

## April 2005 News & Views

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## March Program Review: PRSA Boston's March Program A 'Blog Party'

*Ashley Cheng, BU PRSSA*



(From left to right) PRSA Boston's 'Blog Party' Panelists: Adam Gaffin, Mike Spataro, Mary Helen Gillespie, Sam Witmore, Dan Kennedy

A blog is an online journal, published frequently (often daily). Readers can post comments on each journal entry. The term "blog" is a shortening of "weblog."

"When you go to a blog, there's a party going on," said Sam Witmore, a blog critic and columnist for Forbes.com during a recent PRSA Boston event, and that

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evening members and students came together for quite the party. The panel discussion and networking night, entitled “Navigating the Wide World of Blogs,” took place on March 30 at Weber Shandwick’s offices in Cambridge.

The panel—including Dan Kennedy of the Boston Phoenix, Mike Spataro of Weber Shandwick, Adam Gaffin of NetworkWorld.com, Sam Witmore and moderator Mary Helen Gillespie—talked about three areas of the blog issue: defining blogs, understanding how we can use blogs in media relations, and predicting the future of blogs and other technology. Defining blogs proved to be complicated. The official definition, according to Kennedy, is “any Web site that is produced with blogging software,” but he went on to explain how they’ve evolved into so much more. Witmore divided bloggers into four types: people already employed in the media, independent individuals with influence, vendors, and everyday citizens who want to share their ideas with the public. Like any media outlet, PR practitioners must understand which audience to target to be successful.

Blogs are valuable to public relations practitioners as devices for monitoring public opinion. Gaffin noted that people use blogs to “rant about issues” that wouldn’t necessarily be picked up by more traditional media. And, according to Spataro, journalists read blogs to find breaking stories. “Newspapers are covering what blogs covered six months ago,” added Gaffin.

The panelists emphasized that, by watching what’s going on in the bloggers’ world right now, we can predict what might happen in the mainstream media’s world tomorrow, and our clients will be prepared when a crisis hits. The panelists recommended blog

search engines feedster.com and technorati.com to conduct research for our businesses.

Blogs can also be powerful assets as tools for clients to disseminate information. Top CEOs are “logging on” to encourage transparency in their businesses. In this way, blogs can be tools for corporate responsibility.

As Boston University professor and former PRSA Boston President Steve Quigley, APR, commented, blogs can also give us more “ammunition” to encourage our clients to act ethically to satisfy customers. If we read about an angry blogger’s qualms with our client’s product, we can alert our client to improve the situation. PR practitioners should see blogs as just another medium for our publics to communicate.

The panelists also described technological advances that will improve how we communicate. RSS (Really Simple Syndication) technology, for example, enables users to create a personalized news ticker on their desktops. This allows PR professionals to skip the step of actively researching publications. With RSS, news about your clients comes directly to you. Video-blogging and pod-casting (where audio-blog feeds can be downloaded to your iPod or MP3 player) are also gaining popularity.

By the end of the party, the group concluded that new technology should not be looked at as our enemy or one more way for our clients’ reputations to be ruined. Technology is a tool to make our lives easier—to help us stay informed. “With blogs, you can be that much smarter without the effort,” said Witmore.

## Letter From The President

*Kirk Hazlett, APR*

It was a “mind-blogging” experience! We just held our March meeting, with nearly 60 public relations practitioners ranging from fresh-to-the-field to seasoned pro, on the topic of “Blogs.” As I am in the “truth” phase of my “Truth-or-Dare” presidency, I cheerfully admit that I had zero clue as to what blogs were, nor was I eager to delve into the arcane science.

Shame on me! An extraordinary panel of experts adroitly guided by moderator Mary Helen Gillespie gave a remarkably detailed, amazingly understandable introduction to blogs, what they are, how they work, and what their value is and can be to the public relations profession.

Kudos as always to our Program Committee co-chaired by Tom Nutile and Roger Bridgeman along with the tirelessly energetic Karen Kennedy and the imperturbable Beth Bryant. Just when you think it couldn't get any better, these professionals bring on the next show!

On the “Dare” side of the coin, *dare* I venture the hope that spring is springing?? I haven't yet put away my snow boots, nor will I until the Fourth of July, but I am optimistic! And with the blossoming of flowers and greening of the shrubbery comes the cheerful thought that we have a terrific new member of our Leadership Team, Elizabeth (Liz) Lee, who has

generously offered to take on the mantle of *Young Professionals* affinity group chairperson from the tireless Julie Dennehy. Liz works at SunLife Financial and came to us asking how she could “get involved” with the chapter. Dangerous words!!

I look forward to working with Liz and her committee as they continue the great initiatives started by Julie. PRSA Boston's Young Professionals are the lifeblood of our organization; they are the future leaders of our chapter, and I will be doing everything in my power to help Liz make our Young Professionals an example for others across the nation to emulate.

A last reminder...the PRSA Boston Annual Scholarship has been announced and publicized in colleges throughout the Boston area. If you know of a college student who you feel qualifies and would benefit from the \$1,000 scholarship, please urge/encourage/make him or her contact Chapter Administrator Beth Bryant to request an application form.

Information will be available soon on our April PRSA Boston Chapter meeting. I look forward to seeing you there!

## Spring Into the Young Professionals Affinity Group of PRSA/Boston

The Young Professionals Affinity Group is looking for "young professionals" to join us in our quest to provide fun and creative professional development opportunities for our members.

"Young professionals are an exciting group because they are ambitious, driven, outgoing and really enjoy the opportunity to network. The Young Professionals Affinity Group recognizes the needs and interests of the chapter's young professionals and is committed to providing supplementary programming and professional development opportunities for those members," says Elizabeth Lee, Young Professionals Affinity Group Committee Chair.

"Julie Dennehy and others laid the foundation for the group and have provided valuable experiences for PRSA's youngest members. This spring, their charter will continue as the group comes together to take part in online discussions, evening

seminars and social and networking events," said Liz.

Members who consider themselves "young professionals" are welcome to join. The current programming is aimed at members who have between zero-to-seven years of experience. Professionals new to the Public Relations industry may also find the Young Professionals Affinity Group useful and are encouraged to join.

Plans are underway for an exciting spring and summer season. If you are interested in enhancing your professional growth and making sure that this chapter is meeting the needs of PRSA's young professionals contact Elizabeth Lee at [elizabeth.lee@sunlife.com](mailto:elizabeth.lee@sunlife.com).

## Cymphony joins with PRSA in Strategic Partnership to Respond to Member Needs"

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), and Cymfony, a leader in market intelligence and media analysis, announced the formation of a strategic partnership to support the advancement and education of public relations professionals.

The partnership is a joint venture designed to better serve the diverse needs of PRSA's members and provide enhanced value to the public relations profession. Under the terms of the agreement, Cymfony will help

fund PRSA's member programs through sponsorship of several of PRSA's major events and conferences throughout the year. Additionally, Cymfony will serve as a resource to PRSA by providing valuable information and consultation on PR measurement, media analysis and market intelligence including best practice guides, case studies and whitepapers.

## Two New Clients Bolster Morrissey & Company's Growing Life Sciences and Health Care Practice

Morrissey & Company, a national reputation management and public relations firm based in Boston, will provide external and internal communications support to IBC Life Sciences, of Massachusetts, the leading provider of scientific, technological, and business information conferences in North America, Europe and Asia and Athena Health Care Systems, a Connecticut based nationally accredited provider of multi-level health care services.

## Laura Tomasetti & Associates Public Relations Adds Boston Health Care For The Homeless Program To Client Roster

Laura Tomasetti & Associates Public Relations LLC has been selected as Public Relations agency of record by Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program. The agency's work for Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program will center on BHCHP's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. BHCHP provides a broad range of health care services to Boston's 8,000 homeless individuals and is considered a model nationally.

## Stimpson Communications Offers PR Program for Financial Advisors

*Stimpson Communications has launched Personal Finance Story Ideas, a media relations program for financial advisors and investment managers. As part of the program, the subscribers can get quoted in financial media like the The New York Times, Kiplinger's Personal Finance, The Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg Personal Finance TV for a monthly fee of \$650. Any individual or company that offers financial advice or products—including advisors, mutual fund companies, insurers, banks and others—can benefit. The story ideas are written and emailed by Henry Stimpson to a*

comprehensive, updated list of more than 200 personal-finance and investment writers and editors nationally.

For more information and examples of recent *Story Ideas*, contact Stimpson at [Henry@StimpsonCommunications.com](mailto:Henry@StimpsonCommunications.com) or visit [www.stimpsoncommunications.com/newstoryideas.htm](http://www.stimpsoncommunications.com/newstoryideas.htm).