

PR SA versus UK

On a recent trip to London, I had the good fortune to meet up with a former Grapevine colleague, who left South Africa five years ago and with whom I have remained in contact. She subsequently stayed in the PR/communications industry, for the first two years working for a London PR agency, later moving outside London and joining a franchise business as their PR/marketing manager. Today she is the media relations manager for corporate in Berkshire.



By [Marie Yossava](#), issued by [Grapevine Communications](#) 4 Nov 2013

We obviously talked shop and compared markets and what, if anything, the PR industry is doing differently in the UK. South Africans often elevate 'First World market' practices and I had thought I would hear her listing the many things that the UK does differently, if not better. To my surprise, she praised South Africa's approach and even suggested that we did some things better!

She pointed out that the UK outshines us in terms of their media pool, also in the trade sectors, and glancing at our copy in the office of the UK's Brad Insight media directory, there are thousands of more print titles in addition to other media platforms. When it comes to specific trade industries, the former colleague readily agreed that there is a bigger pie and therefore it is easier to deliver great results. I added that it's becoming even more difficult locally as advertising spend is diminishing and print titles are declining. While there is an onslaught of new media platforms they are not replacing these titles at the same rate.

She indicated that we had better-prepared (confident) company spokespersons willing to speak out or share their opinions, thought-leadership articles as opposed to the companies and clients she had worked for or experienced. Reflecting on seven years with Grapevine, she said our clients had more readily agreed to be in the public eye and saw the value of having a voice in the media. She felt that in the UK it was easier to be silent rather than say anything. A genuine fear of the media exists, which could perhaps be attributed to the ruthless tabloid press and the investigative journalism budgets that some of the more influential titles still have access to. Also, with such a broad spectrum of businesses operating in the sectors - promotional gifts, franchising, telecoms - there are many more companies competing for column centimetres!

On the social media front, the lines are still not very clear and in many cases, it boils down to the opinions that individuals have of social media and whether the brand should/could operate in this medium. In her current role, the former colleague operates in a particularly sensitive sector with associated security risks and as such has to deal with personal views versus business opinion. Do the two collide or can they coexist? By having an individual profile linked to your role, is your opinion then associated with the business that employs you? If you say something derogatory about a customer on your personal profile page, does this become a company matter?

The debate will continue and neither of us foresees a concrete solution. HR departments implement social media policies, and there will continue to be a legal bearing attached to what you say and do on social media. Approaching similar agencies within the PR/communications sector has not provided much guidance either and it would appear that while a number jumped in with both feet first when social media became the 'in thing', they are licking their wounds today. Before you launch into social media, it is important to clearly understand your objectives, audience and content. For now, after two third-party audits, the former colleague's company has decided to rather monitor social media but not to participate in it.

Hearing this confirmed that Grapevine's approach to social media had been correct.

ABOUT MARIE YOSSAVA

Marie Yossava, founder and owner of Grapevine Communications, embarked on a PR/communications career more than two decades ago. In the past twenty years she has built a solid media relations consultancy, which focuses exclusively on media relations.
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