

## Holistic Communications: A Leadership Role for Public Relations?

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First and foremost, to effectively compete in an increasingly competitive environment, public relations professionals need to become more serious business people. We need to train staff to be more capable of handling higher business relationships. And we need to attract more people who are capable of working in this capacity. Many public relations professionals have very little knowledge of the elements in the marketing mix outside of PR or advertising. To truly understand the value of our industry and to seize additional opportunities in the communications business, we need to understand all aspects in the mix, not just our own.

Just as important is a commitment to strategy and evaluation. We must continue to move away from the perception that we are just executors, and not creators, of a strategy. It isn't enough to say our programs are strategic; we must show this by ensuring that at its core, our work is rooted in strategic audience insights. And of course, our strategies must always link to overall business objectives and goals. As the creators of strategy, public relations professionals need to fully understand the importance of measurement—and how best to measure a program's value and impact across industries and geographies.

Whether public relations leads or supports another discipline, we would all be well served to use our expertise and talents to make integration work. Only when we do this can communications programs really reach their full potential.

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### Graham Calls for New Measurement Model, Issues Tracking Expertise

The public relations industry must create “a grounded, understandable and measurable model” for proving the real value of its contribution to organizational success, Fleishman-Hillard chairman and CEO John Graham told an audience in New York last week. And PR professionals must position themselves to take advantage of an expanded mission: to become “the integrator of all messages across the company and across all audiences.”

Graham was delivering the 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Distinguished Lecture for the Institute for Public Relations. His address was the second major speech at an IPR event in recent weeks, following the remarks of Burson-Marsteller founder Harold Burson in London last month (reported in the October 25 issue of *The Holmes Report*.)

Graham told the audience that public relations people “need to prepare ourselves professionally for the increasing role we will have the opportunity to play in helping companies anticipate and prepare for issues, problems and opportunities that may be coming down the track three years, or even five years, out.

“If we are able to anticipate and put communications programs in place to meet those future issues or problems, or to take advantage of those opportunities, we will be considered highly valued members of top management and key advisors to boards of directors.”

To do that, however, public relations people need to “get our act together in further proving the real value of what we do.”

He called for the development of a “a sound, scientifically grounded, understandable and measurable model that takes media tracking data and audience opinion data—which many companies already collect—and uses that information to demonstrate the value that communications programs contribute to key business outcomes,” such as brand value, market value, and earnings per share.

In addition, “we must be able to take on the job of creating and maintaining a comprehensive vision of the future economic and social issues that will impact business outcomes for our respective companies. This means, of course, we must become futurists and learn to think, to plan, and to execute on a long-range basis.”

That would lead to an expanded, more strategic role for the senior public relations professional. “He or she must become the person who sees how all of the pertinent present and future issues come together as a backdrop for company actions, and also become the manager of influential relationships and a brand building champion who can be effective in the urgent world we will live in for decades to come,” Graham says.