. VPs spend most of their time helping to grow the business and build its brand. Vice presidents also tend to have gained a special area of focus in PR.

For more information about agency organization and roles within the agency, see this detailed post from Shift Communications: <http://bit.ly/27G3zOy>. Of course, agency work is not the only avenue available to PR practitioners. There are several

other rewarding career paths to take depending on your interests, needs and ambitions. Due to the enormous variety of possible titles and positions, they are not categorized and detailed here.

Corporate Public Relations

A practitioner may work in-house for a corporation's communications department. The size of the PR department will depend upon the size of the corporation and may or may not be placed under the auspices of a marketing department. Corporate public relations practitioners may work in various specialty areas such as research, in-house communications, social media promotions, community relations, brand development, reputation management, or crisis communications. Often a practitioner will work in several of these areas within a team of communications professionals. Ideally, the corporate PR professional will be able to progress from an internship or tactical level to one of working out strategy and evaluation of the company's outreach efforts.

It's in the corporate world that we so often hear the lament, "We can't get a seat at the table." The complaint relates to the need for public relations professionals to be included in the boardroom where the top management decisions are made that affect the whole organization and where communications insights are highly valuable.

The singular thing that may be blocking this development is that not enough public relations professionals have the financial training they need to understand how their work affects the corporation's bottom line. This is crucial and, fortunately, is recognized as such by more and more professional communicators.

A secondary element may be the need for PR professionals to have the confidence to simply ask to be included in such meetings, explaining they have something valuable to contribute.

Nonprofit & Association PR

The nonprofit sector requires the same rigorous professional standards as an agency or corporation, but the advantages and challenges are different. Nonprofit work almost certainly does not pay as well as corporate work, but the personal satisfaction in working for a cause you believe in cannot be measured in mere dollars. Most nonprofits do not have large communications departments. The result is that a single person may constitute the entire communications department. This can be overwhelming, but it is a great way to gain experience quickly. A practitioner may find himself in a position of training the management team and/or board of directors as to what public relations can and cannot do and the ethical considerations involved. A nonprofit practitioner will learn to work with graphic designers, photographers, videographers and other creative professionals. He may learn about and contribute to board development and fundraising. Nonprofit PR practitioners are often tasked with writing grants, which may become a valued specialty area.

Nonprofit PR practitioners may almost certainly find themselves working with volunteers, directing their efforts in some way. Understanding why volunteers are there and what motivates them becomes necessary; expectations and hopes can vary wildly across a volunteer group. These practitioners may find themselves being a kind of in-house communications conduit between the board, management and the volunteers.

Government & Public Affairs

A brief note to start: What we think of as public relations work within or on behalf of a government institution is more often called public affairs because of a 1913 law that is still on the books. In 5 U.S. Code 54/3107 (<http://bit.ly/25c0WUr>) this law states (as amended in 1979):

“No part of any funds appropriated in this or any other Act shall be used by an agency of the executive branch, other than for normal and recognized executive-legislative relationships, for publicity or propaganda purposes, and for the preparation, distribution or use of any kit, pamphlet, booklet, publication, radio, television or film presentation designed to support or defeat legislation pending before the Congress, except in presentation to the Congress itself” (Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, 2010).

The problem is that public relations was seen as self-promotion and publicity, nothing more. Clearly it has evolved into a more extensive dialogue between parties, but the old perceptions often still exist.

Public affairs work in government is often set against this contentious background, particularly when it comes to issues which divide public opinion. Fortunately, those images don't have to define our concepts of government public relations or public affairs work. The field is much wider and deeper than that.

For example, government public relations is at work when a town proposes paying the mayor and the city council, formerly volunteer positions; when a state's department of transportation undertakes an educational campaign about winter driving; or when the U.S. Forest Service helps to keep the public informed during a season of devastating wild fires. Public relations is also at work when a business has to answer to government regulators and needs to have a good relationship with those regulators.

Private utilities are one example of a heavily-regulated industry; food and pharmaceutical products are others.

PR practitioners may also work with legislators in Washington D.C., as well. They are often involved

in bringing issues to light that may have previously been unrecognized or downplayed; they may also work to help a client understand how to work with public opinion and change laws. However, public relations practitioners are not necessarily lobbyists. If they do engage in lobbying efforts, they must register as such.

Military Public Affairs

Military Public Affairs is a large field. PAOs (Public Affairs Officers) are responsible for telling the story of their unit or their division, maintaining good relationships with reporters, gathering public support, maintaining good community relations, and explaining the mission of their branch of the armed services. A new [APR](#) designation has been designed for this specialized area of public affairs: the [APR+M](#).

Educational Institutions

Institutions of higher education have long recognized and used the power of public relations through challenges such as recruiting new students, faculty research, finding more funding, and managing various crises that may occur on campus. Research and reputation management skills are necessary as well.

The challenge for K-12 education, however, has been quite different. Public cynicism and distrust of the government, increased media scrutiny and increased competition are among the factors that have changed in recent decades. In addition, “unfortunately, schools of education do not provide training in public relations,” and most superintendents, administrators, and teachers have little or no communications and public relations training. Many are uncomfortable promoting themselves or their services. But the fact is, schools must promote themselves because in the absence of the facts, “people will create their own information, and it won't be right” (Bradley, 1996).

“Schools must take it upon themselves to tell their own stories and to listen better to their partners, the public, so they can provide the value the public wants” (Carlsmith & Railsback, 2001).

Perhaps the need for public relations serving our educational system has never been greater. Between the worrying rates of high school graduation in our country today and the fact that many school districts may not have the needed communications training to effect some changes or gather public support, PR practitioners have their challenges cut out for them.

Independent Practitioner,

Freelancer

Ah, to be self-employed! To get away from the boss who never seems to have a handle on things, or the co-worker who can't seem to meet deadlines – what a dream! The mythology is that being self-employed means setting one's own hours, choosing one's own clients and taking a vacation whenever desired. There would be no bosses; a person could be in control. Well, not so fast.

There are a lot of challenges facing the PR practitioner who wants to go it alone. Managing finances, finding clients, and creating a work-life balance are difficult tasks to undertake, all while trying to build a practice. Learning the supervisory and management skills in order to have an employee or two is necessary.

The trade-offs are many. Working in-house for a company or in an agency, there is someone to provide that monthly paycheck, whereas the entrepreneur must generate the revenue to create the paycheck. There's no getting paid just for showing up at work. Paychecks only come from producing results. Clients or projects are assigned to the practitioner, who - at least in the early years - doesn't have to go out and pitch new accounts in hopes of obtaining those clients.

There may still be long hours working in an office, but those hours will be defined. The entrepreneur, on the other hand, may work as much as six or seven days a week when starting out, putting in whatever hours are needed for the job at hand. When there are colleagues in the office, there are people who can help brainstorm ideas and provide some needed feedback. The solo practitioner must find peers who can help provide inspiration, encouragement and insight.

It takes careful planning, self-motivation and self-discipline to run a business or work as a free-lancer. Entrepreneurs tend to have a pretty high tolerance for risk. They are also committed to lifelong learning and to networking with their peers to achieve a needed balance of perspectives (Opperman, 2014).

Operating as an entrepreneur means using management skills every day. In addition to managing other people such as employees or vendors, the practitioner will find that self-management and self-discipline is a continuous process. To be a business owner or a solo practitioner is to look in the mirror every day and learn what one's real strengths and weaknesses are.

Types of specialties in public relations

On a purely practical level, a management accountant and an attorney should be on board. The management accountant is far more than a bookkeeper. He or she will help figure out the profit centers in the businesses and help discover other areas which may be a waste of time. The attorney will guide the entrepreneur on the legal ins and outs of being a sub-contractor or of hiring and managing employees.

PRSA provides various professional interest sections for these specialties and more:

[Association / Nonprofit](#)
[Corporate Communications](#)
[Counselors Academy](#)
[Counselors to Higher Education](#)
[Educators Academy](#)
[Employee Communications](#)
[Entertainment and Sports](#)
[Financial Communications](#)
[Health Academy](#)
[Independent](#)
[Practitioners Alliance](#)
[New Professionals](#)
[Public Affairs and Government](#)
[Technology](#)
[Travel and Tourism](#)

From: <https://www.prsa.org/Network/Communities/index.html>

There are various specialty areas in PR. Normally, a practitioner's work will be a crossover between several of these. For example, a special events planner will need to have good relationships in the community in which the event will take place and will also need to be able to work well with local media. Specialties are not isolated into silos; they mix and match all the time. Specific specialties include (but are not limited to):

Community Relations

A good relationship with the community in which it operates is paramount for most businesses and nearly all nonprofits. Knowing community leaders and having a working familiarity of how people get things done are parts of this specialty.

Crisis Communications

Practitioners who specialize in crisis communications are experts at monitoring the environment to predict trouble ahead. They train executives and managers how to respond to a crisis and help coordinate communication both within the organization and between the organization and the outside world when a crisis occurs.

Employee Communications

Many PR practitioners specialize in bridging the gap between management and staff, and in ensuring that there is good two-way communication between all levels of an organization. Good communication between a company and its various publics always starts with good in-house communication.

Government & Public

Affairs

Although New York State at one point proposed expanding the definition of lobbying to include PR practitioners (see <http://bit.ly/1W1tXLs>), those who specialize in public affairs and politics are not lobbyists. Instead, they are top-level strategists who advise their clients about achieving their political goals and, as with all PR pros, work closely with reporters to deliver their clients' messages.

Media Relations

Working with reporters in an educated, insightful way remains one of the hallmarks of an excellent PR practitioner. Working with traditional as well as online media outlets expands and leverages the reach of the stories and information provided.

Social Media

Social media conversations carry a great deal of weight, and knowing when, where and how to engage in those conversations is an important aspect of today's public relations and marketing disciplines.

Special Events

This category may include everything from planning a media tour to helping produce a festival. A knowledge of how to keep momentum going in the planning stages to creating a good experience for both the participants and audience are important aspects of the job.

Sports Marketing/PR

This is a fun field but one that is increasingly complicated with the number of athletes on social media and the complex relationships between teams and their communities. People who love sports and love communication are a good fit here.

B to B Relations

A business may sell scientific equipment to other businesses and organizations or a manufacturer will establish relationships with wholesalers. Whatever the case, understanding each other's business and working within that framework to encourage cooperation and communication are critical tasks.

Marketing Communications/ Consumer Relations

The merger of PR and marketing takes place more in the consumer goods category than anywhere else. This includes food and drugs as well as clothes, tools, the technology we use, and the myriad of products available today. Goods are not sold if a company's reputation is poor and reputation is built by the principles of public relations.

Investor PR

Possibly the highest-paid specialty in public relations, practitioners working in the financial markets help write annual reports, communicate with stakeholders and release media advisories. They need to have a solid background in finance as well as communication.

Litigation PR

This category involves using public relations strategies and tactics to help manage legal cases that are being played out in the press. Litigation PR can help manage the undue influence of publicity and public opinion. For example, the press deemed Richard Jewell guilty of the Olympic Park bombing in Atlanta in 1996. Jewell was innocent, but could never again overcome the negative and unwarranted publicity and died an early death.

For further information, see the textbook *Public Relations: A Values-Driven Approach* by David W. Guth and Charles Marsh, Fifth Edition, 2012, Pearson Education, Inc.

Skills and attitudes needed to work in public relations

Please note: These skills are summarized and attached to the following three sections (the stages of a career) to designate what types of skills are most needed at each stage.

- **Be an excellent writer.** Social media has not lessened the need for good writing, but has increased it. Clear writing indicates clear thinking and a clear sense of mission. Those who can write in a short, succinct way are much more likely to be noticed in cyberspace. Practitioners need:
 - Excellent grammar and spelling.
 - Precise, succinct sentences.
 - Compelling writing that draws the reader in.
- **Be articulate.** PR practitioners are able to express themselves verbally with good grammar and clear thinking.
- **Be skilled and experienced in social media,** including standard sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest and Instagram, and any specialized sites that might be important to the company in question (Don't take a one-size-fits-all approach when applying for a job. Be sure to make each application and résumé fit each individual company). Understand how to plan and execute a social media campaign as well as how to evaluate it.
- **Understand something about graphic design and about building a website.** A new PR practitioner may not be asked to do these things, but may be directing or working with the efforts of others to do them. Along these same lines, know how to create a good infographic.
- **Work on college grades (for those about to graduate or who are new graduates):** These indicate an ability to meet deadlines and also indicate good work habits. Not every potential employer will look at transcripts; some do.
- **Be curious about the world.** This cannot be emphasized enough. Be interested, be curious and be willing and eager to do the legwork to learn more.
- **Be knowledgeable about civics and how the world works,** whether it be the local community, the state, geographic regions or country, or world economies and governments.
- **Be passionate** about something, some cause or issue larger than oneself or a particular hobby or interest.
- **Be a good listener.**
- **Be detail-oriented.** Be obsessive about the details of any given project or assignment.
- **Be able to work under deadline pressure.** In fact, be motivated by deadline pressure.
- **Be able to juggle multiple projects.** When on the job, a PR practitioner will rarely get closure on one project right away. There will always be a need to move on to other projects or tasks and keep the momentum going. Be organized enough and involved enough to be able to do this without confusion.
- **Be interested in people.** It isn't necessary to like everyone, but it is necessary to realize that everyone has a story and everyone has a point of view.
- **Be prepared.** Part of a PR practitioner's job is anticipating challenges and crises, from a public image issue, to an event that fails to offer sufficient seating for guests, to outright crisis

Part II

New Practitioner

1 - 4 years' experience

involving injury to others and/or to the environment. Responding quickly and correctly is much easier when a practitioner has anticipated problems, but their solutions.

- **Know what skill, abilities and experience you bring to the table.** The PR practitioner needs to have a keen sense about what problems he or she can help solve for any given company.

(Partially taken from “Getting your foot in the door for a PR career,” Hubbell Communications, 2015 - <http://bit.ly/1Y5PYbK>. (Note: The author is not part of Hubbell Communications.)



New practitioners tend to be fresh out of college, pursuing their first internships or in the early stages of their career. However, they may also be older adults switching careers from journalism or something entirely different into public relations. As they lay the groundwork for a career in communications, their days are filled with a lot of learning as they assist with administrative work such as media list building, taking their first stab at drafting press releases and blog posts and monitoring social media channels.

Skills needed at this stage:

- Be polished in verbal and written communication.
- Be proficient in social media.
- Be experienced in the basic tactical jobs that public relations requires such as writing press releases and media advisories, pitching stories, handling event logistics, arranging media tours and so forth.

- Be willing to get immersed completely in a client's or employer's business to learn everything possible.
- Keep an open attitude that assumes absolutely nothing.

Specific challenges:

- Lack of experience and hands-on knowledge.
- Lack of historical context and background knowledge on client or organizational challenges.
- Lack of connections.
- Experience in a different field which may have created misconceptions about PR.

Skills, abilities and interests

A practitioner's natural skills, abilities and interests always come into play when fashioning a career that will work. If a person had to work at something for eight-to-10 hours a day for the next five or 10 years to make ends meet, what would that person be good at and still enjoy years later?

One of the authors of this guide asked herself that question when she found herself a single parent with two small children to raise. Her answer was, “I love to write.” That led first to an interest in journalism and then midway through finishing a degree, to public relations. She felt at home in PR immediately. All her initial career decisions were made with an eye toward having enough flexibility to be with her children at critical times such as soccer games, orchestra concerts and parent-teacher meetings. Millennials are now asking for this same kind of job flexibility.

Be challenged with the same kinds of questions, adjusted to your particular set of circumstances.

If finding an internship or initial job specifically within the communications field has proven long, difficult or fruitless, consider taking a tangential job or internship. In other words, take on something that is more or less related to the specific field desired, and springboard from there. For example, consider selling advertising for the media. It will be an enormous education behind the scenes about how media works. At the same time, it will provide valuable sales training, which will always come in handy at unexpected times and places.

If possible, also consider pro bono assignments as a means of getting experience. Volunteer work definitely counts as experience and demonstrates to employers a willingness to work and learn. Many an organization has gone on to hire its outstanding interns. It's also wise to volunteer for one's professional organization.

Hunting for an internship and finding your first position

Landing that first internship or position is one of the most crucial steps in a career path. Many new PR graduates are able to find full-time employment with the company for which they interned.

Internships also provide a wealth of opportunity to demonstrate baseline PR skills to help secure employment at other organizations.

Internships generally last a few months and may be paid or unpaid. However, there is an ongoing debate about the merits of unpaid internships. According to a 2013 survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, paid internships led to job offers almost two-thirds of the time whereas only one-third of unpaid internships led to a job offer (Weissman, J., 2013).

Remember that an internship is for the practitioner's educational benefit, not just the company's bottom line.

As an intern, a practitioner does have certain rights that are protected by law. However, those rights do not necessarily include receiving pay or a guarantee of employment at the end of the internship (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2010).

Tip for finding first internship

- **If still in school, consult the school's career center.** Many schools collect internship postings and can help connect students with the proper contact to apply.
- **Do the research.** Most companies, particularly PR agencies, will post information about their internship programs on their websites.
- **Start to network from scratch.** Don't hesitate to send emails to PR professionals in the area. Better yet, join PRSA or PRSSA and attend meetings (join, and then join in!). Focus on alumni from school or contacts already made and send a simple note explaining your interest in the PR sector, current level of education, and goal of securing an internship. Most professionals will gladly point out resources at their company if they exist (Schroeder, A. 2015).
- **Pursue internships where you want to live after graduation.** Your internships will be the first step on your professional path and where you will lay the foundation of your network. Do you want to build a network in Lincoln as you attend the University of Nebraska only to move back to Portland and start over from scratch? Probably not.
- **Always put your best foot forward.** Before reaching out for help or applying for a job, compile a strong résumé that supports the goal of working in public relations and includes your professional and academic background.
- **Be professional.** This is a professional application so treat it that way. Make sure application materials are free of typos and use proper grammar. Do not use slang or casual informalities in the cover letter or other materials.

- **Do what you love.** Your internships are a great opportunity to try a variety of roles within an organization and learn about the industry (Johnson, B. 2013).

PR Job Coach Gerry Corbett (a member of the advisory team on this guide) has some advice on his blog for those who are very young (under 25) as well as for those who are over 55: Boldly go forth where no one has gone before. Two points he makes are these:

- **“Don’t shy from the conversation.** Raise the issue in your cover letter. If you are under 25, explain how your skills and experience can help you come up to speed fast and what value you can immediately apply to contribute to the company’s success.”
- **“Network above the crowd.** Work your connections. Identify people in your network who have connections with principals, hiring managers or other influencers at the companies that are the objects of your interest. Don’t hesitate to engage with them on your abilities, capabilities and aspirations. Offer to buy lunch or coffee and have a real conversation about their needs and requirements” (Corbett, G. 2016).

What are employers looking for in a résumé and interview?

Generally, a bachelor’s degree is sufficient for an entry-level PR position, but employers prefer a degree in public relations, journalism or marketing (Bates, 2015).

Employers are looking for applicants who have professional-level social media profiles and internship or volunteer experience (Brownell, 2014; Winchell, 2015).

They also want them to have top-notch writing and grammar skills (Brownell, 2014) and to know how to pitch the media and do research (Bates, 2015).

Employers look for potential hires with knowledge of PR, marketing, and business practices, as well as social media.

Job seekers should also be articulate, motivated, strategic and cooperative (team players) (Bates, 2015).

What should job seekers avoid doing?

Red flags for employers include a sloppy résumé or portfolio (Volpe, 2014); an unprofessional email address (an email address should ideally be firstnamelastname@email.com, no nicknames, symbols, or numbers); and unprofessional social media profiles. Profile pictures for sites like LinkedIn should be a straight-on headshot of professional quality if possible (Volpe, 2014).

Be particularly careful about social media profiles. A Media Post article makes the point that fully one-third of employers have rejected job candidates based on their social media postings (Sass, E. 2016). If you haven’t run a Google search on yourself lately, now would be a good time to do so. In particular, look for any unsavory information or activity such as anything overtly sexual, anything involving drinking too much or anything illegal. Make sure your online profile reinforces your résumé and doesn’t contradict it.

What can new PR grads expect from the profession? What’s the best advice for them?

- Keep expanding skills after graduation (Winchell, 2015).
- Find a mentor, and network, network, network (Winchell, 2015) (Miller, 2015) (Clark, 2015).
- Agency work is good experience, but it is difficult. There is a sink-or-swim mentality. The high turnover rate in PR agencies has its pluses and minuses (Miller, 2015).
- It’s not just about being creative. Public relations work is detail-oriented, time-sensitive, and stressful (Clark, 2015).

Part III

Making a Midcareer Change

5-10 years' experience

- Baby boomer bosses don't understand the millennial generation's mentality about work-life balance. This can lead to difficulties on both ends (Schulte, 2015).
- When applying for a PR job, think about what sets you apart from other applicants (Bates, 2015).

Next Steps

Professional development actions

- Create your résumé and a portfolio of your class and or/internship work.
- Clean up your social media profiles.
- Begin to network. Your local PRSSA and PRSA chapters are a great place to start. Check out your local IABC chapter as well.
- Volunteering with your professional organization is a great way to meet people, learn more and build your résumé.
- Ask questions. Line up informational interviews.
- Focus on the fundamentals.
- Seek more opportunities to learn.

PRSA Job Center: <http://jobs.prsa.org/jobseeker/search/results/>

PRSA PD, Finding a job: <http://prsapdx.org/professional-development/find-a-job/>

If you're already in public relations, by now you understand the fundamentals of PR, you're established professionally, and you've built up a network of friends and colleagues.

OR – perhaps you've been in another profession for a long time, but public relations has appealed to you more and more. Maybe you've been a journalist, and this is the time to make the switch. Perhaps you've got a strong background in health care, or environmental issues, or retail clothing, and you've wished you had more control over the communications and outreach on the issues about which you know so much. Or maybe your job has required a lot of traveling, and you simply want to come in off the road. There are many reasons to make midcareer changes.

Skill Levels Needed at This Stage:

- Good strategic thinking.
- Planning and problem-solving skills.
- The ability to supervise and manage people, both within the company and outside vendors.

Specific Challenges:

- Review your career and decide if you are still on the right path. Priorities often change at midlife or in midcareer. The Harvard Business Review poses some very specific questions to ask at this stage: "Should you consider a more fulfilling job with a pay cut when you've got a mortgage, bills, and college savings to worry about? How do you get the training or education you need to switch careers if you're already struggling to spend quality time with your family?" (Harvard Business Review, 2015).
- Analyze: are you still passionate about your job? Are



there areas where you are stagnating?

- Learn how to advance in the direction you want.
- Find work-life balance. It might be time for a different kind of balance than when you started.

Next Steps

Where do you go from here? There are several steps you can take:

- If you are already in public relations and intend to stay in PR, the first and most obvious answer is to [go for your APR](#) – your [Accreditation in Public Relations](#). The assumption is that you've had about five years in PR before you take this step. The exam takes about three months of preparation, but practitioners will tell you the study process alone is worth the trip. When you're ready, you'll present your portfolio to a panel of three APR judges, and they'll determine whether or not you're ready to take the full computer exam. Getting your APR means you know the specific methods, theories and steps for approaching most PR challenges; it means you've got a working knowledge of social media and of legal and ethical issues in PR. It also means you know something about how the business world works. Employers experienced in working with public relations professionals know the value of hiring someone who has his or her APR.
- **Research:** If you're thinking of changing companies or changing specialties, the next step is research. This is partly where your valuable network of professional colleagues can really help. Ask your contacts about the companies they work for, and learn something about the pros and cons.
- If you're exploring a different specialty area, [ask for an informational interview](#) with a friend or someone who specializes in the new field. An information session will likely alert you to any red flags about the specialty. You'll also find out where you might feel quite satisfied in making the switch. Whatever you do, do your homework.

- **Consider becoming an entrepreneur.**

More people are doing this than ever before at all stages of their careers, but it is perhaps more common among those at the mid-stage and senior stages of their careers. Becoming an entrepreneur takes an ability to tolerate risk, enough savings to last through initial promotional stages until clients start to sign up, and a clear focus on what you have to offer that differentiates you from the pack. Re-read the entrepreneur section on pages 11-12 of this guide.

- Always remember that your own reputation rests on the back of your clients, your company or your organization. Be sure you go where your own values are closely aligned with the organization's or client's values.

In the article, "5 Ways to Tell if You Need a Career Change," Forbes contributor Kathy Caprino says being "chronically worn out, exhausted and depleted" might be the first and most obvious sign that a career change is needed. This assumes, of course, that you are not the parent of a toddler. The point she makes is that often your body tells you what your mind cannot or will not and that it's worth paying attention to those signals.

Other signs include:

- Your skills, responsibilities and tasks are not you at all. (You may be really good at work you actually hate.)
- You've come to the point where your salary no longer makes up for the boredom and emptiness you feel.
- Despite all the "right" choices you made in your career, the outcome feels very wrong. This might be the result of being in a people-pleasing mode or a mode of simply taking opportunities as they come without thinking about what truly might be right for you.
- You have the irrepressible feeling that your talents and abilities could/should be used in a totally different (more creative and impactful) way (Caprino, K. 2013).

Part IV

Senior-Level Practitioners

10-20+ years' experience

Next Steps

Professional development actions

- **Do some self-analysis.** Use the articles referenced in this guide as a start, but also take a moment to write down your most satisfying moments or tasks at the job you have now, your financial needs, the areas of interest you have outside your job, your obligations to your family and/or desire to be with your family and the areas of life you most value.
- **Network.** Specifically, ask for informational interviews.
- **Read the trade magazines** for the area that interests you. There is a wealth of online information about both the pros and cons of any field you are considering.
- Depending upon your interests, you may need to **return to school** to finish a degree, get some certification or simply get more training.
- **Adjust your resume and work samples** from your portfolio to reflect your new interests and goals.
- Thoroughly **analyze your finances.** You want to be capable of paying the bills anywhere from three months to a year during this transition time.
- If you are 40-45 years old, **spend some time understanding that age discrimination will kick in** about the time you reach 45. You will need to start preparing. See the next section for more on this topic.

Defining a senior-level practitioner

This guide is organized according to the stages of a practitioner's career, but in this section a person's age does come into play because there are different priorities at different stages of life. As a result, there are different considerations to take into account when becoming a senior-level public relations professional.

There are now young practitioners with 10 years on the job who are considered to be seniors in their companies or specific industries. They are increasingly found in more areas than just the high-tech industry. A PR pro may be considered a senior practitioner at the young ages of 35 or 40, depending on the depth of experience and variety of skills.

In that 35-40-year age range, a practitioner may still have children at home and be facing college expenses. There may be aging parents who need care. As a result, professional concerns may include climbing further up the corporate ladder to ensure ongoing financial stability, or it might be time to change careers entirely.

Traditionally, a senior-level practitioner has been considered someone with 15-20 or more years of experience. Perhaps a better term here would be "executive-level practitioner," to denote someone who has reached the executive ranks of a company and is considering retirement in the not-too-distant future. In fact, those who apply to the [College of Fellows](#) in PRSA must have practiced public relations at least 20 years.

Age Discrimination

If you are 45 or older, you are entering a new and often bewildering world that will likely include age discrimination. While they may not articulate it as such, employers often want someone 25-30 years of age who's had 20 years of experience. As Gerry Corbett noted on his job coaching blog, a principal in a small firm was looking for a general manager. The man said, "We want a young person for which the job will be a stretch," as if experience and seasoned judgment didn't count (Corbett, 2016).

The hard facts are these: if you find yourself out of a job after the age of 45, it will be much more difficult to find another job. It's worth your time and trouble to spend the years from 40-45 making some serious decisions about your career and your future. If you are considering leaving your job, be sure you have another one lined up first. It's always easier to find a job while you're still employed. If you are considering changing fields entirely, be sure you're able to train for your new field while you're still employed.

No matter the age at which you achieve senior status, your priorities will change once again, and you need to do some preparation for the road ahead.

Advancing, changing careers, giving back

It seems senior-level practitioners can either advance or will simply create a new start for themselves. By now, an executive-level senior practitioner is likely ready to become a vice-president of the firm, or hold some other type of executive position. Some senior executives are hired away to fulfill the same basic role at another company, which also may be considered a move up the ladder. If you're not ready or able to retire, then advancing further up the chain may be in your best interest.

On the other hand, it might be time to make a larger change as discussed in the previous section dealing with mid-career professionals. If you have 20 years or more in public relations, consider applying to become a [Fellow in PRSA](#). Fellows are the top 400 or so practitioners out of the society's 22,000 members. They each have a proven track record of professionalism, of giving back to their communities and of volunteering for PRSA.

Indeed, as a senior, it is time to give back to others in the profession if you are not already doing so. Younger people coming up through the ranks have new ideas and new energy; you can learn from them even as you help them. How can you best help? With your experience, you know a lot about how certain situations and decisions will play out. You can help people prepare for expected future developments and for changes they'll face along the way.

Perhaps the most important way a senior practitioner can help is with the singular wisdom that comes from many years of dealing with human nature. As noted above, people have new methods of communicating and new ways of using technology to achieve communications objectives. But people are still people. They still want to be heard, they still want solutions to their problems and they still want their work to mean something. Senior public relations practitioners have worked with the psychology of human beings for a long time. They can bring a calm steadfastness and keen insight to the job, to their companies, and to those they mentor.

Of course, sudden changes can still arrive with a shock even after many years on the job. Senior-level practitioners cost a lot in the eyes of management. They sometimes find themselves laid off first in an uncertain economy or in a storm of mergers and acquisitions. This can be a devastating turn of events for those who have spent many years in any profession. After spending

years working under deadline pressure, it's hard to know what to do when the clock stops. Here are the specifics to consider as a senior pro:

Skills Needed at This Stage:

- Deeper and more sophisticated strategic skills
- Sophisticated approaches to planning and implementation
- Knowledge and experience in evaluating activities and their success or lack of success
- A broader world-view, and an ability to interact with senior-level peers.

Specific Challenges:

- Age discrimination – even if you are as young as 45.
- Lack of motivation and/or inspiration; severe burnout.
- Changes in priorities.
- Not as much physical energy as in previous years.
- What to do with a wealth of unused experience, education and talent.
- Financial stability during a time of transition.

Next Steps

Professional Development Actions

- If there is still a path for moving up in your company, actively explore it and decide if working at the management level is for you. If it is, be sure your company is willing to give you more management training or fund your training elsewhere.
- If you are out of a job after working for many years, allow yourself some time to grieve, but make sure you start moving forward again at some point.
- Stay involved. If you've been involved with your professional organization (PRSA, IABC or a different one), stay involved and volunteer. If you've been involved with a hobby, your church, a book

club – whatever it might be – stay involved. It's deadly to sit at home and just miss work.

- Put yourself out there. Let people know you're looking for work. Network anywhere and everywhere that you can. Reach out to old contacts. If you are looking for a different executive position at a different company, still network – but do it very quietly.
- Revise your résumé and cover letter. Revising your résumé will remind you of what you've accomplished over the course of your career and give you more confidence. Be sure you fine-tune your résumé to be specifically directed at any particular company to which you are applying or for the type of clients you want to attract.
- Finish your degree if you haven't and be sure you're up to date with your social media skills.
- Know what your age brings to the table. As Gwen Moran notes in a “Fast Company” article,
 - o Your years of experience mean you will get up to speed quickly. The learning curve is not only less steep, but much shorter.
 - o You're more likely to stay on the job a long time. That means less turnover cost for your employer.
 - o You understand how business works. You also understand how communities work.
 - o You have a larger perspective now, so you're a better strategic thinker. You're more capable than you've ever been of predicting the results or consequences of various communications efforts.
 - o You've learned diplomatic skills. You communicate well.
 - o You most likely bring a lot of contacts with you along with years of knowing how to follow the proverbial telephone trail or email trail (Moran, G. 2016).
- When applying for a job, approach a hiring manager directly. Go to the decision-maker.

- Work with recruiters as much as you can (no matter your age or stage of career) but don't overly rely on them. Remember they work for the company, not you.
- Once again, do your homework. Research both the industry and the company where you hope to work.
- Consider opening your own shop, working as a consultant or independent contractor. The rewards can be enormous, but not everyone has the personality to be self-employed. You'll need to be able to provide your own structure, your own time schedule, and your own self-discipline. It helps to feel that inner drive to carve your own path.
- If you have an advanced degree, you might be interested in teaching. Starting out as an adjunct professor in order to test the waters is fine, but don't stay at that level unless all you really want is a low-paying, part-time job. All across the country, adjunct professors are paid something akin to minimum wage for the hours they put in. Go someplace where you can be assured of an assistant professorship or a possibility to advance.

Do watch the movie "The Intern" with Robert De Niro for some relief in the middle of these concerns. (The Millennial author tells the Boomer author this statement is allowed.)

To some extent, job hunting when you are a senior practitioner will make you feel like you're back in kindergarten. This is one of the main reasons to stay involved with your colleagues in your professional network. You'll need the reassurance and support you can only get from your peers. Don't be afraid to ask them for help and advice. Above all, hang on to your confidence. You know what you're doing. Referring again to Gerry Corbett's blog, "Older Does Not Translate to Dead; Ideas to Turn the Tide," this is the time to be bold. Ask for opportunities for improvement. Go to a higher authority.

"Network above the crowd" and get out of your comfort zone (Corbett, G. 2016).

You may well have been kicked out of your comfort zone and may not have left voluntarily. The gift here is that your new perspectives will become much more readily apparent. If you are open to them, new roads may appear in front of you.

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Appendix A
2015 student focus groups conducted to start career
guide research

Questions	University of Oregon – traditional undergrads	Turnbull Center (graduate students)	Marylhurst University (older, non-traditional students)
What professional skills do you enjoy working on the most?	Planning Organization Communications: reaching out, talking to people Event planning Writing	Research Writing Confidence; able to market myself	Facilitating groups or teams of people Event coordination Interacting with people Research Giving briefings and presentations
What is your dream job?	Sports PR: San Francisco Giants Events geared around cooking and baking Being a personal assistant; Planning events Work in the music industry Event planning; wedding planning In-house PR for an agency, esp. with focus on social responsibility, well-rounded employees Work for a larger company	Something where I could have an impact Identifying solutions that can actually be used To be a CCO!	Work for a major automotive mag. - Go to auto trade shows International PR Event planning for an athletic Sportswear company Head of an agency or corporation; Chief Communications Officer
Values: what's most important to you?	Understanding when things come up Work-life balance. Couldn't sit inside An office all day Work-life balance Respect for employees as people A lot of our parents hold 9-to-5 jobs; we want the same stability, but in a new way. We'll do our work, we're hard workers – but we'll do it in our own way.	Ability to travel; leisure time Work-life balance Flexible schedule Careful not to let work take over Woman seen as providers, not as secondary income Transparency in work Gender balance Aligning passion and interests with work culture A safe and control outlet to speak up Personality reflected in work culture Work that's important	Work for a major automotive mag. - Go to auto trade shows International PR Event planning for an athletic Sportswear company Head of an agency or corporation; Chief Communications Officer Autonomy; feeling trusted Opportunity to keep learning Have a mentor Work-life balance Clear expectations on time; a schedule to count on Flexibility Good internal communications Having a voice in the community, Responsibility in the community.

Questions	University of Oregon – traditional undergrads	Turnbull Center (graduate students)	Marylhurst University (older, non-traditional students)
<p>What drew you to public relations?</p>	<p>Started as a business major; wanted to do marketing and management; like the contact side, working with people, as opposed to the numbers-based business program. Didn't want the math-based business classes; went for PR, but still have a business minor. Business is pure memorization; never learned to apply anything, In PR, I can write real press releases. I started with journalism, switched to PR; like the social media aspect, love my professors. Started in journalism when I came to PR, but didn't really know what I wanted to do. PR kind of clicked; I like applying things rather than just studying broad topics. Chose it because PR is what I'm good at; and because there's nothing that doesn't require public relations. My mother's a lawyer; she's always told me to choose a job where ou don't deal with something emotionally draining every day.</p>	<p>Making connections with the audience, whether in the C-suite, helping with nonprofits, more. Can work in so many venues: big corporations, agencies, nonprofits. Want to develop skills to communicate with internal stakeholders. Drawn by the "power of the pen" – shaping ideas and finding meaning in work. Love the core concepts; PR is the glue of everything; love communications theory. Love having the understanding of how everything works together rather than focusing on just one path. Drawn by the mobility and flexibility of the profession; I'm never going to get bored. So many options! I gain satisfaction by creating understanding; solving issues through communication.</p>	<p>Want to capitalize on my aptitude for communicating with people; to learn more, be responsible about it. Had to choose from two certificate programs – was more interested in it after taking the first class. Thought it would be a good pairing with graphic design experience. PR sounded like fun; I do some PR and marketing in my job.</p>
<p>What area of communication or public relations interests you the most?</p>	<p>Sports PR Government and public affairs Nonprofit PR Sports with community outreach; community liaison for a sports team Nonprofit PR</p>	<p>Crisis communication Corporate social responsibility Science communication Global branding International communication Branding</p>	<p>Crisis communications Publishing Corporate PR International PR, public affairs A multi-national agency Internal relations Community relations</p>

<p>If you were to move from tactician to manager or supervisor, what skills do you think you would need?</p>	<p>Determination Organization Risk-taking ability The ability to put yourself first; we're in such a competitive world right now, you have to put yourself first and show what you've put into your projects; show that you're the star. Determination Have a clear goal in mind Ready to move for the job; our generation, we're adventurers – not afraid to go someplace new.</p>	<p>Be an advisor; a decision-maker Be the touchpoint between leaders and key constituents Be ahead of the curve: a visionary Be able to prioritize; know what's most critical Be able to delegate; who can you rely on? Have a good team around you Be a good listener and a good advocate Have a clear understanding of the mission and values of the company Be able to navigate the politics, upstream and down Know the key promise Be able to identify key allies/players Be able to navigate the politics, upstream and down Know the key promise Be able to identify key allies/players</p>	<p>Learn more leadership/management skills Gain more experience on the job Take more management classes; get a head start through management training Learn how to supervise people; learn to be responsible for somebody's performance; demonstrate that you can hold people accountable Sometimes higher management forgets to ask people if they think they'd be good managers.</p>
<p>What do you see as the biggest obstacles to moving forward?</p>	<p>There are so many of us Millennials; the competition Being a woman going into this; it kinds of scares me. Some men get paid more. It makes me nervous that they won't take me as seriously as they would a male. The expectation of what should be on our resumes now; 20 years ago you didn't have to have an internship; now you have to have 2 or 3. Internships; need experience for an internship, but you can't get the experience without an internship. You have to be wealthy to take an unpaid internship.</p>	<p>Experience: how the heck do you get it? How do you prove you have the skills? So many companies don't even know they need me yet? Getting that initial meeting? The budgets aren't there. Either they want years of experience and management experience, or the job they think I'm qualified for has no pay They don't see a value in what we do. I'm stuck in a job to pay the bills; don't know what my next step is.</p>	<p>No experience Unpaid internships Employers want you to know a lot of computer stuff To get your foot in the door, you have to know somebody. Internships are treated like jobs; companies should realize they're taking on a student. For them, it's cheap labor; for the student, it's not necessarily a learning experience. Getting the opportunity to prove yourself. The need to take any other type of job just to get started; and to get the attention of someone who can believe in you.</p>
<p>What are the opportunities you see out there?</p>	<p>It's a growing market; growing by 28% or so. Even though I may not get my perfect job or internship immediately, everything's a stepping stone. I'm excited about the flexibility of it; I don't know exactly what I want yet, but this is the perfect field to explore those different opportunities.</p>	<p>More positions are beginning to appear directly aligned with our Master's degree. Communication quantifies what people don't realize is quantifiable That advantage of having intimate knowledge of the company – that is power!</p>	<p>Communication is becoming a more respected field. The quick news cycle means companies can't let people go; that's encouraging. PR will become more of a vital organ in the organization. Classes make you more well-rounded to go into almost any job. Classes make the difference in increased confidence; a better level of professionalism, and learning how to communicate effectively.</p>