

Ken's 2011 PRSA International Conference Blog

Orlando, FL
Oct. 16 to 18

Day 1 --- Oct. 16.

Imagine, Inspire, and Create. Three simple words. But their meaning is so profound, one can be motivated to do anything after hearing them. That's what I heard from PRSA National CEO Rosanne Fiske to kick off the 2011 PRSA International Conference at the JW Marriott in Orlando. As Co-President of the PRSA Greater Fort Lauderdale Chapter, I hope to use those three words to help our chapter become the very best it can be.

The conference opened with two power keynote speakers: **CNN's Soledad O'Brien and Dr. Peter H. Diamandis, the chairman and CEO of the X Prize Foundation.** O'Brien, who dropped out of Harvard to pursue a TV news career and then dropped back in many years later to finish her degree, had one clear message for all PR practitioners: stories are all about people. Whenever you pitch a story, look beyond the numbers. Numbers don't make the story. People make the story. So look for the faces behind the numbers if you want to get media coverage, especially major media outlets like CNN. O'Brien said what attracts her to a story are the people telling them. Not matter what the story is, if the storyteller is passionate about it, she will be too. So next time you are pitching a story to CNN or any other media outlet, pitch it with passion!

Diamandis stoked my passion for believing in the boundless limits of human ingenuity. The X Prize proves that a nice financial incentive can motivate anyone to invent anything. The Prize began in 1996 as a challenge to build a space plane – an aircraft that can take people to space and back. It was claimed by a team in 2004, who invented such as craft: a space plane known as SpaceShipOne. The winning team got a cool \$10 million. The prize was so successful, it was launched in other areas such as genomics, automotive, education, medicine, energy, and social issues. As a result, we have teams who have designed a car that can go 180 miles on a single gallon of gas, and another team that invented a way to clean up oil spills 5 times more efficiently than BP or any other oil company can. The power of dreams is pretty powerful!

So I jump into my first workshop, **Storytelling for the Digital Age.** It was led by **Johna Burke, SVP of marketing and communications at BurrellesLuce.** Here are some key points from it:

- Target your story through proper channels
- Understand what your community wants
- Leverage the user experience. Make it great.
- Ask tough questions to get a good story. Engage your senses.
- Your primary audience should be categorized as primary, secondary and tertiary.

Next up for me was **Media Non-Transparency: How It Affects Your Story**. It was run by three panelists: **Katerina Tsetsura, associate professor at the University of Oklahoma; Dean Kruckerberg, public relations professor at UNC Charlotte; and Robert Grupp, president of the Global Partners**. This was an interesting session. Why? Because it's a common practice among PR professionals, especially outside the U.S., to pay for media placements. Some examples they gave were Russia. Journalists there have an expectation of payment or other material benefits for covering stories pitched by PR practitioners. There's no such thing as a free lunch. The lack of transparency in this gray area is appalling. You need to pay to play!

Day 2 – Oct. 17

Rethinking Social Media was first up for me. It was presented by **Gerard Braud, chief executive and president of Braud Communications**. This workshop's purpose was to teach the tried and true methods of social media. Social media can get out of control for companies quick. The example Braud used were the Domino Pizza employees who deliberately contaminated food and posted their disgusting behavior on YouTube. Of course the video went viral and the company suffered negative publicity as a result. Braud argues the social media can be a very powerful tool in building relationships.

Following social media, I attended one of the best presentations at the conference hands down, the Disney one! It was called **All Hands On Deck! How Disney Cruise Line Made Its Dream Come True**. Two seasoned PR practitioners, **Rena Langley, vice president of public affairs for Disney Cruise Line; and Jason Lasecki, Disney Cruise Line PR director**, facilitated the presentation. Their presentation was crisp, clean, and very informative. They talked about a long-term PR strategy to launch the Dream, the most innovative and largest Disney cruise ship ever built. The official announcement was in 2007. But their PR teams kept the story hot in the news regularly each year until the ship arrived for its maiden voyage in 2011. Lasecki and Langley talked about collaborating with their partners across the Disney organization (making the most out of your internal resources), creating positive brand awareness, and building internal teamwork.

There was a tremendous level of detail put into messaging and media coverage. They release nuggets of information at a time to keep media hungry and coming back for more. Part of their strategy was to give the media a "user-like" experience on the ship. For example, the media got to tour the ship while it was still under construction at a German shipyard, using iPads to see completed rooms and many amenities. The media also got to see model rooms and rides during a launch party in New York. Finally, the media were given a 2-day cruise with iTouches and QR codes. The coverage Disney received after that generated 1.5 billion impressions on their website. To top it off, they had a huge media event at the ship's christening at Port Canaveral. A two-story bottle of champagne was helicoptered in with singer Jennifer Hudson (who began her career on a Disney cruise ship) blessing the ship.

Here's the key take ways from the Disney talk:

- Bring your message to life (immerse the media in your message)
- Maximize every asset
- Be prepared for shifts in the media
- Leverage use of technology (i.e. iPads, iTouches, Skype)
- Collaborate
- Be Prepared

One good workshop deserves another. So I sat in **Maximizing Your Mobile Mojo: Making the Most of the Portable Web**. It was run by **Dave Fletcher, founder and executive creative director of The Mechanism**. The theme of the workshop was how to create an internal strategy for your business to survive and thrive in an omnipresent future dominated by smartphones, gadgets, and tablets. Fletcher delved into tech industry trends and tools for harnessing the mobile web for businesses. Here's some incredible data from the United Nations: 60 percent of all humans have a cell phone. Of those, 75 percent live in developing countries. About 25 percent of all cell phones are smartphones. Here's a stat that Apple can take full advantage of: 96.5 percent of all global cell phone users do not have an iPhone. That's a huge untapped market for them. And did you know that the iPhone was not the first touchscreen phone ever invented? Nope, IBM came out with a model in 1994. How do you maximize your smartphone app or mobile site for your audiences? 1) Know who your audience is 2) Know where they are accessing your content 3) Provide the services they need.

Day 3 --- Oct. 18

On the last day, I sat in a leadership workshop called **Shut Up and Lead: Listening, Learning and Leading Effectively**. It was facilitated by **M.J. Clark, a leadership consultant** who has spoken to many businesses and organizations about leadership. Here are some effective listening skills: 1) Good eye contact 2) Do things to let the person feel understood 3) Rephrase what they are saying 4) Perhaps, mirror their emotions. Workplace stress may lead to conflict. People who are not managing stress well may become more reactive to the things in their environment that aren't going well for them. There's a tendency for people to fall back into passive or aggressive behavior when they are not handling stress well or feel attacked. Most workplace conflicts are the result of passive or aggressive behavior. Being assertive is one way to reduce stress levels. People with low confidence are usually the ones who are passive/aggressive or aggressive. If this is you, you need to work on your confidence level. People are afraid of confrontation because they are afraid of what the other person might do. But the real reason is our lack of confidence in our ability to handle their responses. As for leadership, it's not about dominating. It's about the art of persuading people to work towards a common goal. To achieve excellence, the group members must be able to create a state of harmony.

I finished off the conference by attending a workshop on **Global Public Relations: The New Rules of Engagement in a New Media World**. It was taught by **Kathy Fitzpatrick, public relations professor at Quinnipiac University; Antoaneta Vanc, public relations assistant professor at Quinnipiac University; and Robert Wakefield, public relations associate professor at Brigham Young University**. The session was about dramatic changes in a global society that's changed the rules of engagement for multinational corporations. Because of that, it's necessary for PR practitioners to design global PR programs that reflect contemporary best practices.

It was a great conference. There were great speakers, lots of good tidbits of info to take home, and the program was definitely beneficial to anyone's PR career.

