

Public Relations in Australia

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Part 1: Background information

Capital City: Canberra

Major Cities: Darwin, Perth, Gladstone, Dampier, Cairns, Fremantle, Brisbane, Sydney, Townsville, Newcastle, Macka, Melbourne, Adelaide, Alice Springs



Official Language: English [79.1% of the population]

Type of Government: Federal Parliamentary Democracy

Location: Oceania region, continent that lies between the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific Ocean

Currency: Australian Dollar [AUD]

Culture:

According to Geert Hofstede, Australia reflects a high level of individuality as a society, rating at a 90 on a scale of 100. Australia has the second highest score of individuality of any country in Hofstede's survey, behind the United States' ranking of 91. Australia's individuality is reinforced throughout their society through daily interactions where privacy is considered the cultural norm.

Australia also has a greater equality between societal levels. These levels include government, organizations, and even families. Through Australia's cooperative interaction across power levels, a more stable cultural environment is created.

Australia is predominantly Christian. According to Geert Hofstede, Australia has over 50% of its population practicing some form of Christianity, other than Catholicism. Overall, the analysis of Australia by Geert Hofstede indicates that predominantly Christian countries have a strong belief in individuality, with individual rights being paramount within the society. As a result of this, individuals in these countries may tend to form a larger number of loosely-connected relationships.

Part 2: Overview of the public relations industry

Public relations is a big industry in Australia, turning over more than \$1 billion a year and employing between 11,000 and 14,000 people according to the American Bureau of Shipping [ABS] census in 1996. The Australian public relations sector includes both hundreds of small locally owned firms, as well as several branches of large international

firms. The industry has experienced a significant increase in Australia, and now there are twice as many public relations professionals as journalists working in Australia.

The first major public relations consultancy in Australia, Eric White and Associates, was established in 1947. Founder Eric White had previously worked as a press secretary to Sir Robert Menzies, and his agency received a large number of contracts from the Liberal Party because of it. In January of 1947 Eric White and Associates was bought by international public relations firm Hill & Knowlton, though it continued to trade under the company's original name until the mid-1980s. Another early influence of the industry, IPR, was founded by Laurie Kerr and Noel Turnbull. IPR was later acquired by the international public relations giant Weber Shandwick.

The dot-com boom pumped a great deal of money into public relations, and its demise caused a few shake-ups in the industry, with both Weber Shandwick and Hill & Knowlton closing their Melbourne branches.

Australian public relations, like most other parts of the world, is a female-intensive profession. A 2006 PhD study done by former journalist and public relations practitioner Greg Smith revealed the profession was 74 percent female. The study also outlined the reasons for this trend, citing that the perceptions of the profession were "fuzzy," and that young Australian males preferred careers which were easier to measure in terms of results.

Journalists and public relations practitioners in Australia have the same symbiotic relationship that exists in the United States. That said, the same bias also exists within each field. Journalists are skeptical of public relations practitioners and their attempts at being an advocate for their company. However, Australians in both fields recognize that public relations and journalism do not inhabit two separate worlds, and also that the truth does not reside on one side only. In fact, Julia Hobsbawm, creator of the company called Editorial Intelligence, attempted to bring together Australian public relations practitioners and journalists to break down the barriers between the two branches of the profession. The idea faced some resistance, being denounced by some commentators as a conflict of interests.

Australia's professional organization, similar to PRSA, is called the Public Relations Institute of Australia [PRIA]. PRIA is the leading body for public relations and communication between professionals in Australia. It represents and provides professional support and recognition to over 2,500 individual practitioners, and more than 150 consultancies. PRIA was founded in 1947, and since its creation it has been the organization's role to promote and enhance the profession and its status to the broader community throughout Australia. PRIA also attempts to enforce the principles of ethical standards and represent public relations practitioners in the best interest of the profession.

PRIA members are required to make a personal, written commitment to a stringent Code of Ethics, governed by a senior group of practitioners known as the College of Fellows. As the foremost industry body, PRIA plays a leading and essential role in industry self-

regulation, with a series of tough Codes and Standards governing members' ethical and professional practices. Since belonging to a professional organization such as PRIA strengthens the level of professionalism of a practitioner, many Australians in the industry have joined, and thus follow its Code of Ethics.

Part 3: Overview of public relations as it relates to students

Learning about public relations industries in other countries is extremely important, especially with the progression toward a flat, global economy. Students of our generation will not only have to work on a national level, but must also be aware of how to interact on an international level as companies expand overseas. Through knowledge of international public relations industries, students can learn how to collaborate with international companies while still being respectful of the countries' traditions and business methods.

Higher education is seen by the Australian government as a fundamental contribution to the future of Australia. The government believes that higher education plays a vital role in Australia's intellectual, economic, cultural, and social development. The Australian government also believes that it is the higher educational system that drives much of the region's economic successes, and facilitates cultural and trade links with other countries. In 2003 the Australian government provided the "Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future" package, which granted an additional \$11 billion in funding over 10 years to enable higher education providers to deliver world-class higher education.

APM Training Institute: Sydney

A tertiary college specializing in public relations and marketing, which is endorsed by PRIA. The courses offered are government accredited and endorsed by other key industry bodies. The curriculum is primarily marketing oriented, with specific focus on event management, entertainment and sports. APM also offers a number of short courses to assist professionals in improving their marketing and event management skills.

University of South Australia

An undergraduate program that aims to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for contemporary public relations practice. The program focuses on the effective management of communication, educating students to communicate in a variety of contexts, and teaching them to research the effectiveness of communication. Students also develop ethical and responsible professional skills through the critical and theoretical approach UniSA offers. Curriculum focuses on strategic and creative public relations, corporate and international public relations, and buyer and consumer behavior.

Macleay College: Sydney

Macleay College is a smaller college located in Sydney that offers innovative one-year full-time business course in public relations and marketing. The course has been designed

for people interested in a career in the industry; however, it emphasizes a strong business background. Curriculum focuses primarily on media relations, corporate and consumer public relations, Web design, news reporting, news releases, and events planning. Graduates of the program can progress directly to three different universities [University of Wollongong, University of Technology in Sydney, or University of Newcastle] to gain further credits toward a more specific genre of public relations.

Australian college students, especially public relations majors, are encouraged, and most times required, to gain work experience through either a co-op program or internship program. Job seeking skills and employment counseling are easily accessible to students at most Australian colleges. Several of Australia's higher education programs offer certification in a shorter period of time than in the United States — one or two years. There are also a number of “tech” colleges that focus on a specific industry and teach an intensified curriculum in order to prepare their students.

There is no specific national professional student organization similar to PRSSA that I was able to find, however, PRIA does offer a mentoring program to help young professionals develop skills and confidence, as well as offer insights to the industry.

Resources Used:

<http://www.pria.com.au>

www.macleay.edu.au/pr.html

<http://www.globalpr.org/about>

www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/as.html>