

On writing: Stu Opperman impacts PR

The most effective public relations professionals understand journalism, and what makes something newsworthy. They also appreciate that writing clearly and concisely is crucial to communicating with news editors and journalists. This is exactly why Stu Opperman is great at PR. I've known Stu for many years, and have often turned to him to review my writing. I know he will help make it clearer and more concise.



Stu Opperman, APR

An accredited public relations professional, Stu Opperman, APR, owns Impact Players, well-connected firm that positively impacts the business agenda of its clients and contacts. Prior to that, he worked for South Florida-based public relations firms and also had a career as an executive and on-air talent in radio.

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

Writing is the backbone of all that I do, whether it's media relations, crisis communications, content production, relationship, or audience building. Effectively communicating through the written word, in whatever format it takes, is how I most often accomplish internal and external objectives.

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

It matters more than ever, since there will be diminishing numbers of people willing or able to write effectively as communication evolves. Those who have embraced or been enabled by the shortcuts will find they need individuals who possess actual writing skills, especially in situations where it is critical to be clear, persuasive, or motivating.

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

Pay attention to effective writing and take note of how it's being done, and that's not just in books. There is plenty to be learned in short-form communications – articles, email, blog posts, Twitter, and even billboards.

4. What are your top writing resources or references (digital or paper-based)?

I'm a big fan of Stephen King's "On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft" (where he famously wrote that "the road to Hell is paved with adverbs"). Strunk and White's "Elements of Style" is a classic I continue to turn to on a regular basis.

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

For the media work I do, there is only one – the Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual.

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

The use of extraneous language that could be replaced by one word (“due to the fact that” should be “because”).

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

My favorite word may be “repugnant,” not only because it's so descriptive but also because the speaker shows his or her distaste in the pronunciation of it. My least favorite are all the ones poor writers litter their copy with, especially in public relations, such as “unique,” “cutting edge,” and “state-of-the-art.” If everything is unique, then nothing is.

I agree with Stu that getting rid of extraneous words (and cliches) would go a long way in giving public relations writing more impact. For more writing insights, check back here on September 29.