

# Interactive Public Relations

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and  
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## Foreword

All too often, public relations is viewed as a management function whose impact on an organisation's profit margin is, at best, nebulous. The current worldwide fervour of accountability has revived that concern. Thus, the age-old question on the effects of public relations has taken on a renewed significance:

- (a) How can it help organisations meet their goals?
- (b) What are its direct effects on stakeholders' perception *vis-à-vis* an organisation?

In responding to both questions, organisations are confronted with a seeming paradox: they question the contributions of the practice, yet appreciate its values and strengths. Similarly, it sounds paradoxical to conceive of public relations as anything but interactive. After all, shouldn't public relations, particularly in its symmetrical mode, be two-way, that is interactive?

The title of the book properly assumes that the realities of the practice, more often than not, are far from symmetrical. The authors of this book rightly assume, then, that for public relations to reach its full potential in organisations, it must be two-way, it must use dialogue, negotiation, and scientific persuasion, reach an informed compromise between organisations and their disparate publics, nurture ongoing communications within truly symmetrical contexts, and strive for consensus, regardless of the barriers to attaining it. Yet, there are corporate examples that negate those conditions, calling into question the techniques of the practice, more so those that are both stakeholder-driven and ethics-related.

Research on public relations practices in India, Greece and Taiwan shows that craft public relations, which emerges on a continuum between press-agentry and public information predominates in those countries. Even though the research has not been replicated anywhere in sub-Saharan Africa, one may conclude from first-hand knowledge that most organisations in Africa tend to be content with substituting public information and a two-way asymmetric models for the “ideal” public relations function. Understandably, those models have their organisational benefits; however, to relegate the entire management function to those models at once limits the sophistication, the appeal and the ethics of a unique function.

*Interactive Public Relations* at once exposes and challenges our (enduring) mindset on the practice. It refocuses our attention on ideal practices that nurture both an ethical and a viable management function. As James E. Grunig notes in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 1920),

Philosophically, we believe that symmetrical public relations is more ethical and socially responsible than asymmetrical public relations because it manages conflict rather than wages war (p.10).

Similarly, J.E. Grunig and Larisa A. Grunig write that

the two-way symmetrical model is the most ethical approach to public relations. Also it is the model most effective in meeting organisational goals (p.308).

What is the overarching message in this book? It is that organisations, including those in Africa, will get most of their public relations function if they are most willing to give up some of the things that they really want. That message places *Interactive Public Relations* squarely where it belongs: on the front desk of anyone who appreciates the unconstrained reach of scientific, ethical public relations that is premised on symmetry.

Africa's governments and businesses, have a stake in this book, as do various non-governmental organisations. For one thing, they have traditionally been involved in programmes in which their returns on investments have not been the driving force. For another, the massive socio-political challenges on the continent make socially responsible programmes as crucial to the well-being of their environments as they are to that of their organisations. This means that private and public sector organisations will be well-served by revamping their communication programmes (the crux of interactive public relations) with a view towards meeting challenges proactively, rather than being blindsided by them.

For those organisations planning a full-blown department of public relations, *Interactive Public Relations* provides the nuts and bolts for and the dos and don'ts of, organising one. And there are also guidelines for planning campaigns or programmes, for conducting media relations, for evaluating communication programmes and for budgeting. There is also a chapter on how practitioners can identify the kinds of resources that will best serve an active department.

For organisations besmirched by, or on the edge of crises, a model for resolving them is presented in this book. For multinational companies or agencies engaged in cross-national programmes, this book provides a road map on how to negotiate the culturally disparate landscape. For organisations interested in taking stock of their citizenship, a citizenship *index* is presented as a benchmark for such evaluation. For organisations pondering how best to maximise their integrated communication programmes, differences and similarities between, say, advertising and public relations are outlined. For practitioners grasping after ethical compass, a code for professional practice of public relations is presented. And for students also interested in the history of the practice in Nigeria, the book highlights its beginnings and the early contributions of Sam Epelle, Alex Nwokedi, Theo Awobogu, Kunle Ojora and Aduke Alakija.

In essence, this book represents the good and the bad of the practice; and presents a balanced analysis of the ideals of public relations, particularly within the Nigerian context. It contains case studies on the effectiveness of the practice and illustrations of its shortcomings.

Invariably, public relations departments (and practitioners) operate in deference to the dominant coalition, that is, the core management that sets the course of an organisation. Such deference has prevented practitioners from posing tough questions and taking issue with the *status quo*, even as they know fully well that implementing a policy or an idea “*as is*” may not be in the long-range interest of both an organisation and its publics.

If scholars, practitioners and students of public relations were interested in placing the public relations practice on a more solid ground, then *Interactive Public Relations* would be an invaluable resource in that effort. Therefore, it is my hope that practitioners and students of organisational communications, integrated communication and public relations will read this book, reflect on it, question it – and learn from it.

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## Preface

Since the publication of the first edition of *Interactive Public Relations* in 2002, a lot has happened but not sufficient to change substantially the contents of the book. The changes effected in this second edition are therefore minimal. This is principally because the book was indeed part of an ending era of public relations books that attempted to cover all aspects of the profession and its history. This is why the historical appendices have been retained with some little additions so that the book will remain a source book for practitioners as well as students of public relations. However, new vistas in the profession would be better captured in the emerging issues of environment, corporate social responsibility, reputation building, case studies, politics and social engineering by future authors.

Public Relations, in its first four decades in Nigeria, is not for the third millennium. Both the practitioners and chief executives of the organisations that would continue to use public relations tools require a new orientation where old ways should give way to more scientific and pragmatic alternatives that the new information age presents. No longer will it suffice to substitute publicity, press-agentry, propaganda, protocol or any of the subsets of the whole, for public relations. In like manner, marketing and advertising should be seen as complementary endeavours and not the same as public relations. The only way to come to terms with these realities is by acquiring and sharing information and knowledge. These essentials are lacking in many present-day public relations.

In *Appendix I*, there is an inventory of 35 published public relations books in Nigeria. Although there may be a few more not known to us (authors), but it clearly shows that they are grossly inadequate. Other than this, some popular books written in the

seventies and early eighties are paraded as references by practitioners. In the new dispensation of information super-highway, books written five years ago can no longer be current when research findings, speeches, reports and even books are accessed on the internet before they are found on the book shelves. On a happy note, many books that have been published so far in Nigeria meet the very high standards required by the profession. Also, the variety in the choice of subjects treated is in line with modern professional public relations practice. While there are many general interest titles, there are some specialised publications. In future, subject-specific books on public relations would be common in the market as the professional horizon expands. Subject areas such as reputation building, issues management, proactive public relations, community relations, corporate social responsibility, employee relations and stakeholders relations, would be among them. At that time, titles such as public relations for legislators, engineers, lawyers, doctors and other professionals would receive more attention. A market-driven economy by a democratic government is facilitating these positive developments.

While we may not compare what is happening in the advanced countries with what's obtained here, we need to be aware of it. As communicators, the need for us to update our knowledge is obligatory and only those who can take up the challenge will dominate the professional landscape of the future. This is precisely why we embarked on writing this book.

There are eleven chapters and extended documentary appendices in the book dealing with various aspects of public relations. We consider it imperative to continue with the exploration of how public relations came to be and its various definitions. For as long as there is confusion as to what public relation is, what it can do and what it cannot do, there will always be need for writers to establish the basics for a wholesome understanding of the contents. The chapter on "The Media in Public Relations" is an attempt to survey an array of the old and the new methods, functions, and uses of public relations.

*Chapter Three* is particularly long. In it, some of the tools of public relations are lucidly examined. Although most of the tools are well-known, yet the rapid development in information technology has greatly improved the options available to practitioners. These tools and functions are treated in four sections – communication, print, electronic and other media.

Also, there are chapters on how public relations departments are organised, public relations in public and private sectors, public relations and other professions, developing appropriate human resources, international dimensions of public relations, crisis management, functions and strategies, community relations and ethical public relations. In all the areas touched in the book, we were guided by the need to relate the basic principles to the actual practice having spent a considerable part of our work-life as practitioners.

While we expect readers to be familiar with the issues discussed in the various chapters, as professional practitioners, users and students of public relations, the appendix section should also be of special interest. Leading this section is a survey of published public relations books in Nigeria. Mention is made of important journals and, of course, the Sam Epelle Memorial Gold Paper Lectures. This is an ongoing research by us of which there will be more readings in the future. There are three accounts of the story of the institute as recorded by some of the principal actors and how the consultancy association came into being. Although we tried to keep the book in its original form and content, a few changes and some addition were effected.

*Interactive Public Relations* is intended to serve as an *aide-memoire* for practitioners, chief executive officers, senior management staff of organisations, students of public relations and the general public. It will gladden our hearts if after reading the book, there is something new to add to readers' store of knowledge.

**Wole Adamolekun and Tayo Ekundayo**

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Also we would like to acknowledge the encouragement and support of several institutions and individuals that made this publication possible. The late Dr Sam Epelle, described as father of public relations in Nigeria is recognised here for his pioneering efforts. He did not only establish the institute, but also set a high intellectual tone through his publications, and this has been a source of inspiration to most practitioners. Our most profound gratitude goes to our friend, Professor Bababunmi Pratt of the Temple University, USA, for believing in our modest contribution to public relations profession. He graciously agreed to write the *Foreword* in addition to a highly professional review. Our very sincere thanks go to Dr (Mrs) Victoria A. Ajala, an erudite scholar and author, for her useful comments and suggestions after reading through the draft. Of course the late Dr Sybil James of the University of Ibadan deserves recognition for her complimentary remarks on reading the very first draft of the book.

To all scholars of Public Relations, we extend our sincere appreciation for navigating this new calling that promises to be a dominant factor in human lives as the economy becomes more market-driven and democratic. The scholarship that public

relations has enjoyed in other lands was most beneficial. In particular, we gained a lot of insights into the current professional practice in *Public Relations Quarterly* and *Vital Speeches of the Day*. These two periodicals published in the United States of America had more than textbooks, kept us abreast of the latest developments in the field of public relations. We commend the publishers for making public relations a living and exciting profession.

We would like to acknowledge specially, those whose works are so compelling that we have had to reproduce them in this book's appendices in order to have holistic picture of various aspects of the profession. They are Tunde Akande, Chidi Uzor, Alex Nwokedi, Victor Oshinowo and Jibade Oyekan.

The present and past presidents of Nigerian Institute of Public Relations are gratefully acknowledged for their commitment to the faithful sustenance of the profession for more than three and a half decades. Permit us to mention the duo of Mazi Mike Okereke, former president and Adekunle Salu, pioneer registrar. They combined to prepare the profession for the year 2000 and beyond. Our professional colleagues and mutual friends that have motivated us are so numerous but we should be pardoned for mentioning Dotun Shaba, Ayo Ajisafe and Segun Ilori, among others.

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Many people at different times, worked on the manuscripts from mere pieces of paper to what you are now reading. We thank Emmanuel Sona, Wole Olaniyan, Emerson Nabobo, Linus

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