

Public Relations in Austria

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Part 1: Background information

Official Name: Republic of Austria

Population (2007): 8,3 million

Capital City: Vienna (1,6 million)

Major Cities: Salzburg, Graz, Linz, Innsbruck

Official Language: German — A variety of Germanic dialects are spoken.

Type of Government: Federal republic

Location: Central Europe; border countries are Italy, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland

Currency: Euro (EUR)

Culture

Austria is very rich in culture, which has been largely influenced by its neighboring states of Germany, Italy, Hungary and Bohemia. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Vienna was known as a world center of culture and particularly famous for being Europe's capital of classical music. It was home to some of the greatest classical composers, including Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Franz Schubert, and Ludwig van Beethoven. Vienna has two well-known opera houses, not only famous for their fine performances, but also for their beautiful architecture. These include grand architectural works such as castles and palaces, as well as the historic city centers of Salzburg, Graz and Vienna.

Austrian cuisine has been very much influenced by Hungarian, Czech and Italian cuisine. To the rest of the world, it is known primarily for its pastries and sweets, such as the Apfelstrudel and the Sachertorte cake. Austria has a long wine-making tradition and produces both white and red wines. Dry white wines made from the Grüner Veltliner grape have gained international recognition. Due to Austria's location in the Alps, winter sports are very popular and the country is the leading nation in the Alpine Skiing World Cup. Soccer is also a popular national sport in Austria.

According to Hofstede, the highest-ranking Dimension for Austria is Masculinity (MAS) at 79, which is considerably high, compared to the world average of 50. This typically



translates into a greater gap between the values of men and women, and that men dominate a significant portion of the society and power structure. It may also generate a more competitive female population that shifts toward the male role model and away from their female role.

The second highest Hofstede Dimension for Austria is Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) at 70, which is slightly higher than the world average at 64. Uncertainty avoiding cultures try to minimize the possibility of novel and unknown situations by strict laws and rules, safety and security measures, and on the philosophical and religious level by a belief in absolute truth.

In the Individualism Dimension (IDV), Austria's score (55) is average, compared to the United States (91) or Guatemala (6). This means that on the one hand, Austria is an individualistic society, where ties between individuals are loose — everyone just cares for him or herself and his or her family. On the other hand, people are integrated into strong, cohesive, collectivist groups.

Austria's lowest ranking dimension is its Power Distance Index (PDI) at 11, which is extremely low compared to the rest of the world, with an average of 55. This is indicative of a greater equality between societal levels, including government, organizations, and even within families. This orientation reinforces a cooperative interaction across power levels and creates a more stable cultural environment.

Part 2: Overview of the public relations industry

History of public relations in Austria

Despite many interesting beginnings for public relations, the “professionalization” of public relations only started with the end of World War II when it also had to dissociate itself from (Nazi) propaganda. Starting in 1945, press offices were established in the public sector as well as for various political parties, lobbies and corporate companies. In the 1950s, public relations started to become an issue in higher education, when the first dissertations were written at the University of Innsbruck. The University of Vienna started to offer its first public relations lectures in 1960, and in the 1980s, the Universities of Salzburg, Vienna and Klagenfurt established public relations as an area of concentration in their journalism and mass communication studies. In 1987, the University of Vienna started to offer its university course (“Universitätslehrgang”) in public relations.

Public relations agencies, societies and associations developed quite late; the first agency was created in 1963 and the Austrian Public Relations Club was established in 1975. Today, the Public Relations Verband Austria (PRVA) is the representative body of communication experts in various agencies, enterprises and institutions, as well as independent communication consultants. It was established in 1980 as the successor to the Austrian Public Relations Club.

Public relations is a predominantly (70 to 80 percent) female profession in Austria. Roughly one-third of professionals work in agencies or as freelancers and two-thirds work for institutions, authorities, associations or corporations.

The public is growing increasingly aware of the significance and need for public relations as a profession, as evidenced by a 30 percent annual growth within the Austrian public relations industry. Professionals and communication specialists are frequently situated at the highest level of a company's hierarchical structure.

Relationship between journalists and public relations professionals

The relationship between journalists and public relations professionals is undoubtedly tense. Studies have shown that Austrian journalists are not always the objective and neutral "gatekeepers" who decide what is worth publishing, as they sometimes change content to protect prestigious advertising accounts.

On the other hand, journalists don't want to admit they are being influenced by public relations professionals in choosing articles, even though some news releases seem almost entirely reproduced. Some public relations professionals have been accused of tricking journalists into writing an article, not telling the entire truth or protecting their client, and even bribing journalists.

There are various prejudices on both sides. Yet despite some ethical problems (that will be investigated by the future Austrian PR-Council), there is a cooperative partnership as each learns to optimize the symbiosis.

Ethics

Due to various ethical problems in public relations (such as product placement, bribery, borderline public relations, etc.), the PRVA is currently debating the establishment of a Public Relations Council for Austria.

The PRVA defines public relations as the following: "Public relations comprises all long-term measures of concept, taken by an individual/company/institution in attending to one's/its obligations and rights toward society, respectively the public, in order to set up and to support mutual trust."

Every member of PRVA follows the PRVA-Codex of Honor as well as the principles of the Code d'Ethiques International, adopted by the Confédération Européene Relations Publiques (CERP) at the General Assembly in Athens on May 11, 1965 (Codex of Athens).

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

In Austria, higher education is provided by universities (including the universities of the arts) and Fachhochschulen (colleges of applied sciences), which were introduced in 1994. There are also Academies (e.g., teacher training colleges).

Austria's university system was free until 2001, but students are now subject to fees (about 700 Euros a year). Students enroll in one or more fields of study in which they are expected to graduate after four to six years. Since the 1970s, the first degree was the Magister (Latin for master) in the humanities, economic and social sciences, law and natural sciences. However, with the Bologna process, Austria has committed to transforming its system to the structure of distinguishing between bachelor's and master's degrees (of three years and one to two years respectively). Postgraduate degrees such as LL.M., Master of Laws, an internationally recognized postgraduate law degree and Master of Business Administration (MBA) were introduced in the 1990s.

Since the 1980s, the institutes for communication studies at the University of Vienna, the University of Salzburg and University of Klagenfurt have offered public relations as an area of concentration. The first public relations course was established at the University of Vienna in 1987. At that time, there was no other comparable public relations program in higher education in all of German-speaking Austria, Germany and Switzerland.

Today, there are various degree schemes at colleges of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen) and other private academies and institutes, which offer PR training courses as well as continuing education courses for evening schools and distance learning courses. There are many possibilities for further public relations education that could contribute to the professionalization of the Austrian public relations industry. A trend in education is "integrated communication" and "integrated communication management," as can be seen in various classes and courses offered.

There are no specific organizations for public relations students; however, students can join the Public Relations Verband Austria (PRVA) as a "student member" if they agree to follow the PRVA-Codex of Honor as well as the principles of the Code d'Ethiques International.

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