On writing: Julie Mullen buzzes about PR

This month, for the third edition of On Writing, I reached out to Julie Mullen, who has had a long and very effective career in public relations. Julie has not only worked in the trenches of the PR world, but now, as a communications agency owner, directs communications strategy, and hires and manages staff.



Julie Mullen Partner/Co-Founder The Buzz Agency

Julie Mullen is co-founder and partner of one of South Florida's largest communications firms, The Buzz Agency, based in Delray Beach. The firm specializes in public relations, social media, community outreach, and event management. A proud Air Force brat, Julie has lived in 10 states and one foreign country. Her PR career includes director-level positions in broadcast and print media, as well as in agency, not-for-profit and corporate sectors.

Organization: The Buzz Agency

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1. What role does writing play in your work and how important a skill is it?

At this point in my career, I spend much more time editing than writing. I do enjoy giving "track changes" a hearty workout. Most of the writing I do currently is geared towards new business development (e.g., proposals, RFP's). Is it important? Absolutely. Our livelihood depends on it. Who wants to hire a communications firm that can't craft an interesting message? Or spell?"

2. Does writing well still matter in a digital/text/emoji world?

There are many platforms our industry uses to create compelling messages. Press release writing is obviously much different than creating content for a Tweet. But regardless of *what* you are writing, it's critical to know *how* tell the story in an effective way. Additionally, I will not even consider an applicant whose writing skills are sub-par. From their initial introductory email, to their resume, to their writing samples, and if we give them a writing project, we look at the compilation of it all before we even begin to take the next steps. I don't want recent college graduates mistaking their for they're, for example.

3. What's the best advice you've received or would give on how to improve writing skills?

Read, read, read. If you're a publicist, read content that is relevant to your client – newspapers, magazines, industry trades, etc. Get to know what kind of information those outlets require and what style of writing they tend to use, then format your written pitches, releases, presentations accordingly.

4. What are your top three writing resources or references

(digital or paper-based)?

AP Stylebook has always been my go-to source. I also use industry sources like PR Daily or PRWeb.com. But the best source I have is an editor I know, who, I believe, is the best in the business.

5. Do you follow a style guide, and if so, which one?

Yes, AP Stylebook is like the Bible of proper grammar and punctuation for journalists, so if it's good enough for them, it certainly is good enough for me!

6. What's your top writing/grammar/usage pet peeve?

Improper use of homophones, such as their/there/they're; affect/effect; than/then. It drives me NUTS!

7. What's your favorite word and what's your least favorite?

My least favorite has to be any form of hyperbole, such as AMAZING! SPECTACULAR! MOUTH-WATERING! Wow, it's hard to pick a favorite word, but contenders include serendipity, oxymoron, and love.

Do you agree with Julie that your livelihood in public relations depends on being able to write well? Share your thoughts in the comments. And be sure to check this space on the last Thursday of every month for more thoughts on writing.