

# Executive Memo

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Focus on  
Communications

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## E-mail & Public Relations

by Brigid O'Connor, MBA



eBay, eTrade, eCommerce, eGreetings, eZine—all words now considered common that didn't even exist ten years ago. And the mother of all new words is surely e-mail.

Let's travel back in time to 1993. I was at the Colorado Bar Association (CBA) as assistant director of communications. The computers were Unix based, we used Word Perfect and the CBA didn't have a URL let alone e-mail access for staff—most associations didn't.

Fast forward to 2002, I was working at the Medical Group Management Association as the vice president of marketing and communications. I received about 150 e-mails a day, we published several e-newsletters, ceaselessly updated our Web content, and reporters shot us e-mail queries without a second thought.

E-mail is likely the most praised and simultaneously cursed phenomena of the last decade, and its impact on public relations is astounding. A 2002 survey of 142 journalists conducted by Vocus, Inc. found that 70 percent of respondents cited the Internet and e-mail as technology that had the most significant impact on journalism in the past three years. The same survey asked journalists to rank their preferences for receiving releases and 43 percent selected e-mail with attachments. E-mail with links came in second. Overall 83 percent of journalists preferred e-mailed releases.

"Since the majority of information I receive from public relations people either doesn't fit the topics I report on or doesn't fit the magazine itself, it's a lot simpler to quickly scan an e-mail and delete it than have to deal with it by phone," says Michael Romano, a reporter for *Modern Healthcare Magazine*. "On the rare occasions when I get something that

is useful or interesting, it's also much simpler to reply by e-mail

for more information. Either way, it beats both the phone and the fax."

Cynthia Rosso, vice president of communications for the Regulatory Affairs Professionals Society (RAPS) has developed an e-mail dependent tactic that assures reporters receive only what they need. "At RAPS we created an e-list, which the press can join through an online form or by contacting us directly," says Rosso. "We now mail very few press releases by snail mail, opting rather to develop our e-list and post releases online through a press release service. It's saved us lots of time and expense, and it gets the message out quicker."

But e-mail also offers its share of trials and tribulations. Philip Rahrig, executive director for the American Galvanizers Association, was pleased when an editor expressed interest in an article he'd written. But he didn't realize that the size and format for pictures and graphs would mean that he'd have to send and resend the information to the editor.

"I finally gave up and burned a CD of the article. It seems his [the editor's] computer and e-mail service could not handle the size of the file and somehow the file kept getting corrupted when he tried to open it," says Rahrig. "The moral of the story...our desire for technological advancement and the economics and ease it delivers, sometimes far outweighs our ability to deal with it."

Certainly e-mail's impact on public relations also reaches beyond media relations.

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## PR E-mail

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According to a survey by the Creative Group, a staffing service for communications professionals, public relations professionals are traveling less and less. Eighty-one percent of respondents named increased e-mail and seventy percent named increased telephone communication as the major replacements for in-person meetings.

John Peterson, Nu Skin Enterprises' director of public relations for North Asia, has never been to the countries he covers. "There really is no necessity for me to travel. I can communicate with my counterparts very easily, and cheaply, via e-mail. We have daily exchanges of information, sometimes just a conversation relative to our public relations challenges and strategies. Rather than stay late at night to accommodate the 14–15 hour time difference, I send my messages during my working hours while the Asians are home asleep. They come to work as I am going home and respond. When I come to work the next day I have their responses and we start again. Convenient, cheap and easy!"

What's next? What new techy word will be tripping off our tongues and reshaping public relations before we know it? According to "Clique of Instant Messagers Expands into the Workplace" written by Amy Harmon in

the March 11, 2003 *New York Times*, "IM-ing" might be it.

"Less intrusive than a phone call and more immediate than e-mail, instant messaging is finding users far more quickly than e-mail did when it was first introduced, according to Forrester Research... "In the last year alone, Forrester said, the number of instant messages has grown by more than 50 percent... The latest in a string of technologies that conspire to demand faster responses at more hours of the day, instant messaging quickens the pace and broadens the volume of communication for many of its users. More than pagers, cell phones or e-mail, it provides the ability to broadcast an almost constant online presence."

Just as subject lines rule in e-mail land, with IM-ing acronyms rule. So I'll end with one of IM-ing's omnipresent acronyms—B4N or in other words "bye for now." ♦

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*Through At Ease, LLC, O'Connor offers media training and public speaking guidance, along with counsel and implementation in issues management, message development, communications audits, publications enrichment, brand management, and organizational development in terms of building/rebuilding communications departments. O'Connor can be reached at [b\\_oconnor@earthlink.net](mailto:b_oconnor@earthlink.net).*

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## President's Message


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are all over the board—movies, family, sports—even discussions on industry issues!

There is no better way to meet your peers face-to-face than the CSAE Annual Conference in Colorado Springs, May 29–31, 2003. Not only will there be great educational and informational sessions, there will be lots and lots of opportunities to network and communicate with others. We have a much to learn from each other and sometimes, this event is a great way to get away from work, relax and learn. Kathy Smith, Jeff Arnold and their committee have come up with a terrific conference program. If you haven't seen it,

check it out on page 6–7 or on the CSAE Web site, [www.csaenet.org](http://www.csaenet.org). Don't be left out. The conference will be filled with networking opportunities, education and lots of fun. Mark your calendars and register today. I look forward to seeing you there!

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*Karen M. Wojdyla*  
President