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THE VOICE OF CPRS OTTAWA/GATINEAU



The Canadian  
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## President's Message

*By Stephen Heckbert*

First, let me congratulate Annie Cuerrier for her outstanding job as president of the Ottawa/Gatineau chapter for these past months. She has reenergized the society and has created several new initiatives that will pay dividends long into the future. The board will miss her, and the Ottawa communications community will miss her spirit, her warmth and her passionate commitment to the field of communications and public relations.

As for me, I have agreed to return as president of CPRS Ottawa/Gatineau only for the briefest of time prior to our AGM this June. The society needs new thinking, and that's why we need you to consider joining the board and giving of yourself for our society.

We have many exciting things coming up, including a national conference that we will be hosting in the not-so-distant future. We will be launching other exciting initiatives soon, and we will also be bringing new spirit to the community in the coming months. We will continue to work with our members—and our future members—on exciting professional development and interesting and fun social events.

Enjoy the spring, now that it has finally arrived, and please join us for upcoming events—it's always good to see you.

Thank you, as always, for your interest in the society. We need your counsel, and we welcome your feedback. But most importantly, we need you.

## Past-president's Message

*By Annie Cuerrier*

What a great year we've had! We had an impressive line-up of speakers for our professional-development sessions, held an excellent full-day conference in February and recruited a lot of new members to our chapter. We've also received tremendous support from volunteers for many of our events and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them for their valuable help.

I enjoyed serving as your president this past year—it was an excellent opportunity for me to meet a lot of you and to share our thoughts and ideas on topics that interest us all. I also enjoyed working with our board members on various initiatives, from promoting our local chapter to a host of different organizations across the region to organizing high-quality events for our members. Our members were well served by them and I also would like to thank them all for the countless hours of work that they've dedicated to us.

Unfortunately, I will not be able to finish this current term as president as I've recently moved to Toronto. Stephen Heckbert, our past-president, has graciously accepted to step in until our annual general meeting in June.

I hope that you'll continue being an active member of CPRS Ottawa/Gatineau. And should you have any ideas or suggestions on future sessions or initiatives that your local chapter should get involved in, it is always a pleasure to hear from you.

Wishing you a great summer!

# Media Strategy Depends on Who is Involved

## Model provides a starting point for media-relations decisions

By Mark Giles

When a police or law-enforcement agency faces a difficult issue, deciding on a media strategy can involve many factors. If the issue involves charges against a police officer or other person in a position of public trust, it can further complicate an already stressful experience. With the development and use of a sound media-relations policy, however, decisions can be made more easily.


Approaches to media relations often vary, but the public's attitude toward issues with law-enforcement personnel is fairly consistent; a higher standard of conduct is expected and, therefore, a greater degree of openness and transparency is required. Having a model as part of a sound policy can simplify the decision-making process and help determine what constitutes openness in a given situation.

Law-enforcement models exist in a variety of other areas, such as the nationally accepted use-of-force model, which provides a guideline for dealing with offenders of varying threat levels. As with the use of force, media-relations decisions must also be weighed on a case-by-case basis, taking operational needs into account. Public- and media-relations policies exist to help commanders manage issues. Good policies and strategies achieve this, while also maintaining operational security, officer safety and the integrity of investigations as top priorities.

"Media relations must be part of the operational-planning process," said Captain Steve Moore, Canadian Forces Provost Marshal, the military's chief of police. "To ensure appropriate strategy and tactics are employed, media-relations policy must be developed and used at all levels of command."

### A law-enforcement-based model

The following model was developed after consultation with media-relations staff at several Canadian police agencies as well as the Department of National Defence and the Pentagon, which also has its own on-site police agency. Using the type or seriousness

	Criminal Code or other serious offences	Minor Criminal Code or NDA equivalent or federal offence	Police act, NDA or similar legislation	Performance-related disciplinary action
Senior police, military or other enforcement officers	Proactive	Proactive	Proactive or reactive depending on seriousness	Reactive (passive)
Police personnel, civilian and military police, all ranks	Proactive	Proactive	Active or reactive depending on seriousness	Reactive
Military (all ranks and occupations)	Proactive	Active	Active or reactive depending on seriousness	Reactive
Civilian support personnel	Active or reactive depending on seriousness	Reactive	N/A*	Reactive
General public	Proactive or reactive depending on seriousness	Reactive	N/A	N/A

\*Civilians working with police agencies and the military are not normally subject to police acts or the NDA. There are exceptions, however, such as when civilians are deployed on overseas missions with the Canadian Forces or civilians employed with the RCMP.

of an offence along the horizontal axis and the status (employment) of the accused along the vertical axis, it employs the philosophy that more serious offences generally call for a more proactive approach and that the public holds senior officers, and both police and military personnel (generally in that order), to a higher standard of conduct than the public at large. Charges against a member of the public do not normally generate much media interest unless they are very serious, of a unique nature or involve a prominent member of the community.

For this model, the following definitions apply:

*Proactive response* — Taking the initiative to advise the media and public of the incident and any related charges, normally by distributing a news release or holding a news conference or briefing.

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**Active response** — Posting of the incident or charges to a publicly accessible forum, such as a departmental website.

**Reactive (passive) response** — Information not normally distributed publicly, but may be released in response to queries by media or members of the public.

**National Defence Act (NDA)** — Federal charges under the Criminal Code or other legislation, such as the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*, can be laid under Section 130 of the NDA. Other charges, normally disciplinary in nature (similar to those laid under provincial police acts), can also be laid under the NDA.

### Type of offence versus status of the accused

The model balances public expectations of openness and transparency with the seriousness of the alleged offence and provides general guidelines for each category. The higher standard expected of police and law-enforcement officers is also extended—although to a lesser extent—to military and civilian support personnel. While the model recommends a proactive response for all personnel charged with serious offences such as sexual assault, child pornography, large frauds or thefts, it also recognizes that the expectation of transparency is generally less with more minor offences.

### Websites and bulletin boards

Disciplinary (internal) charges or actions against law-enforcement and military personnel, laid either under a police act or other equivalent legislation, are generally considered less serious and do not generate the same level of media interest. Therefore, they can usually be dealt with using an “active” response, including posts to a publicly accessible website or other forum. This forum should not be used as a substitute in situations where a proactive response is warranted, such as high-profile issues or those involving senior officers and other situations that could affect public trust and confidence. However, this forum works well for handling internal charges that do not involve personnel or cases serious enough to require a news release or briefing.

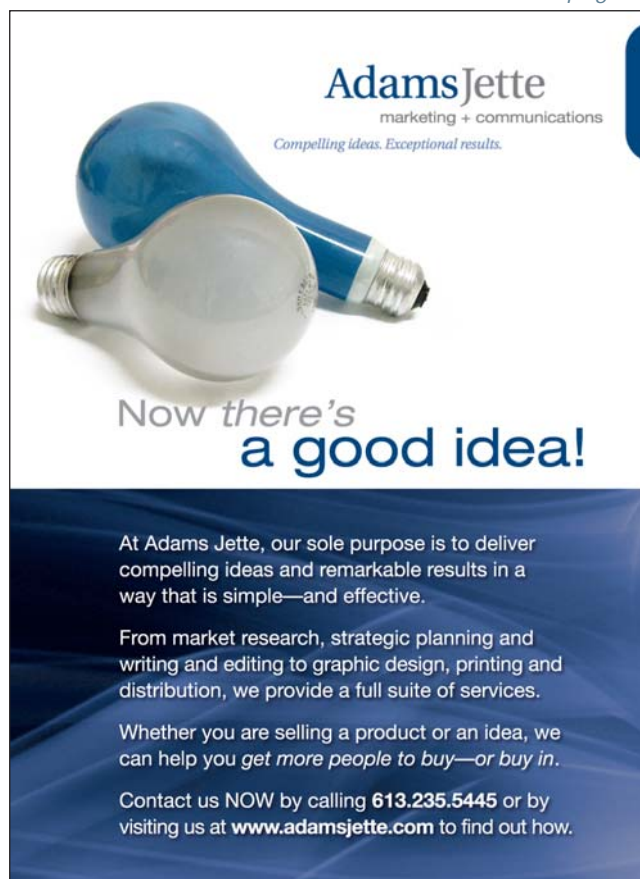
An agency should make reasonable efforts to ensure that interested media and members of the public are aware of the website or bulletin board. DND uses the website of the Chief Military Judge ([www.forces.gc.ca/cmj](http://www.forces.gc.ca/cmj)) to publicize upcoming courts martial of military personnel, and makes considerable efforts to ensure that media and other interested parties know where to find it. When a case calls for a proactive response, the website posting is normally supplemented with a news release.

### Privacy and other factors

The name of a person charged with a criminal offence (young persons and publication bans excepted) is public information and will normally be released unless privacy, security, safety or investigative reasons dictate otherwise. All information is subject to relevant provincial or federal privacy and access-to-information legislation and, regardless of media or public interest, cannot be released if the law prohibits it. This sometimes frustrates reporters, but media-relations strategy and tactics are, like all other police and law-enforcement operations, subject to the rule of law.

Any strategy must take into account that information withheld for valid reasons can still be released later if the situation changes. Once it is released, however, it is difficult to stop or even limit its distribution. Regardless of the decision to release or withhold information, as with use-of-force cases, it is important that agencies be able to articulate the reasons for the actions they take. When they fall within policy guidelines, that policy may need to be explained. If actions were taken due to exceptional circumstances, those circumstances may also need to be explained.

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## Take the Leap Conference a Huge Success

By Christina Stefanski, Public Relations Student, Algonquin College

On February 29 close to 100 CPRS Ottawa/Gatineau members, non-members, students and friends gathered at the Chateau Cartier Resort in Gatineau for *Take the Leap... from Good to Great*—a full-day conference designed around the idea of sharpening our skills to become excellent public relations practitioners.

Seven top experts spoke about a variety of aspects affecting communication in present times. Communications and public relations practitioners learned from Jim Lukaszewski, Edith Wilson, David Scholz, Blair Peberdy, Dr. Terry Flynn, Adele Stevens and Elizabeth Seymour, each of whom offered excellent advice on how to communicate effectively.

Danielle Côté, APR, CPRS Conference Chair, organized the event with help from volunteers and students from Algonquin College, Carleton University and the University of Ottawa. In her opening remarks, President Annie Cuerrier noted that CPRS is growing, vibrant and anxious to help people take a new leap as public relations professionals. Speakers offered communications and public relations practitioners strategies for communication by motivating, inspiring and informing the audience. They covered a wide range of topics, including the importance of face-to-face interaction despite the expansion of social media, the value of traditional media, maintaining relationships to achieve positive results, the importance of respecting others to build strong internal relations and recognizing that crisis can be an opportunity.

“The conference was an excellent professional development session that was true to its theme,” said CPRS National President Derrick Pieters. “It covered a wide variety of topics that addressed many aspects of public relations that practitioners and students need to function effectively.”

In her closing remarks, Danielle Côté thanked all of the professional speakers for their excellent presentations and said that communications and public relations practitioners are “ready to take the challenge from good to great.”

Based on the positive feedback from conference attendants, CPRS Ottawa/Gatineau is considering hosting a similar conference in the future.

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Sometimes an issue is unique. For example, the recent case of the HIV-positive woman in Borden, Ontario was the first of its kind to be handled by the military police and the National Investigation Service. Although the accused was a member of the general public, the other factors involved raised the need for openness and transparency significantly. Given its unique nature and public-health implications, a very proactive response was initiated. This strategy was explained to both internal and external audiences, including the media.

### A workable, flexible policy is the best option

In outlining categories into which the vast majority of situations fall, this media-relations model provides a guideline to determine appropriate strategy for serious incidents or charges involving police, military and law-enforcement personnel. Each situation must still be weighed on a case-by-case basis, balancing the need for openness, maintenance of public trust, individual's privacy rights, operational security and officer safety, and the integrity of investigations and the court process.

This model is developmental in nature and is intended to provide a starting point in the media-relations decision-making process. I welcome your feedback to further refine it for use by the police and law-enforcement community.

*Mark Giles is a senior communications analyst with the Privy Council Office. Although this article was originally written for Blue Line, Canada's national law enforcement magazine, much of the content is relevant to communications practitioners in other fields.*

### CPRS Suffers Loss of Board Member

This past January, the board was saddened to hear of the sudden passing of Mark Salter, Senior Account Executive (Capital Region) with News Canada.

Mark was a member of the Ottawa/Gatineau Board of Directors, a colleague and friend. We will remember Mark for his professionalism, his calm demeanor, his warm smile and his commitment to helping our chapter to grow.

# Another “Public Relations Initiative”

By Andrée-Ann Gagnon and Benoît E. Lalonde, public relations students, Cité collégiale

## PR or Propaganda?

When journalists or news commentators use the phrase “public relations initiative” it is usually done in a very derogatory way. Nevertheless, public affairs officers must follow their mission to gain the trust of their various audiences and work in the interest of the public as well as in the interest of their employer.

When we read the newspaper, listen to the radio or watch television, too often we see and hear a correlation drawn between propaganda, cover-ups, “spin,” deceit—and public relations. A politician goes on a “public relations” tour. A company undertakes a major “public relations initiative.” Even the army can’t escape:

“Since then, the official justification for the invasion (of Afghanistan) has shifted towards “improving the fate of the Afghan people,” much like we quickly forgot about the alleged weapons of mass destruction to talk about the “liberation” of the Iraqis... Of course, this is a **public relations initiative** on the part of the Canadian Armed Forces.” (Frédéric Julien, writing in *Le Devoir* on August 1, 2007 [Loose translation].)

There are numerous examples like these. It is time for us to undertake our own public relations initiative.

## A Profession with a Bad Rep

Public relations does get bad press. But as students, we learn that public relations serve to build relations of trust between a company, an organization or government and their various internal and external audiences. We want to foster knowledge and mutual understanding. We want to promote two-way and balanced communication. We want to work in the interest of the public. We respect ethical principles.

This definition or understanding of public relations is very different from what we see in the media. What is going on?

Are journalists having fun spreading this image of public relations? Do we have too many colleagues who do not share our definition of public relations or the values that should guide us? Is the social or economic reality catching up with us too fast?

The answers to these questions are neither simple nor obvious.

This lack of understanding of the true nature of public relations represents a major challenge for us. We have to show employers, journalists and the general public the true meaning of “public relations initiative.”



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## Newly Accredited Members

CPRS Ottawa/Gatineau is pleased to announce that two members of our local chapter were accredited in 2007: **Léa Werthman**, Senior Communications Advisor with Service Canada and **Mark Buzan**, Principal of Action Strategies.

The accreditation process measures and recognizes a member's experience and competence in the professional practice of public relations. For more information on becoming an APR, contact Cindy Goldberg (cindy@blueprintpr.ca).

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