



# PRécis

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

September 2009

## Reaching out to masses, a key function of public relations

*It is communication that plays an important role in disseminating information to all stakeholders and making a difference in people's lives, says Preetha Reddy, MD, Apollo Hospitals Group, addressing members of the PRSI Chennai Chapter at its 2009-10 inaugural. Rajiv Lulla, CEO, NDTV Metronation, points out that in India although social networks go back centuries, actual penetration (Internet) today is less than 3%. He adds that the challenge is to put together tools that can activate large masses of people.*

Rajiv Lulla, CEO, NDTV Metronation, and Preetha Reddy, MD,



Preetha Reddy, MD, Apollo Hospitals, lights the kuthuvillaku as (l-r) Suganthy Sundararaj, R.K. Dharan, Rajiv Lulla (partly hidden) and G. Krishnan look on.

Apollo Hospitals Group, inaugurated Chennai Chapter's activities for 2009-10. Addressing members, Preetha Reddy, MD, Apollo Hospitals Group, who has been spearheading activities at the group and at whose initiative Apollo's 'tender loving care' concept was launched, complimented

Suganthy Sundararaj, manager-PR, Apollo Hospitals, for taking over as the PRSI chairperson and assured continued support.

Stating that public relations sometimes did not give the right connotation and that it was not considered in a

## First woman chairperson for PRSI, Chennai

Suganthy Sundararaj, manager-PR, Apollo Hospitals, has taken charge as chairperson of the Public Relations Society of India (PRSI), Chennai Chapter. She is the first woman chairperson of the Chapter. Born in Chennai, Suganthy studied in Bentinck High School, Vepery, completed her pre-university at Women's Christian College and graduated in economics from Ethiraj College. Soon after the final examination, she began her career as a ward secretary at Apollo Hospitals. She then became receptionist at the front office and later handled corporate affairs, before moving to public relations in 1984.



Suganthy Sundararaj.

Suganthy, one of Apollo Hospitals' oldest employees (the hospital was set up around the time she joined) had the opportunity to learn and grow with the organisation. "My flair for meeting people not only helped me grow faster but also widened my horizon. It helped me interact with people better and sharpened my communication skills," she says, adding that she always believes in looking at life's larger picture and that she is a firm believer in the almighty. "I was born with a sense of humour, I take immense pleasure in helping others and also believe that values and morals are most important to become a good human being."



*Preetha Reddy chats up with K.S. Varalakshme, Dr. Bhama and Suganthy Sundararaj. In the background is V.S. Ramana.*

complimentary sense, Reddy referred to Barack Obama's campaign for the presidential election and said that it was the skill of communication that put him in the White House. That he was young, refreshing and different also contributed to his victory. "Every time we communicate right, we touch people's lives; it's a huge responsibility," she said.

Dwelling on the 'localisation' factor, what he called the "future of mass communication", Lulla, a chemical engineer from Aligarh Muslim University who later studied abroad, explained that localism amounted to more than the overwhelming phenomenon of social networking. "Our social networks are much stronger than anywhere else. It can tap into the massive universe of our city's population," he said. Pointing out that Internet penetration in India was less than 3%, he was for putting together tools that could activate large masses of people at the bottom of the pyramid.

Lulla said that the need for localisation emerged from the fact that 70% of stories in the media related to national issues, stories out of Delhi and Mumbai, and that there was "a city-centric rise of interests" the H1N1 flu virus, safety, traffic, road conditions, local celebrities, music, dance and arts, sports, food, jobs and social events. According to him, a local television channel such as NDTV Hindu would help better interaction with viewers and get to know what they really wanted; it would engage and empower local

advertisers; provide more shelf space for video content; and help the channel engage in better customer relationship management. Referring to how an Obama visit to a small town in the United States was covered by numerous local networks there, he said the same could

be done in India, too.

Lulla said that national advertising needed better geographical targeting. There are several local and small businesses that are looking for an alternative medium to place advertisements - a local medium that offers better customer service, understands their business and can generate local leads and responses. He provided the example of Idea using Abhishek Bachchan as their brand ambassador, and Shreya in south India.

Listing many social issues that needed to be addressed, Lulla broadly classified them under three heads: safety, health and education. "What difference can we make? How safe are our airports, trains, streets and public places? A city's health issues are as unique as are its food, water and environment. How can our education system lay stronger foundations in our youth?" he asked. And added: "The are 150 different subjects that people can talk about. We must empower citizens to encourage participation. Involve government authorities and businesses to move toward solutions. More challenges mean more opportunities. We must create cross-media opportunities for print, radio, television and outdoors. We must engage viewers and advertisers and tap into their passions and interests."



*R.K. Dharan tries his hand at serving soup to Rajiv Lulla as Era. Raju Arumugam, Daniel Dass and Huma watch.*



*The new committee members get together for a formal cake-cutting ceremony.*

# Communication is all about social bonding, says a doctor

*What is communicated and how it is communicated matters, and the goal must be to establish trust and credibility, says Dr Prithika Chary, consultant neurologist and neurosurgeon, Apollo Hospitals, adding that communication is a skill - the qualities of a good communicator are building rapport, having creativity and patience.*

The subject was the ‘power of communication’, but Dr Prithika Chary, consultant neurologist and neurosurgeon, Apollo Hospitals, dwelt at length on the biological aspects to drive home the point. She also made the point that humans hurt humans more than by anybody else - all the negative news in the print and electronic media was proof of that, she said, adding that no animal hurt a fellow member of a species. “Newspapers should put the good news on the front page. How can each one of us do something to improve this? Through better communication,”

she was convinced.

According to Dr Chary, the brain stems that motivate humans to form emotional bonds with others first evolved to mobilise the high-quality maternal care necessary for reproductive success in placental mammals. “The quantity and quality of maternal care received during infancy determines adult social competence, the ability to cope with stress, aggressiveness and even preference for addictive substances. The development of neuro-chemical systems in the brain regulates aggression and other types of social behaviour. Social neurobiology has the potential to provide new strategies for treating and preventing violence and associated social dysfunction,” she explained.

Dr Chary listed five essentials of PR: prominence (how big is it really), timelines, punch (impact) of story on readers/audience and how they will be affected, proximity (local, regional, national), and the personal or human element. Stating that PR was not only about positioning statements and press releases, solving problems or identifying solutions, understanding reporters and



*Dr Prithika Chary during a lighter moment.*

interviewing styles, and helping to improve the corporate image, Dr Chary said that employers were not satisfied with the emotional and social skills of graduates (referring to a 1993 British report on employer satisfaction). It was not only the intelligence quotient that mattered, emotional and spiritual quotient mattered, too.

What was communicated and how it was communicated mattered as well. There were different kinds of communication and, according to Dr Chary, 8% of communication was in words, 38% sound, and 54% body language. “We must acknowledge that differences exist even as we seek to apply encompassing solutions to large problems. Only then can true equity be achieved. The two halves of the brain are not alike; each hemisphere has functional specialization. The goal is to establish trust and credibility. Communication is a skill. Avoid negative words or even hedging words (may be, possible etc). The qualities of a good communicator are building rapport, having creativity and patience,” she said.

Chemistry played an important role in how a relation progressed, Dr Chary pointed out. Phermones (also found in



*A section of the audience is all ears as a member (extreme right) gets up to ask a question.*

sweat) produced sexual attraction, what she referred to as the “invisible social impact that heavily influences human behaviour.” Research suggested that chocolate released serotonin in the brain, which served to heighten senses and brighten moods. Oxytocin, the “hormonal superglue” increased sensitivity to touch and encouraged grooming and cuddling. “It bonds us with people we love more and is usually discharged during orgasm, delivery and breastfeeding.

The shortage of serotonin is widely associated with depression.”

Dwelling on the aspect of man-woman relationships and the communication aspect, Dr Chary said that understanding the strengths of the male-female chemistry was the key to a successful marriage. “Togetherness and independence are necessary for



*Sudha Umashanker presents a bouquet to Dr Prithika Chary.*



*Krithika Shukla, Indra Mani, Aysha, Suganthy Sundararaj and Padmaja Rao pose for the camera.*

the success of a relationship. Human beings are social animals and need to live with each other to thrive and survive. Appreciate each other's differences, develop different sets of friends and keep love alive. Mature love nurtures intimacy,” she said.

Perception is reality, Dr Chary said. She exhorted the audience to aim to establish trust and credibility, and to show empathy and caring. “Be polite and kind in your dealings. Allow each other space. Life is all about social bonding,” she said.

## New executive committee takes charge

The Chennai Chapter of the Public Relations Society of India, which commenced its activities for 2009-10, is entering its 41st year. It was one of the first chapters in the All-India body. An active body, PRSI, Chennai won the Best PRSI Chapter Award for 2008-09, when it also conducted the 29th All India PR Conference in Chennai.



In the picture are the newly elected executive members. Seated (l-r): Kalidoss (treasurer); R.K. Dharan, vice president, PRSI (south); Suganthy Sundararaj, chairperson; Daniel Dass (immediate past chairman); G Krishnan, secretary; P. A. Sethuraman; Standing (l-r): V.S. Ramana (past chairman); Mariam Andrews; K. S. Varalakshme (joint secretary); and Era. Raju Arumugam.

The 31st All India PR Conference will be held in Chandigarh from 11 - 13 December 2009. There will be a concession on registration fee for senior citizens and students. See back cover for details.

# PR has a long way to go to prove its worth, say experts

*Mythili Chandrasekar, senior vice president and executive planning director, JWT, is convinced that a good PR idea can make for good branding. PR should be treated as a distinct management function, she says; Bhagwan Singh, consulting editor, Deccan Chronicle, stresses that the onus is on PR practitioners to provide a proper image to the outside world; Arup Kavan, Well Spring, says PR programmes should align with company branding objectives, but for PR to find a place at the boardroom table it will take some doing; Dr Shripad Bhat is for having an open relationship with media and government.*

To celebrate National PR Day, April 21, the PRSI, Chennai Chapter, invited four guests to elicit views about public relations. Present were Mythili Chandrasekar, senior vice president and executive planning director, JWT; Bhagwan Singh, consulting editor, *Deccan Chronicle*; Arup Kavan, Well Spring; and Dr Shripad Bhat, head, Govt. Affairs Division, Ford India. R.K. Dharan, national vice president (south), PRSI, explained the significance of National PR Day and G. Krishnan, secretary, read out the 'Code of Ethics'.

Letting the tone for the discussion, R.K. Baratan, founder-member of the PRSI, Chennai Chapter, mentioned the aspect of corporate social responsibility and gave examples of the Melinda Gates Foundation and Sudha Murthy donating wealth toward the cause of basic healthcare and

education. At the other end of the spectrum, he provided examples of the Nano plant moving out of Singur and the Satyam fiasco. In all the cases, there was the element of PR going either right or wrong.

Taking off from where Baratan stopped, Mythili Chandrasekar provided a broad sweep of building image and reputation (included the product, CEO, company and social responsibility) and how branding and PR worked (included philosophy of the organisation, services offered, employee participation, stock market and the Internet brand). Infosys, for instance, she said, never really ran a PR campaign but created an image through the actions of its top management and creation of wealth for employees. "Most consumer models are built around CEOs," she pointed out, giving the example of Kingfisher's tag line 'Living the good times'.

The Femina Miss India contest had gone on to become a property brand by itself. "We work in a world of ideas. A good PR idea can make for

good branding. PR should be treated as a distinct management function," said Chandrasekar, citing the examples of Ashok Leyland, Dominos Pizza, Lifebuoy, ITC and Cadbury, brands that have stood the test of time.

Against the backdrop of a tough economic environment, lay-offs and salary cuts, Bhagwan Singh stressed that the onus was on PR practitioners to provide a proper image to the outside world. PR, he said, had become more important because advertisement budgets had been pruned after the economic downturn.

"Don't run away from journalists, talk to them. Newspapers are responsible and understanding and are not interested in selling a few more copies. And don't underestimate small papers. There's nothing like a small or big newspaper. Even a small ant in a soft drink bottle can cause a lot of damage," Singh said.

Arup Kavan emphasised that the opportunities for PR were enormous and that PR practitioners hadn't done enough to grasp them. Stating that



(L-r) R.K. Baratan, Bhagwan Singh, Dr Shripad Bhat, Arup Kavan, Mythili Chandrasekar pictured at the start of the programme.

clients usually approached PR agencies for the media aspect first, he said that agencies did not engage with media as they should. "It's only when PR moves from 'thinking about it' to 'doing something about it' that PR will be better equipped to deal with today's environment," he said, adding, "PR is not equal to media relations, but it is still what largely passes for PR."

Kavan said that reinvention was necessary and it mattered because there would always be the satisfaction of developing and implementing PR solutions that worked. There were also the aspects of earning respect, driving growth and utilising opportunities. "Grappling with changing media dynamics is a challenge. How do you deal with aggressive advertising, editorial-combo offers? What about media-led on-the-ground events that spawn editorials in various forms? How do you deal with the phenomenon of large media houses investing in brands and offering them committed, favourable editorial?" he asked the audience.

Dwelling on the aspect of earning respect, Kavan gave the example of a PR outfit that promised coverage and delivered by charging the client Rs 2,000 per story and paying the media contact Rs 800- Rs 1,000. "A business built on a pay-off platform does nothing for our reputation as an industry. It's time we broke the

stereotype and built ourselves a reputation we'd like for ourselves. It will be dreadful if we don't make the time to set the basics right," he said.

Kavan said that PR programmes should align with company branding objectives. "The more we align with business objectives, the less PR programmes disintegrate into a set of mood-of-the-moment tactics. A good PR programme engages with multiple target audiences and stays on for years from hostile and skeptical audiences to an engaged customer. Each demands different commitment. Intent has to be backed by considerable time, effort and dedication," he said, adding that key messages should relate to: what we say and how, what do we want to communicate, what is core to the brand, what is relevant, and how does it fit into a larger communication plan. "Understanding behavioural



Era. Raju Arumugam, Thomas Abraham and R.K. Baratan listen to what Dr K Sundari has to say.

psychology and more about the product is key. Are we generating enough ideas? There must be a commitment to research that impartially tracks programme efficiency. We should know what component of our programme works and what doesn't so that future energies are not wasted in the wrong direction."

Not refraining from calling a spade a spade, Kavan said: "Earning our place at the boardroom table will take some doing. Lobbying for it isn't enough. Our marketing and advertising counterparts are already there. They don't think very high of what we bring to the table. We don't do much to give them cause to think otherwise. We will be better equipped to leverage PR when each of us live each day with eyes wide open and take the trouble to learn about other communication disciplines (such as marketing and advertising). A true reflection of whether we are leveraging right is when we are able to attract and retain talent. We can only leverage PR when we develop a learning culture. PR is not about smooth talking our way out of difficult situations but schmoozing our way into the hearts and minds of the target audience."

Shripad Bhat was for having an open relationship with media and government. PR was not a "sidey activity", he said. There were roles and responsibilities, but PR was the first casualty always, he added.



Myhtili Chandrasekar makes her presentation.

# The magic of digital visual effects: View of a British university dean

*Steven Hubbard, associate dean (computer animation), the Media School, Bournemouth University, U.K., traces the development of the digital visual effects industry.*

With PR today being much more than sending page after page of press releases or relying on the print media alone, PR practitioners are having to keep pace with developments in the media field happening at a furious pace. Bringing a sample of such developments in the British digital effects industry was Steven Hubbard, associate dean (computer animation), the Media School, Bournemouth University, U.K. The university, home of the National Centre for Computer Animation, caters to 17,000 students, including about 80 from India.

Pointing out that what India was going through today was what Britain's digital effects industry experienced 25 years ago, Hubbard went on to explain what digital effects or digital visual effects was all about - shots in a film that cannot be achieved in front of the camera but created post-production.

Tracing the growth of the visual effects industry, Hubbard said that the

traditional visual effect was a film-based process undertaken with optical and photochemical techniques. In what he called the "golden age" of visual effects, were movies like Star Wars (1977) and Jurassic Park (1992) produced. In 1992, computer animation was used to portray seven minutes of a full-motion dinosaur. And within two years, the entire U.S. visual effects industry went digital.

Gradually, London gained reputation as the creative centre for commercials production. Quantel innovated by using computer technology for video and created Paintbox, which allowed a single frame to be loaded from video into computer memory, manipulated and stored back to videotape.

Meanwhile, the 3-D computer animation industry developed on two fronts - educational institutions spinning off small specialist boutiques as digital pictures and post-production companies bringing in highly specialised 3-D hardware (the Computer Film Company and Peerless Camera Company were exceptions).

The turning point was when Kodak found Cinesite to promote a digital film. Cinesite rapidly became the first



*Steven Hubbard speaks about the British digital industry.*

contemporary large-scale digital effects studio in Britain. The Moving Picture Company, the largest commercials video post-production house, established its film effects subsidiary, Digital Film, drawing people from Cinesite and other companies and began drawing a profile, especially on James Bond films. Framestore, Megalomedia and the Computer Film Company merged to form Framestore. And Polygram created a science fiction film called Pitch Black, leading on to the Harry Potter series.



*Thomas Abraham presents a memento to Steven Hubbard as Rachel Sunderland and Daniel Dass watch and applaud.*



*Dr C.B. Paul Chellakumar, group chairman, Campus-Abroad, and Dr Bhavani Sitaraman, associate professor, Alabama University, Huntsville, USA, exchange views.*



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