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Shaping the field: Bob Heath and the two volumes of the *Encyclopedia of Public Relations*



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ABSTRACT

The five papers on this theme emerged from a plenary panel with the same title as the one above at the third Barcelona International PR Conference held on 2–3 July, 2013. They were stimulated by the then-forthcoming publication of the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Public Relations* although they also address the first edition, the place of both in the public relations field, and links to issues surrounding encyclopedias in general. At the time of this submission, most of the authors had not seen the complete published copy that was released in late September, 2013. All five articles, albeit with some overlap as this was not a co-written project, are presented here as individual pieces with different titles and a variety of approaches.

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Encyclopedia of Public Relations, Second Edition: Another step in the path toward understanding the profession

As I write about the *Encyclopedia of Public Relations* (2nd ed.) which I edited for Sage Publications, I await the arrival of my copy. As of today, August 27, 2013, the book is due out early in September. It is touted to be 1152 pages long, capturing in two volumes the state of academic thinking about the profession and best practices of public relations.

When I was asked to do the first edition (*EPR1*), I was amazed that a major communication publishing company such as Sage was interested in this project and, moreover, thought it would sell. That is always the final, or is it first, criterion for a publishing project. Then, over the years, I received favorable comments and sales reports. I even saw it cited in scholarly work. Who would have thought?

Then, one day, I received an email from Sage. The author of the email asked if I would be interested in discussing a second edition. Such calls are particularly interesting because one is again dealing, at least in the case of Sage, with the reference book production folks. They see the world differently from academics, and they have a different market in mind, although they certainly are not disinterested in the academic side.

They wanted to do a second edition! Really? Who would have thought? I said, yes, and we discussed what it should cover. We had a quite different sense of what the second edition should be. For instance, they thought the sales for *EPR1* in Europe and other parts of the globe were a bit disappointing. So, they said, don't give those topics much attention. They wanted to cut biographies, including those on women. They felt that sources such as Wikipedia provided that sort of detail and libraries don't like to pay for what readers can get for free. Other matters were discussed. I was asked to create a proposal; that was merely a formality because they were sold on the project but a proposal is the start of the book's scope and purpose. Thus, at that time, I suggested that if we had more authors from outside of the US, we could not only enrich the book's content but increase its market—and sales! Now I had their interest.

Knowing the virtue of an advisory board from my work on *EPR1*, I quickly scrambled to get “second opinions.” Virtually none of the biographies are available online. Few of the authors in *EPR1* were from outside of the USA, and the number of engaged scholars and professionals outside the USA had increased dramatically since 2003 when we were creating the first edition. And the discipline was changing in dramatic and quite interesting ways. But, I worried, can I convince the editorial team?

So, the upshot of my proposal was that 150 *EPR1* entries were reprinted verbatim. 190 entries were revised, some quite substantially, and 160 new entries were added. Some entries, including biographies were cut, but I got other biographies included. So, with the two editions together, it is an amazing statement about the persons, mostly from the US, who created the modern version of the profession. Moreover, we not only kept all of the entries on women, but carved out an appendix that reprinted all but two and framed them as part of the growing impact of women on the profession. Two of the entries on women were featured as freestanding because they truly were giants—and we had ample material to write long entries on them. (By the way, including bios on women has appeal for sales since so many students today are young women.)

Then, I went out further on the limb. I contended that instead of ignoring non-USA sales, we should go for more international appeal. And, as much as intellectual appeal gets publishers' attention, sales really rings the bell. Authors love to recommend to libraries the purchase of books that contain their work. But that meant that I had to be able to get advisors who could help me expand the topics. Not only did we need topics, but authors.

Along the way as we planned, we began to realize how much an encyclopedia is a living document, and one that records, but also charts directions. So, we set out to revise and add.

Most revisions were created by the previous authors who knew well how trends of various kinds were shaping and reshaping the topic entries on which they had written. Some were retitled to highlight changes. We didn't want to dwell on changes, but record them accurately. Dwelling too much tends to diminish the value of the first edition. Instead of being “wrong,” it merely needed certain updates. One of the most recurrent updates was created by innovations and changes in new media.

But, beyond relatively minor, but important, changes for new media, we realized that we needed new media topics. Several of the advisors had their fingers on those changes, but more importantly, they had doctoral students who were our “experts.” What an opportunity for our next generation of academics to get their publication start with the encyclopedia. Not only would that have ego value, but served well as they were looking for jobs. They now had “evidence” of their expertise. Thanks to the heavens that we had access to them. They wrote on topics that to me were beyond obscure but which help readers not only to learn a technical vocabulary, but understand the mechanics of current computer assisted communication.

We expanded the number of countries and geographical areas that we could highlight. Public relations is an emerging discipline in many countries, some of which offer great challenges and opportunities. In many countries topics such as democracy, media availability, and propaganda are old hat topics or taken for granted. In other countries, democracy is tenuous or perhaps merely a dream. Media are less available, but also more likely to suffer government elites' control. Propaganda is not something to be ignored or shunned, but the reality of daily practice as ruling elites work to convince their constituents that they have a choice between the elites' way or the highway. But, we also have expanded topics on

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