

**A Comparative Study: the Effect Culture has on  
Australian Public Relations and How It Differs  
from American Public Relations Practices**

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## **Abstract**

### **Australian Culture**

#### **Summary of Australian Public Relations**

According to the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA), “public relations is the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization (or individual) and its (or their) publics.” PRIA is the leading public relations professional organization in Australia whose main organizational goal is to provide ethical principles and regulation to the industry (Ciarlante).

Most public relations practitioners agree that the father of modern public relations in Australia is United States General Douglas MacArthur (Sheehan, 2007). During his time in Australia around 1942, General MacArthur changed the widely-perceived view of public relations from simply a one-way communication publicity model to a two-way asymmetric communications model where he explained a message should be “managed, controlled and influenced to achieve an end,” (Sheehan, 2007).

The first major public relations agency, Eric White and Associates, was founded in 1947 (Ciarlante). Founder Eric White was the former press secretary for Sir Robert Menzies, which enabled White to form relationships and future clients from the Liberal Party of Australia (Ciarlante). Hill & Knowlton, a major international public relations firm, later acquired Eric White and Associates but it continued to function under its original name until the mid-1980s (Ciarlante).

Today, public relations is a major industry in Australia producing more than one billion dollars annually (Ciarlante). According to the American Bureau of Shipping (ABS), the Australian public relations industry employs more than 14,600 people, and it is estimated to grow by 31.7-percent over the next five years. These practitioners are predominantly female and outweigh the number of journalists in Australia 2:1 (Ciarlante). According to an analysis conducted in 2009, the practitioners are comprised of the different sectors as follows: 11-percent academic, 12-percent not-for-profit, 19-percent government, 25-percent corporate and 33-percent consultants.

### **Australian Culture's Effect on Public Relations Practices**

## **Australian Public Relations vs. American Public Relations**

Like the culture of Australia and the culture of the United State of America, there are many similarities and differences in their practices of public relations (Howell, Winter 2002). We will explore the two countries idea of the definition of public relations, the actual public relations industry in both countries, Australia's and the United States' professional industry associations, public relations in higher education and the formatting difference of their public relations materials.

First, the sheer essence of the public relations industry differs dramatically between Australia practitioners and America practitioners. As mentioned earlier, public relations in Australia is defined as the “deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization (or individual) and its (or their) publics,” (Public Relations Institute of Australia, 2012). The 2011/2012 modernized definition of public relations accepted by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) states that “public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.”

The main difference between the definitions is the emphasis on “understanding” in Australia and the emphasis on “relationships” in the United States. In Australia, the main priority for a public relations professional is to use effective communications initiatives to gain “understanding and acceptance” from their organizations’ publics (Public Relations Institute of Australia, 2012). In contrast, in America, public relations practitioners’ number one goal is relationship building which requires strategic communication between organizations’ and their

publics (Public Relations Defined, 2012). However, in both Australia and the United States, public relations is categorized as a management function and serves the same symbiotic purpose in both countries (Ciarlante).

The public relations industries in the United States and Australia are drastically different in size. According to a 2009 census conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the number of public relations professionals in Australia is estimated at 14,600 individuals (Public Relations Institute of Australia, 2012). According a census conducted one year earlier, in 2008, by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of practitioners in the United States was estimated at 199,000 individuals (Industry Facts & Figures, 2012). Despite the difference in size, both countries' public relations industries are dominated by females (Ciarlante).

The birth of public relations occurred much earlier in the United States than in Australia (Timms). P.T. Barnum first used public relations-like publicity tactics during the early years of the Barnum and Bailey Circus in the 1850s (Timms). Public relations gained more attention when it first became practiced as a profession in the early 1900s (Timms). The first practitioner, and often considered the father of public relations, was Ivy Lee (Timms). In contrast, as mentioned earlier, the introduction of public relations to Australians occurred in 1942 by General Douglas MacArthur (Howell, Winter 2002).

Shortly after the birth of public relations in Australia, the Public Relations Institute of Australia was founded in 1947 (Ciarlante). The equivalent of PRIA in the United States is the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) which was also founded in 1947 (About PRSA, 2012). Both of these institutions focus their efforts

on enhancing the professional development of the industry, sets standards for the practice of public relations and abides by a specific code of ethics (Howell, Winter 2002). Both the PRSA and the PRIA function as the voice of public relations in their countries (Howell, Winter 2002).

As of 2012, PRIA has a membership base of more than 3,000 practitioners (Overview and Corporate Profile, 2012). There are four categories for membership available for public relations professionals in Australia: full member, associate, student and registered consultancy group (Overview and Corporate Profile, 2012). For full membership with PRIA, a public relations practitioner must have five years full-time experience in public relations, communications or a similar occupation or have a PRIA accredited degree with at least three years full-time experience (Overview and Corporate Profile, 2012). The associate membership is for public relations practitioners who are working full-time in the industry, but they have not yet met the minimum years of experience requirement (Overview and Corporate Profile, 2012).

Currently, the PRSA maintains a membership base of more than 21,000 practitioners (About PRSA, 2012). The PRSA has a similar structure for membership with lower annual membership dues varying with each chapter of the association unlike PRIA (About PRSA, 2012). PRSA also offers a public relations certification process for experience public relations practitioners called an APR, or Accredited in Public Relations (Accreditation in Public Relations, 2012). This program was established in 1964 and awards the accreditation through a measurement process of an individual practitioner's knowledge of the industry,

industry practices and communications theory, their planning, researching, strategic communications and evaluation abilities and their commitment to excellence in the industry and their profession (Accreditation in Public Relations, 2012).

Approximately 5,000 practitioners currently hold the APR title in the United States (Accreditation in Public Relations, 2012). This program is overseen by the Universal Accreditation Board (UAB) (Accreditation in Public Relations, 2012).

Unlike Australia, PRSA has established a professional student organization for those studying to become public relations practitioners (Timms). However, PRIA does offer a mentoring program for students and young professionals and endorses tertiary college that specializes in the education of public relations and marketing (Ciarlante). PRSA's student organization is called the Public Relations Student Society of America, or PRSSA (Timms). The organization was founded in 1968 and focuses on building mentoring relationships between current professionals in the industry and public relations students while educating students on ethics and industry practices (Timms).

Finally, when it comes to the actual production and creation of public relations materials in the United States and Australia, there are slight differences. Both countries have integrated social media into the work of public relations practitioners (Public Relations Institute of Australia, 2012). However, in America, public relations practitioners strictly abide by the rules set by the Associated Press Stylebook, there is no equivalent style guide in Australia (Public Relations Institute of Australia, 2012). Yet, Australia does have their equivalent to the Associated Press called the Australian Associated Press (AAP) (About Australian Associated Press,

2012). When it comes to the slight formatting difference in public relations materials, the most important and recognized public relations material is the press release. For example, a press release distributed in the United States typically contains a headline, a slug, dateline, contact information and a boilerplate, but in a typical Australian press release, a slug is not required, the actual date is required in the dateline and the contact information is at the end of the release (About Australian Associated Press, 2012).

Just like the difference in public relations materials, the difference in the public relations industries in Australia and the United States are slight. The industry is growing rapidly in both countries, and the late introduction of public relations in Australia account for most of the differences. In time, most practitioners believe that the public relations industry in Australia will mirror that of the industry in the United States.

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