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Apr28

[Mike](#)

[More on who we are and what we do](#)

In follow-up to Brandon's recent post, [What do we do?](#), I thought it would be beneficial as a PR tip to expand on his answer by explaining more about who we are and what we do in University News Services.

When new acquaintances inquire about what I do for a living, I often reply, "I work in public relations." That's the easy answer—although it's far from a precise (or my preferred) description. But people understand "public relations" (at least I think they do).

I could respond, "I'm a writer" (after all, most days I probably devote more than half my time to the craft). But that's the difficult answer. So nebulous, it almost certainly would elicit follow-up questions regarding topics covered and places where my work appears (which include this blog—requiring more explanation).

Or, I could reply with my official title—or the one many of my colleagues share (and that I, too, wore prior to my rise into the ranks of middle management): *senior news specialist*. (It sure *sounds* impressive, doesn't it?) But, with apologies to former bosses Bill, Neil and Laurie (if they're the ones who created the title), just what the heck is a *senior news specialist*, anyway?

More people would likely know what's meant by "publicist" or "public information officer." But to me, "publicist" smacks too much of Hollywood. I mean, Paula Abdul probably has a "publicist" (and does she ever need one). And PIO, though quite common, may be more closely associated with the public sector (city hall, police headquarters, military units).

That leaves us with the single best description for what we do: media relations.

I mentioned above that better than half my time is spent on writing. When not writing for one of our publications (such as [News & Events](#) or [RIT: The University Magazine](#)), this blog, or other internal projects, my writing often targets the media: news releases, pitch letters, photo ops and tip sheets. When not writing reporters, I'm calling or e-mailing them (or, as often, they're calling or e-mailing me; here's the beauty of working in media relations for a university rather than a for-profit corporation: as much as we need reporters, they need us—or, more precisely, they need our experts).

When not writing, arranging interviews or otherwise dealing directly with the media, I'm likely digging for news from professors or students—for stories that will eventually be pitched to the media (beginning the process anew). So, as you see, media relations, in one form or another, is a large part of what we do.

[Next time](#): Are we just a bunch of media-obsessed news junkies?

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1. [Mike Saffran](#)
Apr29

Update: So there I was, standing with my friends John, Kim and Patty in the Inn Between (the "IB" for those familiar with it), in Geneseo, on Friday evening when I was hit with "the question": "What do you do at RIT?" I paused momentarily--appreciating the irony--as only about an hour earlier I had shared with you on the blog my typical response to the query. "Media relations," I replied with vigor--and a sense of personal triumph (for not responding "public relations"). :-)

2. [Pete Karl](#)
May01

I find myself in a sort of debacle when it comes to describing my work. The "Web Developer" nomenclature is friendly, though not without some poise. I've bumbled with such titles as Chief of Programming, Web Programmer, and Web Designer; each of which fail to sum things up accurately.

3. [Silandara Bartl](#)
May01

Pete, I think Web Developer works as a good description of what you do. My title however...I used to be a "News and Web Specialist" which is even murkier than just a "News Specialist." I described it in equally muddy terms as, "Well, I do web stuff and I do PR stuff." Now I think I'm a "Web specialist" which, come to think of it, is probably fine as I specialize in Web things, whatever they are that week or year.

4. [John Fallaco](#)
May02

Blank stares. Lots of them. That's what I've been presented with each time I answer the question that has been posed to me countless times over the past few weeks (yesterday was my first day at University News Services): "What's your position going to be?" On the rare occasion that I do get a response, it is inevitably this: "Well, it has the word senior in it, so it's gotta be good. Right?". Then I begin to throw out the terms "public relations", "media relations" and the ambiguous "communications". At that point, I get a half smile and the individual walks away. I'm curious as to what Justin thinks. Do people have any idea about what it is we really do?

5. [Silandara Bartl](#)

May03

Mike, I like the "I'm a writer" response because it's vague and mysterious. It makes people wonder if you're a successful novelist, penning novels in your PJs or tapping away in coffee shops. For me, unless I'm strictly doing web site tecchie stuff, I'm first and foremost a writer - doesn't matter whether that's journalism, PR, copy writing, blogging, web content, proofing my husband's term papers, whatever I think once writing is ingrained in you, you can't help but *be* a writer all of the time. Now, that's not quite the same as what I *do*, I suppose. But when people ask me what I do, I give them the benefit of the doubt and presume they're asking about who I am, not just how I earn my paycheck.

6. [Mike Saffran](#)

May04

I, too, like "writer"--as a description of my avocation as much as my vocation. As mentioned in an earlier post, I've been writing, in one form or another, for as long as I can remember. One day, perhaps "writer" will be the best response.

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About us

The Tiger Beat takes you behind the scenes with the members of [RIT University News](#)—the news and public relations division of [Rochester Institute of Technology](#). Get the "story behind the story" and an insider's look at who we are and what we do to publicize RIT news.

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