

Seek Out Traditional and Non-Traditional Skill Sets for PR Professional, Part I

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People seeking to break into the public relations profession come with a wide-eyed version of what it takes to be successful in the field. They might feel that being a receptionist for 10 years and having a friendly disposition is a common denominator. Or that they know someone on the advertising side of the media can provide them easy and credible entry into the editorial side of the house.

Finding qualified, experienced public relations professionals takes a bit of time and searching, especially if you seek an individual that not only can offer their skill set on a local level, but regional and national as well.

Whether you are interested in entering the public relations field or you are seeking a communications specialist, there are some traditional skill sets that are essential to the role.

- **Excellent writing skills.** This remains the number one attribute for a communications professional. From drafting news releases to bylined articles to written pitches, abstracts and media kit materials, this asset cannot be compromised. It's critical that one can explain in writing a product, service or company, its attributes and its differentiations. When interviewing a prospective communications professional, give them a writing task, from developing a biography on himself or herself or a background on your company.
- **Understanding of your key media.** The public relations individual must know the priority media of any organization, whether it is local, regional or national. Who are the key local reporters? What trade publications should they identify? What are some initial ideas/stories for pitching the company? Anyone interviewing for the role should come in prepared to answer these questions and anyone conducting the interview should be prepared to ask them.
- **Expertise in gaining results.** A portfolio demonstrating the candidate's ability to secure media coverage is important. Some companies enlist the help of a novice to save money, but if they don't have a running track record of success and haven't pitched to even the local media, don't expect your name in the *Wall Street Journal* or trade publication anytime soon.

In the next column, I'll discuss some of the non-traditional skill sets that potential employers should consider when hiring a public relations professional.