



This project is funded by the European Union

TWINNING PROJECT “PREVENTION AND FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION”

MANUAL ON MEDIA COOPERATION

EXPERT: Maurizio Mensi, National School of Administration - Italy

EXPERT: Massimiliano Belli, School for the Judiciary - Italy

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union within the Twinning Project “Prevention and Fight against Corruption” and with the expert’s support from the OSCE Mission to Serbia. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the experts and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union nor the OSCE Mission to Serbia.

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Part 1 – General Framework

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This document offers guidance on the provision of information to news media, defined as information in any form provided to news and information media, and especially of information that has the potential to generate media attention, public interest, or inquiry.

The examples include, *but are not limited to*, interviews, press releases, media advisories, editorial boards, letters to the editor, opinion-editorial columns, audio or video news releases, B-roll (video footage provided free of charge to news broadcasting organisations), as well as blogs and other Internet or social media postings used to convey news or items of public interest. Scientific and technical reports or articles and technical information published in professional journals are *not* included in this definition.

2. PRINCIPLES AND RULES OF COMMUNICATION

ACA expects its employees to abide by the following set of core communications principles:

- Be honest and accurate in all communications;
- Respond promptly to media requests and respect media deadlines;
- Act promptly to correct a record or erroneous information, whenever appropriate;
- Promote the free flow of technical information;
- Promote plain writing of media documents and releases;
- Create greatest transparency possible by distributing information timely and widely through the Internet, the social media, by email, through media wires, and by way of other mechanisms;
- Protect confidential, classified and non-public information.

A. HOW TO IMPROVE MEDIA AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Over the years, the duties and obligations associated with public relations have undergone several interpretations.

For the purpose of this Manual, public relations are defined as practice of managing the sharing of information with the public and the media. Common activities include working with regular media and media that serve employee communication purposes – including social media and speaking at news conferences.

The Manual provides committees at all levels with the information needed by ACA to properly interact with media operators (i.e. journalists, TV) and conduct solid media

campaigns in support of its activities. Information has also been outlined in a check-list format, to help those interested in obtaining information on “how to” perform specific tasks. The aim is to help with the understanding of what it is exactly that a public relations officer does, and hopefully also provide the tools s/he needs to do a good job.

B. TERMS OF REFERENCE

A PRO (Public Relations Officer) performs the following tasks:

- Assists the Director of ACA with activities related to communication, outreach and media relations;
- Assists with the planning, development and implementation of communication strategies to raise awareness about the policies, programmes and specific activities of ACA;
- Supports the Director of ACA by providing liaison services, training, guidance and assistance to public relations officers and other identified spokespersons;
- Supports ACA offices by maintaining contact with PROs to ensure policies, programmes and related activities are understood and properly communicated;
- Supports ACA offices by assisting with media training and workshops, and by providing media contact information and support regarding any media requirements, as needed;
- Educates citizens about ACA’s significant contributions to the achievement of its objectives through various press, electronic, broadcast media outlets and social media;
- Monitors best practices in communications and media relations to ensure that daily activities reflect current knowledge and requirements;
- Maintains a current list of main media outlets and contacts;
- Performs basic social media functions including sending Tweets, updating Facebook pages, and uploading photographs/video footage;
- Assists with the organisation of news conferences, editorial boards, interviews, speeches and presentations;
- Performs other associated communication tasks at a comparable level, as assigned.

A PRO should have excellent verbal and written communication skills (and should also be required to speak fluent English). S/he should be technologically savvy with the latest versions of word processing, presentation and social media software, or be capable of learning about them quickly and efficiently.

He should also have good connections among the media, and the skills and ability to establish and maintain such relationships.

The job of a PRO can be very demanding of a person’s time, as things can happen at any given time.

C. TERMINOLOGY

The most difficult step in learning about any field is mastering its language or terminology used in day to day work. This chapter contains brief explanations of some of the terms used in the practice of PR.

- a. Advertising:** Commercial public promotion of goods and services through any media.
- b. Assignment Chief:** The manager in a news agency responsible for directing reporters to cover specific events (see also “News Editor”).
- c. To attribute:** To indicate that spoken or written words belong to a specific individual or organisation.
- d. Backgrounder:** A document that explains the subject in detail (see “Fact Sheet”).
- e. Byline:** The name of the reporter who had researched and written the story.
- f. Camera operator:** The individual responsible for filming material to be used for broadcasting. They can be mobile or studio-based.
- g. Camera-ready:** A description of material that is in the final stages of preparation for printing (today it refers to the final version of work on a computer or a USB memory stick).
- h. Caption:** The wording under a photograph, illustration or cartoon.
- i. Communications:** A generic term often used to describe public relations, public information and public affairs activities.
- j. Community relations:** The aspect of PR that seeks to develop and maintain positive, healthy relationships, at all levels, between the ACA, the citizens and the institutions.
- k. Copy:** Printed text used to produce news, features, editorials or other printed matter for reading on air.
- l. Cutline:** A comprehensive photo caption which provides background information about events related to the action in the photograph and describes the action itself.
- m. Daily:** A newspaper that is published every day.
- n. Deadline:** The latest time for an item to reach a reporter or an advertising representative to allow its inclusion in the material that is being prepared for publication or broadcast.
- o. Exclusive:** A story covered by only one person or news agency, usually presented from a very specific point of view.
- p. Facebook:** An online social networking service.
- q. Fact sheet:** A document used to explain a subject or event in some detail (see Backgrounder).
- r. Feature story:** An in-depth report on an issue, offering a particular viewpoint.
- s. Graphics:** Anything that is not copy (photos, cartoons, charts, logos, etc.).
- t. Headline:** The words at the beginning of all printed news, features and editorial items. (Note: reporters do not write headlines – this is done by headline writers.)
- u. Image:** How a person or an organisation is perceived by the general public. Also refers to a photographic or visual representation of a person or object.
- v. Interview:** A conversation between a journalist and a person.
- w. Journalist:** A generic term used to describe reporters.
- x. Leaks:** Unofficial and anonymous disclosure of information to the media.
- y. LinkedIn:** An online networking tool that strengthens and extends one’s existing network of trusted contacts.
- z. Marketing:** The business of assessing consumer needs, and then creating a demand for a specific product. The four P’s of marketing are: Product, Price, Promotion and Placement (distribution).
- aa. Media:** The world of journalists that report, analyse or comment the news.
- bb. Media relations:** The art of working effectively with the media.

cc. Medium: The means by which a message is delivered. It usually means by print, radio or TV, but the Internet, social media and blogs are making enormous gains in delivering messages.

dd. Monthly: A publication issued each month.

ee. News: Reporting on very recent events. (From the word “new”, or an acronym for “North, East, West and South”).)

ff. Press conference: A gathering of media so that they can be provided with the same message at the same time and location.

gg. News Editor or Director: The manager in a media agency responsible for directing reporters (see Assignment Chief).

hh. Press release: A story prepared in-house and issued to the media.

ii. News story: The basic form of journalism, in which an event is described by answering the questions who, what, when, where, why and how.

jj. Periodical: A publication that appears on a regular basis.

kk. Photographer: A person who takes photographs for a publication.

ll. Promotions: Activities intended to attract public attention and positively influence those who have been attracted.

mm. Public affairs: Matters having to do with the public (replaced the term ‘public information’, which had replaced ‘public relations’ in the federal Government as term used to describe positive influence of public opinion).

nn. Public relations: The term used to describe the business of creating a public environment which is favourably disposed toward an organisation.

oo. Quotation: Spoken or written words belonging to a specific person.

pp. Reporter: A person who gathers information for print or broadcast media agencies.

qq. Scoop: The first story dealing with a major news event.

rr. Social media: Refers to the means of interaction among people in which they create, share and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks through the Internet.

ss. Sources: People who provide reporters with information.

tt. Weekly: A publication that is issued each week.

uu. Twitter: An online social networking and microblogging service available on the Internet, which allows users to send messages (“tweets”) limited to only 280 characters.

D. IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA

The media can help ACA objectives in many ways. By getting to know and then working with reporters, you can promote activities and gain recognition for significant achievements, thus maintaining a positive public image and building good community relations. Through the media you can also participate in public discussions about issues that are significant to ACA.

Professional and social media provide most people with all their information about international, national, regional and local events. That is why the media – of any type – are the best way to reach the public and let it know about your programmes and events. Positive aspects of building and maintaining good media relations can never be over-emphasised.

Internet is the prime source of information for most people today, and an organisation's credibility can be completely won or lost in the few seconds it takes a person to look at its website or social media platform. Thanks to template software for web page creation, it has become increasingly easy to create and maintain a website, or have someone who knows someone that can take on this task.

When it comes to social media, it is relatively easy to learn the tools required for their use. Just communicate the facts, keep it simple, and let people know what you are up to and that they are welcome to join in.

E. EFFECTIVE MEDIA RELATIONS

Successful media relations are based on mutual trust, respect and understanding, and it will be up to you to take the first step, as most reporters cover many different things in the course of their working day. They are often working on several story assignments at the same time, so sometimes it is useful to take the initiative.

You should call the newspaper editor/radio or TV assignment chief just to book a few minutes to get acquainted. They are often very busy people, but they also like to know who they may be running into in the community.

Be prepared for any type of meeting. Be ready to answer questions because that is what media people do: they ask questions. It may seem like a social call, but it will actually be a business meeting for both of you. Also, have your own questions ready.

See if there are any feature writers or programmes that focus on issues that are of interest to ACA. Once you have all this information, and the journalists know who to call for information on specific items, ACA will be in a position to establish a good working relationship with the media.

3. DATA PROTECTION

As highlighted by attorney Jasna Milanović¹ in her report on the *“Legal framework regulating the Anti-Corruption Agency’s obligations towards the media and public”* in relation to data protection, information contained in the asset declarations of public officials that are not deemed public under the law may not be used for purposes other than proceedings deliberating whether a violation of law has occurred (Article 47(6), Law on ACA); *“pursuant to Article 69 of the Law, when informing the general public ACA is obliged to ensure protection of personal data, especially data on public officials and associated persons in situations where no violation of the Law has been established, in accordance with special regulations; in addition, according to Article 70, when informing the public or replying to complaints submitted by legal entities and natural persons, ACA is obliged to restrict information that may affect legal proceedings, privacy, or any other interest protected by the Law.”*

A. THE RIGHT OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

As underlined by attorney Milanović, *“According to the Law, the right of access to information of public importance is considered crucial for the realisation and protection of*

¹ OSCE consultant, legal expert

the public's right to know and the effective functioning of a democratic society. This right creates the conditions for effective gathering of information about the work of public authorities and establishing effective public control thereof, which is necessary in a democratic society.

[...] the media play a particularly important role in initiating and stimulating public debates, which is essential for the development of democracy. People are getting informed through the media.

The media and journalists are obliged to provide the public with accurate, reliable and timely information about all the issues of public importance.

[...] The public authorities are required to enable the media and journalists to have at their disposal quality and relevant information for the exercise of the public's right to know, which implies the obligation of public authorities not only to respond to their requests for information, but also to proactively release as much information as possible, on a daily basis. By enabling the media and journalists to perform their professional duties, the authorities also contribute to realising the public's right to know. Namely, the constitutional right of being informed,² i.e. the right to information, which is guaranteed to everyone, is actually comprised of two rights - the right of access to information of public importance and the right to be informed accurately, fully and timely about issues of public importance.³

According to the Constitution and media laws, the media have to respect this right, but the public authorities also have the duty to make it possible for the media and journalists to provide such information to the public. This is also in line with Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights,⁴ which stipulates the right to receive information as part of freedom of expression, together with the freedom to hold opinions and impart information and ideas.

The freedom to receive information and opinions includes the right of the media to gather information and seek information through any and all possible lawful sources in order to transfer such information and ideas to the public; this freedom also includes the right of the public to be adequately informed, in particular on matters of public interest”.

B. OBLIGATIONS OF THE ANTI-CORRUPTION AGENCY TOWARD THE PUBLIC AND THE MEDIA

As a public authority, the Anti-Corruption Agency (hereinafter: “ACA”) has certain obligations regarding the realisation of the public's right to know, as stipulated in the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance,⁵ which governs the manner in which any person exercises the right to free access to information of public importance.

² Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, Article 51

³ Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, Article 51(1)

⁴ A guide to the implementation of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Monica Macovei, <https://rm.coe.int/168007ff48>

⁵ [Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance](#), “Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia“, nos. 120/2004, 54/2007, 104/2009 and 36/2010

As highlighted by attorney Milanović, “This right, guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia as a human right (Article 51(2)),⁶ is based on the legal assumption that all information held by public authorities⁷ are accessible to the public, resulting in the obligation of public authorities to make such information available to it. Namely, information of public importance is information contained in a document held by any public authority, created during or relating to its work and which the public has a justified interest to know, regardless of the source of information (a public authority or other source), carrier of information (paper, tape, film, electronic media, etc.), date, the way in which the information was obtained, and any other similar attributes of such information (Article 2 of the Law).

There is a legal assumption that justified interest of the public to know exists with regard to any information that is held by public authorities. This assumption, however, may be argued by said public authorities, except when it involves information concerning threats to or protection of the public health and the environment – when it is not allowed (Article 4 of the Law). Still, public authorities may deny access to certain information only exceptionally, to the extent necessary in a democratic society to prevent a serious violation of an overriding interest based on the Constitution or law (Article 8 of the Law, in accordance with Article 20 of the Constitution of the RS).⁸

It also implies, for the first condition to be met, the need to provide evidence that data classification has been carried out in accordance with the relevant law, i.e. that a relevant decision had been lawfully taken by the authorised person. A public authority is also obliged to prove that denying access to information of public importance is necessary in a democratic society, that is, to consider prior to denying it whether or not there is a possibility for anonymisation, so as to partially satisfy the request.

According to Article 7 of the Data Secrecy Law, the protection of commercial and other secrets is governed by special laws. Everything that was mentioned above concerning data secrecy i.e. classified information also applies to other information or documents qualified as secret by regulations, or official documents based on the law, which are also stipulated in Article 9(1)(5) of the Law as possible grounds for restriction of the right of access to information.”

C. OBLIGATIONS OF ACA AND OTHER PUBLIC AUTHORITIES TOWARD THE CITIZENS, JOURNALISTS, MEDIA AND OTHER APPLICANTS

Attorney Milanović has underlined that: “Said Law stipulates the public authorities’ obligations toward the applicants regarding the realisation of the applicants’ right to access information of public importance, i.e. the public’s right to know.

⁶ [The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia](#) (“Official Gazette”, no. 98/2006), Article 51(2): “Everyone shall have the right to access information kept by state bodies and organisations with delegated public powers, in accordance with the law.”

⁷ According to Article 3 of the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance, within the meaning of the Law, public authorities are: government authorities - all government authorities, territorial autonomy and local self-government authorities, all organisations vested with public powers; and legal entities founded or financed completely or predominantly by the above authorities.

⁸ Article 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia regulates the restriction of human and minority rights.

Although the right of free access to information of public importance is a human right, since the purpose of this right is not recognised only in the interest of the applicant, but also of the society as a whole, the right belongs to citizens and media, every natural person and legal entity, domestic and foreign,⁹ but also to public authorities.¹⁰ The applicants exercise this right by filing a request for free access to information of public importance with a public authority, as well as by lodging a complaint with the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance, whose decision may be appealed in an administrative dispute. According to Article 5 of the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance, this right includes four legal rights of an applicant: the right to be informed whether the public authorities hold specific information, or whether it is otherwise accessible; the right to be provided with insight into a document containing the requested information; the right to be provided with a copy of such document; the right to be provided with a copy of said document by mail, fax, electronically or otherwise.”

4. ACA’S MEDIA POLICY

The fact that ACA was created to deal with problems related to corruption often exposes it to considerable interest of the local and national media, which have the power to enhance, as well as reduce, its overall reputation. For this reason, it is extremely important to manage the relationship with the media positively, constructively and professionally. The overall responsibility for ACA’s media relations rests with the Director/Deputy Director and the head of the press/communications office.

A. GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND RULES

The Anti-Corruption Agency¹¹ is a public institution vested with a wide range of competences¹² It was established in 2008 and is accountable for its actions; for this reason, it has to interact fruitfully with media representatives and respond promptly to media enquiries.

As a consequence, it needs to be proactive in developing positive media coverage which will allow it to communicate with the community it serves, build support for its core objectives, and enhance its reputation. It also must respond quickly to limit potential damage to its image caused by adverse or incorrect media coverage.

⁹ [Manual for Implementation of the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance](#), p. 61

¹⁰ As regards the recognised right of public authorities to be applicants, the author of this report finds is completely unacceptable, having in mind the aim of said right – public scrutiny of the exercise of power by public authorities, the exercise of public offices by public officials, and the spending of public funds as a basis for informed public debate of those actions, thus contributing to increased transparency, accountability and good governance of public authorities and officials. The public authorities have other mechanisms for exchange of information.

¹¹ [The Law on the Anti-Corruption Agency](#), “Official Gazette of the RS,” nos. 97/2008, 53/2010, 66/2011 – decision of the Constitutional Court, 67/2013 - decision of the Constitutional Court, 112/2013 – authentic interpretation, and 8/2015 - decision of the Constitutional Court. See also the Law on Financing Political Activities, published in the “Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia” no. 43/11 of 14 June 2011, and its amendments published in the “Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia” no. 123/14 of 10 November 2014

¹² The Law on the Anti-Corruption Agency, Article 5

The ACA has obligations toward the media and the public relating to providing them with information of public importance, in accordance with three laws: two laws that regulate its competences in preventing and fighting corruption (the Law on ACA) and oversight of the financing of political entities (the Law on Financing of Political Activities), as well as the law governing its and other public authorities' obligations concerning the realisation of the public's right to know (the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance).

As highlighted by attorney Milanović in her report on the *“Legal framework regulating the anti-corruption agency's obligations toward the media and public,”* in line with the Law on Financing of Political Activities, ACA publishes on its website financial reports of political entities, as well as annual and election campaign expenditure reports, thus providing the media and the public with information on the funding of political entities. In addition, the Law on ACA obliges the Agency to make available on its website various types of information (registers and records) related to public officials, as well as information on the officials' non-compliance with their statutory duties and ACA's decisions thereon, namely on the manner in which they perform their public offices.

In addition to these required information, ACA also publishes on its website other information concerning the performance of its own duties (annual reports, analyses, legal opinions, etc.) and uses other ways to reach the public.

However, the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance stipulates different obligations for ACA and other public authorities, except for the duty to compile and publish on its website the Information Booklet, thus ensuring the transparency of its work. Namely, under that law ACA is required, like any other public authority, to enable realisation of the public's right to know, i.e. to provide the media, journalists, citizens and other applicants with information of public importance upon their requests for free access to such information.

B. RESPONSIBILITIES

The ACA staff have an obligation, expressed in the Staff Code of Conduct, to act in the best interest of the Agency at all times.

The head of the press/communications office should participate fully in Director/Board consultations and decision-making processes on official ACA matters, so as to be able to reply to media enquiries the best possible way.

ACA press/communications office staff must never express views and opinions in public with the intention of discrediting the Agency, nor should they express views on behalf of the ACA unless they have been authorised to do so by the Director/Board.

C. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MEDIA

Only Director, Deputy Director, Board members or formally authorised press/communications office staff may provide an institutional relationship to the media on behalf of the Agency.¹³

Director, Deputy Director and Board members are encouraged to respond to media enquiries, but they are requested to inform the press/communications office whenever they establish contact with the media, in order to facilitate monitoring and archive work.

They are also encouraged to consult the press/communications office for advice or assistance when dealing with media enquiries.

All media enquiries relating to ACA policies, operations and issues received by the Agency must be directed to the press/communications office; if the Director, the Deputy Director or a member of the Board do not wish to answer directly, the spokesperson, in consultation with them, will receive the enquiry and be responsible for coordinating the gathering of relevant information and communicating it to the media.

The ACA affirms the right of the press/communications office staff to interact freely with the media as private individuals, on the basis of the Law on Access to Information of Public Importance.

When discussing with the media or writing about matters outside their area of work, staff must make it clear that they are speaking as private individuals and not as staff members. The use of ACA position titles, letterhead, etc. is prohibited in this context.

Any staff member who becomes aware of an issue or event that has the potential to significantly impact ACA's reputation or stakeholder relationships must immediately notify the press/communications office, so that the office can plan any actions that need to be carried out.

The staff are prohibited from exploiting or mentioning the position they hold in the Agency to obtain benefits that are not due to them, and must not conduct themselves in a manner that may cause harm to the interests or image of the Agency.

In accordance with the rules relating to the protection of the right of access to information and transparency, staff members must maintain the confidentiality of all the information they have learned during the performance of professional duties which they are not obliged to communicate to authorised persons.

D. CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

Confidential ACA information must not be disclosed to the media under any circumstances. Requests for confidential information must be referred to the office of Director/Deputy Director, so that they may be considered within the provisions of the Law on Access to Information of Public Importance.

¹³ Reformulated from the original text: Italian Ministerial Decree of 23 February 2018, Adoption of the Code of Conduct for Employees of the Ministry of Justice, Article 12 - Behaviour in private relationships and relationships with the media, published on 15 April 2018 in the official bulletin of the Ministry of Justice

Any staff member who receives a request for confidential information from the media or any other party based on the Law on Access to Information of Public Importance must forward it immediately to the Director/Deputy Director or the press/communications office.

As attorney Milanović reminds us, *“A public authority is also obliged to prove that denying access to information of public importance is necessary in a democratic society, that is, to consider prior to denying it whether or not there is a possibility for anonymisation, so as to partially satisfy the request.”*

E. SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

The ACA’s Media Policy governs interaction between the staff and the media, and assists the staff with maintaining and developing effective media relations.

The head of the press/communications office is responsible for media relations. Initial contact with the press/communications office can be made using a specific phone number or by e-mail.

Any member of the press/communications office can take the initial contact, which is to be immediately notified to the head of the office.

The press/communications office coordinates ongoing information-sharing processes between all the sectors of the Agency concerning issues that affect or could potentially affect ACA’s media and public relations.

The head and staff of the press/communications office must be able to provide assistance to Director, Deputy Director or Board members in managing media statements, interviews and enquiries. The same staff members are also available to help managers coordinate and manage communication flows within the Agency itself concerning the organisation of trainings for journalists tailored to the needs of individuals or groups.

Part 2 – Practical Framework

5. MEDIA RELATIONS – MEDIA TEAM

When we speak of communication, at least at the level of public administrations, the reference is toward a targeted action aimed at ensuring correct dissemination of information concerning relevant activities and decisions taken, according to criteria inspired by the logic of transparency that characterises today’s modern civil societies. In particular, what we want to convey varies depending on the objectives and the recipients; what we want to communicate to the media must be done by specific offices and profiles - press/communications office; spokesperson; head of press/communications office; press officers - and must meet the needs of the media without giving up our own: in practice, players standing on opposite sides must make an effort to find a compromise, one that is aimed at satisfying the needs of both parties.

A. PRESS OFFICE: INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE.¹⁴ FUNCTIONS

The main function of the press office that usually comes to mind is to select, filter and convey information coming from within the organisation to the media. To do this, the main interlocutors are the mass media: newspapers, radio, TV, magazines, etc. that are able to reach precise and circumscribed user targets as well as the mass public in general.

But one of the key functions, to which we tend to give least thought, is the care of the image of the institution for which we work. In general, this aspect involves those who deal with external relations, namely those who concentrate their activities on enhancing the communication of the institution, and, in particular, those who work in a press office, i.e. who work to make sure that the general or sectoral press speaks about the institution, even when the news does not completely correspond to the truth but more to the interests of the institution itself. To do this, the press office affects direct information provided to the journalist and his/her model of information processing, through a continuous promotion of the public administration, starting from its successes and introduced novelties.

Furthermore, support for internal communication should not be overlooked if the institution does not have a communication office, as it can be provided through a series of activities aimed at highlighting potentially interesting news to the top management.

But, first and foremost, in order to be able to carry out their own activities better, those who work in a press office must be credible, because the loss of reputation amounts to a hardly quantifiable damage, with can have negative effects especially for institutions of political importance, which – in time – could result in their being discredited and perceived as unreliable.

Organising a press office means learning each day how to move, when to dare, how to manage situations, and how to achieve results.

Everything starts from the knowledge of the administration itself: in fact, the press office is undoubtedly the structure dedicated to the relationship with the media, but the better it knows the mission of the institution - the more it is useful. One of the biggest mistakes a press office can make is to promise something it cannot keep. This is especially true for public institutions.

Once it has understood its own administration and acquainted itself with the history of the organisation and its future projects, the press office is ready to study the strategy to achieve the objectives that made the intervention of the experts necessary.

B. THE OBJECTIVES

¹⁴ For simplicity, if there no differences are highlighted, when we refer to the press office the term is intended to be extended to also include a possible communication office/directorate/department

In summary, the main objectives of the press office are “in compliance with the applicable rules on state secrecy, official secrecy and protection of the confidentiality of personal data, and in accordance with the behaviours required by the deontological cards:”¹⁵

- To achieve the greatest possible constant and targeted visibility in the media;
- To certify and endorse the credibility of the messages disclosed by the organisation;
- To convey complex messages, translating them from the bureaucratic language;
- To create a continuous flow of information;
- To involve journalists in specific events;
- To create a positive image of the organisation;
- To prevent and resolve situations that are dangerous and harmful for the organisation (crisis communication);
- To turn the organisation into an indispensable source on specific issues.

C. THE SUBJECTS

Therefore, a good starting point is the creation of a media team that is able to best perform the above fundamental role aimed at satisfying the right to inform and be informed, which is protected by Article 21 of the Italian Constitution.

C.1. CREATING A MEDIA TEAM

There are three fundamental positions in a media team: that of coordinator (head of the press office/press officer or Director of the communications department), spokesperson, and writer. In the ideal situation, these three roles are covered by different persons, however in many cases they are overlapped and often handled by a single employee.

C.2. COORDINATOR

For the role of coordinator, we need someone who can easily relate to people, is well organised and creative, someone who has activity management autonomy and excellent communication and verbal skills (even in front of the cameras), as well as the ability to work in a team and spend a great deal of time on the telephone. Among the main tasks, the coordinator must ensure that press releases go out on time, keep in touch with the media, keep the lists updated, and do everything that needs to be done to organise and execute the events in the best possible way: s/he is the one who ensures that all press people have received a statement or handout, that interview requests have been satisfied, who checks all the sound equipment and makes certain that the right people – press officers, journalists - are standing in the right place during a press conference or a public event.

C.3. SPOKEPERSON

¹⁵ Italian Law of 7 June 2000, no. 150, "Discipline of Information and Communication Activities of Public Administrations", Article 1(4)

Unlike the head of the office or press officer, who identifies with the institution for which s/he works, the spokesperson deals with the top figure of the institution, reporting and interpreting his/her thoughts; the relationship between the two of them is therefore based on trust.

The spokesperson should not have to think about the activities of the coordinator, and should instead focus his/her attention on what needs to be said - the content of communication.

Unlike the coordinator, who takes care of the 'dark side of the work' and is not present in the eyes of the viewer, the spokesman carries out his/her activities in the spotlight (and for this reason he/she is usually more visible and recognisable than the coordinator). A good spokesperson, though, should never appear as the main person on the scene, but should always carefully follow what is happening around him/her. S/he is in charge of direct collaboration with the top management body for the purpose of maintaining political-institutional relations with the media, and the one who knows what, how and when to say, but also what not to say.

In order for a spokesperson to perform this role successfully, s/he must be available (there are no working hours like those of a public employee); responsible (we sometimes need to act without having time to hear the opinion of the head of the organisation); impartial (even if we have reference media, we should never privilege a specific newspaper). This figure must be highly professional, always up-to-date on current issues and fully informed on those that fall within his/her area of competence, must have a strong relationship of trust and belonging with the head of the administration, whose choices, orientations and strategies s/he must be able to communicate. In other words, s/he must be the constant reference point in the daily relationship with the media.

The position of spokesperson does not represent duplication within an administrative authority. Like the press officer, s/he is a professional figure who provides information about news – but s/he is also a person outside of the administration; for this reason, s/he has a lot to learn about the organisation and must have skills sufficient to add political nuance to any type of information.

C.4. PRESS OFFICER

In many offices, especially those on the smaller side, the role of press officer often coincides with that of head press officer or coordinator. On the other hand, it is also true that many organisations, especially large ones, often decide to rely on specialised external agencies instead of individuals, even when they are present among their human resources.

A press officer must have certain characteristics that are required for this role and often coincide with those of journalists. It is not by chance that public bodies may require that candidates for this job be listed in the register of journalists, as it often happens in Italy.

These requirements are:

- Curiosity: this is perhaps the element that best describes the essence of the work of a journalist. It is about looking for news and events, surfing the Internet and, most of all, rummaging through the news concerning the sector one is dealing with, “stealing” cues from everywhere, storing, and later withdrawing and reworking them at the right time.
- Investigation severity: it is the rigour with which we seek documents and do research; it has to be done with seriousness, and with expertise in the selection of sources and the sorting of (multiple) information that are encountered and related to the sector in which we operate (but just not that). We must always be careful and alert to anything.
- Mental flexibility: it is another fundamental element that is useful to understand whether we are going in the right direction or have to review our line of action. This is because the characteristics of this job are mobility and dynamism, and without flexibility we risk remaining anchored in situations that no longer fit our needs.
- Ability to communicate: writing and speaking are fundamental in this profession, regardless of the fact that it often happens that both actions cannot be performed the best possible way. In this case, even the empathy that can be established with our interlocutors can play a fundamental role: in fact, they will be much more interested and likely to follow our desires if we manage to “tune in” to their own wavelength.

A very important factor in written and oral communication is the mastery of a fluid and simple language, which helps significantly, for example, when we are on the phone, i.e. when the interlocutor cannot see us: in this circumstance, the tone of voice, the articulation of words and the fluency - from more “institutional” to more colloquial - can help get us out of all kinds of situations in which we can find ourselves. Knowing how to govern this form of language is even more useful in the written field, when processing the news we want to disseminate in the best form becomes very important - starting from those conveyed through press releases, which require synthesis, clarity and simplicity.

- Organisational skills: these involve knowing how to methodologically manage a press office, and above all how to get properly organised in a job that is continuously full of stimuli, unexpected events and last-minute news that can make it necessary for a press officer to call and write an e-mail or a press release all at the same time. Therefore, the organisational capacity consists especially of knowing how to organise multiple things that often need to be done together, while still maintaining the ability to control and supervise everything that’s going on.
- Ability to involve people: it is the direct consequence of the previous point and is the basis of the media team. Knowing how to present ourselves as welcoming, available, pleasant and captivating is the key that allows us to be, and to be

perceived as, authoritative both inside, with our employees, and outside, with our interlocutors.

- Positive attitude: this is a very demanding job and a press officer cannot afford to be lazy and listless. Days are often “hot,” especially when there are crises or moments of tension, when the newspapers do not write or, if they do, write not in the way we would like them to, or when an event remains uncovered due to unpredictable causes. In such cases, having ideas and being creative in knowing how to find new and more effective forms of communication can make the difference between a good and a mediocre press officer. This is especially true in small organisations/companies, which require much more visibility than large structures (in which there is, on the other hand, less autonomy). Everything must be done with a good dose of speed.
- Stress resistance: all that has been said so far can only lead us to the logical conclusion that this line of work involves high levels of stress. Having to deal with people inside and outside the structure on a daily basis, always responding in first person about what is happening, always talking, writing, organising, selecting, watching the clock – all this produces a lot of adrenaline. But it is also the beauty of this job: it is never repetitive, although it is certainly not quiet either. The important thing is to find a way to stay calm without letting oneself becoming engulfed by situations, and avoid being pushed to the brink by complex situations.
- Cross fertilisation: this American term indicates that those who dedicate themselves to external relationships must know how to navigate among the most diverse topics and not concentrate only on those that are linked to the organisation. Obviously, the ability to be informed about current political, economic, legal and social affairs must be the main requirement for a good communicator, as even the most frivolous topics can sometimes help us get out of difficult situations.

D. THE SITUATION IN ITALY

After many years of ambiguous situations and misunderstandings between two completely different worlds in terms of objectives, modes of operation and timing of action - that of the public administrations and of the journalists - in the year 2000 Italy adopted legislation on the subject: the Law No. 150/2000 and the following Presidential Decree No. 422/2001 concerning the “Discipline of Information and Communication Activities of Public Administrations.”

The requirements for working in a press office of a public authority were outlined in these regulations: “The press office shall be managed by a coordinator, who shall assume the role of head of the press office, take care of connections with the media based on the directives given by the body’s top management, ensuring the highest degree of transparency, clarity and timeliness of communications to be provided in matters of interest to the administration.”

Identification and regulation of professional profiles in press offices is subject to collective bargaining, with the participation of organisations representing the category of journalists.

For the entire duration of their engagement, coordinators and members of press offices are not allowed to carry out professional activities in the journalism sector.

Particular tasks of the following figures are highlighted as follows:

D.1. HEAD OF THE PRESS OFFICE

S/he is responsible for the strategies and information structures directed at the mass media: s/he organises and directs the press office, takes care of the image of the organisation in the media, maintains relationships with the journalistic editorial staff and coordinates the information activities that administrators and offices direct at the media system.

D.2. PRESS OFFICER

S/he is in charge of managing an activity or a sector within the press office. S/he can coordinate the organisation of press conferences, act as Editor-in-Chief of the in-house organ's or institution's publications, manage information campaigns or oversee specific editorial activities.

If we are not in a position to create a press office, we can at least try to organise and manage it, and behave as employees of such an office.

E. ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

Organising and managing a press office requires expertise and professionalism so that the production of press releases and their dissemination, the promotion of events and initiatives, and the propagation of ideas and projects can achieve desired results. The staff of a press office can be managed by journalists, editors, or staff specialised in the field of press office activities.

Writing and disseminating press releases is only one of the envisaged activities, but at the same time there are many other fundamental activities that should be managed in the best possible way: preparing the contact list and updating the mailing list, collecting all the information and news on the event we intend to promote, maintaining contact with the reference media (which works better if we are able to establish contact directly with the editorial staff responsible for promoting our initiative), and using tools and new technologies that allow us to be fast, precise, up-to-date and efficient.

The management of a press office can take place within the institution or can be outsourced to the staff of an organisation for a specific event, or to communication agencies that, as part of their activities, also deal with press office affairs.

Without entering into the organisational modalities of individual institutions, it should be noted that in the hypothesis of an internal press office there are certain fundamental actions that need to be carried out permanently to facilitate its correct management:

- Prepare a contact list of newspapers, subjects, offices, institutions, bodies, etc. (as detailed as possible), to which we can forward press releases;
- Prepare in-depth documentation on the organisation, topic, event that will be promoted through the activity of our press office, but also on current news that, apparently, might have little to do with the interests of the institution, so that any necessary information can be provided. This is especially true for institutions that play a political and social role, such as the ACA;
- Evaluate the dates for sending out press releases relating to the promotion of events, because the frequency of publication changes depending on the type of printed medium (daily, weekly, monthly, bi-monthly). This is fundamental if we want to avoid situations where our press release may arrive later than the publication date of the magazine in question;
- Create a website of the institution (if one does not exist), take care of it and keep it updated, or - in case there is a communication office or a web editor - do so at least with the pages that fall within your area of competence.

These activities should be regularly carried out so that we can be ready to face both expected and unexpected daily situations:

- the first case concerns planning: the top management of the institution considers communication/information to be one of the essential elements for achieving its objectives, and a path to structured planning that leads to the creation of an *ad hoc* office (in case of absence) or its restructuring (if existing) and the implementation of the annual communication plan. In this case, the vertices play an active role, as well as the press office - if it stimulates promotion of communication initiatives, and if the actions that take place are aimed at getting what in the language of the profession has been termed “return on media”, i.e. the quantity and quality of publications, comments and quotations resulting from the work of the press office;

- the second case is related to solicitation: when the institution has to perform actions described above not because it has planned to do so, but because it is pressed by an external cause, like an event (that forces it to clarify or interpret a situation) or a subject (who raises a question, asks for information or explanations). This phase may be characterised by urgency - both in terms of time and seriousness of the situation (especially when top management is involved in unsavoury situations) - or lack thereof: in this case, we will have sufficient time to prepare an answer or organise an action and carry it out the best way (for example, gather informative material or hypothesise possible questions in case of an interview request).

F. POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

Those who work in a press office are often obliged to balance between their professionalism and the ethical rules related to the group they belong to (most of the time, they are journalists) and the organisation for which they work; moreover, it often happens that a spokesperson/head of the press office is not able to obtain full information, thus unintentionally generating, at the general level, an image that appears to be non-transparent to say the least, and undermining on a personal level his/her own authority and credibility. On the other hand, because of their high profile, those that belong to top management are often convinced that are very well acquainted with the rules that govern communication processes and relationships with the media. In this context, the relationship with the employer is likely to unfold each day under the banner of conflict.

This is especially true for those in the role of spokesperson, when this position does not coincide with that of the head of the press office. Being a less institutional figure, called to intervene to disseminate, clarify and interpret the thoughts of the political top of an organisation - by use of voice, not written documents - the relationship of trust that links the spokesperson and the leaders of the institution plays a decisive role for the image of everyone, both the protagonists and the organisation. This is even more true when the spokesperson, chosen not among the internal employees but brought from the outside, is not officially invested in the role: in this case, greater freedom of action in terms of what to say and not to say, and consequently a lower level of responsibility for the declarations made by the spokesperson lead to the lesser responsibility of the organisation and its leaders, as - depending on the circumstances and the “political” consequences of the work of the spokesperson – it is much easier to disavow his/her statements by hiding behind the usual formula of being “wrongly interpreted.” In summary, in crisis situations, the spokesperson can be used as a perfect alibi for people for whom s/he works.

G. TIPS & TRICKS - Basic Rules of Behaviour

When one of the above elements is referred to as proactive attitude, this does not mean to include unscrupulousness which some use more for their own personal interests, to show off, than for the interests of the institution for which they work. This is especially true for public authorities, which may have more or less explicit rules of conduct that indicate to those working in the media team the path they need to follow and behaviour they should employ.

So, in the media team some people may be authorised by the management of the institution to issue statements or speak directly with the media, while others may be intended for more limited functions, perhaps those mainly relating to written communication.

Once it is clarified who can relate to the media, it is good to follow some practical advice to avoid being involved in situations that could lead to negative consequences, both from the personal point of view and that of the institution:

1. Know your audience: it is very important to know who the journalists with whom we have a working relationships are, and where they are from, because the news are treated differently by different newspapers. Knowing this can help us decide how to convey our information.

2. Maintain good relationships: it is very important to respect journalists and their work. This should apply not only as a rule of general behaviour, but also as a basis for the relationship of trust that we want to establish with them: it will allow us to become more confident, but it will also facilitate our work, especially in crisis situations. In this way, it will be easier to know what sort of information they want and why, what the real deadline is, and to be as convincing as possible in case a journalist objects to our answers. A good relationship can also help us with “off the record” declarations or “no comment” situations, during which it might prove useful in preventing potentially dangerous situations. In fact, in such situations we may give the impression that we don’t want to answer a particular question, or that we would prefer to hide something: having a relationship of trust with certain journalists could prove very effective for our work.
3. Be correct: it is important to respect the journalists’ deadlines, but it is equally important not to provide a hasty response that could force us to request its denial or correction the day after. Also, in this case, it is better to reply that we need a bit of time to answer: the most important thing is to get back to the journalist in time so as not to miss the deadline. That way, we will be able to discuss the best way to reply with the top management of the institution.
4. Be clear: when we speak with the media, we must bear in mind that our information will be received not only by the journalists but also by people who might be of different educational and cultural levels (readers/viewers). Furthermore, we must keep in mind that not all the journalists will have good knowledge of the arguments related to our institution. It is therefore very important to explain things as simply as possible, using as little bureaucratic language as possible: if we do it this way, there will be a good chance that our information will be disseminated the way we want it to be.
5. Be proactive: the role of a press officer is not just passive, or reduced to providing explanations when requested. It is also important to act in advance, thus avoiding chasing situations that could get out of hand at the most delicate time. Knowing our audience means creating a map of our contacts, and dividing the different topics that make up our business according to groups of journalists who deal, or have dealt with, our issues. We must develop our relationships especially with them, writing e-mails and sending them articles or press releases. The final objective is to be identified as the journalists’ reference point for matters that affect our institution, a valuable source of information which can provide required information in a competent manner.
6. Be smart: good relationships are also important for obtaining “feedback from the media”: in fact, in some cases it may be sufficient not to communicate formally, but to do it by way of a confidential message (via e-mail or through one of the many social networks) or a veiled indiscretion. In this case, the message might not get spread high and wide, but if the aim is to create an expectation even before the official communication is issued, the goal will probably be achieved, even and especially if the news item does not contain truly relevant information.

Again, to better convey a message, you can suggest to, or press, a journalist to conduct an interview with the institution’s top management - an action that should be well considered, both because you will have to choose the right

newspaper or medium, and because it “weakens” our position in relation to future requests by the same journalist or newspaper.

7. Keep calm: a well-prepared press office should not panic when it finds itself under pressure, because it is solicited from the outside (and sometimes from the inside, when the news involves top management). For this reason, organising meetings with insiders, as well as training and updating the staff who work there can be a good investment, even if this requirement does not arise immediately.

Solicitation can take place in three ways:

- **Internal**: it can arise from a situation created by the organisation itself, when it takes the initiative to communicate something: it is therefore predictable and, consequently, more manageable. For example, suppose that, following a regulatory change, public administration authorities must appoint a person responsible for preventing and fighting corruption, who will be tasked with writing an annual report on the organisation that must take into account certain parameters, and be prepared - from a formal point of view - in a certain way. This is something new, both for the organisations and those who will want to know more (the media leading the list). In such a situation, the press/communications office cannot and should not be caught unprepared, as an increase in requests for information or simple clarification is to be expected in the period following the announcement: it is advisable to immediately organise a small task force, well prepared on the subject, to face the situation. At the same time, a series of pages can be planned on the website with all the possible situations imagined to better explain the new legislation, and to limit, as best as possible, the wave of requests. Again with a view to internal strategy, it is also possible to take action aimed at stimulating the curiosity of the media, but in a way that does not make the organisation's interest in conveying a certain message appear too evident. The typical situation would be to create an expectation of the central news, by sowing clues with the intent to provoke “fallout” on the topic of interest. An example from soccer can help to better understand when one piece of news underlies another that is actually more important: when his team (Real Madrid) won for the third consecutive time at the end of the Champions League final on May 26, top player Cristiano Ronaldo released the following statement to the press: *“It was very nice to play for Real Madrid. We made history and now we are going to celebrate.”* In an instant, one of the most famous soccer players declared to the world his intention to leave the Madrid team. By not saying anything about where he would play the following season, he created a spasmodic wait for the next announcement;

- **External**: the second method of solicitation is typical of an emergency context, in which the element of unpredictability is decisive. In this case, we can encounter two situations: if the request for explanations or clarifications comes from a journalist that we know, once we are satisfied that the journalist is prepared and correct, and that s/he has never exploited (neither s/he nor his newspaper) his/her work to attack our institution, we can afford to take time and give a more relaxed interview; if we do not know the sender of the request, or if we know that it is an assault journalist of a newspaper that has written notoriously against our organisation, then hesitation could seriously embarrass the office and the entire institution because it would be taken either to mean that we are not sufficiently informed about the facts, or would generate suspicion that there must be something we want to hide. If we let the newspapers go to the presses with this idea, there is a risk that the following day we will read in them something that is wrong, or something that we do not want. In such a situation, in order to avoid leaving a journalist

with the possibility of choosing between various negative hypotheses, the best solution is often a firm and convinced denial of the unfortunate fact the journalist asked us about. If we decide to do it in written form, by issuing a press release, it is necessary to prepare just a short note that fully utilises the '5 W' rule and nothing more. By doing so, we will gain valuable time that we could use to prepare an effective response - one that we would not have been able to conceive of in the excited phases of an emergency.

For example, if a prominent element of the institution should end up in the press's viewfinder, or if certain procedures (executed or not executed) should be contested, a good press office - providing that the issue does not disappear on its own within a matter of hours or a day - should gather all possible information on the matter and imagine, in the most objective way possible, all the media's hypothetical questions: what exactly happened? Who are the subjects involved? What is the story of these subjects? Did they act to satisfy their own aims, or because they were forced to do so by a situation unknown to most? How has the story evolved, and what has been done? What happens now? Therefore, we should use denial as a general principle, but we must also bear in mind that there may be exceptions depending on the situation and the subjects involved (for example, think about a listed company);

- **The third form of solicitation**, also external, is that which, although coming from outside the institution, does not possess the characteristics of an emergency and is therefore easier to manage. In this situation, monitoring of topics that could be of possible interest to the institution by the press office can prove to be decisive. Most of the time, ideas stem from journalistic inquiries: if those who deal with them turn to the source (i.e. to our press office), we can easily find ourselves in the previous (above) form of solicitation. Quite frequently, however, the press office is contacted only after the investigation has already been initiated: in that case, if you have paid attention to the news, you can avoid being perceived as unprepared by gathering, in advance, a fair amount of useful materials to provide answers to possible, predictable questions on the subject.

Analysing all the situations described above, we can conclude that a press office performs its work best if it knows how the journalists think, foreseeing and preventing the questions of both those who are asking them to deepen an aspect or seek hidden truth, and those who are exploiting the situation by setting off on a witch hunt for political purposes. This is why - we repeat once again - it is important that press offices be populated by journalists, and why it is essential, in terms of prevention, to establish and maintain excellent relations with colleagues from the media. In fact, we must never forget that even while strenuously defending the institution in which we work, we must at least try to respect the right to information: this is not a simple thing to do, especially in an age when Internet simultaneously allows greater usability and refutability of the news.

6. BUILDING AND MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE MEDIA RELATIONS

The press office is called upon to manage an important part of the organisation's communication plan: it takes care of the information to be provided to those on the outside, transforming an internal fact or event into a news item to be disseminated to the public, through the media i.e. those charged with disseminating information.

Apparently, this should not be a particular problem; or rather, it was not a problem until recently. But today, in the era of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), in which everyone has the opportunity to talk, and to comment in a more or less aggressive manner, things have changed significantly. Consequently, the following question is beginning to turn up with a certain insistence among the insiders: does it still make sense to talk about press offices, spokespeople, heads of press/communications offices and press officers today?

A. PRESS OFFICE/COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT IN THE 2.0 ERA: YES OR NO?

The answer to the question is affirmative and, even if it seems so, it does not represent a paradox.

This positivity becomes a necessity when we realise that today we live in a society of images and information that are provided in real time, thanks above all to the Internet which makes it possible for us to stay connected with everyone, always and everywhere. However, all this also creates much confusion, because a situation can be told and commented at the same time by an infinite number of users, making it extremely difficult to distinguish real news from those that are a probable or even false.

In this context, the formal communication of an institution acquires that extra something that makes it different, legitimate: it becomes “communication with the stamp”¹⁶ that is recognisable both by professionals and end users because it is made by professionals, with and through professional tools. In this way, an organisation is able to best satisfy the citizens’ right to know, recognised in every democracy, even if filtered through the media.

At the same time, “communication with the stamp” facilitates greater understanding even among those who generate information, making it evident who does what, who performs specific roles and is vested with particular responsibilities. In this way, the institution itself benefits from it, as the communication channels are established the best way. The same applies to the members of the press office/communications department, who thus become visible as points of reference to the media, and to journalists, who know who to turn to and, above all, how to distinguish official news from those that are general and often unfounded. In this second case, the institution fulfils its duty toward those that have the right to know, who – in the case of ACA – are basing their right on the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance.¹⁷

B. INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The right to be informed/duty to inform can be facilitated, but does not have to depend on the relationship between the press/communications office of an institution and the media. Clearly, the best basis for institution-media relations is provided by the credibility of subjects belonging to the different groups, while simultaneously respecting the interests of their respective employers. On the part of the institution, credibility is achieved not only by respecting the work of others, in terms of responding always and in any case - even in case of a negative response to the received request - and within the deadline set by the journalist, but also by the demonstrated authoritativeness, starting from effective knowledge of the matters that fall within the institution’s competence.

¹⁶ Vieri Poggiali, *Uffici stampa*, Roma, Centro di documentazione giornalistica, 2017

¹⁷ “Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia,” nos. 120/2004, 54/2007, 104/2009 and 36/2010

The same applies to the journalist, who ought to be acquainted with the subject discussed and must never appear arrogant when attempting to obtain information.

The element of credibility applies first of all to those who are responsible for these offices. However, “regular” press officers are not excluded: the need to establish the best relations with the media applies to them as well, especially if one day they aspire to become managers - hopefully without snatching the job from under their boss.

C. ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE: SPEAKING AND WRITING WELL

Another way to better promote the right to be informed/duty to inform involves the exhibition skills of the press office, both in terms of spoken and written language. Those who know how to write are not always able to speak equally well, and vice versa. However, it is important for a good press office that they be able to do both. Obviously, the speaking ability is necessary because we need to speak on the phone with journalists, intervene at conferences, conduct dialogues with the relevant public, etc.

Fluid, formally correct language, coupled by a welcoming but professional approach, is an essential requirement. Today there are mainly two models. One is that of aggressive, shameless communication, based on dynamic models (perhaps excessive) used by press offices that assault, sometimes taking the risk of becoming invasive, like “paparazzi”. The other model is that of applying class and measure, of being known without using sensationalism, without intrusions that could be unpleasant. We must remember that the world of promotion and communication of today is extremely clogged (think of all the spam and inappropriate mail you receive every day), and that stubborn communication, overly aggressive and “muscular”, is more likely to annoy than captivate.

Language is the essential tool when we are on the phone and the interlocutor cannot see us. The tone of voice, the choice of words and the fluency are all decisive elements. Flexibility can also come to our rescue in this case, helping us to modulate the language depending on the situation (more “institutional” or colloquial, more concise or in-depth, etc.).

Although we all talk, regardless of whether we do it well or badly, the exercise of writing is usually more challenging since not everyone is able to write well. Precisely because of its interaction with the world of journalism, the ideal press office must not only be able to find and provide news, but should also be able to present them in the best form, favouring synthesis, clarity and simplicity, so as to transfer the contents to the media in the correct manner, because, as the Italian historian and literature teacher Claudio Giunta asserted, “if you cannot teach someone how to write, you can at least tell them what not to do when writing.” Based on this statement, if we want to maintain good relations with our journalists, we must:

1. Place ourselves at their level and use language that can serve both us and them. In this regard, the Italian writer Italo Calvino speaks of the “anti-language”¹⁸ - a language that is the enemy of clarity and concreteness, saturated with bureaucratic formulas and used by those who do not have good control of language and often exchange simplicity for slovenliness and lack of elegance, while

¹⁸ Italo Calvino, *L'antilingua*, Il Giorno, 1965

simple writing is always advisable, especially when we are creating official documents;

2. Establish the best possible communication channel, also to avoid inconvenient requests for rectification caused by interpretations that differ from what we would have wanted because of the unclear text. In case of written texts, another Italian writer, Primo Levi, argues that “one should not write in an obscure way; the better a text is understood and the less it lends itself to misunderstandings, the more value it has, and more hope of diffusion and eternity ... Writing is used to communicate, to transmit information or feelings from mind to mind, from place to place and from one time to another, and the person who is not understood by anyone is not actually transmitting anything, but is instead shouting in the desert ... The task of the writer is to make himself understood by those who desire to understand him: that is what his job is about.”¹⁹

D. COMMUNICATING CORRUPTION

The general rules of spoken and written communication must be elaborated to be adapted to the context in which they are to be used.

Each organisation, in both public and private sector, is a stakeholder that can focus either on itself (to achieve a good image, to be known with precision and without equivocations), or on the goods or services it produces (to make its activities and purposes known). The more clearly these interests are expressed, the better they will be understood and conveyed by those on the receiving end of the information. This is the general rule; subsequently, each organisation will have to take further efforts to better spread issues that concern its own field of expertise.

In the specific case of those that work in the anti-corruption sector, there is an additional required effort to “translate,” in the most comprehensible way they can, the technical, bureaucratic language used by insiders into one that can be understood by as many people as possible. As we have seen, even without recalling the fundamental principles of communication, if the person transmitting a message and the recipient of the message do not speak the same language, and the message is not correctly decoded, its content will never reach the recipient in the desired way.

Therefore, to avoid misunderstandings, it can be useful to define clearly and unambiguously:

- 1) What the ACA is, as well as its mission and field of expertise, explaining exactly what it can and cannot do;
- 2) What corruption is, and what the consequences of a corrupt society are in everyday life.

Regarding the second point, first of all it is necessary to make a clear distinction between real and perceived corruption, which deeply affects the reputation of a nation, especially in terms of investments; then, it is important to also explain the difference among many types of corruption (legal, moral, petty and grand corruption²⁰); finally, the synergies with

¹⁹ Primo Levi, *Dello scrivere oscuro*, Torino, Einaudi, 1976

²⁰ Elaine Byrne, Anne-Katrin Arnold, Fumiko Nagano, *Building public support for Anti-corruption efforts*, Washington, World Bank, 2010

members of the institutions and the civil society are welcome, because the ACA can discuss and debate publicly with them, through educational projects intended primarily for young people as the future ruling class of the country. For this purpose, a good contribution can be derived from the Glossary of Corruption, a publication promoted by the European Union and produced by the Association of Independent Electronic Media, which targets both the citizens, “to raise their awareness of the danger of engaging in corruption or remaining silent about it, and to encourage them to take an active stance in fighting corruption,” and the media, “to help them explain to the citizens the havoc corruption is wreaking in their daily lives.”²¹

E. THE CULTURE OF NEWS: SELECTION CRITERIA AND CHARACTERISTICS

Professionalism of the insiders is, therefore, one of the basic conditions required to set up cooperation and relationship with the media in a correct way; however, it might not be enough if we don't take another step forward in trying to understand how the media “think” and why they sometimes acknowledge our solicitations and sometimes do not.

Some of the main tasks of a press office involve drafting press releases and managing relationships with the media to promote publication, at the same time looking for best paths or “shortcuts” so that the news to be spread is granted space within the mass media. To do this, the press office must guarantee the authenticity and reliability of its own information; therefore, transmitted news must be reliable, complete, comprehensible and truthful.

But, what is news? What makes one fact different from another, and what causes a fact to rise to the level of news? Understanding this concept requires the assimilation of the idea of the “culture of news.” Regarding the facts, one of the greatest contemporary philosophers²² asserted that one could argue that a fact has liquidity as one of its characteristics, which allows it to take on different forms depending on time and circumstances.

Not everything has the character of a piece of news, and not everything deserves to be spread outside. In a nutshell, not everything is characterised by newsworthiness, which is a prerequisite if a fact is to become news. A fact is news - and is therefore deserving of being disclosed outside - if it concerns our recipients by affecting their lives and activities. Putting ourselves in the role of the recipients of the news is the first thing to do to evaluate the “newsworthiness” of a fact or an event.

Another characteristic of news is relativity: even if the event is the same, various texts that report it can be different. This happens when journalistic work is done superficially, with inaccuracies and errors, in bad faith, with the distortion of the facts. But it also happens when an article is written correctly and honestly. In the latter case, the difference is to be attributed to the different point of view of the writer, whose discretionary evaluation constitutes one of the cornerstones of freedom of information. It follows, therefore – and it is always good to remember this in your relationships with media – that one news does not correspond to one truth. So, even if potentially any fact can become a news item, the opposite is also true: no event represents news at first, but

²¹ Čedomir Čupić, Zlatko Minić, *Glossary of Corruption*, Belgrade, ANEM, 2014

²² Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2002

becomes it at the moment when its potential interest for the recipients, i.e. readers/radio listeners/viewers is recognised. Therefore, it is the journalist who generates the news, through his work of filtering, selecting and interpreting a fact, and s/he does so based on the assumption that the event has, or does not have, an audience that is interested in knowing about it. Thus it follows clearly that “the essential purpose of a news is not to warn, instruct or entertain, but to inform.”²³ This is why a news is also characterised by certification, the certainty of a given fact, and for this reason each news must contain answers to the five questions - who, what, when, where and why - which constitute the minimum information required to certify, in fact, an event. Otherwise, in the absence of these elements, the fact remains, or is at most classified as, a personal opinion.

F. TIPS & TRICKS – News Values, Sources and Problems

NEWS VALUES

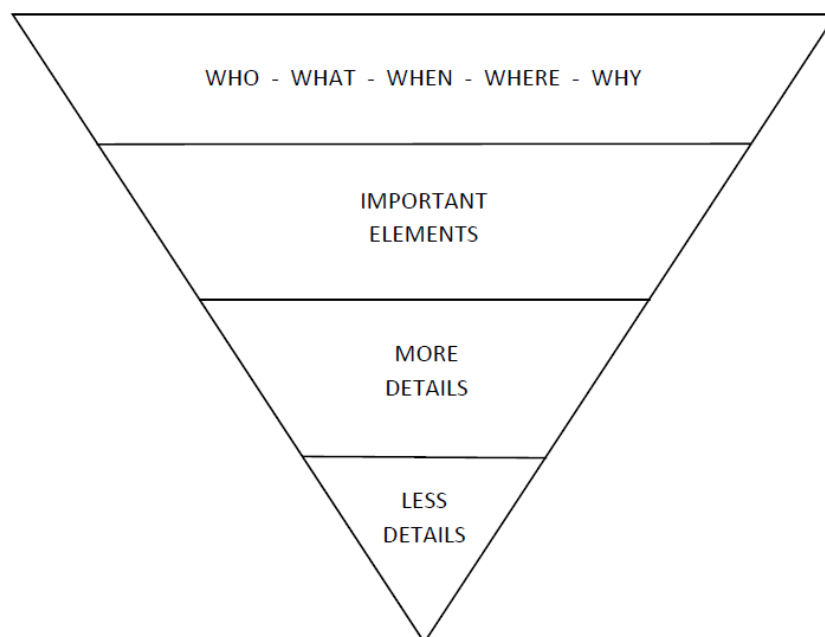
It has been said that a journalist, working as part of journalistic editorial staff, assumes a fundamental role in the process that transforms a fact into a news item. This discretion is linked to a series of conventions that are more or less applied by all newspapers: the news values.

When a press officer is considering preparing a press release for the organisation in which he works, he would do well to first understand if it has the potential of becoming news, i.e. whether it will cause interest or not. The following are the elements that can influence the work of a press officer the most:

- Innovation - if an event is repeated with the same frequency and in the same manner, the interest in it may subside;
- Dimension - the more important the event, the more relevant will be the interest of the recipients;
- Communicability - the easier an event is to communicate, the easier it will be to pay attention to it;
- Dramatics - one of the most popular mottoes in journalism is that “even bad news is good news.” If an event can stir up emotions, it is preferable to those that cannot;
- Practicality - the more the information we want to communicate affects the daily lives of citizens, the more they will listen, and therefore the greater their interest will become.

Regarding writing the news, be it a for press release or a communication to be published on the website, it may be useful to use the “inverted pyramid” formula, which highlights the most important elements in the first part of the text and the marginal ones in the second:

²³ Joshua Halberstam, A prolegomenon for a Theory of News, Philosophical issues in journalism, New York 1992



THE SOURCES

One of the definitions attributed to the concept of sources claims that “journalistic sources are people and documents that provide information on events that are the subject of news, when the journalist is not a direct witness.”²⁴ Therefore, the source that is a person, while providing a partial and limited representation with respect to the totality of the event, constitutes one of the fundamental elements of the concept of news. Because of this partiality, journalists have a moral duty to draw from different sources to guarantee the widest and most precise knowledge of a fact. Regardless of the selection that the journalist will make between those he heard earlier or later, a press officer is one of his/her highest level sources, one of those that guarantee the validity of information, because press officers possess institutional authority and are therefore viewed as credible.

A press officer is fundamental to a journalist and his credibility must never be questioned. Indeed, every opportunity should be taken advantage of to show the media that they can trust and rely on the professionalism of their source, even when we cannot provide an answer to what the journalist is asking.

Observed from this point of view, direct relationship established between a press officer and media staff takes on a fundamental aspect: “Know your audience and let your audience know you” must become the type of behaviour to keep in mind if we want to perform the job of press officer the best possible way. To do this, we must try to do our best to foster the relationship between those who carry out journalistic work on behalf of the organisation and those who do it for the media. For example, we can organise *ad hoc* meetings, schedule periodic briefs with journalists and publishers, make public and encourage the publication of events and documents concerning the activities of the organisation, eliminating to the greatest extent possible any need for further clarification.

²⁴ Alberto Papuzzi, *Professione giornalista, tecniche e regole di un mestiere*, Roma, 2003, Donzelli editore

POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

When the media are covering the news – newspapers in particular, as they appear the following day instead of in real time like in the case of online newspapers, radio or TV – they often demand that the institution grant them certain exclusivity concerning the topic in question. In some cases, such requests go so far that the media might end up preferring not to give a specific news item common dominance. This fact presents a problem for any press officer, especially when the interest of the media to publish is lesser than that of the institution. In such a case, it is a good rule to prepare multiple versions of the same news so as to respect the different types of media, whose languages and times have different needs, as well as create that wanted uniqueness that can help us overcome this impasse. The alternative to the news “pre-packaged” by us is sending various materials and leaving the processing of the news to the freedom of the journalist. However, this second hypothesis does not assure us that the message will eventually be conveyed the way we would have liked it. It is precisely in these potentially complicated situations that a savvy press officer will be able to put to use the good relationships that have been established with individual journalists, suggesting on the phone or through social channels possible different interpretations of the same information.

With regard to previously mentioned good and interpersonal relationships, a potential problem can also arise from the way in which benevolence of a journalist is sought. In fact, until recently press offices used to give gifts to journalists with whom they interacted on a more regular basis. Today times have changed and, fortunately, both for economic and deontological reasons, greater attention is paid to such practices.

Professional delicacy in these cases is a must, especially for those who, like the ACA, are tasked with fighting corruption phenomena. The Agency’s press officers will have to pay more attention to establishing and maintaining relationships with journalists because the risk of achieving the opposite effect could be more concrete than one might think. Indeed, “The media and the public pass judgement on the work of the agencies, and they play an active role in fighting corruption. The media largely determine where either of these forces will stand: with or against the agency. If the forces are against it, the agency’s work may turn out to be completely futile. If the forces are in its favour, the agency is more likely to be successful. Furthermore, when the media support the anti-corruption agency’s work, it is possible to turn the culture of the entire country toward openness and accountability. Communication determines where the media will stand in this struggle.”²⁵

7. BEST PRACTICES

A. PREMISE

The following indications take into consideration the optimal situation, which refers to an *ad hoc* organisational structure - press office - well inserted and valued within an organisation, working under best conditions on developing relationships with the media.

²⁵ Elaine Byrne, Anne-Katrin Arnold, Fumiko Nagano, *Building public support for anti-corruption efforts*, Washington, World Bank, 2010

We are aware of the fact that not all organisations are able, for different reasons, to equip themselves with this structure; however, the best practices remain the same, and we will continue the discussion by analysing - having explained what a press office actually is - the tools used by those who work in such an office.

B. THE TOOLS

As part of the main functions of the press office – and considering it unnecessary to dwell on e-mails and mobile telephones, which have become unavoidable tools even in our non-professional lives – there are some specific activities that merit a more in-depth discussion, concerning both content and operating techniques.

The basic assumption is that every press/communications office should be able to operate at its best, both in terms of human and instrumental resources, which must be organised in proportion to the dimensions, objectives and political and social “weight” of the organisation. To think that setting up a serious professional structure can be a useless investment, in terms of waste of money and energy, is a mistake because in the long run, even if operating in a field that requires infrequent communication, an institution will inevitably face crisis situations in which it will have to make at least some clarifications, if not even defend itself.

The main tools used by a press/communications office are:

- Press release
- Press conference
- Press review
- Journalistic interview
- Mailing list
- Database
- Website and online press office
- Press article
- e-newsletter
- Social listening and social tools

C. PRESS RELEASE

A press release is one of the main tools used to communicate with the media. It presupposes the existence of news, that is, of a fact that we consider useful to make known to a certain category of recipients, and consists of a short/medium text that will provide our recipient with the information necessary to learn about and be able to disclose our news.

In some cases, a press release can also go beyond the simple description of fact, expressing opinions or position statements in relation to certain issues; rectifying and integrating other sources of information on particular topics that are the subject of discussion or controversy; or providing statistical data from particular sectors.

However, in order for this type of communication with the media to function properly, precise rules must be followed. The first and most important is that a press release must

be written by press officers. As we have mentioned, the ideal relationship with the media is based on the use of the same language code, which differs from one journalist to the next; if it is necessary to include technical or bureaucratic elements in the press release itself, it is important that we try to integrate them into the text in the best possible way. It is not under question whether the input should come from the top of the institution. It is, however, up to the press office to elaborate the initial idea – it is a matter of dignity of the person doing the job, and the need to provide a clear message to those receiving the information.

C.1. DRAFTING THE PRESS RELEASE

Good writing and the passing of information makes for an excellent combination. So, when writing a press release or an article, three elements must be taken into consideration:

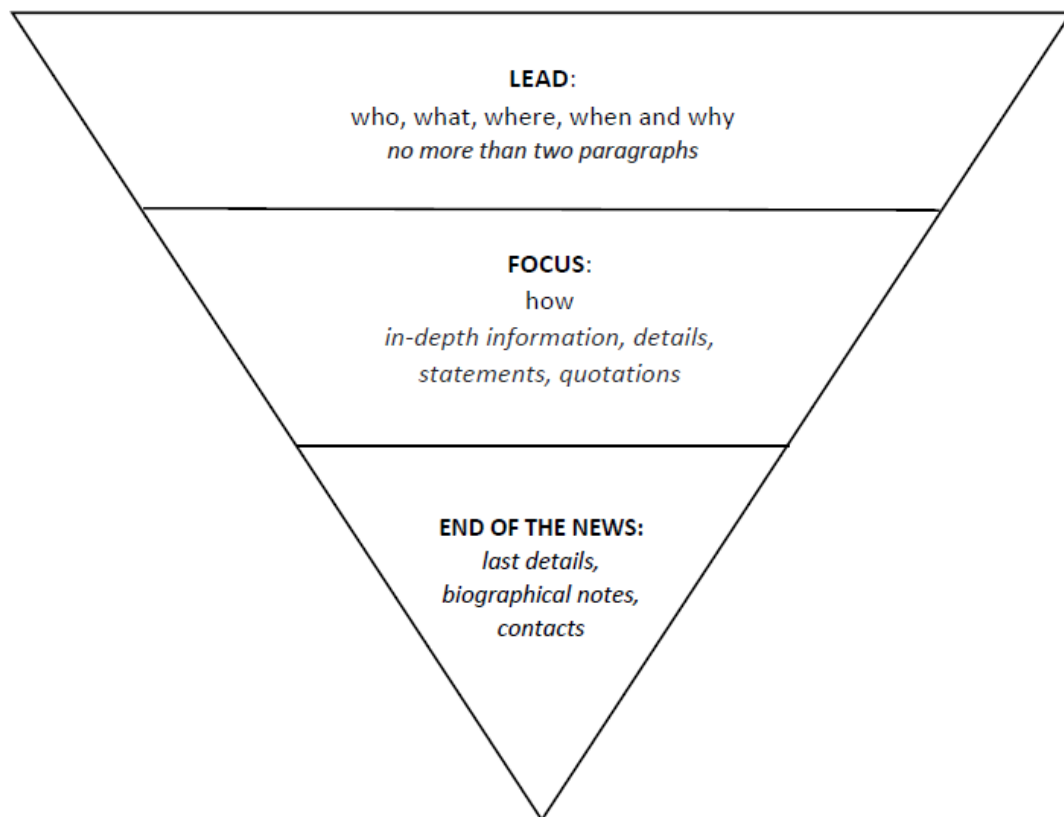
1. The incipit, defined as “lead” because it has the function of guiding the reading of the document;
2. The focus, e.g. the content or a detail of the news on which to build the entire document (involved subjects, location, statistical data ...);
3. The structure, e.g. how different parts of the news are distributed within the document. It depends on the choice of focus.

Therefore, the text must be prepared according to the message, explicit or implicit, contained within the news, while carefully avoiding all unnecessary information. In essence, it must include only what is in Anglo-Saxon journalism defined as “straight news” or “hard news,” avoiding the “feature” that gives additional but not objective information (atmosphere, impressions, comments), going beyond the fact to communicate (information), and encroaching on the symbolic representation of an event (persuasion).

All the fundamental data of the news must be provided at the beginning (lead): who, what, where, when and why, because whoever will be reading the press release has no time to waste and will want to know immediately what the news is about. Use American-style syntax, typical of agency journalism, which must not include any plot but only the key to understand what is being communicated: subject, verb, object, time and place complements, and finally other accessories. It will be the editor’s task to interpret, comment and use a more “rounded” shape, so also be aware of the fact that the text of the press release must be able to be cut short at any point without losing its original meaning.

We must use a journalistic style consisting of simple syntactic constructions, short paragraphs (with sentences not longer than two or three lines), clear and essential language that is easily understood by the recipients, so that the text can be published as is. Avoid gerunds, especially in the opening, avoid repetitions, cacophonies, check that every sentence has a nice sound to it (once we finish writing the text, we must learn to also listen to it - reread it), and avoid words that might have equivocal meaning.

Let us not forget, finally, the elements of the text: the title, summary, and captions to the photographs. To schematise this passage, here too we can resort to the inverted pyramid to define the rules of good writing:



C.2. TIPS & TRICKS

Accuracy. Verify the information with the official source, check numbers and data, avoid grammar and syntax errors.

Brevity. Condense the press release to include fewer words, abolishing superfluous adjectives and adverbs and any other type of complication of the form. To improve the art of conciseness, it can be useful to practice using the social network “Twitter,” which allows us to express our thoughts using only 280 characters (including spaces).

Clarity. Speak the same language as the reader, i.e. the journalist, who in turn will have to speak that of his/her readers: facilitating the task will mean improving the result. An idea in every paragraph; an accomplished concept in every sentence; linear sequences of subjects, verbs and complements. In this regard, George Orwell’s six rules for writing clear and tight prose²⁶ may be useful:

1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print;
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do;

²⁶ George Orwell, *Politics and the English Language*, 1946

3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out;
4. Never use the passive where you can use the active;
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent;
6. Break any of these rules rather than say anything completely barbarous.

Content. To ensure that our press release will emerge and be noticed among the many that invade daily newsrooms, it must be convincing and must intrigue the recipient. Furthermore, it must be organised in blocks; writing long texts without breaks makes it impossible to capture and focus the reader's attention on the main aspects of the message.

Title. There are two schools of thought:

1. The one that considers it useless, and therefore a waste of time, to add a title to the press release. Indeed, there are also those who consider it to represent actual abuse against the free interpretation of the press;
2. The one of the undersigned, which considers it useful to add a title, both because it facilitates the work of the recipient of the press release - especially today, when journalists are always pressed for time and have to write more than one article in a day - and because that way we can be more certain that greater attention will be given precisely to the passage that is more important to us.

Form. In addition to the paragraph structure, it is necessary to take care of other graphic aspects: header, margins, line spacing, the body of the text (which should be large enough to facilitate reading, and presented in a readable and clear font). It is necessary also to write at the beginning, in a very evident way: "Press release" or "Press note" or "Information for the press." Finally, insert the contact details - starting with the mobile phone number, personal or service number - of the head of the press office or the office that had drafted the press release, so that the recipient knows whom to contact to request additional information.

Photographs and graphics. Nothing enhances a story more than a good photo or graphic (diagram, crest, map, etc.). Here are some guidelines when taking photographs for use in newspapers:

- a. Avoid "grip and grin" shots (two people shaking hands and smiling into the camera). If a person has won an award, take a photo of that person with the award or doing what s/he did to deserve it;
- b. Take pictures of people, not inanimate objects;
- c. Take a number of photos and then pick the best one.

For writing captions of what is in the photo, follow these basic rules:

- a. Start by describing the action in the photo and use the present tense;
- b. Name everyone in the photo, from left to right and from back to front;
- c. If there are no people, consider using a quote from the press release;

- d. Be sure you have enough copies of photographs to send one out with each release;
- e. Do not expect them back; if you need a copy for the files, have it printed separately.

Officiality. A press release should always be issued on proper letterhead²⁷ and contain the name and phone number of the contact person at the end of, and outside of, the release for confirmation purposes or if there are any questions. Be ready to answer questions after a press release is issued.

Correctness. We must treat the media fairly and press releases should therefore be provided to all. One tip for those who want to release information to the media electronically: never send our information in the form of an attachment. The media are very wary of the risks of virus contamination, and one way of spreading them is through attachments. It is better to copy the information that is being sent into the body of the e-mail itself. It will increase the chances of having it read and used.

Timeliness. There are some cases when most of the rules described above can be skipped. The form, the musicality and the graphics can all be neglected in favour of timeliness.

Checklist. Prior to sending the press release, it is very important to make some final checks:

- Does the press release conform to the ACA Press Style Guide?
- Does the press release answer the five “Ws” and the “H”?
- Have all media been provided with a copy of the press release?
- Is the information presented in declining order of importance?
- Is the press release brief (200 to 250 words)?
- Is the press release issued on a letterhead or appropriate stationary?
- Does the press release include a contact and a phone number?
- Is the press release dated?
- Are exact dates used for the occurrence of the event?
- Are “-MORE-” written on the bottom of the page if there is more than one page?
- Does the symbol “-30-” appear at the end of the press release?
- Is the Director of ACA aware that a press release is being issued?
- Is there a copy on file?
- Does it include a photo with permission (optional)?

C.3. DISSEMINATION OF THE PRESS RELEASE

A press release must be addressed to the journalist who is permanently involved with the specific sector or topic. Each press release must be addressed to a targeted journalist. However, in case of news that exceeds the ordinary scope of work of the organisation, it will be necessary to make it known to the head of the service and eventually to the editor-in-chief. In any case, it is a good method to prepare a mailing list of newspapers with specific journalists to whom communication is to be sent.

²⁷ See “communication with the stamp” in Chapter VI, *Building and Maintaining Effective Media Relations*

The main media to take into consideration when sending a press release are:

- Press agencies
- National/regional newspapers
- Non-specialised weekly and monthly magazines (that have columns on the topic or may be interested in it)
- Specialised press (weekly, monthly, bi-monthly)
- Radio (national/local broadcasters)
- National/local television networks
- Internet (specialist sites, blogs, ...)

C.4. TIPS & TRICKS

Diversify. Many times, to speed up the work, we tend to write a single press release to be distributed to various recipients. Instead, to make our communication more effective, it would be preferable to do the following:

- Differentiate the layout and structure of the press release by highlighting some aspects of the message compared to others;
- Try to send the press release to the precise recipient instead of a generic one. In fact, it would be desirable, when preparing the address book of our contacts, to identify the natural person responsible or otherwise directly involved in the type of message that is being disclosed.

Sincerity. Trying to build a relationship with journalists based on respect is more important than many things we have mentioned so far. For example, it is considered a form of respect to provide an answer to a journalist who has asked us a question, even if we cannot do it immediately, as long as we do it in a way that is acceptable according to the media standards: if we leave him “hanging” and avoid his subsequent calls, the next time he might not be willing to assist us. Another thing to avoid is announcing a news item as exclusive when it is not: this time, the risk involves ending up on the blacklist of the media. As a result, the next time we need journalists, they will not answer our call.

Methods and times. Press releases ought to be sent mainly by e-mail, and should be followed by follow-up telephone calls to the journalists to ensure that they have indeed received the document. If an opportunity arises, we can also support publication by better explaining the sense of the news and underlining the part that is most interesting to us. The follow-up can be avoided if we use social tools, which are now widely available. Except in extraordinary cases, a press release should be dispatched late in the morning and, in any case, no later than in the early hours of the afternoon.

Format. A press release should be sent in ‘Word’ and not ‘pdf.’ format, to facilitate the work of the editor who, as already mentioned, may not have the time necessary to process our note from scratch. This must be done always, even if the transmission of the document takes place in the morning, and must be considered a form of courtesy and attention to those who are receiving the document. Furthermore, since journalists never have sufficient time on their hands, the Word format could encourage them to use the

“copy and paste” action, with could result in the news being published exactly the way we wanted.

Operational press plan. The operational press plan is fundamental for organising the various phases of work in a press office. The main factors and aspects to be taken into consideration are:

- **Recipients:** define the targets to which you will want to address your press office activity;
- **Topics:** define and plan the topics you will cover in your press releases;
- **Journalistic publications:** identify and constantly update the list of newspapers to which press releases should be sent;
- **Tools:** identify and organise all the tools used to disseminate your press office activities: writing press releases, organisation of press conferences as well as projectors and screens for presentations, press folders;
- **Timing:** set deadlines within which to send press releases;
- **Storage:** manage and take care of press review (press clipping), or verify and identify the channels, newspapers, sites, etc. where our press releases have been published and archive the various articles that have been published, remembering for each article to indicate the source from which it was taken, the page number, and the date of publication.

C.5. PRESS OFFICE STRATEGY

The ultimate goal of the press office is not just to “find space” within the media, but also to build a virtuous communication circuit based on the fact that news can easily reach the media, who then communicate it directly to the people. It is important to understand if and how the message has arrived, and what sort of reaction it has caused. Based on a conducted analysis, different communication strategies can be adopted for the future.

Multi-channelling

The increased complexity of information to be provided and the diversity of the composition of the public with whom we interact through various tools (paper, web, smart-phone, tablet, radio, TV) also impose the adoption of a multi-channel strategy. It is no longer necessary to match the objectives, recipients and communication channels – “social” platforms are taking the lead.

Mesto okupljanja

Meeting point

Journalists (local, national and sectoral) are flooded each day by hundreds of emails, whose content does not always end up in their media (blogs, newspapers, etc.). On the other hand, journalists and bloggers are also constantly looking for interesting stories, people and businesses, and are using the web to search for them. Therefore, it is difficult but not impossible for the two worlds to meet.

Old and new rules

Once, the only way to make the news was to go through the media: in fact, companies and organisations communicated with journalists through press releases, and no one but the chosen few had access to this information. Today we can talk to the public (avoiding

the use of expert language) without necessarily going through the media, for example by taking care of our website.

Ignore the old rules

Instead of focusing only on traditional media of general nature (newspapers, TV), it is also necessary to target our communication to the sites and blogs of the sector. Instead of writing press releases only when we actually have important news to share, we should focus on content that can be created specifically for our recipients and disseminated through the channels they can use whenever they wish.

Pay attention to the content

The care of the content (of a website, a blog, a newsletter) makes it gain credibility in the eyes of the public and creates a relationship of loyalty between the issuer and the end users of provided information. Content is more important than the aesthetic aspect of the website, although a clever combination of space and colour further helps users to appreciate the content.

D. PRESS CONFERENCE

A press conference is a good way for one person, a group of people or an organisation to reach a large number of journalists with the same message, at the same time and in the same place. For this reason, it is related to an important event or extraordinary circumstances, and it is therefore not appropriate to use it to announce, for example, the results of ACA's work or any other activity that common sense tells you is actually routine.

Preparation, development and post-conference phases must be well organised, with particular attention paid to the needs of the media.

It is especially useful when the following conditions occur:

1. The institution is in a position to provide important information to the public or journalists, that is, to obtain further information through the debate with the press;
2. It is useful and effective to visualise information with the support of audio-visual media;
3. It is appropriate to allow journalists to directly examine the characteristics and performance of a new service;
4. The institution considers it productive to anticipate and therefore prevent, through the debate, any possible doubts, replies and lack of information.

D.1. PREPARATION

With a view to the institutional objectives in this area, at this stage we must assess the correct motivation of journalists whose presence is planned and whether their participation can lead to positive developments.

D.2. PROGRESS

During the intermediate phase, the press conference will have more prominence if the person called to preside over it holds certain prestige. Both the official speaker - usually the person holding the leading position in the institution - and any managers called to support him/her must be prepared for the specific techniques used at press conferences, aimed at exhibiting clear exposure: the ability to respond to questions the press office has prepared, but also the ability to evade the discourse around questions which they do not want to answer, or those that cannot be answered. Indeed, in this regard, if there are certain elements we do not wish to talk about, it is better to be clear and explicit from the very beginning (for example: “I will not comment rumours on ...”).

D.3. POST-CONFERENCE

At the beginning of the press conference, large documentation (press kit), prepared by the press office with particular care, regarding both form and content, will be distributed to the participants.

D.4. TIPS & TRICKS

Organisation. A press conference should observe the following guidelines:

- Be sure it is convened for a theme that is of real interest to the relevant public;
- Be sure it is the best way to deliver the message. If your conference turns out to be a “false alarm,” it is unlikely that journalists will show up for the next one;
- Select a proper spokesperson. Have subject matter experts on hand;
- Select the proper location and provide it with all the necessary equipment; be sure that it can accommodate all the expected media representatives, that it has adequate power supply, is easily accessible, and that it is comfortably warm in winter and well ventilated in summer. TV lights can generate quite a lot of heat, so keep them away from overhead sprinkler systems; bear in mind the possible logistical aspects such as travel, accommodation, food and drinks;
- Make a list of invited journalists, divided according to the newspapers they work for; distribute invitations and send out a “Media Advisory” at least five days before the press conference. Follow-up with a phone call the day before and on the day of the conference, and ensure that you have a media register to record the names and agencies of the journalists attending;
- Send the press release to the news agencies to announce the conference;
- Prepare media kits carefully. These should be handed out prior to the press conference so that electronic media can review them and make decisions on what to publish. Media kits may include the following, depending on the specific event:
 - Copy of the news release;
 - Backgrounder;
 - Speeches;
 - Biographies of speakers;
 - Agenda of the press conference; and
 - Digital images.
- Have a moderator. S/he should announce the ground rules, control the Q&A session during the conference, be aware of the different deadlines of the

attending media representatives (radio, TV and print, in that order), and finally close the press conference;

- Select visual aids carefully. TV reporters may want digital video footage, while print journalists may want photographs. Copies that are not available should be provided as a follow-up action. Do not make any promises you cannot keep;
- Make provisions for broadcast and print reporters; ensure that the person holding the press conference is placed on a raised platform, and that camera risers (normally in the back of the room) make shooting (of stills and video footage) over the heads of other attendees possible; another option is to create a large centre aisle to allow camera operators freedom of movement;
- Be sure that proper audio feed equipment is available (multi-boxes allow radio journalists to plug in and tape the proceedings without having to place microphones in front of the person that is holding the conference).

Date. Press conferences are usually held between Tuesday and Friday (as during the weekends media often operate with fewer editorial staff).

Time. Ideally, press conferences should take place between 10 in the morning and noon. This allows assignment chiefs time to locate and assign reporters, and gives the reporters time to prepare. A press conference timed in such way also gives editors and news directors a good chance to feature the obtained material in their noon and early afternoon news casts, or in the evening editions of newspapers. Press conferences planned to be held later in the day run the risk of being overtaken by other fast-breaking news stories. Journalists and reporters are notorious for running late, so the later a press conference is planned to start, the greater are the chances that a replacement reporter or journalist may be assigned to attend it.

Place. Normally, a press conference is held at the headquarters of the organisation. In any case, it should not be too far from the editors or their correspondents.

Invitation. It must be sent by e-mail exclusively, neither too early nor too close to the scheduled date: it is recommended that it be done four to five days prior to the event. It is also recommended to make sure that no other significant events or press conferences of particular importance are scheduled on the same date;

Recall. The day before the conference, it is recommended to confirm, by making a phone call, that the invitation to the press conference has arrived to the appropriate e-mail address;

Press folder. It is an essential tool of the press conference; if complete texts are not available, it may be useful to include a summary of the topics that will be dealt with, as well as some additional materials (statistical data, costs, comparisons, significant precedents, one or more photos with captions);

Post production. Especially for blogs and websites, it is very useful to send a report from the press conference, including the statements that have been made and the photographic material. Eventually, you can also send a letter of thanks to the journalists. The following day, the results of publication of the news are checked through a debriefing of the subjects who have worked on the event.

E. PRESS REVIEW (PRESS CLIPPING)

In addition to materially representing the collection of everything that was ever published by the newspapers on the organisation, its executives, partners and the sector in which it operates, the press review (press clipping) is also sort of a business card of the institution.

The collection of news is intended to update the management and other stakeholders about the facts of the day, keeping in mind that managers and executives can rarely spend much time reading newspapers and keeping themselves properly informed.

Press clipping/review makes it possible to understand the level of the image and reputation of the institution which, in this way, can manage to outline and/or correct the guidelines for future communication.

Press clipping/review is also useful to manage the information of interest, follow the key issues, and identify new areas of development or new topics on the political, economic, social, trade union and/or social and cultural scene. It is a management tool within the organisation that allows for timely, vital and quick consultations.

From the technical point of view, press clipping/review has deeply changed since the time when scissors and glue were used; today, the electronic version is universally used by increasingly specialised staff working through a reference database that can perform search by newspapers or topics that were previously reported by the organisation in line with its needs. It contains extracts, short descriptions of articles, as well as the image of the placement of the article on the page of the newspaper from which it was taken.

Some online databases offer both original documents and extracts therefrom. Possible difficulty lies in the quality of the selection: it is more difficult to identify articles that address certain issues than to search for them by name (people, public authorities, abbreviations). For this reason, it is important to verify the level of knowledge concerning the institution and its interests prior to choosing the company to provide this service.

F. JOURNALISTIC INTERVIEW

The moment of the interview must be carefully prepared by the press office, starting with the analysis of the newspaper (or media outlet), the point of view that is usually given to the articles, and the types of topics that the media outlet mainly deals with.

The next step to be taken by the press office is to prepare the interviewee by conjecturing with him all the possible questions that may turn up to be dangerous. Having done this, s/he will feel more relaxed in dealing with any traps, knowing that a diplomatic response has already been identified. In fact, the interviewee must never seem nervous, in difficulty, or - even worse - reticent. Of course, s/he can always use the “no comment,” option with grace and providing reasons why s/he does not wish to disclose additional

information. However, we must keep in mind that the “no comment” reply is often perceived as confirmation, something akin to “Yes, but I cannot say it.”

Preparing the interview also means evaluating, at the beginning, how much space and importance the newspaper will give the interview. That way we can avoid, for example, generation of false expectations of a prominent position in an authoritative newspaper, complete with photographs, only to be surprised when the words are published in a small box as part of a broader investigation.

Another evaluation concerns the content of the interview, in particular the number of topics to be discussed and the quality of the newspaper that submitted the request. The first case occurs when the topic has already been extensively covered, above all in terms of interviews given by other parties with the right to comment: in that case, there is a risk of inflating the issue with the consequent possibility of fuelling confusion rather than providing clarity, or that of boring the readers. The second question concerns an interview request submitted by several different newspapers: in such a situation it is appropriate to conduct a case-by-case analysis and decide if it is more strategically opportune to send the message to the local level - therefore preferring the media that cover a specific territory - or whether it would be better to choose a prestigious national/international outlet to increase the relevance of the interview (which will irritate the newspapers that were denied the interview). In the latter case, another good rule is to diversify, giving the opportunity to conduct an interview also to newspapers that traditionally do not report in favour of our organisation.

Finally, before meeting with the journalist, it is important to make an identikit of him/her, and vice versa, to provide the interviewer with an identikit of the person who will be interviewed. During these moments before the interview, it is legitimate to ask if not exactly the exact questions that will be posed, then at least which issues will be addressed during the interview.

F.1. TIPS & TRICKS

No interview is the same, and press, radio and TV interviews significantly differ from one another. However, there are some suggestions that are generally valid, which allow the interviewee to give an interview in the best possible way:

Preparation:

In response to media interview requests, ACA should identify the spokesperson(s) who can provide the requested information.

- Whenever approached by a reporter, an ACA employee should notify his/her immediate supervisor and coordinate with the Agency’s PRO.
- ACA officers should facilitate interviews and work to meet reporters’ deadlines.
- Meetings that are open to the public are, by definition, also open to the media. ACA employees who are presenters at public events, such as conferences or meetings, are encouraged to accommodate requests from present media representatives regarding their presentations while still on site. Interviews or media questions that go beyond the

scope of the specific presentation should be referred to ACA's PRO for appropriate follow-up.

- As a matter of routine, media interviews should be conducted "for the record" and attributable to the person speaking to the media representative, unless an alternate attribution arrangement has been mutually agreed upon in advance. ACA recognises the following types of attribution:

- **For the record:** All statements are directly quotable and attributable, by name and title, to the person making the statement.
- **On Background:** All statements are directly quotable, but cannot be attributed by name or specific title to the person commenting.
- **On Deep Background:** Anything that is said in the interview is usable, but cannot be directly quoted or attributed. The reporter writes it on his/her own.
- **Off the Record:** Information is for the reporter's use only and is not to be printed or made public in any way. The information is also not to be taken to another source in hope of obtaining confirmation.

From time to time, ACA receives queries from the media. Here are some guidelines you can follow when dealing with them:

- a. Find out exactly what the question is, what prompted it (an article or a rumour), and what the reporter wants (an interview, suggestions concerning interview subjects) and when it is needed (deadlines);
- b. Get the reporter's name and the news agency s/he works for;
- c. Make sure the right person is acting as ACA spokesperson.

This is the best way to quickly get facts, find varying points of view and prepare a balanced report.

A properly handled interview is a good way to spread the Agency's message. It can also dispel rumours, clarify points of view and confirm successes. It enhances the public image of ACA and raises its profile within the community.

How to behave during an interview:

The ultimate response to a media query is a full-fledged interview. However, a great many people are uncomfortable with the idea of having to deal with a reporter face-to-face.

This is understandable, but knowing how to give a good interview is essential for anyone whose job is to provide the public with information about the work of ACA. Here are some guidelines:

- Be certain that the right person is giving the interview;
- Be positive, calm, courteous and enthusiastic;
- Avoid hesitation and expressions of surprise;
- Remember that the interviewed person is the expert, not the reporter;
- Remember that the interviewee is talking to the public. Use colloquial language and avoid jargon, acronyms and long titles;
- Do not use the first name of the interviewer because that may seem overly familiar;
- Try not to avoid answering questions, as it can make you look like you have something to hide. If you want to move on with the discussion, you can give a short answer and then bring the conversation back to the key messages with the phrase "and that's why...";

- Listen carefully to the questions and make sure to answer only the question that was asked;
- Where possible, provide complete answers that encourage the interviewer to pose the next question;
- In many cases, you may not even have to answer the question; you can always answer any question with a position that is more reflective of the reality;
- Be honest (if you don't know the answer, say so);
- Never guess (obtain the information after the interview for a timely follow-up);
- Be concise to avoid confusion;
- Avoid speculation;
- Assume that everything you are saying is "for the record";
- Avoid policy issues other than explaining what the current policy is; make sure you are completely certain of all relevant policies;
- Review any background material to be given to the journalist for accuracy;
- Avoid "yes" and "no" answers;
- Leave answers to political questions to elected officials;
- Assist the journalist in obtaining information;
- Be accurate;
- Do not ask to see the story before it is released (it is the property of the media agency);
- Do not tell the journalists how to do their job (or dictate to them);
- Do not ask for clippings or tapes;
- Do not try to be funny;
- Do not lie;
- Do not assume that the reporter is either well informed or uninformed.

Interviews on printed paper:

- If a journalist calls and you need to collect some ideas, ask if you can call back after a few minutes.
- Journalists often have very tight deadlines and it is therefore important to respect their time.
- You can try to ask, but cannot expect, a journalist to give you a copy of the article in advance, before it is published.
- Pay attention to questions that begin with the words: "So what you are saying is..." The interviewee must always answer in his/her own words.
- Do not let the interviewer drag you into a topic regarding which you do not feel at ease.
- Be aware of "disposable" comments: anything that is said could be used, even if the journalist has closed his notebook.
- Avoid speaking "off the record" unless you have a great relationship of trust with the journalist.

TV interviews

- Always watch the interviewer, without paying attention to the camera.

- Do not move or swing in the chair. If the interviewer is standing, stand with one foot in front of the other: this will help prevent swaying.
- Do not move or relax at the end of the interview until someone tells you that the camera has been turned off.
- If the interviewee is wearing a microphone, attention will be paid to everything that he/she says before it is removed.

Broadcast interviews

Prior to accepting, it is good to ask the interviewer some questions:

- What is the name of the programme and what is its audience?
- What topics will be addressed?
- Will someone else also be interviewed, and if so, who? (Never agree to a “face to face” discussion without knowing who the other interviewee will be)
- How long will the interview last?
- Will the interview be broadcast live or will it be pre-recorded?
- Where will the interview take place?

G. MAILING LIST

Mailing list is the list of contacts to whom we will be sending our press releases. The preparation of a complete, up-to-date and reliable mailing list is one of the initial activities of a press office, and is certainly one of the fundamental steps required for those who deal with this activity to reach their desired objectives.

The updating of the mailing list should be performed constantly, and the list should be enriched with as many details as possible. For example, at the beginning we will have only the e-mail address and telephone number of the switch-board, or the secretary of the editorial staff; then we will be able to add the name and surname of the Editor-in-Chief or head of the sector. Therefore, as we consolidate our contacts we will keep inserting additional e-mail addresses and telephone numbers into the mailing list. This list must be divided into categories (local and national newspapers, periodicals, agencies, radio and TV stations) and, within each category, into newsrooms, with particular attention paid to those that are relevant to the organisation’s activities.

H. DATABASE

Preparing, maintaining and updating a database that contains information that could prove useful in times of difficulty is an added value for a properly run press office.

As we have already mentioned,²⁸ employees of a press office can be subjected to strong pressures, depending on the level of stress to which they are exposed, and to have ready items that help them get out of emergency situations is priceless. Therefore, even when

²⁸ See Chapter V, *Media Relations*

the working day does not present any particular difficulties, it is part of the office's responsibility to prepare and take care of a database, from reports to annual budgets, from interviews and statements to press and public interventions (conferences, articles, press releases), to publish public and general information on the website of the institution in a special section for the media, and to keep, possibly in electronic format, the most detailed and delicate information for possible use in case of need.

However, the database is useful even when we are not in an emergency situation. In fact, we must not forget that the good image of the institution also depends on the skilful work of the press/communications office in spreading written documentation and images.

We should, therefore, have an extremely efficient database. If the budget so allows, it might also be useful to engage companies that monitor different media channels, especially radio and television channels and the web.

I. WEBSITE AND ONLINE PRESS OFFICE

Belonging to the group of more “traditional” digital tools, the website of the organisation is still one of the most used, above all because exposing the organisation through a well developed site does not involve particularly high costs. We just need to want to do it. Here too, the press/communications office must be involved in the front lines:

- Experts in communication should create the best reading paths, using a skilful blend of texts, images, spaces, colours and graphic elements so as to capture the attention of the users. Even those with less experience, or who have ended up on our web page by chance, ought to be able to “navigate” the website on their own;
- Press officers should create a specific section for the media, containing all the material that can be disseminated and that we know can be of interest to them. This section constitutes the real online press office, aimed at making available the press releases to all, including potential interlocutors who are not yet included in the contact directory. Thanks to the online press office, press officers can put on the Internet - in real time - information and documents, conferences that are on the agenda and scheduled events, while the media can benefit from a constantly updated database which they can consult at any time. The section should include press releases, images, presentations, thematic press kits, as well as audio and video material, so as to facilitate their work.

In addition to being integrated into the corporate website, the online press office can also be reached independently via a dedicated domain.

An area dedicated to images is also needed, as it provides journalists with the opportunity to download logos and photos as well as complete press kits.

Usually the materials are saved using compatible formats ('jpg' or 'tiff' for photos and 'pdf' for logos or graphics) and made available in low and high resolutions in order to meet the needs of different media.

Finally, we can insert a press clipping/review area in the online press office, which usually collects documents in 'pdf' format that reproduce articles and documents that have been published in national or international press.

Furthermore, it is essential to create a section dedicated to contacts, where we need to specify all the references of those who work in the press office. If several professionals are involved, it is advisable to highlight the person in charge and possibly the local staff.

The basic contact details are: name and surname, land telephone number, and possibly also mobile phone number and e-mail address. There are also those who can be contacted through instant messaging applications such as Messenger, Skype or Google Talk.

Many press offices use tools to communicate updates: news alerts, newsletters and RSS feeds. A news alert is a notice sent by e-mail to all the users who have requested it in order to be notified about any updates and information, such as the inclusion of a new press release. It is certainly a useful and intelligent service that can promptly inform accredited journalists of our news.

The RSS feed (Really Simple Syndication) is a format that uses 'Xml' language to notify the publication of new articles or news on the web and allows us to easily aggregate the contents of a site and present them in other forms through software specifically installed in the user's computer. That way, the user is always and constantly updated on the news from the sectors that interest him/her.

The difference between a newsletter and the RSS Feed is that in the first case the press office has to send updates by e-mail to users who choose to receive them; in the second case it is the users themselves who, by subscribing to the feed, retrieve updates directly from the system.

The RSS Feed has some undoubted advantages, at the expense of selection and personalisation of information by professionals.

Obviously this section should be particularly taken care of, as we have every interest in treating journalists the best possible way. Therefore, as discussed above, all the texts must be provided in the Word format, so as to achieve a doubly positive effect: to facilitate the work of the journalists, and result in end documents (articles) that are not too different from how we envisaged them, precisely because of this facilitation (opportunity to use copy/paste). In other words, if the journalist has no reason to re-process the entire document from scratch - which s/he would had it been uploaded to the site in 'pdf' format - it is very likely that the article will not deviate too much from the scheme we have set up.

Press officers must also take care of the elaboration of the texts, at least those that are to be published on the home page of the website, by virtue of those journalistic writing skills - the 5 Ws that we have mentioned in the previous chapters, and that make the difference between a text that is well written and balanced, and one that is more bureaucratic and still typical of public administration authorities. In both cases - communicative and informative - having and maintaining the best possible showcase of our organisation allows us to considerably reduce the requests for information and clarifications that are addressed from the outside, with a net gain in terms of time

(because we can devote it to other issues), image (because in one stroke we are showing efficiency and transparency), and truthfulness of information (because the website of the institution confers official nature of the primary source on the documents it contains).

J. PRESS ARTICLE

Written communication tools are divided into the following categories:

- Informative articles

These are articles that are characterised by one or more news, whose purpose is to inform or instruct the readers. When preparing an informative article, first and foremost it is necessary to follow three simple rules:

- Be brief: since readers are often in a hurry, it is important to condense the content into as few words as possible, possibly abolishing all superfluous adjectives and adverbs, refraining from rhetorical phrases and personal judgments, and avoiding repeating the same concept over and over;
- Be accurate: you must be certain of what you are writing, always checking the information received, making sure that there are no errors in the data and figures shown and that you have not made any grammatical errors while drafting the text;
- Be clear and concise: you need to adapt your language to that of the people who will be reading the article, so it is better to use simple and essential sentences (subject, predicate, complement), each of which should contain a single concept. A press release must also answer the five questions - who, what, where, when, why - and should capture the reader's attention from the very beginning.

- Opinion articles

Although it has the same requirements as the informative article, the difference in this case is that the writer is required to personalise the news, always expressing his point of view or that of the people interviewed on the topic. Among the tips to be more effective:

- Write about things that are interesting to the public and not only those that interest you;
- If we have interviewed someone, for example for our website, it is essential that we state his/her name, surname, profession and provenance and, if authorised, to also use a photograph;
- Words, illustrations and photographs are preferable to figures and numbers;
- Use titles and subtitles to summarise and clarify the topics covered in the text.

K. ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER

The e-newsletter is an e-mail message that is sent periodically and free of charge to those who have requested it, generally by completing an online registration form. Therefore, to receive one or more newsletters, one must first have an e-mail address.

Today, the e-newsletter is a widespread tool of external and internal communication used by public bodies, non-profit institutions, associations, companies, etc. This tool can be used to simply, quickly and economically transmit news and information to a multitude of subjects. By periodically sending a newsletter, an institution, company or association can

also create and maintain a continuous relationship with the citizens, users or their employees.

E-newsletters generally contain updates, news, articles and insights. They can be different not only in terms of topics they cover, but also layout, structure, sending periodicity, and especially purpose. In fact, there are many ways and reasons to produce an e-newsletter: in particular, institutions use it as a tool that allows for transparency and provision of information to citizens, users of their services, and the media. It is possible to use the e-newsletter to spread news and articles, or to quickly notify the users of any website updates.

Internal e-newsletters differ from the above. In public bodies and private companies alike, production of an e-newsletter addressed to the staff responds to the main objectives of internal communication: informing the employees, allowing and widening participation in the organisation, making employees feel part of the organisation in which they work, creating continuous communication, opening a space for dialogue and sharing. In fact, the e-newsletter can represent an effective channel of direct contact between the top management and the employees of an institution.

K.1. TIPS & TRICKS

How to Structure and Write a Newsletter

As with any communication activity, the design of the message of a newsletter must be evaluated on the basis of communication purposes. Therefore, structure, graphic elements, style and writing register must be chosen taking into consideration its recipients and objectives.

Here are some suggestions to make the most of the newsletter:

- Write short news/articles: when online, people generally spend little time reading, so it is important to write in a concise and clear way. For example, it may be useful to follow the inverted pyramid rule (both in single news items and the entire newsletter, stating the most significant aspects or the news first, and inserting details and less important news afterwards) or use captivating titles.
- Structure news in a way that will make reading faster and more enjoyable: then add paragraphs, use different characters for titles or various sections/columns of the newsletter, use colours, insert images.
- Do not forget the basic elements: the title (it is quite common to name the newsletter after the company/organisation, followed by words such as “News or Information”, but it may be useful to think of a more creative and appealing title), number and date, logo/banner of the institution, contact information of the editorial staff, website address.
- Insert links: newsletters contain reported articles, services and insights that are generally available or described on the website, so it is essential to provide links that refer to appropriate site pages. This method allows you to write very short

news, which will eventually be investigated more closely by the users through the site.

- Limit the size: the newsletter must be quick to download and open (as well as to read), so it should not include any heavy images or attachments.
- Ensure uniformity and consistency: it is important that the style and structure of the newsletter be respected in all the issues, so as not to confuse the recipients.
- Insert only the news: use the newsletter to provide only new, current and updated information, without repurposing dated news and articles.

How to Promote and Manage a Newsletter

- Publicise and give visibility: on the homepage of the website (Internet or Intranet), prepare a visible space dedicated to the newsletter, inserting its short description (topics, periodicity, etc.) and the form to request registration.
- Prepare the subscription form: many different data can be requested from the user, but it is better to provide only a few mandatory fields (name and e-mail address may be sufficient); however, it is important that the registration is followed by an opt-in mode, so that the user expresses interest in receiving the newsletter by filling out the form and then explicitly requesting registration.
- Ensure the possibility of deletion to members: in compliance with the provisions on the protection of personal data, in each newsletter (generally in the final part) it is necessary to provide a link that can be used to forward a request for deletion or cancel one's subscription directly.
- Dissemination: in the website or in the newsletter itself, it is possible to provide - through a form - the possibility for a subscriber/user to register a third person. In order to increase the readership of the newsletter, it is also possible to carry out the so-called "cross promotion," proposing others' newsletters of related subjects and obtaining in return the promotion of ours.
To advertise the newsletter, we can also use other tools, such as social networks, search engines, etc., in addition to the website.
- Make previous newsletters accessible: it is useful to publish the database of previously produced newsletters on the website, thus allowing users to peruse and view the newsletter before registering; the publication of the database also allows members to find, quickly and easily, items or materials of their interest.
- Carefully evaluate the time of dispatch: it is important to respect the periodicity, so it is necessary to choose the cadence by evaluating a series of elements, such as the required commitment and the work needed to prepare a newsletter, the chances of having interesting news to share, etc. It is also important to strategically choose the time of sending the newsletter, considering also the target to which we are addressing it, since people tend to read their e-mails on certain days and at certain times.

L. SOCIAL MEDIA, SOCIAL LISTENING AND SOCIAL TOOLS

Social media presence and the tools available from the Internet are powerful additions to the overall public relations efforts the Agency needs to engage in.

We must not make the mistake of thinking that these tools are only for young people. Social media presence has become one of the most powerful tools to reach a large audience quickly, efficiently and effectively. It involves building relationships and engaging the audience in an impactful way. It can be used to share and promote information, increase the audience base, and foster community engagement.

For this reason, the Agency is encouraged to use these channels as ways of disseminating information to the news media.

Social listening refers to listening to, and monitoring of, the activities of digital media. Knowing how to move in this environment is essential for organisations that plan a communication strategy that will also include the Internet, because today most information exchange takes place precisely on the web, both from an active and passive point of view. In the first case, reference is made to the ability of the institution to stay present on the Internet and to adequately control the social tools it has decided to use. In the second case, it refers to the press office's knowledge of the newspapers that operate online and, specifically, of journalists who write on certain topics (as it has been until now, and continues to be with the traditional media), and to the knowledge of press articles and comments concerning our organisation, for the purpose of monitoring the online reputation of the organisation for which we work.

To do this, once the sources have been identified we need to add a further study aimed at getting to know the key words related to the sector of our competence, so as to identify the trending topics that can help us connect with appropriate media when we decide to use them, but also to learn of any negative opinions that are circulating among the “surfers,” so that we can anticipate, and be prepared in, potential situations of crisis involving the media.

Before we mention some of the most useful social tools in terms of relations with the media, it is good to make a recommendation: before opening an official social channel, the administration should have a published social media policy²⁹ defining the objectives pursued by the organisation, the contents intended for publication, as well as permitted behaviour, especially when communication interactions result in offensive and threatening comments. The potential of social media is extraordinary, but if we do not know how to govern them the risk of obtaining a negative image becomes very high.

Twitter

It is a micro-blogging service, so defined because it imposes a limiting number of characters for messages that we want to publish on the Internet. Because of this feature, it can be very useful in sending the heart of the institutional message to an indefinite number of recipients, with the possibility of accompanying it by links and photos if necessary.

This tool also makes for an effective listening tool, aimed at monitoring the topics of particular interest to the organisation or the image of the organisation itself. In this

²⁹ See Chapter IV, *ACA's Media Policy*

regard, we can post periodic surveys - for example, once per week or month - which could provide us with a valid idea of how the organisation is perceived outside.

Blog

The term blog is the abbreviation of web-log or “track on network”.

A blog is an autonomously managed network space based on self-publishing mode that allows us to publish news, information or stories of any kind in real time: a sort of personal online diary.

It represents another way of communicating and informing on the Internet in an easy and fast way, because:

- It is not necessary to know HTML or any other type of language to programme it, and therefore does not require any particular technical skills;
- We can become “operative” in a few minutes, and it is exactly like writing using Word.

Types of Popular Blogs

- **Personal blog** - This is the most widespread category. The author writes about his/her everyday experiences, posts poems and stories, talks about hardships and protests. The comments of readers are generally much appreciated and give rise to very personal discussions. This type of blog is often used by high school or college students, with a large number of cross links between one blog and another.
- **Topical blogs** - Many journalists use blogs to give voice to their opinions on current affairs or news stories, or simply to express their opinion on issues that failed to find space on the pages of newspapers for which they write. Other people use the blog to comment on news they read in newspapers or on websites.
- **Thematic blog** - This type of blog often becomes a meeting point for people with common interests.
- **Blog directory** - One of the peculiar characteristics of blogs is the large amount of links. Some blogs specialise in collecting links on a particular topic. Even some news sites may fall into this category.
- **Photo-blog** - These are blogs on which photos are posted instead of texts.
- **Blog showcase** - Some blogs act as “showcases” for the works of their authors, such as cartoons, comics, amateur videos or other particular themes.
- **Political blog** - Because of the extreme ease with which it is possible to publish content through a blog, some politicians are using it as a communication interface with citizens, to expose problems and share solutions, mainly at local level.
- **Urban blogs** - Blogs referring to a defined territorial entity (a city, a country, a neighbourhood) and using digital word of mouth techniques for direct and indirect socialisation tasks, also with the use of images and videos related to the community.

- **Watch blog** - Blog in which the author publishes errors found in online news, on websites or in other blogs.
- **M-blogs** - Blogs used to advertise musical discoveries and to make others participate through the publication of mp3 or audio files of various formats.
- **Vlog or video blog** - It is a blog that uses movies as the main content, often accompanied by texts and images. The vlog is a form of distribution of audio-video content, often used by bloggers, artists and directors.
- **Audio blog** - These are audio blogs published through Podcasting. The peculiarity of this type of blog is the ability to automatically download updates through RSS feeds with encapsulated audio both on our computer and on portable mp3 players.
- **Nanopublishing** - Monothematic blog, with a light and written content.
- **moblog** - Blog that relies on “mobile” technology. The contents are often images (sent via MMS) or video (in some cases recorded directly through a video call).
- **Multiblogging** - The ability to manage multiple blogs with a single script.
- **Blog-novel or blog novel or blog fiction** - A novel or a story divided into short tranches that develops on a blog and is therefore aimed at an audience. Most often the comments of other bloggers and/or visitors can be useful indications for the author in the further development of the story.

L.1. TIPS & TRICKS

How to Create a Blog

The blog is usually linked to a guided publishing programme that allows us to automatically create a web page, and, as we have already said, to do so without necessarily knowing the HTML language.

In short, the basic steps that need to be taken are:

- Register with one of the countless sites offering this service;
- Choose a graphic template, that is, the “graphic layout” of the blog, which can always be changed;
- Obtain the address for the blog;
- Start to write.

Online publication is instantaneous.

Each article is generally linked to a thread, a sort of discussion on a specific issue, where readers can write their comments and leave messages to the author. Despite the diversity of the covered topics, one of the elements that characterises the blog and at the same time unites all the authors of blogs is the provision of a large amount of little-known links to the readers.

The blogger is the one who writes and manages the blog, while the collection of all the blogs together is called a blogosphere, or blogosphere. Among the most used we can mention: Wordpress, Blogger, Splinder, Clarence, Blogsome and MySpace.

Flickr, Pinterest and YouTube

These tools should be used for the dissemination of images, infographics and institutional videos.

Among the images that can be reproduced on Flickr: profiles of the organisation's top management, events in which the organisation took part (photo-news), or even images of daily work (photo-reportage) such as an internal meeting that is explained to the outside world in the form of a press release.

Pinterest is very effective for the production of infographics, i.e. information "translated" into graphic form that many times manage to transmit the key content of our message much more effectively than a written text. Moreover, the synthetic feature of this type of information allows it to be bounced on the Internet in a much more direct and effective way. It may even return the popularity to the website, where it will be possible - with the provision of appropriate links - to find more detailed information with a greater number of elements.

YouTube is a web platform that can be very useful for spreading institutional videos related to the activities of our organisation. Entire sessions of events can be reproduced, and it is therefore particularly useful, for example, if we want to give greater prominence to a very important conference, or for short films on the organisation's activities that may also be useful to the audio and video media because of their brevity.

Lately, videos that present and illustrate institutions with great effectiveness have started spreading, strengthening through the force of images those behind the institutions, and showing their structure and tasks.

M. CRISIS SITUATIONS

The instruments we have analysed so far form the basis of daily work, but may prove useful also when there is a need to face a crisis situation, that is, situations that arise from the "manifestation of unexpected events that influence, both from the outside and inside, the activity of a certain company"³⁰ and risk undermining its image and credibility. In fact, as Coombs wisely observed in his studies of the Situational Crisis Communication theory,³¹ events are not always so unexpected. According to Coombs, we can identify three types of crises:

- Victim cluster: even the organisation is the victim of a crisis that was caused mainly by external factors. Since there is no particular responsibility, its reputation is minimally affected (for example, when someone disseminates fake news to affect the image of the organisation);

³⁰ Raoul Romoli Venturi, Cecilia Casalegno, Pasquale De Palma, *Comunicazione integrata e PR: istruzioni per l'uso*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2014

³¹ W. Timothy Coombs, *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding*, 2007, Los Angeles: Sage

- Accidental cluster: the organisation has accidentally caused the crisis, but lack of intention limits the damage to its image (for example, complaints from different stakeholders linked to lack of transparency;
- Preventable cluster: the organisation is aware that its conduct could have provoked the situation that is difficult to manage, through incorrect behaviour or incompliance with the regulatory provisions. In this case, a deep shadow is cast over the reputation of the organisation, inside and especially outside (for example, when management behaves in a way that is not suited to the role it plays).

No crisis should ever be underestimated. The planning of the strategy to be adopted must be entrusted to a working group that must include the management, an expert in legal matters, a spokesperson in charge of communication with the media, and an expert (depending on the sector affected by the crisis). The strategy passes through:

- The preparatory phase, in which we plan how to deal with the situation, how to explain it to the outside world and through which channels. This is the most delicate moment, in which we must establish the line of action to be followed, choosing between two possible options:

- 1) Take responsibility for the negative event: the actions range from a clear admission of error, followed by public apologies, to the attempt to mitigate the situation through good relationships with the media, or by admitting but minimising³² the fact or reminding the public how much good the organisation had done up to that moment;
- 2) Deny responsibility for the negative event: in this case we can strongly deny, or find justification by trying to minimise our responsibility until we get a chance to attack those who have accused the institution.

- The action phase, during which the person in charge of dealing with media must remain in constant contact with journalists, both by sending them communications prepared by the working group and responding to their requests, while simultaneously balancing the need of the public to be informed with the need to safeguard the image of the institution. Using different tools that are available for various evolutionary phases of the critical event, we might wish to employ this kind of strategy:

- The day of the event: the first answer should be a press release: provide minimum of information in order to gain time;
- The following day: hold interviews or a press conference, depending on the emphasis reported in the media: in the first case the risk of embarrassing questions is more limited, but in the second the dissemination of information has a wider range;

³² In the communications field, this phenomenon is called “stealing thunder”: the concept originates from law, and indicates that lawyers prefer to report flaws in their own cases rather than give their opponents an opportunity to discover them themselves.

- The following days: assess whether the case is “deflating” or not: in the latter case, the strategy would be not to leave the initiative to the journalists who are chasing news, but to continue to spread further limited details of the story, also through the use of social media.

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Regardless of the chosen strategy, it is important that our actions avoid certain behaviours that could compromise our goal. It is sometimes also advisable to completely withdraw from the entire story.

- Things to avoid

- Too frequent use of the “no comment” reply: our interlocutors might think that we are not inclined to elaborate on the subject because we are trying to cover unclear situations;
- Use of bureaucratic language full of technical terms: someone could even believe that this will make him/her appear more competent and authoritative, but most people - in this case as well - will in fact think that s/he does not want to speak with clarity;
- Appearing nervous in front of the camera: lack of natural behaviour and ease, or repeated pauses while trying to answer a question, do not lend themselves to the serenity with which we would prefer to convey the message;
- Do not permit unauthorised personnel to release information: it is precisely in critical situations that we must demonstrate maximum compactness, exposing a single person to represent us in external relations. By doing so, we give a sense of coherent and consequential communication and avoid the risk of someone who does not know all the steps saying something that could be detrimental to the institution.

- Things to do

- Try to figure out the motivation behind the journalists’ requests: this rule has general value, but is especially useful in emergency situations. Before answering the asked questions, it is good to try to hypothesise, as much as possible, the use that will be made of the statements provided by the interested subject or spokesperson. To do this, it may be useful to ask ourselves a series of questions, such as: what is the objective of the article? Who else will be interviewed? Where will the interview take place? For which newspaper does the journalist work and what types of articles does he write?
- Do not leave the answers to chance: once we have tried to prevent potential negativities as much as we could, we can concentrate on the content of the statements. In this case as well, we will work on a list of possible questions, including the most banal ones, trying to memorise possible answers so as to minimise eventual uncertainties when facing the journalist.