

Public Relations in Germany

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Part 1: Background information

Official Name: Germany (Deutschland); Federal Republic of Germany

Capital City: Berlin

Major Cities: Munich, Cologne, Dusseldorf, Frankfurt, Dresden, Heidelberg, Hamburg, Bremen, Hessen

Official Language: German

Type of Government: Federal Republic

Location: Central Europe; borders the Baltic and North Seas, the Netherlands, Poland and Denmark.

Currency: Euro (EUR)

Culture:

As Europe's largest economy and second most populous nation, Germany is a key member of the continent's economic, political and defense scene. European power struggles immersed Germany in two devastating World Wars in the first half of the 20th century and left the country occupied by the victorious Allied powers of the United States, United Kingdom, France and the Soviet Union in 1945. With the advent of the Cold War, two German states were formed in 1949: the western Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the eastern German Democratic Republic (GDR). The decline of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the end of the Cold War allowed for German unification in 1990. Since then, Germany has expended considerable funds to bring the former East German's productivity and wages up to Western standards.

The Geert Hofstede analysis for Germany shows an emphasis on Individualism, Masculinity and Uncertainty Avoidance. Power Distance and Long-Term Orientation are both ranked considerably lower than the others. Power Distance is the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Long-Term Orientation describes the order of relationships by status and observing this order. This illustrates Germany's belief in equality and opportunity for each citizen, as well as its ability to change and adapt rapidly.

Germans prize forward thinking. They appreciate planning and knowing details for upcoming events and commitments. They also believe that maintaining clear lines of demarcation between people, places and things is the surest way to lead a structured and ordered life.

German food plays a significant role in defining German culture. For breakfast or at snack time, one can choose from 300 healthy kinds of bread and fine pastries made famous by German bakers. A balanced



meal can consist of fresh fish from the traditional Hamburg fish market, sauerkraut, bratwurst or potatoes, a favorite staple since the 18th century.

World-famous German beer is an integral part of the country's history and culture. From over 1,200 breweries across the nation, more than 5,000 different kinds of beer may be found on tap. Munich's annual Oktoberfest celebration is a sixteen-day festival held each year from late September through early October. It is one of the most famous events in the city and the world's largest fair of its kind, with some six million people attending every year.

Part 2: Overview of the public relations industry

The development of public relations in Germany was initially shaped by political, economic and social conditions. The same is true of the profession today.

Changing types of state had a decisive impact on the history of German public relations. The German Alliance (1815-1866) — an alliance of states of German princes and free cities — was succeeded by the German Reich (1871-1918). The Weimar Republic (1918-1933) was followed by the national-socialist dictatorship of the Third Reich. Two separate German states were later established, which reunited in 1990. These turning points in German history also mark the varying developments in the nation's practice of public relations.

In Germany, journalism and public relations are nearly inseparable. An agency with a good reputation is viewed by journalists as a source of valuable information. The majority of German journalists follows ethical and moral codes and try to prevent influences for or against individuals, companies and causes from appearing in their stories.

An estimated 20,000 full-time public relations practitioners currently work in Germany. Around 40 percent work with a company; 20 percent in organizations such as associations, unions, churches and the like; and another 20 to 30 percent in social and political institutions, such as municipal administration and courts. Approximately 20 percent of the public relations practitioners work in public relations agencies. The number of public relations practitioners is increasing at a faster pace than that of journalists.

The German Public Relations Association, or German Council for Public Relations (DPRG), was founded in Bonn in 1958. The Council founded an ethics commission in 1988 and issued the Seven Self-Commitments — an ethics code — for members in 1991.

In 1973, the leading public relations agencies founded their own association, *Gesellschaft PR-Agenturen*, or GPRA, translated as the Association of Public Relations Agencies. Today, about thirty public relations agencies are involved, representing nearly 1,500 employees.

Media representatives and journalists view public relations in two different lights. First, they recognize it as an indispensable source of information, even though they are prone to using negative characterizations. These expressions refer to events that they consider overstated and lacking content. Secondly, communication experts are treated by journalists as partners, or colleagues. Especially in company boardrooms, the image of the communication expert has significantly improved over the last two decades.

The differentiation of public relations roles shows is evidenced by the fact that heads of public relations departments and senior consultants in the public relations agencies have managerial roles, while the employees of the public relations departments have technician roles. Getting ahead in an organization is normally combined with a change of role. The 'reflective' and 'educational' dimensions should be understood as dimensions of the managerial role.

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

For many years, public relations training in Germany was "training on the job." In the 1960s and 1970s, the DPRG and some private institutions offered the only training and advanced courses. In the early 1980s, public relations was institutionalized at universities and polytechnics as a marginal field of communication studies programs. The professional associations established a training and examination academy (*Deutsche Akademie für Public Relations* [German Academy of Public Relations], DAPR) in 1991, and there are some forty other private academies and institutes offering public relations training courses for students in varying stages of their professional careers.

Today, several German universities have established public relations courses within their communication studies programs. In the near future public relations training will shift more toward the traditional education offered at universities and polytechnics. The content of academic training programs and many general courses offered by private institutions is very diverse. They cover the entire spectrum of the profession: the basics of communications and public relations, history of public relations, public relations theories, methods and tools of practical public relations and several aspects of communication management

There is no student society for public relations, but there are pre-professional organizations for journalism students at most colleges in Germany. Many public relations agencies and businesses offer internships.

Resources Used:

Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management: PR Landscapes

www.globalalliancepr.org

PR Guide Germany

CIA World Factbook

Geert Hofstede

http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_germany.shtml

http://www.cometogermany.com/ENU/culture_and_events/german_food_beer.htm

<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/germany-country-profile.html>

(www.dprg.de).

(<http://www.pr-guide.de>)