



PRécis

A journal of the Public Relations Society of India, Chennai (for private circulation only)

June 2008

'Journalists have to re-think their roles'



The Internet and the World Wide Web have redefined the boundaries of communication. Or are there any boundaries left at all? What is clear, however, is that the newspaper publishing industry across the world is trying hard to keep pace with the relentless change of which citizen journalism, blogging and Web 2.0 are examples, and making all-out efforts to grab the attention of the reader or viewer. Newspapers are getting a makeover, online sites now have podcasts and vodcasts... for the traditional reader, even the journalist, the changes are too fast to comprehend. Karthik Subramanian, editor, Ergo describes some of those changes.

The Public Relations Society of India, Chennai Chapter, got Karthik Subramanian, editor, *Ergo* (a recent addition from *The Hindu* Group) to address its members on 'A 21st Century approach to news: challenges and opportunities'. Referring to a 2005



Karthik Subramanian (extreme right) just before his presentation. Others (from left) are M.S. Arulvel, T.F. Jayasurya, and Daniel Dass.

Poynter Institute Study, he urged members to view a flash video called epic 2015 (on the Internet), which is a sort of science fiction that tries to visualise what is the future of the media - what will happen in 2015 and how news organisations will change.

Subramanian said that players like Amazon and Google were able to save people's preferences by placing cookies in computers. Over a period they knew exactly what a particular viewer liked to read. The implication is that newspapers can be customized for subscribers with the help of robots, and broadsheets may lose their relevance. The e-paper, Subramanian pointed out, was no longer the PDF version; research is on in Japan to produce a sort

of flexible paper that enables people to read through reflected light.

So, what then is the future of newspapers? Will editors and reporters have jobs to hold on to? "Journalists have to re-think their roles," said Subramanian, "The traditional role of journalists as gatekeepers of information needs re-thinking. For example, there are blogs written by people with niche interests backed by a depth of information journalists cannot provide. So, what will differentiate a journalist and a blogger? The youngsters who are coming into the profession should have answers to these questions."

The other aspect Subramanian dwelt on was whether the Internet could be

trusted as a news source. Does new media have credibility? He agreed that it was a dilemma facing journalists. “We have entered an area of pervasive media. There are 4,400 million digital cameras in the world, many embedded in mobile communication devices, which capture and deliver life as it happens. You can shoot a video and within a few minutes upload it on the Web. That is the extent of technology. What then is the role of journalists in such a situation? What is the role of newspapers? As a sharing society, everyone competes for influence and attention.

You no longer need to be a journalist to capture attention. All you need is an Internet connection.”

Referring to the creators of content, Subramanian talked about Wikipedia, which generates more page views than traditional Web sites, Microsoft Encarta, and Google News. The Encyclopedia Britannica was now a thing of the past. “Messages resonate through multiple mediums. People want to read content, hear audio and watch video on the Net. There is a huge challenge today to cater to the 21st Century youth who are also interested in knowing what is happening in the world. There is a fun, anytime-anywhere element now. News on the mobile, for instance, requires a different grammar,” Subramanian explained.

Today, the ordinary person can react to news. People want to know more. The media has to be more transparent and participatory. It is clear that media organisations can no longer afford to be one-dimensional. Information has to be delivered in different formats. According to Subramanian, studies revealed that newspapers would be smaller in format with fewer staff. Proportionately, they would have smaller influence, attention, profits and margins. Newspapers, therefore, would cater to specific, niche target audiences.



S. Muthiah presenting a memento to Karthik Subramanian.

The Hindu's free tabloid targets IT employees

Ergo in Latin means 'therefore'. On December 10, 2007, *The Hindu Group* launched *Ergo*, a tabloid targeted at IT professionals in the 20-35 age group. It is probably the first free sheet to be produced from a reputable publishing company in India. With today's generation not really taking to the daily newspaper, *The Hindu* management decided to put together a young team to experiment with a new publication. Karthik Subramanian, editor, who heads a 12-member young team, is the oldest at 30!

The revenue for *Ergo* comes from advertisements. “Advertisers are interested in targeting the young IT crowd and *Ergo* is a good avenue for them. We have the editorial freedom to do things *The Hindu* wouldn't, as long as we follow the rule of the land and handle delicately issues pertaining to taste,” said Subramanian, adding, “Sex, gay rights and lesbianism issues are discussed openly by youngsters today. *Ergo* cannot afford to miss out on these issues.”

So, how has the experience been for the *Ergo* team? “It is like walking on ice. What you think is right for youngsters they won't read. It is shocking to learn that many of them do not even know simple language. We are going by trial and error, but sailing fairly well. *Ergo* is a product you can read in 10-15 minutes,” Subramanian said.

When *Ergo* invited applications for contributors, it received 700 applications, 400 from BPOs. “IT guys hate their jobs. They are starved for entertainment. We give them something to talk about, also issues we want to cover. We need to grab the attention of the audience with attractive headlines. Tabloids do it better than broad sheets. Ultimately, it all depends on individual preferences. Why pass moral judgment?” he asked.

Dealing with information in the digital age, a challenge

The world today is divided into 'digital natives' (youngsters below 15 who are at home with computers) and 'digital immigrants' (the rest who are ill at ease with computers). Youngsters are no longer passive recipients; they have much less deference to authority compared to earlier generations and treat hierarchy with scorn. The new ways of distributing information pose great challenges to authority, says Chris Wensley, Director for the Centre for Excellence in Media Practice, Bournemouth University, U.K.

Thanks to the initiative of Paul Chellakumar, president of the Association of Accredited Advisors on

Overseas Education, and chairman, Campus-Abroad, PRSI, Chennai Chapter members played host to Chris Wensley, Director for the Centre for Excellence in Media Practice, Bournemouth University, U.K., and Rachel Sunderland, International Relations Officer. Bournemouth, to the south of London, is inhabited by 165,000 people and is, in the words of Wensley, “a friendly, welcoming seaside town.” It is a modern university committed to innovation and excellence in learning and teaching. Out of its 16,000 students spread over 130 nationalities, more than 100 are Indians. Sunderland pointed out that the university worked closely with industry, to transform student-learning experiences, and shared good practices with other universities as well. Bournemouth University had received a grant of four million pounds from the Higher Education Funding Council for England, an indication of its stature.

Talking about 'A world of knowledge - how the media and IT are changing our lives', Wensley said that the world had witnessed three major revolutions: the Printing Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the Internet and IT Revolution. Dwelling on the invention

of printing, Wensley said that before printing began, in England, all knowledge was confined to monasteries. When a book had to be duplicated, it was handwritten by monks, an awfully slow process. The vast majority of the population did not know how to read, there was indeed no literature to read, and books were chained to monasteries.

“When the printing press arrived, books were made into a large number of copies. Knowledge was released from chains and made open, universities were set up, and schools took on a different purpose. There was challenge to the church, to authority; people began to think independently. All this led to the Reformation, the growth of Protestants, and a new way of thinking about religion. For the educated, literate citizen, reading became a very important aspect,” Wensley said.

The Industrial Revolution that began in Britain spread in Europe fairly quickly. Peasants who hitherto had been growing what they needed in their villages started to move. The discovery that energy could be harnessed from coal led to the establishment of factories and mass production. The invention of the steam engine meant that people



Dr Sundari Krishnamurthy greets Chris Wensley, as Rachel Sunderland, Daniel Dass and Dr Paul Chellakumar applaud.



Sudha Umashanker and Rachel Sunderland in discussion with Chris Wensley.

could move around. All this heralded new ways of tourism and trade, and a consumer-driven society that we see today.

“We are at the very cusp of the Third Revolution. The Internet and IT has created a gap between young people less than 23 and the rest. The huge change in technology has led to the chip becoming more powerful and smaller, and things have suddenly opened up in a way that never was previously. People get together in a small village to discuss things; in larger towns that is not possible. The challenge is to bring people together and share ideas. We have online communities now, such as MySpace and Facebook,” Wensley explained.

Wensley provided the example of his daughter who had met about 50 students of a university on Facebook even before she joined the university. Traditionally, knowledge was contained within libraries and debate, discourse and discussion would take place at the



Suganthi Sundararaj (right) and Rachel Sunderland exchange business cards as Dr Paul Chellakumar and Chris Wensley look on.

heart of universities. The university was a place of instruction with groups of learners exploring together and the teacher transmitting knowledge. Wensley pointed out that Google, virtually a generic term for search; Digg, an online discussion forum for trivial and serious issues; and Flickr, a site for sharing pictures and photographs; and such other sites had changed the whole world of

communication beyond recognition. All this in a way supported and enhanced democracy, according to him.

The Encyclopedia Britannica, once staple reference material that cost a huge amount of money to buy, was now as good as non-existent. Wensley mentioned having recently seen a DVD containing 'the whole world's knowledge' for sale at 99 pence in a store in London. The arrival of Wikipedia, which allows users to add information and correct mistakes, had brought a totally new approach to knowledge. “There is the danger that people can put out wrong information but then they get corrected quickly, and information is made up-to-date,” he said.

Wensley talked about how citizen journalism had brought a new flavour to the newsroom. He mentioned about the radio magazine programme in Bournemouth University where students no longer wished to just learn the basics, they wanted to learn to become professionals.

“Schools are changing. For example, students in Cayman Islands in the Caribbean are in touch with students in a London school. The broadcast media is becoming interactive; from one-to-one communication, it is now many-to-many communication. Earlier you had the curriculum delivered-wisdom received mode; now it is peer-to-peer communication,” he said, pointing out that even the BBC had loosened controls to make its archives available to people.

So, what does all this mean for journalism? During 9/11 and the London underground bombing pictures were taken by ordinary people. It brought the citizen journalist to the fore and people began publishing their thoughts about events through blogs. “If you wish to know about life in Baghdad better, you can learn about it



Stella Maris PR students await the start of the programme.

from a blog written by a person residing there,” said Wensley.

Quoting Mark Princely, Wensley referred to 'digital natives' (youngsters below 15 who have grown up with the digital age) and 'digital immigrants' (the rest who are not totally at ease with computers, who rely on books for information rather than go online, and who have to learn to cope). “Youngsters are no longer passive, they are recipients of ideas. They have much less deference to authority (compared to earlier generations) and treat hierarchy with scorn. The new ways of distributing information pose great challenges to authority. There is also the challenge of what information to believe in. PR and communication should come in handy here,” he said.

Two PRSI stalwarts remembered

While Stella Maris is 60 years old, the all-India PRSI body has completed 50 years, and the PRSI, Chennai Chapter, 40 years. It was a red letter day when the Public Relations Department, Stella Maris, and PRSI, Chennai Chapter, got together to organise a memorial lecture in honour of Gyan Haksar and M. Gopalakrishnan, pioneers of PR education in India. Recalling their contribution is R.K. Baratan, a veteran PRSI member. Rakhi Lalwani, director-public relations, South India, the Taj Group of Hotels, Resorts and Palaces, delivers the first of a yearly series of lectures Stella Maris has planned.

The PR Department of Stella Maris College (SMC) and PRSI, Chennai Chapter, organised a memorial lecture at the college premises in honour of two yesteryear members Gyan Haksar and M. Gopalakrishnan, both no more. Preeti Haksar, wife of



R.K. Baratan, Rakhi Lalwani and Preeti Haksar lead a group to the Stella Maris auditorium.

Gyan Haksar, was present. The mood was a bit sombre and proceedings got off to a start with a prayer song, a blessing, by Dr. Sister Rita Marneni, secretary, SMC.

Welcoming the gathering to the PR Department's first memorial lecture, Dr. Sister Annamma Philip, principal of the college, said that the effort by the fledgling department (it introduced a master's course only two years ago) marked an effort to institutionalise a vision, which was to open the young minds of professionals to the very finest that a flourishing field like PR had to offer the world today. "The corporate world and businesses are growing at a rapid pace. PR brings the human face; the very idea is to connect with people, reach out to the masses and include everyone in our quest for a

better future. This memorial lecture needs the support of both industry stalwarts and academia scholars," she said.

Dr. Sundari Krishnamurthy, head of the PR Department, SMC, who took the initiative to get the memorial lecture going, said that best

practices in PR had to be pursued daily and continuously. The department, she pointed out, specialised in community, customer, employee and government relations, and provided the right environment for all-round education. The curriculum straddled PR in the corporate sector as well as in government.

Recalling the early days, Krishnamurthy said that Baratan (R.K. Baratan, founder-director of the Institute of Public Relations and Communication) and she had to teach and access students, reduce the learning experience to numbers. Everything was measured and there were practical applications through internships. Students were well trained in media usage through lab workshops and networked with professionals; there was research in B.A. and M.A. programmes, she added. The thrust, she said, was on working towards the formation of young women professionals.

Striking a poignant note, Krishnamurthy said: "In all of life, nature and beings are well connected by a network of relationships and they mutually impact each other. Those who are no longer in our midst appear in our midst when we remember them."

Reminiscing about his days as a PR student, Daniel Dass, chairman, PRSI, Chennai Chapter, said that in the mid-



R.K. Baratan recalls the early years of the PRSI, Chennai Chapter, and the contributions made by Gyan Haksar and M. Gopalakrishnan.



PRSI members go through the exhibits that showcased the achievements of the Stella Maris PR Department.

1970s Madras hardly had quality PR teachers and he himself had wondered whether he had made the right decision by opting for PR at the University of Madras. PRSI then provided guest faculty as well as industry exposure, and Haksar and Baratan moulded young minds like his then. "PRSI entering its 50th year is a matter of pride for the entire fraternity. SMC has long been a corporate member. We will provide opportunities to students to work at PRSI seminars, conferences, and workshops and also with industry. We hope students will contribute meaningfully to the field of PR," he said.

Addressing Preeti Haksar, her daughter Ruma and husband Raheja, Baratan said that it was a cherished and emotional moment for him. "Gyan Haksar is the father of PR education in India. Though PR is discussed at almost every PR conference, the only persons who gave it shape in the form of a university degree in the 1970s were Gyan and Gopalakrishnan. In 1974, Gyan had discussed with the then Vice Chancellor, Malcolm Adiseshiah about the prospect of starting a B.A. PR course at the University of Madras. With his usual thoroughness, Gyan provided the details to Dr Adiseshiah and the latter appointed Gyan as convener of a committee to formulate the regulations and syllabus for a diploma in PR," he explained, showing members a copy of the University's circular dated 25.11.74.

Members of that committee included M.S. Madhav, *Indian Express*; K.K. Nanu, Indian Oil Corporation; C.R. Sundaram (Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer's

son); Rajammal Devadas, principal, Avinasilingam College, Coimbatore; and K.R. Sundararajan, Indian Institute of Engineering Technology.

At Sundaram's home the same evening, Haksar, Gopalakrishnan

and Baratan met. And surrounded by books and papers, Baratan typed out the syllabus for a three-year degree course in PR on his Remington Rand portable as the four agreed on the niceties. Haksar fine-tuned the syllabus the following day and presented it to Dr Adiseshiah. "It was characteristic of his energy and devotion to PR education. Always soft-spoken and in many ways the opposite of Gyan was Gopalakrishnan; together they formed a well-balanced team," Baratan said.

M. Gopalakrishnan, who graduated from Presidency College, began his career as Public Relations Manager in the Indian Atomic Energy Commission, reporting directly to the legendary Dr Homi J. Bhabha, its Founder Director. For personal reasons he was released by Dr Bhabha, and returned to Madras to join the T. I. Group of Companies as Public Relations Manager. He later became Director of the Imageads Advertising Agency.

Gopalakrishnan served PRSI, Chennai, as Secretary and then as Chairman. His daughter is settled in Madras and his son works for the Sundaram Clayton as Works Manager.

Baratan also recalled the calibre of some of the students of the first and second PR batches Satyan Bhatt, MD, Prism Public Relations, Chennai; Suresh Selvaraj, president of the Outlook Group, New Delhi; Daniel Dass, branch manager, ASP Advertising, Chennai; and Joseph Ashok Kumar, who works in the Publications Division of IMF, Washington.

However, after four batches, the University of Madras discontinued the course. Thanks to Haksar's persuasion, Sister Julius Irene at Stella Maris provided the PRSI a small hall in the college where a one-year part-time PR course was conducted for 12 years.

V.S. Ramana, former chairman, PRSI, Chennai Chapter, said that when he arrived in Chennai six years ago and got associated with PRSI activity and its members, he saw professionalism, buoyancy and a value system in place - the result, he was convinced, of contributions by doyens such as Haksar and Gopalakrishnan. "People need to connect; students and teachers with the PRSI, and PRSI with the corporate world. Companies need to realise the need for good PR professionals and provide internships. We need to take PR to greater heights. PR matters more than advertising. In the early days, we practised and then learnt along the way; today it is the other way round."



Stella Maris PR students seated alongside PRSI members.

Delivering the memorial lecture on 'Best Practices in PR', Rakhi Lalwani, director-public relations, South India, the Taj Group of Hotels, Resorts and Palaces, said that there was nothing that substituted experience and knowledge. Tracing the growth of the Tata Group, from a trading firm in 1858 and a pioneer in the hotel industry (with the Taj Mahal, Bombay, in 1902), to India's most respected business house today, recognised for its integrity, understanding, excellence, unity and responsibility, Lalwani played a short film on the House of the Tatas, 'Century of Trust' that showed how the company lived its values.

"Taj Hotel Resorts and Palaces began with Jamsedji's love for Bombay. He wanted to offer the city fine buildings just as one would offer jewels to the beloved. The Taj Mahal, a landmark in Mumbai, was the first to introduce American fans, Turkish baths, English butlers, an air-conditioned ballroom, cold storage, and the first licensed bar (Harbour Bar) in India. The Taj is expanding rapidly everywhere," Lalwani said.

Providing PRSI members a snapshot view of how the Taj approached PR, Lalwani stressed that the Group was driving PR internationally, trying to establish the brand as an emerging global Indian luxury hotel in the global marketplace and consolidating its position as Asia's leading hotel chain.

"Visuals and communication tones are adopted to build the brand. Romantic and power holidays are used to highlight cultural aspects. Our luxury wildlife lodges and dynamism exemplify innovation, and acquisition of the Ritz Carlton in Boston dynamism. We have launched several key destinations and worked with the Indian Government to develop roads and railways as early as in 1974. The Taj was the first to open a resort in Goa (Fort Aguada); it has eight hotels in Kerala. We leverage on our palaces to highlight the brand and work with operations teams to develop a mind-blowing palace experience. Every guest is treated like a maharani or maharaja, welcomed at airports with turbans, and provided signature treatments," Lalwani explained, adding that the company had

made a film on the history of palaces, subtle PR as she termed it.

Another aspect of Taj PR, she remarked, was to get celebrities to stay in its hotels celebrities such as Liz Hurley, Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie, Richard Gere and Gordon Brown.

Journalists were brought in to feel the experience. "Give exclusives to media. You have to have a strategy, use a good photo, and understand the publication - each has its style," she observed.

Dr Sister Colleen North presented a memento to Lalwani.

A commitment to empower young women, through public relations

The Department of Public Relations, Stella Maris College, which has been offering an undergraduate course in PR since 1975, was begun with the vision of imparting PR skills and professional training to the young students of the college, to enrich individual careers of working women who could contribute meaningfully to PR.

The ideals of the department coincided with the mission of the college, which was to "empower young women to face the challenges of life with courage and commitment, to be builders of a humane and just society, and to promote a learning community in which all, especially from the lesser privileged backgrounds, feel part of the collaborative high quality educational process that is value-based and leads to holistic growth."

Gyan Haksar and M. Gopalakrishnan were behind the inception of the first B.A. Public Relations course offered by Stella Maris in 1975.

The first memorial lecture was preceded by the inauguration of an exhibition that pictorially showcased the achievements of the PR Department, as a B.A. course earlier, and as an M.A. course now.

Dr Sundari bags award



Dr Sundari Krishnamurthy, head of the Department of PR, Stella Maris College receives the Best Faculty Award 2007 from Lakshminarayanan, vice chairman, Cognizant Technology Solutions, and (extreme right) Dr (Sr) Annamma Philip, principal, Stella Maris College at Diamond Jubilee College Day Celebrations held at Stella Maris College on 8th March 2008.

Register for Indo-U.S. business meet in June 2008

INDIA USA GLOBAL BUSINESS AND PR CONFERENCE

12-17 June 2008 • Chennai India

The Public Relations Society of India, Chennai Chapter; Prakruthi, Chennai; and the University of Findlay, Findlay, Ohio, U.S.A., in collaboration with Indo American Chamber of Commerce, will together organise in June 2008 an Indo-U.S.A. Global Conference on PR and Business. This has been possible thanks to the initiative of Dr. Nabarun Ghose, professor-marketing and business, University of Findlay, Ohio, USA. (his father Dr. Amol Ghose was a chartered founding member of PRSI Chennai in 1969).

The Conference theme will be: Business Opportunities and Challenges in the Markets of India, USA, and the World - Building Competitive Skills.

The Conference will cover many relevant aspects of PR and business, with special interest / relevance to India and world business, such as marketing, management, economics and finance, and accounting, and issues related to international business, environment, outsourcing, hospitality and tourism, and services and retail.

The six-day programme will include an appreciation of the socio-cultural-economic aspects of India, and participants will be taken on trips to places such as DakshinaChitra, Mahabalipuram, and corporate houses such as L&T-ECC.

Some of the key speakers who have confirmed for the program include:

Mr. David T. Hopper, Consul General, US Consulate, Chennai

Dr. Paul Sears, Dean, College of Business, The University of Findlay, Ohio, USA

Dr. Sarath Divisekera, Co-ordinator, Research & Research Postgraduate Studies, School of Applied Economics, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia,

S. Muthiah, Historian, Author & Columnist

Arun Bewoor, Director, DakshinaChitra

Harish Bijoor, Brand-expert & CEO, Harish Bijoor Consults Inc.

Dr. Bala K.R. Balachandran, Professor of Accounting, Editor in Chief: Journal of Accounting, Auditing & Finance, Kaufman Management Center, Leonard N. Stern School of Business, New York University

Ranjini Manian, CMD - Global Adjustments Relocation Services

Professor Atul Tandon, Director, Mudra Institute of Communications Advertising (MICA)

Virendera (Sam) Singh, former US Dupont South Asia Head, and Founder Pardada-Pardadi Educational Society (PPES), INDIA

The registration fee, includes Conference registration, activities, digital proceedings, lunch/tea during the sessions.

Participants from India - Business Leaders, Academicians, Corporate Communicators

& PR Professionals: Rs. 20,000

(For all 6 days program)

Students/Researchers: Rs. 5,000

For those not able to participate in the 6 day program -

One day program: Rs. 5,000

Three days program: Rs. 12,000

Participants from USA/Overseas -

Academics & Other Professionals: US \$ 950

Post Graduate Researchers, Students and Video Presenters: US \$ 475

Virtual Participants: US \$ 250

For registration and other details, please contact:

PRSI

National Vice President (South) PRSI

R.K. Dharan Ph: 98400 66096

Email: rkdharan@yahoo.com

Conference Chairman & Immediate Past Chairman, PRSI Chennai

V S Ramana Ph: 9940198135

Email: vsramana@intecc.com,

nishjayram@yahoo.co.in

Chairman - PRSI Chennai

Daniel T. Dass Ph: 26480608 / 9841022345

Email: prsichennai@yahoo.com

Prakruthi

Dipankar Ghose Ph: 99403 55521

Email: advn_nat@yahoo.co.in

Participants from India

Participants from India should send their cheques / DD made out in favour of 'India-USA Global Business and PR Conference', to Public Relations Society of India, Chennai Chapter Conference Secretariat

This issue is sponsored by:



भारतीय नौवहन निगम लिमिटेड
(भारत सरकार का उपक्रम)

The Shipping Corporation Of India Ltd.
(A Government of India Enterprise)

Published by PRSI, Chennai Chapter, and designed by Advertising and Sales Promotion Co. Edited by: Sashi Nair
Secretariat: 5, DB Shunmugam Street, Kilpauk, Chennai - 600 010. Phone: 28296677 / 93826 14433. Email: prsichennai@yahoo.com

www.prsichennai.org