

Is it a PR problem or is it a business problem?

Yesterday, I read Gini Dietrich's take on the state of the PR industry, *The PR Industry Does Need Better PR*, on her firm's blog, *Spin Sucks*. Basically, Gini points out that what people think they know about PR is wrong or misleading. It's her conclusion that what the PR industry needs is better PR.

I think what the PR industry needs is better business skills.

Have you been to a PR networking event lately? If you have, you've probably noticed a lot of young people, mostly women. These young people often have inflated titles—including account manager, account director and even vice president—after being in the industry for three years or so. Many of these PR “pros” studied PR in college. Some may have even had an internship or two.

You may also have met a lot of former journalists who have decided they will have more job stability in public relations, while using their writing skills and knowledge of what is newsworthy.

What few of these PR people have is a solid understanding of business. Few, if any, have gone to business school. Few, if any, understand basic marketing ideas like push-pull. Fewer still understand finance, balance sheets or even how to read and interpret data.

Lots of people are busy trying to figure out how to get the word out about an event, or how to have a great social media campaign, but what they are failing to see is the big picture—how public relations helps a company to achieve its business objectives.

A big part of the disconnect that currently exists between

public relations agencies and the business side of the industries served has to do with the separation between communications functions and marketing and sales roles. Even though public relations is part of marketing communications, public relations does not usually have a stake in marketing and sales processes and outcomes. Businesses may hire public relations agencies to help with image, but even then, the point usually is to increase the bottom line (i.e. sales in for profit organizations, influence or donors at nonprofit organizations).

In his article 3 reasons to find a new PR/social media agency, Scott Signore states quite succinctly the following as his third reason:

Finally, despite the evolution in the category and the number of significant changes the PR business has endured over the years, it's still about executing a communications program that helps drive business. So, look for another PR and social media agency partner if your current group is not directly supporting your business objectives.

What Scott is saying is that if PR agencies are not helping companies achieve **business objectives**, they should be fired. Fundamentally, they are not doing their job.

And yet, as I said before, too many PR professionals simply do not understand business. All public relations pros should be reading business books or articles or watching business-focused programs. Those who want to be high-level agency executives should consider going to business school.

What do you think? Is it a PR problem? Or is it a lack of business know-how?