



# THE UNIVERSAL ACCREDITATION BOARD ACCREDITATION STUDY COURSE

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

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## Session **9**

### **Overview**

This session of the Accreditation Study Course is intended to acquaint participants with relationships between public relations and information technology, specifically the Internet and the World Wide Web, as a part of business literacy.

*NOTE TO COACH:* Because of the fast-changing nature of this subject, this session should include or conclude with a segment in which knowledgeable local practitioners or IT managers respond to a group of “today” questions. Suggestions are listed at the end. It would be a good idea to give your specialists Handout #35 in advance, or to review during the earlier portion of your presentation. As a lead-in to the questions, it is suggested you ask for their comments on handout items that need updating. If they have the handout in advance, you might invite them to submit current items to augment the handout to candidates.

### ► **Reading to be assigned BEFORE this session**

- Detailed List of Knowledge, Skills and Abilities tested, Candidate’s Preparation Guide for the Examination for Accreditation in Public Relations, and Specific Areas of Competence for Readiness Review.
  - > Section 2: Business Literacy
  - > Section 8: Using Information Technology Efficiently

### ***Special Note for Coach***

*If you have not been coaching recently, please review these preliminary materials: For You, the Coach; The Coaching Method; Managing the Class; About House Rules. Before the day of the class, make sure you are familiar with the content in the reading which candidates should have done, and with the exercises you are going to conduct in this session. Consider any adjustments you may need to make if this is a free-standing unit, or is part of a sequence of preparation classes.*

### ► **Significance of Subject Matter**

- Business literacy and technology are weighted at 12 percent of the multiple-choice Examination. (See paragraph at end of page 3.)
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- ▶ **Handouts for this session**
  - Online Resources, Handout #32
  - Permission Marketing, Handout #33
  - Technology Lecture Notes, Handout #34
  - Other Considerations about Information Technology, Handout #35
- ▶ **Visual Aids needed for this session**
  - Technology, Visuals #23a through #23q (17 pages)
- ▶ **Exercises conducted during this session**
  - Credit report e-mail
  - Local conditions with news media
  - Humane Society and Fireworks

## I. Agenda

*For coach's reference only. Covered in early narrative.*

- > Technology Today – A Few Remarks
- > Web site management
- > E-mail management
- > Permission marketing
- > News groups (USENET)
- > Attacks or rumors arising on the Internet
- > Bringing it all up-to-date

## II. Technology Today – A Few Remarks

*Visual #23a, Information Technology  
and Public Relations*

- ▶ **Begin:** This is a difficult topic to approach, in helping candidates prepare for the APR Examination. Some of you in this room are probably knee-deep in technology every day – if not even farther up your torso. Some of you could have been entirely otherwise occupied for the past few years. Some of you may be fluent in several aspects of information technology, but have not been responsible for management or troubleshooting, which you now will need to know. As we proceed, we all may need to be patient with each other.
- ▶ What I propose to do is:
  - > Lay out some basics and general principles, as a foundation
  - > Provide a good many other considerations in handouts – which we can discuss as needed
  - > Exercise your brains with a few real-life episodes
  - > Bring up some hazards which can have a very negative effect on your public relationships
  - > Suggest that the Internet can be a real servant, a potential headache, and a potential headache remedy
  - > Call on some people who work in this field every day to share current practices, viewpoints and concerns.

- ▶ As you all surely are aware, the subject matter of information technology is not simple or straightforward and the situation changes under us so fast that it is hard to keep our footing. For this reason, information technology is largely “off the bookshelf” of printed textbooks recommended for study for accreditation. In this session, we will be giving you some additional resources – which are recommended right now, but may change every time this preparation class is offered in the future. Things move fast in this field.
- ▶ **Now, a basic perspective.** Any discussion of technology today must start out with the old “good news; bad news” approach, or “on the one hand; on the other hand”. This has been true from the beginning of the so-called “information age.” In 1996, the contrasts in the situation were well expressed by John Pavlik, who directs the Center for New Media at Columbia University:
  - > To public relations professionals, the World Wide Web is both a powerful tool of communication and a dangerous threat to organizational well being. Properly used, the Web represents the ultimate communication tool for building relationships between an organization and its publics, both internal and external. The Web can deliver messages with a wide variety of media – text, audio, graphics, still pictures, animation, full-motion video, even virtual reality environments where organizations can demonstrate products or services or showcase physical facilities.  
  
Conversely, the Web empowers the individual to create his or her own communication platforms. At least a third of all Web sites have been created by individuals outside any official organizational context. Journalist A.J. Liebling once observed that freedom of the press belongs to those who own one. The Web enables anyone to own a digital press. This may ultimately be good for democracy, but along the way it presents significant challenges to organizations trying to manage the communication function in the age of the information superhighway.
- ▶ **Back to our own words:** For some of us, the Internet is a tool; for some it is a way of life. Whatever your job responsibilities may be, every accredited practitioner needs to be well acquainted with this form of communication. The Detailed List of Knowledge, Skills and Abilities tested in the Examination spells that out clearly. In the multiple-choice Examination, only 2% of the questions will be directly concerned with information technology. That’s not many questions. But take a look at the listing for business literacy – 10% of the questions – and notice that sections 2.2 and 2.5 speak directly to the field of technology. As a tool, technology will come into play in many other categories. In reality, it is everywhere today. The hazards and the opportunities affect us all. The panelists for your Readiness Review will know this. You will want to be able to reflect your knowledge of technology wherever it arises.

*Elapsed: about 5:00*

- ▶ Before we go very far into Web technology, let's pause for a moment and consider an "everyday occurrence" – the kind of thing which could confront any one of us, any morning.
  - > **Relate:** Let's say you are working in public relations for Equifax, one of the major credit reporting agencies. One April morning, while you are peacefully tackling your inbox, a cousin telephones. She has just found in **her** inbox three e-mails from friends, all with the same subject:

*Visual #23c, Your Credit Report*

**YOUR CREDIT REPORT GOES PUBLIC IN JULY!  
REMOVE YOUR NAME ASAP!**

- > The messages are identical: "Starting July 1, the four major credit bureaus in the U.S. (Equifax, etc.) will be allowed to release credit info, mailing addresses, phone numbers, etc., to ANYONE who requests it. If you do not want to be included in this release of your personal information, you can call . . ." and it gives a toll-free number and the procedure for "opting out." The messages conclude, in all capital letters, "PASS THIS MESSAGE ON TO ALL IN YOUR ADDRESS BOOK, FRIENDS AND FAMILY." Which, obviously has been happening.
  - > **Ask the class:** What do you do, now? Take two minutes and note down your ideas, and then we will compare.
  - > When the time is up, or sooner if all have finished writing, ask:
    - Who will give me one idea?
    - How many had something similar?
    - Who has something different?
    - How many had something similar?
  - > Continue as long as the discussion is productive.
- ▶ **NOTE:**
- If someone mentions monitoring Newsgroups, commend them, ask for a little information, and then move on, saying you will take Newsgroups up in more detail later.
  - If no one mentions Newsgroups, don't bring it up now.
  - If someone mentions the next point (standard procedure), recognize it and move on to the transition to Web technology.

*Elapsed: about 15:00*

**Otherwise, observe:** As you probably know, when you receive this kind of e-mail, or anything that sounds scary and mentions a specific organization, standard procedure is to first go to the organization's Web site to check for a hoax or an authentic situation. You probably have so trained your cousin, but not her e-mail list. So you send your cousin the company Web site address, and suggest she transmit it back to the senders of those three e-mails, and hope they will send it back one more leg. And learn something, in the process. On your Web site is a warning about this "false" e-mail.

Actually, if you have been working at Equifax for more than a few months, you probably know that incoming message by heart. By the time your cousin called, it had been circulating for several years. Your Web site contains a notice; your trade association has issued three previous news releases about it, and the Federal Trade Commission issued a consumer alert, early on.

The telephone number in the message is real. It was established in 1997, to permit individuals to “opt out” of mailing lists for pre-approved offers of credit.

Now, as public relations people, let’s think for a moment about why these e-mail chains keep recurring and so persistent. Are people chewing up band-width just for fun? Or is something else at work here?

- > **Preside** over a little discussion; **probe** for values and fears. People value privacy; they are afraid of identity theft. They lack experience in assessing hoaxes and misjudgments. They react fast and may shoot from the hip – on this and other topics which strike at their values and fears, real or perceived.
- > **Observe:** If this really were you, and you took time to think along these lines, you might make sure that your item on your Web page emphasizes how the existing system protects privacy of credit information, and that the opt-out number helps prevent unwanted e-mail offers. This might be an opportunity to glean a little positive reaction. When something like this comes down, it is usually a good idea to take ten minutes and consider values and fears, and whether there is a constructive way to recognize them. The good news here is that you have a Web site on which to make this explanation, and possibly recoup some of the damage. Further along, we’ll talk about some other options.

*Elapsed: about 20 minutes*

Now let’s take a longer look at Web technology. These remarks are the considered opinions of competent public relations practitioners with substantial experience in this area, written in 2003.

*Visual #23d, Web Site Management*

### III. Web Site Management

- ▶ **Web pages are essential:** Public relations practitioners should have a deep knowledge and understanding of how to incorporate use of the Internet in their public relations and communications. Putting the fact base into one sentence: The Internet is a broad-based global technology that connects people using computers through the use of electronic mail, and through highly visible public “sign posts” known as Web pages. Virtually every company intending to do business successfully is generally expected to have a Web page where customers, the public, regulators, government officials, and members of the news media can obtain basic information about the company.

- ▶ **General principles:** Web pages should contain – at a minimum – detailed contact information about your company or, for agency practitioners, about your client. The most basic information that should be incorporated in any Web site is information about how to contact the company. Most people who use the Web complain that this is the most common difficulty they find in using corporate Web sites. At one time, Web sites were viewed as billboards. Now, people want to know who authorized the billboard, who maintains it, and how to contact someone knowledgeable and helpful.

*Visual #23e, News Media*

- ▶ The Web site should include a section tailored to the **needs of the news media**. Many companies have very sophisticated press rooms on their Web sites. A good example of a media-friendly Web site is the press room maintained by the Boeing Corporation, which contains images of its aircraft, video clips, biographies of executives, official photographs of executives, and many other documents including product specifications, white papers and backgrounders.
  - > One major advantage of the Web for this type of distribution is that it eliminates the need to send documents and photographs via US Postal Service or overnight courier services – which once kept public relations people pretty busy. Another advantage is that an online press room is available 24 hours a day. A down side is that while online press rooms make journalists' jobs easier they often eliminate the one-on-one personal contact with public relations practitioners.

A study of journalists' expectations of online pressrooms was made in 2002 by Joanna Schroeder, APR, for her master's thesis. Two reports are available on the Web: One was published in PRSA's Tactics; another is on the site of Women in Communication. The URLs, and Schroeder's e-mail address, are given on a handout for this session.

A Web pressroom is not a panacea. One practitioner notes:

"It seems to me that journalists almost never visit your Web site to find out specific information. Those who do are especially likely to misinterpret what they've seen.

"All of our press releases are posted – but I've noticed that the beat reporters are far more likely to pick up the phone and call me to verify simple data (earnings per share last quarter, for example). I find the less experienced reporters are the ones more likely to try to draw information from the Web site. Unfortunately [they are] reporters who know little about the company and who leap to conclusions not supported by the information available.

"We are a fairly small company. Someone like Boeing with heavy international coverage may find that posting detailed information allows them to serve the international media."

- ▶ **Content management:** Public relations practitioners should direct content management strategies. Many companies assign responsibility for a Web site to the information technology department (IT), but control of the content is properly a corporate communications function. Communications professionals should partner with IT on technology related issues such as
  - approval processes
  - archiving strategies
  - Web statistics (WebTrends, CommerceTrends, etc.)
  - use of a customer data warehouse (for cross-selling, up-selling)

However, content should be directly controlled by the communications function of the company, and be viewed as an additional channel of distribution to deliver company (or client) messages to multiple audiences.

- > **Direct to the audience:** The Web creates opportunities for direct communication to target audiences. A practitioner in a financial firm observes, “Especially during the tech boom, investors went directly to Web sites for earnings updates, rather than wait for traditional news media to report quarterly numbers. I believe this is happening more and more often – especially with press releases – which are often more directed to investors or customers or employees than the news media.”

- ▶ **Web site usability:** Practitioners should understand how to conduct usability testing as a means for making sure their Web sites are easy to use and their labeling is appropriate and intuitive.
- ▶ **Rich media:** Practitioners should understand how to use rich media to enhance the site. Examples of this would be streaming video segments that support the organization’s efforts. A caution: It is wise to offer such segments as an option, via a clickable link. It is considered polite, in the Web world, to give the size. For example, a Web page might say Download Adobe Acrobat PDF file here (file size 1.2 mb).

*Visuals #23g, Weblogs (Jupiter page)*

- ▶ **Weblogs:** For the first ten years of their young lives, Weblogs or Blogs were primarily personal journals posted on the Web for family and friends. More recently they have been adapted for business communications and reputation enhancement. One example: Early in 2003, Jupiter Research, an arm of Jupitermedia Corp. in Darien, Conn., was posting its analysts' Weblogs, hosted from a common page. The analysts report highlights from speeches they give and conferences they attend and their thoughts on current development. And there is a developing aspect of dialogue among “bloggers.” In an article published in *Computerworld's* April 2003 issue, for example, blogs are credited with escalating the discussion of Sen. Trent Lott's remarks about Sen. Strom Thurmond to the mainstream media. The following public outcry eventually forced Lott to resign as Senate Majority Leader. *Computerworld* offers a free newsletter; the URL is on our much-mentioned handout.

#### IV. E-mail Management

- ▶ **News media:** Public relations practitioners need to be especially careful in how they use e-mail to communicate with journalists. While many journalists are extremely conversant with and comfortable using e-mail, many (astonishingly) are not. In addition, many news organizations, particularly in smaller cities, have not upgraded computer equipment sufficiently that journalists are able to download attached documents. The Associated Press Web site, in 2003, specified “no attachments” in e-mail messages to it.
  - > **An aside:** This is also true of a growing number of corporate mail systems. Virtually every e-mail virus spreads as an 'attachment.' On grounds of security, some systems simply reject all attachments. It's wise to ask before you send.

It's important for the practitioner to keep track of which journalists prefer to receive e-mails with attachments, or e-mails without attachments, as well as those who simply prefer to receive a fax. This is a rapidly changing area of media relations. Just as public relations professionals routinely keep track of the interests of journalists with whom they communicate regularly, practitioners should also make sure they know the changing e-mail preferences of those journalists.

When distributing news releases by e-mail, practitioners should ensure that the mail addresses of the recipients are kept confidential. It is not only embarrassing, but regarded by most journalists as a “beginner's mistake” when all of the recipients' e-mail addresses are included in the “TO” field of the e-mail, making them visible to all the recipients. E-mail addresses for a broadcast e-mail should be entered in the “BCC” field of the e-mail. Be sure to put one name in the “TO” field, even your own. Some older mail packages still operating in the field will grab names from the BCC field and put them into the TO field if it is empty. This is contrary to technical standards, but it has been known to happen, according to an experienced systems manager.

*Elapsed: about 30 minutes*

- ▶ Now let's take a few minutes to check on local conditions: *Allow 10-15 minutes*
  - > **Ask class:** What is your experience, currently, about journalists and e-mail?
    - Who will give me one thing?
    - How many have a similar experience?
    - How many differ?
    - Who has another aspect about e-mail and journalists?
    - What about attachments?
  - > *Make a transition: Now, another important concept:*

- ▶ **Marketing:** Practitioners need to understand the concept of “**permission marketing**,” where the consumer first is asked for permission to send e-mail marketing materials before they are sent. Unsolicited e-mail messages to journalists or consumers that are specifically intended as a “commercial” for a client product or service should be avoided.

Maintaining a functional permission marketing list calls for both finesse and expertise, but it is a “solved problem” in the phrase of one experienced system designer. Off-the-shelf software – some of it free – can handle the whole thing automatically for you, avoiding the many hazards of purchased e-mail lists. His full discussion and details are in a handout we will distribute at the end of the session.

When you set out to control broadcast e-mail promotion, you may find yourself in direct opposition to the mindset of some marketing department staff. One experienced systems manager observes that marketing people are likely to insist that customers “need to know” about new products or services, whether or not they have inquired about any of them.

- > Three things to remember, here:
  - Consumers are becoming much **less tolerant** of unsolicited and undesirable e-mail.
  - Unsolicited E-mail marketing messages are likely to wind up in the consumer’s Inbox alongside various “spam” invitations to enlarge, enhance, or perform better sexually. Is that the company your company wants to keep?
  - A firm with eager marketers should ask the legal department to check the **contract with the access provider** for “terms and conditions” and “Acceptable Use Policy.” All major providers specifically prohibit mass mailing of unsolicited material. Most providers are becoming more aggressive on enforcement. There may be a risk that the provider could terminate services as a result of marketing mailings.

*Visual #23j, Remember Subpoena!*

- ▶ **A caution flag:** A Certified Records Manager among the contributors to this session reminds us that e-mail messages can be (and ARE) subpoenaed in lawsuits and in government investigations. Subpoenaed e-mails were conclusive evidence in the New York Attorney General’s action against big Wall Street financial firms in 2003, which brought billion-dollar fines and settlements. No matter what the medium (paper, microfilm, microfiche, CD-ROM, hard drive, Internet site, intranet site, or whatever) it’s important to think of content when sending messages.

*Visual #23k, Post the Big Stuff!*

- ▶ **Internal e-mail v. Intranet:** An important aspect of e-mail management is encouraging public relations staff and others to post lengthy documents on the Intranet Web site and send a short e-mail message with a link to the material, rather than sending large files as e-mail attachments. Keep reminding people that this practice conserves electronic resources, time and energy. System administrators, in their laid-back moments, love to relate the true story of a CEO who was so pleased with a PowerPoint presentation on the company's good year that he e-mailed it to the entire employee list – 30,000 of them, worldwide! It was 150 megabytes! Of course, the system foundered and shut down. About the time the IT staff located the problem and began to regain control, the CEO telephoned one of the recipients, found the message hadn't arrived, and e-mailed it again – to EVERYONE! The company DID have an Intranet where the presentation could have been posted.

*Elapsed: about 45 minutes*

*Visuals #23l, Promotion*

- ▶ **Promotion:** The advantages of electronic mail for promotion are obvious: Almost no cost, fast turnaround, immediate response. Nearly all organizations now use this method to make announcements to members, to promote events and projects, and to urge action on matters of importance to them.
  - > **Tell the class:** With this in mind, I invite you to step into the shoes of a public relations practitioner across the Atlantic. You work for a major Humane Society in the United Kingdom. The Society has a number of “concerns” regarding animals – abuse, pet abandonment, illegal trading in endangered species. At the moment, “loud fireworks” lead your list. Every year, your office gets hundreds of calls about pets that have become lost, injured or distressed due to loud fireworks.

You have done your homework: Your survey of veterinarians in England and Wales reports that in the past year nearly 5,000 animals were treated for fireworks-related injuries or were prescribed sedatives because they were so frightened by the loud bangs and flashes of fireworks. In two months, there were 700 reports of such incidents. In a public opinion poll conducted by a research institute – 1,000 telephone interviews – 71 percent of the people questioned agreed that loud fireworks should only be allowed at public displays, and 57 percent agreed that for private use, the public should only be allowed to buy low-noise fireworks.

Now there is a bill in Parliament, which proposes limiting the sale of fireworks to certain times of year and licensing fireworks displays. It is coming up for second reading in the House of Commons. You want people to contact their Members of Parliament in support.

You have bought a list – an e-mail list – which the vendor says consists of cat and dog owners who have “opted-in” to receive related information. Your message has gone out.

NOW your telephone rings, and the caller politely informs you that the Society's name is under fire on the Internet. One of his friends, not a pet owner, has received several copies of the message. The friend – who says he is not an “opt-in” and had no prior relationship with the Society – has posted a notice on his Internet news group, saying – and I quote – “This is a political lobbying junk-o-gram from . . . the main animal charity in the UK. They have clearly hired a spammer to deliver their message, which is most unacceptable. If any UK reader can perform appropriate re-education to the decision-makers in this body, please do so now.” News groups being what they are, the discussion is lively and continuing, and none of it is favorable to the Society.

- > **Tell the class:** This IS a true story. The full name of the Society is withheld as a matter of courtesy. There is no need to perpetuate the embarrassment.
- > **Ask the class:** SO—what do you do?
- > **Preside** over a little discussion.

► Wind it up with “the rest of the story”:

- > What did the Society actually do?  
Your counterpart on the staff apparently thought fast. She asked the caller to report to the news group that the Society is furious over the development; to pass on an e-mail address for response, and to post the URL for a public apology on their Web site. The apology declares that the Society is “carrying out a full investigation into how ‘spam’ e-mail was sent in its name, and will be taking the necessary steps to ensure that it does not happen again.”
- > Coming back to this side of the ocean:  
The obvious lesson about buying e-mail lists is covered more fully in the hand out on Permission Marketing. You probably are aware that spammers “harvest” e-mail addresses from Internet traffic, and often invade other servers on the Web and transmit from them, to disguise the origin. The sleuths in the news groups determined that the Society's e-mail was sent from “compromised” machines, one of which was in Argentina.
- > Another booby-trap crops up in this episode.  
The Society's original message asked recipients to write a letter or send an online fax to their Member of Parliament, urging support of the bill. Shortly a different news group is reporting that the Society – and I quote – “brought FaxyourMP.com servers to a standstill for 48 hours by e-mailing people to submit e-mail fax forms, in contravention of FaxyourMP.com's explicit policy.”
- > Lesson #2: If you are going to encourage a fax campaign to government officials, check to make sure it is permissible.

- > The good news: Despite the commotion, the Fireworks bill passed its second reading in the House of Commons unopposed. The bill went to committee; protocol calls for a third reading. In the meantime, the Society undertook an online petition drive. A message from the campaign coordinator to an Internet news group urged them to “ask your friends and family to sign our petition.” Access to the petition was on the Society’s Web site.

*Visual #23m, News Groups*

► **Monitoring news groups:** It is easy to monitor what’s being said in news groups about your organization, your product, or issues which are of concern to you.

- > **Ask class:** How many of you go to Google and check up on News Groups?
  - [Show of hands] [Modify remarks below accordingly, but fill in for the people unacquainted with the system.]
- > **Continue:** The search engine google.com archives News Group messages. By its count, it has 700 million – repeating, seven hundred million – in its memory. Since 1981. When you access the Google site, there is a button to click for Groups, and a search box. “Advanced Groups Search” permits you to narrow the search by date (starting in 1981 if you wish), subject, author and specific words, phrases or news groups. Just as in a search of Web sites, the system brings up a list of messages with a date, a few words of the content and a link to click to read the message. It identifies the news groups, tells how many messages are in each thread, and offers a diagram of the traffic, showing who responded to whom, with dates. In your Equifax role, you could have learned that the credit report warning was circulating that month on at least three news groups. One, with the subject “Protect your Identity, This is SERIOUS” had a thread of 24 articles. All this is free.

There are thousands of news groups ricocheting messages around the country, most of them narrowly defined, such as “rec.aviation.homebuilt” – a third-tier group under the category of recreation. Conversation in a group is not limited to its title. Some of the fuss over credit reports came in a group called “rec.gambling.poker.” And there is a big category of groups with unlimited scope, identified with the prefix “alt.”

News groups operate within a structure called Usenet. Every major Internet Service Provider such as AOL or AT&T Worldnet operates or offers a news server with software similar to a mail program. Messages addressed to a group on one server are automatically transmitted to other servers’ groups with similar interests, anywhere on the Internet. Possibly this is the world’s fastest forwarding system. When a subscriber signs on to the Internet, new messages appear in an inbox. Subscriptions are free.

In practice, Usenet could be called “the world’s largest back fence.” The official term is “a distributed broadcast e-mail system.”

- ▶ **Public relations tool:** The universe of net users offers possibilities for informal research on products or ideas. One example: the group “rec.woodworkers” is large and busy. The owner of a small tool manufacturing shop that specializes in planes posts a message every now and then describing a new feature in development or under consideration, and asks for reaction. So does a large catalog seller of woodworking supplies. All the groups have protocols and customs and would resent being exploited. If you search out a few appropriate groups and will play by their rules, you can get very fast feedback at no cost other than your time. And, of course, you can use the network to explain how you stubbed your toe, or amplify or correct information and opinion in circulation there. Google.com provides rosters of groups; so does your ISP.
  
- ▶ **Subscribing:** This is something you take up with your IT department. The “how-to” varies with your software and your internet provider. If you plan to 'post' messages in any newsgroups, you will probably want to set up a separate e-mail address for this activity. E-mail addresses used for posting to Usenet are routinely 'harvested' by spammers; inevitably you will get significant ongoing amounts of 'spam' to this address. Using a separate address for this purpose keeps this garbage out of your regular business contact address. You can subscribe to any number of news groups under that account. In addition to your interest groups, you should subscribe to the group 'news.announce.important'; this group has only a few messages per year, but they are of import to all readers of any newsgroups. The “newusers” groups will be helpful on startup. Further information about the functioning of groups is given in the handout I keep mentioning.

*Elapsed: 55-60 minutes*

*Visual #23n, Releases, Financials*

- ▶ **Announcements, Releases, Financials**
  - > **Observe:** You surely are aware of the business news services which handle news releases electronically. Later, we will ask our panel which ones are most popular or reliable at the moment, and which ones tell you who has picked up your release or posted it.

You probably also are aware that there is a growing trend to distribute by e-mail many of the reports that publicly-owned companies are required to give to stock holders. In the financial market, required reports and announcements can be nicely handled electronically, because the technology of distribution meets the standard of simultaneous information.

An option for stock price or regulatory filing e-mail alerts: A number of outside services such as IREye will handle this for a company, integrated within the company's Web site.

Annual reports are frequently distributed in electronic format (Adobe Acrobat PDF files, with Excel spreadsheets for financials) A systems manager cautions that financials created in Excel should always be converted to “locked” pdf format with digital signatures for distribution, lessening the hazard of someone changing the data.

*Visual #23o, Attacks, crises*

## V. Attacks, crises or rumors arising on the Internet

### > *The coach continues:*

- A practitioner’s crisis plan should always include what the organization would do in the event of cyber attack. When the company will respond to “rumors” and when it won’t.
  - Rumors and attacks in chat rooms and news groups obviously can spread like wildfire – so can your response, if you choose to use these channels. IT people probably can show you how to do this. It is a management decision, or a policy decision, when to limit your response to the medium where the rumor arises, when to inform directors, stockholders or community advisers, and when or whether to make some kind of public announcement.
  - Electronic vandals enjoy breaking into, altering, modifying, and defacing corporate Web sites. If the company’s Web site has been invaded and corrupted, the immediate action should be to shut down the site and stop the flow of false or derogatory information. The practitioner would immediately contact IT staff to accomplish this. It may be possible to forward requests for that site to another machine which is uncorrupted.
  - Airlines and other companies include in their crisis plans creation and maintenance of a “dark” Website. This contains pages specifically designed to hold important crisis-related information that can be used to replace the company’s live Web site quickly when a disaster occurs.
- > A company’s plans should also include how they would communicate with their publics via the Web in the event of a crisis.
- **For example:** At Principal Financial, headquartered in Iowa, a spokesperson relates: “On 9/11 we used the Web to explain to customers what we were doing as an insurer of property and lives. We also used it to explain where and how much we were donating financially and otherwise to assist in clean-up efforts.”
  - On the East Coast, another practitioner recalls that companies with offices at the World Trade Center used the Web in a different way. “Companies like Aon and Merrill Lynch posted regular updates re: how many employees were missing at the site, and asked employees who had no other way to contact the company during the initial hours – when communication was virtually halted in New York City – to log on to the Web site to let company officials know they were OK.”

*Visual #23p, Rethinking Strategy, Tactics, Finance*

## VI. Summing up

- > While electronic communication is now an important part of an integrated communications plan, it is not the end-all, be-all. Using these resources to distribute messages effectively depends on who your target audiences are compared to the demographics of the people who are most comfortable with technology.
- > Information technology has forced the public relations practitioner to re-think strategy, tactics and finance. For example, more funds are now devoted to technology, causing a shift in spending away from traditional media. The technology has given rise to whole new segments of audiences or publics for communication. Strategies and tactics differ for those who rely on the Internet and the Web, and those who shun it or skim it lightly. New measurement techniques have emerged, such as number of “hits” and time spent per visit to a Web site. It’s worth thinking about how this differs from counting print clippings. Budgets, staffing and time allocation reflect these shifts.
- > **Online resources:** Experienced practitioners working in technology recommend a free monthly newsletter called NetGain UPDATE. It is published by a consortium of independent communications technology consultants. They allow you to share it with your associates, clients, managers or anyone else you think would benefit from it. The URL is on the handout you are about to get.
- > **The Institute for Public Relations** offers, at no download fee, papers on new technology including the 1996 piece on the Information Superhighway, by John Pavlik, which I quoted early in this session. That URL, also, is on the handout.

*Distribute Handouts #32 Online Resources, #33 Permission Marketing, #34 Technology Lecture text, and #35 Other Considerations about Information Technology.*

- > **Proceed:** We have several handouts from this session. One is labeled Handout #32, the resources I have been mentioning to you. Handout #33 is Permission Marketing. This is your reference on the steps you want someone to take to maintain a squeaky-clean list, and how to do it with almost no sweat. Another is Handout #34, the main body of my remarks today, for your notes. Then there is Handout #35, Other Considerations about Information Technology. These are the further thoughts of the experienced practitioners who contributed to the body of this session, in 2003. I have given it to our panel members to review, and suggest you follow along with them as they single out things for updating, or contribute their own further thoughts. It is open season on questions to the panel.

*Elapsed: about 75 minutes*

- > **Introduce the panel members;** call on one of them to single out three items for comment; then ask another for three, and continue as long as constructive.

- ▶ Then turn to:

*Visual #23q, What's happening today?*

## VII. What's happening today?

*Conduct this segment as you wish.*

- ▶ Suggested questions for technology panel to consider:
  - > What is the most important issue at the moment in Web usage?
  - > What changes have you made in the past year or two, in the function of your Web site or sites?
    - Any changes in security procedures?
    - Are you targeting additional or different audiences now?
  - > How are you testing usability of your site?
  - > Are you using streaming video?
  - > What is your preferred search engine, currently?
  - > Have you made changes in internal e-mail in the past year or two?
  - > What about use of e-mail to outside audiences?
    - Customers/clients
    - Stockholders
    - Regulatory bodies
    - Journalists
  - > What electronic services such as Business Wire or PR Wire are you using?
    - What features do you like the best?
  - > How do you distribute newsletters?
  - > Are you currently monitoring Usenet news groups? How?
  - > What new technology do you see on the horizon?
  - > What effect will it have on the practice of public relations?
  - > What applications for it do you see in public relations?

### References

- 1 *Managing the Information Superhighway: A Report on the Issues Facing Communication Professionals*  
A study funded by a grant from The Institute for Public Relations Research and Education.1996.  
[www.instituteforpr.com](http://www.instituteforpr.com)

For this session, significant contributions of technology information and insight were made by: **Steven L. Lubetkin**, APR, Fellow PRSA, Vice-President, Corporate Communication, FleetBoston Financial Corporation and **Emily Abbas**, APR, Manager Corporate Communication, GuideOne Insurance; **Robert D. Bonomi**, Internet Services Consultant, Chicago; **Jim Haynes**, APR, Fellow PRSA, Quick Silver Interactive Group, Inc.; **Jane Keairns**, APR, Web Manager, Principal Financial Group; and **Laurel Davis O'Brien**, APR, Vice-President Public Relations, Nuveen Investments.

## Session 9 Links

### *Handouts*

- |                                                          |                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #32 Online Resources                                     | <a href="http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO32.pdf">http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO32.pdf</a> |
| #33 Permission Marketing                                 | <a href="http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO33.pdf">http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO33.pdf</a> |
| #34 Technology Lecture Notes                             | <a href="http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO34.pdf">http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO34.pdf</a> |
| #35 Other Considerations about<br>Information Technology | <a href="http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO35.pdf">http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO35.pdf</a> |

### *Visual Aids*

- |                                 |                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #23a-#23q Technology (17 pages) | <a href="http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachVis23.pdf">http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachVis23.pdf</a> |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|