

Executive Summary



Bulldog Reporter and Cision
**2010 Journalist Survey on
Media Relations Practices**

2010 Journalist Survey on Media Relations Practices

Survey conducted February 8-15, 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF RESULTS

A broad survey of working journalists across all media was conducted using SurveyMonkey.com as the data collector, and generated valid responses from 1,729 journalists, of which approximately 49% were editors or editorial staff and some 26% were reporters or writers. The objective was to analyze changing journalist working conditions, attitudes towards public relations professionals, and the utility of public relations to the editorial process. This survey is also designed to establish benchmarks, so changes in such metrics may be tracked annually.

CHANGING JOURNALIST WORKING CONDITIONS

- 1. Editorial staffs shrink.** The majority (about 54%) of respondents reported that the editorial staff size at their media outlet had decreased over the past 12 months, while about 36% reported no change in editorial staff size. Just more than 8% of respondents reported an increase in editorial staff at their outlet.
- 2. Editorial workloads increase.** Overall, journalists report a marked increase in workload over the past 12 months, with only about 26% reporting no change in their editorial workload. The single greatest manifestation of this greater workload is the expectation that journalists now produce a greater number of stories within the same work week, reported by about 46% of respondents. In addition about 24% of respondents reported they are expected to work longer hours, and the same percentage reported that they now cover more beats. A beneficial by-product of this increased editorial workload to PR professionals is that nearly 18% of journalists reported that they now make greater use of press releases or other PR material as sources.
- 3. Journalists increasingly publicize their work on the social web.** Journalists report a substantial usage of social media to promote or publicize their work. Almost 52% indicate they do so, and of those most use Facebook (76.6%) and Twitter (71.7%). Fully 41% of journalists also indicate that they regularly track mentions of their work being referenced in social media and traditional media.

MEDIA RELATIONS PRACTICES

- 1.** Journalists express concerns with PR professionals. In terms of frustrations in the relationship between media and corporate communications and PR professionals, journalists report a wide range of dissatisfactions. Some 45% of journalists report that the communications professionals they work with don't understand which subjects they cover. Nearly 27% say communications professionals don't understand the subjects they are pitching. More than 30% report they cannot find information they need on corporate websites, and nearly 32% specifically say they can't find the name and/or telephone number of a communications professional on the corporate website.

In terms of the perceived professionalism, almost 70% of journalists rate PR and corporate communications professionals as substantially or extremely professional. However, when it comes to the understanding of journalists' media outlets, most journalists—about 53%—say communications professionals have only “some understanding.” In terms of understanding journalists' jobs and editorial focus, again about 55% of journalists say communications professionals have only “some understanding.”

- 2. Journalists convey concerns with PR materials.** The greatest concern journalists have about the materials they receive from corporate communications and public relations professionals is that it is written like advertising, not journalism—nearly 60% registered this frustration, while nearly as many (59.4%) said the material sent by these professionals is simply not relevant to their work. More than half of responding journalists complain that emails from communications professionals don't highlight why readers would care about the subject.
- 3. Journalists find value in some PR material.** Journalists generally seem to attach modest value to the press materials supplied by PR professionals. More than 65% of journalist respondents report that 20% or fewer of the stories they file are assisted or facilitated by corporate communications or PR professionals, including the use of press releases. Of this 20%, nearly 5% say they are never helped by communications professionals. Conversely, however, nearly 18% of journalists say that 60% or more of their stories are aided by communications professionals.

In terms of the source of journalists' story ideas, about 27% say they receive such ideas from corporate communications or PR professionals once every month or more, and another nearly 30% report receiving story ideas from communications professionals even more frequently: Every two weeks or more (14.5%), once a week or more (13%) and once a day or more (2.7%).

DETAILED SUMMARY OF RESULTS

QUESTION #1: What is your title? *(Please choose the most accurate title.)*

The overwhelming majority of respondents to this survey were frontline working journalists—nearly 85% reported titles of reporter/writer, correspondent/columnist editor/editorial staff, news director, blogger or freelance journalist. Fewer than 1% reported a non-editorial management title.

Reporter/Writer	26.5%
Correspondent/Columnist	2.5%
Editor/Editorial Staff	49.0%
Blogger	0.3%
Producer	1.8%
Booker	0.1%
On-Air Talent	4.0%
Media Outlet Manager (Non-Editorial)	0.6%
News Director	2.4%
Freelance Journalist	3.9%
Other	8.6%

QUESTION #2: For which type of medium do you work? *(Please check all that apply.)*

Nearly 41% of respondents work at newspapers; about 24% work at trade publications, nearly 9% work at consumer magazines, and about 13% work at broadcast outlets, providing a reasonable representation of the journalist profession. In addition, almost 1% work at blogs, and more than 4% at news websites.

Weekly newspaper	16.4%
Daily newspaper	24.1%
Consumer magazine	8.6%
Trade magazine or newspaper	24.4%
Local television	6.9%
National television	0.9%
Local radio	4.7%
National radio	0.6%
Wire service/News syndicate	1.6%
Blog	0.9%
News website	4.4%
Other website or online media outlet	6.6%

QUESTION #3: Which beat do you primarily cover? *(Please choose one most applicable beat.)*

Respondents cover a wide range of beats, with the greatest number (7.6%) covering city/metro, followed by government/politics (7.7%), healthcare/hospitals medicine (5.8%), and business, general and sports/recreation with almost 5% each. About 6.7% represent the combined beat category of entertainment/arts/culture, while nearly 5.7% cover the combined category of technology, business and technology, consumer.

Accounting	0.2%
Advertising/Marketing	0.6%
Agriculture/Farming	1.6%
Architecture/Design	0.6%
Arts/Culture	3.5%
Automotive	1.3%
Banking	0.4%
Beauty	0.1%
Biotechnology	0.2%
Books	0.4%
Business, General	4.9%
City/Metro	7.6%
Education	4.0%
Electronics, industrial	0.6%
Energy/utilities	1.4%
Entertainment	3.2%
Environment	1.2%
Family/Parenting	0.5%
Fashion/Apparel	0.3%
Financial Services	1.5%
Food/Beverage/Restaurants	2.5%
Government/Politics	7.7%
Healthcare/Hospitals/Medicine	5.8%
Home/Garden	1.3%
International News	0.3%
Law	2.4%
Personal Finance	0.5%
Professional Services	0.1%
Pharmaceuticals	0.3%
Publishing/Media	0.9%
Real Estate/Housing	1.2%
Retail	1.1%
Science	1.2%
Social Policy	0.5%
Sports/Recreation	4.9%
Technology (business)	4.1%
Technology (consumer)	1.6%
Travel/Hospitality	2.3%
Transportation	1.1%

QUESTION #4: How has the editorial staffing at your media outlet changed over the past 12 months?

(Please select the most accurate description.)

All the talk about shrinking editorial staffs is confirmed by this survey, in which more than half (almost 54%) of journalists confirmed a reduction in their media outlet's staff size. However, nearly 36% of respondents reported no change in editorial staff size, and 8.4% actually reported an increase.

What's more, when journalists at trade publications are viewed in isolation, nearly 48% report no change in editorial staff size, and 7.1% report some growth. Newspapers, though, seem to have taken the greatest hit to staff size, with only 15% of daily newspaper journalists reporting no change in editorial staff size, and a staggering number (almost 81%) reporting some kind of decrease in staff levels.

Our editorial staff size has not changed.	35.9%
We have about 1%-10% fewer editorial staff.	18.3%
We have about 11%-20% fewer editorial staff.	15.5%
We have about 21%-30% fewer editorial staff.	8.8%
We have about 31%-40% fewer editorial staff.	4.9%
We have about 41%-50% fewer editorial staff.	3.7%
We have about 51%-70% fewer editorial staff.	2.1%
We have about 71%-90% fewer editorial staff.	0.5%
Our staff has decreased by more than 90%.	0.1%
<i>Total reporting decrease in editorial staff</i>	53.9%
We have about 1%-10% more editorial staff.	4.4%
We have about 11%-20% more editorial staff.	1.4%
We have about 21%-30% more editorial staff.	0.9%
We have about 31%-40% more editorial staff.	0.3%
We have about 41%-50% more editorial staff.	0.6%
We have about 51%-70% more editorial staff.	0.4%
We have about 71%-90% more editorial staff.	0.1%
Our staff has increased by more than 90%.	0.3%
<i>Total reporting increase in editorial staff</i>	8.4%
Other	4.1%

QUESTION #5: How has your editorial workload changed over the past 12 months?

(Please check all that apply.)

Since only about a quarter (25.3%) of respondents report that there's been no change in their editorial workload, we can infer that most editorial staff are working harder than ever—more output, longer workweeks, more reliance on alternative information sources. Indeed, more than 46% of journalists respondents say they're expected to produce more stories each week, but reporters and writers suffer an increased workload more acutely: almost 56% report having to produce a greater number of stories within the same workweek. More than 24% of journalists report the imposition of longer hours, and the same number also report responsibility for covering more beats. What may be heartening to corporate communications and PR professionals is the fact that the changes at editorial departments seem to have increased journalists' reliance on press releases and other PR materials—nearly 18% report this trend.

There's been no change in my editorial workload.	25.3%
I'm expected to produce a greater number of stories within the same work week.	46.5%
I'm expected to work longer hours.	24.1%
I'm expected to produce shorter stories.	17.9%
I now cover more beats.	24.1%
I use fewer sources for my stories.	11.0%
I make greater use of syndicated wire services (e.g., Associated Press) as sources.	8.2%
I make greater use of press releases or other PR material as sources.	17.9%

QUESTION #6: What are the greatest concerns you have about the corporate communications and PR professionals you meet or work with? (Please check all that apply.)

The fact that almost half (45.4%) of journalists still cite that they become annoyed when communications professionals do not know which beats they cover should serve as a wake-up call to communications department and PR agency managers. (Note that this number soars for trade publication journalists, more than 59% of whom cite this issue as a concern, and for technology business journalists, almost 57% of whom cite this frustration.)

Almost equally disconcerting to communications managers might be the claim journalists make that they can't find information they need on corporate websites (30%) or that they can't find contact information for a communications professional on the website (31.9%).

They don't understand which subjects I cover.	45.4%
They don't fully understand the subjects they are pitching.	26.9%
They don't take "no" for an answer when I turn down a story idea.	13.9%
They follow up press releases with a phone call to see if I've received them.	31.1%
They leave long voice messages on my phone.	13.7%
They do not provide access to their clients when I need it.	20.8%
They don't return my phone calls promptly enough.	15.9%
I cannot easily find information I need on corporate websites.	30.0%
I cannot easily find the name and/or telephone number of a corporate communications or PR professional on the corporate website.	31.9%

QUESTION #7: What are the greatest concerns you have with the material you receive from corporate communications and PR professionals? *(Please check all that apply.)*

The complaint by the majority of journalists (59.4%) that communications professionals send irrelevant materials is probably tied to the information deficits cited in the previous survey question. An even larger majority of journalists (almost 60%) claim that communications professionals send material written like advertising, not journalism, and even more healthcare journalists (nearly 68%) echo this perception. Overall, surprising numbers of journalists think that material contains too much jargon (almost 25%) and that material is not clearly written (23.4%).

Another chief concern expressed by nearly a quarter (23.4%) of journalists is the claim that much communications-generated material fails to focus on a story idea. A frank statement of this failure was articulated by one journalist in an open-ended comment referring to communications professionals: “They don’t even pitch an idea—they pitch their company and say, ‘Hey, does this company fit with anything you’re working on?’”

Material sent is usually not relevant to my work.	59.4%
Material is not clearly written.	22.1%
Material does not focus on a story idea.	23.4%
Material contains typos or grammatical errors.	12.4%
Material is written like advertising, not journalism.	59.7%
Material contains too much jargon.	24.9%

QUESTION #8. What are the greatest concerns you have with the emails you receive from corporate communications and PR professionals? *(Please check all that apply.)*

Response to this question echoes the concern expressed by journalists in the question above regarding the failure of communications professionals to pitch useful story ideas consistently. Indeed, journalists’ most common complaint about communications-generated emails pertains to their lack of connection to readers: Some 52.2% of respondents say these emails typically don’t explain why readers would care about the subject.

Other concerns cited in the question could make up a checklist for communications professionals before they send a pitch email to journalists, helping ensure they a) write more compelling email subject lines, b) get to the point quickly, and c) edit aggressively to shorten the message in general.

Email subject lines don’t grab my attention.	23.5%
Email doesn’t get to the point quickly enough.	43.2%
Email doesn’t tell why my readers would care about the subject.	52.2%
Email is too long.	26.3%
Email wastes time with pleasantries.	10.6%

QUESTION #9. What percentage of stories you file are assisted or facilitated by corporate communications or public relations professionals, including the use of press releases? (Please estimate.)

Answers to this question make clear that journalists depend on communications professionals to do their work. However, according to this survey, most journalists report this contribution to be minor at best. The majority of respondents—almost 66%—say communications professionals help them with fewer than 20% of their stories, and it goes down from there: almost 36% of respondents that say communications pros help them with fewer than 10% of their stories, and nearly 5% say communications never helps them.

The good news: more than 17% of journalists in general use communications professionals or press releases for 40% or more of the stories they file, with nearly 43% of technology business journalists use communications for more than 40% of their stories.

Zero percent	4.7%
1%-10%	35.7%
11%-20%	25.5%
21%-40%	16.7%
41%-60%	10.5%
61%-80%	4.3%
More than 80%	2.6%

QUESTION #10: How often does a corporate communications or PR professional give you an idea for a story that you might not have had otherwise? (Please estimate the frequency.)

Again, we can see that journalists acknowledge the utility of communications professionals in doing their jobs, here at a higher level—the contribution of actual story ideas. In general, more than 30% of journalists say they receive such an idea from a communications professional every two weeks or more frequently. For city/metro and technology business journalists, this number rises to more than 34%, but for healthcare journalists, it goes down to only about 24%. The contribution of communications to editorial is further reinforced as we drop down the frequency scale: Nearly 58% of all journalist respondents report receiving help from communications at least once every month, and nearly 71% of technology business journalists say they receive story ideas from communications pros at least once a month.

Once a day or more	2.7%
Once a week or more	13.0%
Once every two weeks or more	14.5%
Once every month or more	27.4%
Once every six months or more	24.2%
Once a year or more	12.0%
Never	6.1%

QUESTION #11: How would you generally rate the professionalism of the corporate communications and PR professionals you meet or work with? (Please evaluate.)

Journalists may have lots of reasons to criticize communications pros, but they generally tend to regard them as professional. Indeed, nearly 70% of journalists rate communications practitioners as substantially or extremely professional.

Extremely professional	12.5%
Substantially professional	57.4%
Modestly professional	27.7%
Lacking professionalism	2.2%
Totally unprofessional	0.2%

QUESTION #12: How well do most corporate communications and PR professionals you meet or work with understand the editorial mission of your media outlet? (Please evaluate.)

Communications professionals didn't fare as well on this question as on the issue of professionalism. In keeping with a trend of such opinions, most journalist respondents here give communications pros credit only for "some understanding" of their medium's editorial mission.

Superb understanding	1.8%
Substantial understanding	22.8%
Some understanding	53.2%
Poor understanding	19.7%
No understanding	2.4%

QUESTION #13: How well do most corporate communicators and PR professionals you meet or work with understand your job and editorial focus? (Please evaluate.)

Communicators fare no better when journalists evaluate their understanding of individual editorial jobs and focus than when they assess communicators' understanding of general editorial missions. In short, a majority (55.2%) of journalists give communications professionals credit only for "some understanding" of their editorial jobs, but another 21.5% believe communicators' understanding is poor to nil. Only 23.3% of journalist respondents believe communicators have a substantial or superb understanding of their individual editorial charters.

Superb understanding	1.4%
Substantial understanding	21.9%
Some understanding	55.2%
Poor understanding	19.3%
No understanding	2.2%

QUESTION #14: How would you generally rank the quality of writing in materials, like press releases and email pitches, sent to you by corporate communications and PR professionals? (Please evaluate.)

Strong writing ability is consistently ranked by communications managers as one of the most valuable skills in the public relations arsenal—after all, we are communicators. Unfortunately, journalists, who also ply their trade with the written word and value it highly, don’t think much of the writing skills of corporate communications and PR professionals. Nearly 60% of journalist respondents believe the materials they receive from communicators is only “somewhat skilled.” More than 27% of respondents give communicators a higher rating, but another 13% think their writing is actually worse than “C” level.

Excellent writing	1.5%
Substantially skilled writing	26.7%
Somewhat skilled writing	58.8%
Substandard writing	11.8%
Terrible writing	1.2%

QUESTION #15: How would you generally rank the mastery that corporate communications and PR professionals have of the subject matter they approach you about? (Please choose the best answer.)

More than 44% of journalists believe communicators have substantial (41.5%) or superb (2.9%) understanding of the subject matter about which they are pitching. Unfortunately, nearly half of journalists give communicators credit for no better than “some understanding” of their subject matter. Communications managers can perhaps rationalize why a media relations practitioner cannot master the editorial missions of 30 different trade journals and the focus of several hundred journalists covering their marketplaces, but one has to ask: Is there any excuse for a communicator not to possess a “superb” understanding of every subject he or she pitches?

Superb understanding	2.9%
Substantial understanding	41.5%
Some understanding	48.9%
Poor understanding	6.0%
No understanding	0.8%

QUESTION #16: What percentage of the emails you receive from corporate communications and PR professionals relate directly to the beats you cover? (Please choose the best answer.)

It would appear that journalists believe much of the email they receive from communicators is off target: more than half of journalist respondents report that only 20% or less of the email communications they receive from communicators relates directly to their beats. Only 3% report it is on target 80% of the time or more often. If this is true, it bespeaks a tremendous waste of time and energy, on both the editorial and corporate communications sides of the equation. It also helps explain occasional journalist frustration with communications professionals.

0%-5%	17.8%
6%-10%	18.6%
11%-20%	15.7%
21%-30%	12.5%
31%-40%	8.7%
41%-50%	7.0%
51%-60%	6.6%
61%-70%	5.8%
71%-80%	4.4%
81%-90%	2.2%
91%-100%	0.8%

QUESTION #17: Do you regularly track pick-up or mentions of your work being referenced in social media or traditional media? (Please select one.)

Currently more than 40% of journalists regularly follow the pick-up or mention of their editorial in other media. As Google, Yahoo and other search tools become more effective—and as media outlets and journalists become more adept at optimizing for search—we can expect this practice to become more widespread.

Yes	41%
No	59%

QUESTION #18: Which methods do you use to let PR and corporate communications professionals know what you want from them and how you want to work with them? (Please select all that apply.)

The bane of conscientious media relations practitioners—to say nothing of firms whose business it is to track the work habits and preferences of journalists—is the reluctance or refusal of journalists to reveal how communications professionals can work most effectively with them. As answers to this question reveal, the discovering of journalists’ editorial hot buttons, their likes and dislikes, and their special, individualized needs for information can be extremely inefficient. Most journalists—some 61%—report that this valuable information most often gets transmitted one-on-one over the phone. Very few journalists (fewer than 10%) discuss such preferences with trade reporters, and only about one third ((34.1%) reveal them in surveys. Perhaps most disconcerting, nearly one quarter of respondents (24.8%) say they rarely or never reveal their preferences,

leading to the possible conclusion that one reason for the cluelessness of some communicators about the journalists they pitch is due to the lack of clues supplied by those very journalists.

My preferences can be found on our media outlet’s website.	15.1%
I respond to email surveys sent out by media directories.	34.1%
I discuss my preferences in interviews with trade reporters who cover this.	9.9%
I express my preferences with PR people on the phone.	61.0%
I rarely or never provide my preferences.	24.8%

QUESTION #19: Do you regularly use social media to promote or publicize your own work?

(Please select one.)

While the Internet generally and social media specifically may be contributing to the shrinking of traditional media audiences and staff sizes, these digital vehicles are also allowing traditional media (and the journalists employed by them) to more effectively market their content. Today, the majority of journalists responding to this question indicate that they use social media to promote or publicize their work. As social media usage continues to grow, both among the general population and among journalists, we can expect the practice of self-promotion using social media to grow among media outlets and editorial staff as well.

Yes	51.8%
No	48.2%

QUESTION #20: (If yes to question #19) Which social media networks do you regularly use to promote or publicize your own work? (Please select one.)

If you were wondering about which social media networks journalists prefer, answers to this question give you some directions. If you’re looking for the best way to hook up with journalists—make friends, offer help, pitch a story—clearly Twitter offers the greatest attraction: it enjoys high usage among journalists (nearly 72%), and, since you can follow most anyone on this network without permission (unless they have locked their account), you have instant access to tens of thousands of Twitter journalist members. All you have to know is the journalist’s name.

Twitter	71.70%
Facebook	76.60%
MySpace	4.00%
LinkedIn	25.30%
Digg	5.80%

ABOUT THE SURVEY

Cision and Bulldog Reporter jointly conducted the survey to analyze changing journalist working conditions, attitudes towards public relations professionals, and the utility of public relations to the editorial process. This survey will also establish benchmarks, so changes in such metrics may be tracked annually.

About Cision

Cision (www.cision.com) empowers businesses to make better decisions and improve performance through its CisionPoint software solutions for corporate communication and PR professionals. Powered by local experts with global reach, Cision delivers relevant media information, targeted distribution, media monitoring, and precise media analysis. Cision has offices in Europe, North America and Asia, and has partners in 125 countries. Cision AB is quoted on the Nordic Exchange with revenue of SEK 1.8 billion in 2008.

About Bulldog Reporter

By providing an inside view into the workings of journalists and top media organizations Bulldog Reporter helps PR practitioners increase their effectiveness in gaining positive coverage. In addition, Bulldog Reporter offers a repository of insight into media relations best practices, techniques and technologies that increase PR professionals' success in developing long-term relationships with the press, building brands, measuring results, and cultivating respect from upper management for the public relations functions. In short, our media relations products and services provide the most useful, most comprehensive and most accurate information about media relations available to public relations practitioners.

The Bulldog Reporter product and service lines are owned by Infocom Group, which was founded in 1980.

Jim Sinkinson
Publisher
Bulldog Reporter
510-596-9333 Cell 510-914-0958
jimsink@bulldogreporter.com

Heidi Sullivan
Vice President, Media Research, North America
Cision
312-873-6653
heidi.sullivan@cision.com