

Public Relations in Switzerland

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Part 1: Background information

Official Names:

Long Form: Swiss Confederation

Short Form: Switzerland

Local Long Form:

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft (German)

Confederation Suisse (French)

Confederazione Svizzera (Italian)

Confederaziun Svizra (Romansh)

Local Short Form:

Schweiz (German)

Suisse (French)

Svizzera (Italian)

Svizra (Romansh)

Country Code: CHE (Confoederatio Helvetica, Latin)



Capital City: Bern

Major Cities: Zürich (east), Geneva (west), and Basel (north)

Official Languages: German, French, Italian, Romansh

Government Type: Federal Republic

Location: Central Europe, between France and Germany, north of Italy
(Coordinates: 47 00 N, 8 00 E)

Currency: Swiss franc (CHF)

Culture

Geert Hofstede, who ranks countries based on their Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), Masculinity (MAS), Individualism (IDV), Power Distance Index (PDI) and Long Term Orientation (LTO), determined Switzerland's highest rank is in MAS at 70 compared to the world average of 50 and a European average of 59. A high MAS ranking indicates a greater polarization between men and women. Men in Switzerland are more assertive, competitive and dominating compared to the women. However, this high rank could also indicate a rising assertive female population. The Swiss, compared to the rest of the world, are competitive and assertive.

Switzerland's second highest ranking is its IDV at 68 compared to a world average of 43 and a European average of 61. In Switzerland people work more for the benefit of

themselves and their immediate family rather than forming close bonds with extended families and other societal groups like in a cohesive society. People in Switzerland are brought up to look after themselves and their nearest relations (Hofstede, 2008).

Part 2: Overview of Public Relations Industry

Professionals in Switzerland view public relations in much the same way as the United States. In Switzerland, public relations most often is referred to as corporate communications. The origins of public relations in Switzerland are unknown. However, the profession has witnessed a growing demand for services, specifically as related to trend analysis. As of 2001, 3,037 agencies, companies and nonprofits have been identified (van Ruler and Vercic, 2003).

In 1953 the Schweizerisch Public Relations Gesellschaft (SPRG) was founded and serves as the public relations professional organization in Switzerland. SPRG has local chapters in Lugano, Luzern, Zürich, Basel, Lausanne and Ostschweiz/FL. SPRG reports that “PR is the management of communicational processes for organizations and their related groups. PR stands for active communication, dialogue, and is part of management.” (SPRG, 2008) Currently no student chapters exist.

Agencies in Switzerland have an additional organization, the Bund der Public Relations Agenturen der Schweiz or Association of Swiss Public Relations Agencies (BPRA). For an agency to gain membership it must demonstrate that it offers a ‘full range’ of public relations services; full range meaning consulting, conceptual work and execution. The agency also must have existed for a minimum of five years and employ five or more practitioners. Characteristically, Swiss public relations firms mainly consist of a small number of large agencies with few or no small- or mid-sized ones. While Switzerland officially recognizes four languages, the field of public relations is dominated by the German-speaking population. This is perhaps because of Zurich’s economic importance. Swiss agencies employ approximately eight people, with about five working on actual public relations (van Ruler and Vercic, 2003).

Ethics appears to hold importance in Swiss professional society. Many businesses have adopted codes of ethics. Many universities require that students take ethics courses. However, no specific code of ethics for SPRG has been found.

The average salary of a public relations practitioner with two year’s experience in Switzerland is about CHF 69, 000 or \$55,672. However a public relations consultant typically earns CHF 111, 000 or \$89, 550. Common titles for public relations professionals include:

- PR Executive (PR-Leiter)
- PR Consultant (PR-Berater)
- Spokesperson (Pressesprecher)
- PR Assistant (PR-Assistent)
- PR Journalist (PR-Redaktor)

- PR Secretary (PR-Sekretär)

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

In Switzerland, two recommended academic paths exist for people wishing to enter the field of public relations. Unlike other countries, Swiss private universities do not provide adequate training. Students either obtain a federal diploma or a degree from one of Switzerland's public universities (N Volle, personal communication, April 9, 2008).

In 1969 SPRG founded SPRI as the training institute for public relations in Switzerland. The goals of the institute are to increase professional standards, improve the image of the profession in societal eyes, and produce responsible public relations practitioners. Students work to become a federally certified public relations assistant or a public relations consultant.

Training for a public relations assistant certificate includes courses in concept techniques, internal and external communication, writing, proofreading and communicative behavior. The training lasts approximately 12 months.

Courses for consultants are typically aimed at people who already have several years of experience. The average age of those seeking a public relations consultant certificate is 30-35. These courses reflect more the management aspect of public relations with emphasis on the political, legal, socio-economic and communicational. According to SPRI, the twenty month training will teach the potential consultants how to help establish strategies for companies, develop and implement public relations strategies and measures, run a department or agency, use human and financial resources efficiently, and be competent in methods of environmental monitoring and management issues (SPRI, 2008).

While several public universities in Switzerland offer a bachelor's degree in communication studies, the University of Lugano in the southern, Italian-speaking area offers the most public relations oriented courses because the government has designated it as the school for public relations. An undergraduate degree in Switzerland takes three years and is taught in the language native to the canton. At the University of Lugano, classes for a bachelor's degree are taught in Italian. However, the master's program courses are in English. Approximately 50 percent of master's students are international, primarily from the Western Hemisphere and Germany. According to Nina Volles, managing director, Executive Masters of Science Communication, University of Lugano, European students are encouraged to study outside their native country for their master's degree. In Switzerland, public relations is referred to as corporate communications (N Volle, personal communication, April 9, 2008).

Core Courses:

- Corporate Identity and Image
- Integrated Marketing and Communication

- Investor Relations
- Sponsoring and Event Management
- Issues and Crisis Management
- Internal Communication
- Commercial Communication Law
- Visualization in Business Communication
- Data Analysis
- Corporate Communication Research

The capstone classes include 12 ECT of field work/internships. A master's degree requires a total of 120 ECT and takes approximately two years to complete. Students for the master's program must have received a bachelor's degree. Students with SPRI training must fill the gaps in their education curriculum before acceptance in a master's program.

The University of Lugano also offers an Executive Master's program, which requires a 21-month study. Students enrolled in this program participate in a global alliance and study business in Copenhagen and in Los Angeles, at UCLA. Applicants for this program must, in addition to a bachelor's degree in public relations, marketing or communication, have obtained three years of relevant work experience.

Another major public relations university in Switzerland is Universität St. Gallen, MCM, an institute for media and communications management, located in Zürich. At MCM students are offered both bachelor's degrees and master's degrees in three areas (Universität St. Gallen, 2008).

- MCM 1-Information and Media Management
- MCM 2-Corporate Communications
- MCM 3-Media and Culture

Synopsis

Public relations in Switzerland appears to focus more on the strategic management function of communication as is evident by the preferred term of corporate communications. Lacking in Switzerland is any student organizations like PRSSA. However, public relations studies in Switzerland place a higher emphasis on international communication as compared to many U.S. universities. The multi-lingual culture necessitates a diverse understanding of communications, which is reflected in the degree requirements (Zellweger and Traschel, 2008). Almost all textbooks used to teach public relations, however, were written in the United States or Germany, with few exceptions. The reputation of Switzerland for business and banking makes it an ideal location for people wanting to practice investor relations or corporate communication management.

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