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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Reap Substantial Benefits by Joining PRSA Boston

By Tom Nutile

As president of PRSA Boston, I'm occasionally asked why one should join the chapter. Can it help you do your job better? Can it help you get a better job? Can it help you meet other practitioners you can team with if you're a sole practitioner looking for help on a big project or you can hire if you're a corporate director looking for outside help? The answers to those questions, of course, is Yes.

There are many more reasons, however, to become a new member of PRSA Boston or to renew your membership.

The Boston chapter's leadership team and program committee are always on the lookout for what's new, what's important, what's vital to how we do our jobs. We turn those topics into programs, whether it's last month's program on the latest advances in social media or last fall's program on measurement.

Those monthly meetings, especially the ones that are designed as social events, such as the Summer Social (usually held in August) and the

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Practicing PR in Boston

Yrlen Ysasis and Christopher
Ranjitkar

Boston is the seventh largest media market in the U.S. Our city has a distinct character, known as much for buttoned-up Beacon Hill as it is for the deathly loyal Red Sox fans. Our city holds the most Monets outside of Paris, is home to one of the most important marathons in the world, and is a launch pad for several high- and biotech firms.

So, with such a distinct character, what is it like practicing PR in Boston? And how is it changing? To answer these questions, we asked several senior level PR practitioners who head

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War Zone PR

***Learn How Running the Embedded
Journalist Program in the Iraq
Conflict
Helped Two Boston PR People
Learn Lessons for Civilian Public
Relations***

By Tom Nutile

As a former top media relations officer for the Army who has since made the transition into corporate PR, Guy Shields says that his military job of setting up and running the embedded journalist program for the Iraq conflict was a bit like trying to get the go-ahead on a big public relations program in the corporate world.

"Generals are just like presidents and
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December Holiday Party, are great opportunities to network with your peers.

The PRSA Boston web site (prsaboston.org) offers, to members only, a Job Bank with the latest PR jobs listed. Members also have access to the membership directory, where they can look up and contact other PRSA Boston members.

In joining PRSA Boston, one also joins PRSA National. So paid members also reap the benefits of being a member of the national organization. Members receive PRSA National's *Issues and Trends*, a daily news monitoring service that includes a synopsis of the day's news stories that are relevant to our profession.

Two high-quality publications also go to members by mail. *Public Relations Tactics* is a monthly newspaper that delivers best practices and news. *The Strategist* is a glossy quarterly magazine that examines trends and delivers cutting-edge advice on the issues facing seasoned public relations practitioners.

The Professional Resource Center, available on the national web site (prsa.org) is a research method that one can access from one's desk, via PC, that maintains bibliographic references to thousands of editorial abstracts from the Society's periodicals and publications. It is free to members but is a paid service for nonmembers.

For information on how to join PRSA Boston, click [here](#). ■

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internal communications departments or have their own practices.

"The Boston public relations community is an intimate one," says Claire Papanastasiou,

Senior Public Relations Manager of Boston-based law firm Bingham McCutchen. With offices nationwide, as well as London, Hong Kong and Tokyo, Papanastasiou says her team deals with journalists around the globe.

"Boston is unique among other large media markets in that the PR and journalistic communities really are communities. The press here has a personal feel," says Papanastasiou.

Of course, it's difficult to describe the practice of public relations in Boston without talking about the industries that dominate the local economy.

"Boston's a great place to be a PR practitioner, with the region's four major industries -- technology, health care, financial services and education -- providing both energy and balance," said Robert Brown, Professor of Communications at Salem State College. "With Harvard, M.I.T., B.U., B.C., Simmons, Emerson, Wellesley and the state colleges and universities, Boston is one of the intellectually richest and healthiest areas worldwide."

What Brown says seems to resonate throughout the community. Several PR firms in Boston and the surrounding

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"We are close to where the hot new technologies are being developed and then applied." – Larry Weber

PR in Boston- Continued from page 2 metropolitan area focus exclusively on growth industries such as high-tech, biotech and healthcare. With many companies spinning off from research at local universities, some practitioners attribute local growth of the industry to academia.

“We are close to knowledge-based industries such as technology and bio tech, academic institutions and great incubators such as the [M.I.T.]Media Lab,” says Larry Weber, Chairman of both the Racepoint Group and the W2 Group. “We are close to where the hot new technologies are being developed and then applied. This is a huge advantage for local PR companies.”

The technology that Weber says is providing work for local firms, is the same technology that is changing the industry. The digital media movement and globalization have prompted the decline of print journalism, and staff reductions at many of the area’s newspapers and local broadcast media, including several major changes at *The Boston Globe*.

Lizz Summers, Director of Communications for the New England Revolution, talks about local media cutbacks from a sports-related standpoint.

“In sports, besides shrinking space in written papers and shorter time on the airwaves, coverage has begun to center on the Red Sox and Patriots, leaving little time for other teams and sports,” says Summers. “While demand for sports information is up in the city given the recent success of the teams, the ability to provide full, in depth coverage of all teams has gone down.”

“There is less room for stories on non-

profits and other softer news,” says Harron Ellenson, President of Boston PR firm Harron & Associates, and former Director of Marketing of the MBTA. “For example, before, you could pitch a non-profit client’s story to local morning news programs. With media consolidation, many of these local morning programs were eliminated.”

Ellenson, whose firm provides communications services to several leading nonprofit clients, maintains that the change in the media landscape, certainly not unique to Boston, doesn’t mean that there are fewer opportunities.

Kelley Chunn, who heads Kelley Chunn & Associates, agrees that the shrinking of local media means that practitioners just have to find different ways to get their stories across.



“Changes in local broadcast and print media mean that we as practitioners have to change the way we think and pitch stories”
-Harron Ellenson

“Even with media consolidation, there are several niche outlets to pitch our clients,” says Chunn, whose firm specializes in non-profit and multicultural communications.

“Boston is a two-subject town when it comes to news,” Ellenson says. “Sports and politics are the two areas Boston loves. And though the changes in local broadcast and print media mean that it is more challenging to find a place for non-profit stories, it also means that we as practitioners have to change the way we think and pitch stories.” ■

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vice presidents of companies, and convincing them to let a reporter spend the next three weeks with them in the back of their tank took some selling,” says Shields, who set up the program in the winter of 2003 as a colonel in the U.S. Army and who now is senior manager of public relations for Raytheon Integrated Defense Systems in Tewksbury.

Shields will speak about his experiences setting up and running the embedded program – and the lessons he learned that have helped him in civilian public relations – at the March 25th PRSA Boston monthly meeting at the Newton Marriott. He will share the stage with Steve Komarow, currently an Associated Press editor who was embedded when he worked for *USA Today*. Also joining the panel, live from Baghdad by speaker phone, will be long-time PRSA Boston member, Vic Beck, a Boston-area public relations executive who is handling media relations and the embedded program right now. Beck is a captain in the U.S. Navy. For more details and to register for the 6 p.m.-9 p.m. program, click [here](#).

By many accounts, Shields says, the embedded program was a great success. And the journalists who were embedded – going into conflicts alongside the troops, with their laptops, cameras or microphones at the ready – feel that they maintained their objectivity and credibility, despite sometimes bonding with the soldiers, maintains Shields.

The lessons Shields learned in the Middle East have carried over into his civilian PR job at Raytheon. “The importance of operation and coordination,” he says, “plus the importance of messaging, and coordinating the message across internal and external audiences. That was hugely important. We had to make sure that internally the messages were aligned. It was subtle in that we didn’t want to hand out cards to the troops on this is what you can and can’t say.”



Guy Shields (left) and his Kuwaiti deputy, Col. Elshati, at the Coalition Press Information Center in Kuwait.

In general, said Shields, the instructions to troops operating with an embedded reporter were: “Always speak the truth, don’t speculate, and talk to your own level. Don’t try to speculate on what anyone else is doing.”

It wasn’t all smooth sailing. There was the incident when Fox’s Geraldo Rivera inadvertently gave away some troop movements before they had taken place. The information apparently didn’t get to Iraqi troops, but Geraldo did have to go back to military headquarters to receive a briefing from Shields on what types of things he couldn’t say on the air, and why.

“What we needed to do was un-embed him for a little bit in order to talk to him,” Shields recounts. But the incident served as a reminder of how well and how popular military personnel view the embedding of journalists. “The unit didn’t want to let him go. Even the commander didn’t want him to leave.... I spent about an hour telling him the ground rules and the unit sent him back” to the front. ■

Know when to hold 'em, when to fold 'em
**PRSA Boston/PR Newswire Charity Poker
Set for April at the Waltham Elks Lodge**

Are you a hot poker player seeking acclaim for your skills? Or are you simply a novice who'd like to learn one of the hottest poker games in the country in a low-pressure atmosphere? Either way, you'll get a chance to play No Limit Texas Hold 'Em, and maybe even gain some bragging rights in the Boston PR community, when PRSA Boston/PR Newswire holds its second annual Charity Poker Tournament on Wednesday, April 30th.

The Charity Poker Tournament, sponsored by PR Newswire, with proceeds to benefit the PRSA Boston Scholarship Fund, will be held at Elks Lodge No. 953, 101 School St., Waltham.

Networking begins at 6 p.m. and the tournament starts at 6:30 p.m. The donation is \$45 for PRSA Boston and Pub Club members and \$55 for non members.

No cash prizes will be awarded, although you might be able to earn those bragging rights for the year. Either way, you'll be contributing to a good cause. Chips are supplied at the beginning of the evening.

Trophies will be awarded to:

- The Best Player
- The Best Agency Player
- The Best Corporate Player

This tournament is being held in conjunction with PRSA Boston's monthly meeting and is appropriate for people with even just a basic knowledge of No Limit Texas Hold 'Em Poker. If you haven't played in years, that is no excuse. All you need to win is a chip and a chair! We will have professional poker tables and trained dealers.

For more information, keep an eye on the PRSA Boston web site, www.prsaboston.org

And by the way, we've been advised to include this legal disclaimer: There is no proof that winning this tournament helps win new business or recruit new employees. But, you know, it can't hurt.

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