

# How to Hire a Senior Communications Professional

*By Everett E Tackett, APR*

There is a clear correlation between organizational success and effective communication. Communication provides organizations with the ability to introduce new ideas, change perceptions and move people. Good communication does not happen by accident or in a vacuum. Companies and organizations must communicate in an environment that becomes increasingly more sophisticated and fragmented with each passing day. The recent surge in high-profile accounting scandals and the ongoing media coverage of the ethical lapses in large corporations have eroded the credibility and negatively affected the reputation of virtually every business. This rapidly evolving situation calls for seasoned professionals who can plan, manage and organize effective public relations activities that build strong relationships with key constituencies.

It can be a daunting task to find senior public relations practitioners who measure up to this challenge. Fortunately, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) makes it very easy to identify seasoned practitioners who are experienced, committed to ethical practice and have the proven ability to write comprehensive public relations plans. These individuals have earned their Accredited Public Relations (APR) designation through a rigorous credentialing process.

To be eligible for the accreditation process, practitioners must have at least five years of continuous experience in the practice of public relations. This requirement ensures that these practitioners have performed public relations activities across the full business cycle and that they more than likely have experienced an ethical dilemma in their careers. During the first five years of practicing public relations, prospective candidates will have participated in detailed public relations planning and will have written at least one comprehensive plan to address a critical problem or to leverage a high-value opportunity.

As part of the accreditation process, the candidates must complete an in-depth questionnaire about their career and present a portfolio of their work to a panel of three accredited professionals in an engagement called a "Readiness Review." During the Readiness Review, the panel asks the candidates a battery of questions to measure their level of preparedness to take the written exam. The candidates must demonstrate that they have participated in the full four-step public relations process that often separates the profession from many other disciplines. Candidates will present plans that they have written and engage in a thorough discussion on how they conducted research, planned the objectives, managed the communications activity and effectively evaluated the results of their communications efforts.

By evaluating the candidates' responses to the questionnaire and reviewing the candidates' portfolio, the panel determines if the candidates have a detailed understanding of the Code of Ethics that they affirmed they would abide by and uphold as members of PRSA. The Code of Ethics provides strict guidelines for the ethical conduct of the public relations profession and the candidates must demonstrate that they have a detailed understanding of the Code and how to apply it in real-world situations. The candidates will have to describe the various articles of the Code that address the free flow of information, competition, disclosure of information, safeguarding confidences, conflicts of interest and enhancing the profession. Once the candidates have successfully advanced to the written examination, they again will face situational questions concerning the ethical conduct of public relations activities.

During the written examination, the candidates will face 150 questions that they must answer within three hours. Most of the questions are oriented toward public relations planning and the ethical conduct of the profession, but these aren't the only areas that the candidates must answer. The candidates must demonstrate that they understand many of today's business management techniques. In a business world swimming in acronyms, the candidates will answer questions about the meaning of MBOs, GANTT charts and Six Sigma. Many of today's communications efforts leverage the interactive environment of the Internet and the candidates must show their understanding of how to best use the latest technologies for their communications efforts. The written exam also has questions pertaining to the use of some very traditional public relations tools such as the news release, the brochure and the advertisement. If the candidates didn't have a particular tool or product in their portfolio that they presented to the Readiness Review panel, odds are that they will have to answer questions about these items during the written exam.

Following the successful completion of the Readiness Review and the written exam, the candidates earn their coveted APR designation and join an elite group of public relations professionals. Their commitment to the profession doesn't end when they receive their accreditation certificate. Accredited members must maintain their credentials by participating in their respective chapters, attending professional development courses and contributing to charitable causes in their local area. Accredited professionals are indeed committed to the profession of public relations.

Commitment is the hallmark of a true professional. To prepare for this challenge of the accreditation process, candidates will dedicate at least an hour a day for eight to six weeks to study academic texts and to memorize the Code of Ethics. Many of them will attend seminars and participate in teleconferences to learn more about the profession and to develop themselves into recognized leaders in public relations.

Accredited professionals often are the most active members in their respective chapters and hold senior-level positions in corporate and agency environments. As businesses strive to find active and engaged employees to fill their ranks, they can always point to an accredited professional who exemplifies these attributes. Accredited professionals are more than communications gurus – they are leaders. They stood up to take an exam that wasn't required. They sacrificed the time and effort to make a successful attempt at a difficult process. They went the extra mile to grow as a professional and to give back to their profession.

As organizations look for senior-level communications talent to help guide them through difficult situations, there are accredited professionals who have proven their knowledge, expertise and commitment. In a world where there are so many unknowns, the APR designation provides organizations with tangible evidence of true public relations expertise and leadership. Accredited public relations professionals have proven their commitment to the profession. They've shown their understanding and adherence to a published code of ethics. These professionals have demonstrated their ability to write comprehensive plans and deliver results.

As businesses and organizations look for senior-level public relations talent to get the most out of their communications efforts, they can turn to the professionals who have proven themselves through a rigorous and quantifiable process. The professionals who have earned their APR have proven themselves through a testing process and in front of a panel of their peers. To find accredited public relations professionals, businesses can contact their local PRSA chapter or by visiting the PRSA website at [www.prsatucson.org](http://www.prsatucson.org).

**Everett E Tackett, APR**

Communications Manager

[Raytheon Missile Systems](http://Raytheon Missile Systems)

2416 N Barnwall Ct

Tucson, AZ 85749

Phone: (520) 760-8484

[everett\\_tackett@raytheon.com](mailto:everett_tackett@raytheon.com)