Public relations texts to refer to events, Web sites, etc, which as' was used previously. For 7) report that some historians ng the words 'public' and 8) others say the term was the Yale graduating class of tape recordings of interviews Queensland in the late 1990s Public Relations Institute of to Associate Professor Gael ney (Public Communication , in political science, public i.e. “only as a channel or al context. say with the Sydney Daily respected political reporter.

PR and web technology: a match made in virtual heaven?

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Abstract

Online communication has become an accepted term amongst Australian public relations practitioners and academics alike. However, effective models by which to research and practice in a virtual environment are yet to be fully developed. Instead, traditional communication techniques have been modified to include new media technology such as websites and corporate blogs and more recently social media, in an attempt to address the ever-growing need for organizations to ‘have an online presence’ or at least online elements to their communication campaigns (Chia, 2006; Kent, Taylor and White, 2002). This paper will argue that simply modifying traditional public relations techniques is an inadequate approach to developing online community engagement campaigns. It will instead demonstrate the necessary interdependence of communications, web technology development and design in order to show how a website designed for online community engagement, might be created. This is a central theme underpinning the rationale behind the development of the Australian Asbestos Network website, an NHMRC funded public health communication initiative due to launch in November 2010 and designed to engage the Australian community on the issue of Asbestos-related diseases and their various causes.

Keywords: new media, web technology, online communication, online community, public health communication.

Introduction

For organizations with an interest in online communications, developing and maintaining an online presence is more than just uploading material into the virtual space. It involves building active and interactive relationships with real people, not just Internet Protocol (IP) addresses and to do this successfully involves working with in diverse professional discourses and translating these into practice. Hardware and software designers, content creators, graphic designers and communications practitioners all have to understand the strategy and work together to achieve the main communication goals. The final product has to attract a community of interest and build two-way relationships in an
online space. However, current practice in public relations does not appear to support a multi-disciplinary approach to new media, in particular, website development. In fact, public relations practitioners, who should be the mediators of information between disciplines in order to ensure the effective translation of communication objectives set by the owners of the website, often don’t understand the technology themselves. This can lead to ineffective websites due to the lack of understanding between the public relations practitioners, who are often the project managers, the technology developers, the aesthetic designers and the content developers.

This breakdown in communication is further exacerbated in fields outside of public relations, where audience interaction is treated as one-way communication rather than a more complex interaction between the organisation and their key stakeholders. Website owners such as medical practitioners, often don’t know how to enact effective online communications strategies for the purpose of relationship building and as such, gravitate to traditional mass communications methods, which although effective in some demographic groups, is no longer effective in the more technology savvy groups such as Generations X and Y (Chia, 2006; Kent, Taylor & White, 2003). Even so, the activation of web technology provides a neutral yet accessible environment in which to build relationships and thus is an important area for the public relations industry to understand and ultimately master. In areas such as public health, where engagement and consultation with communities is more important than merely having a ‘web presence’, the challenge of developing online relationships is crucial (Bonniface, Green & Swanson, 2006). Thus, in order for websites to be effective in community engagement, public relations practitioners must be informed and conversant with the languages of Web 2.0, in particular, technology, as well as communication (Gregory, 2004).

In a recent National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) grant project entitled Asbestos Stories, the online space has become an environment in which Australians affected by Asbestos-related diseases can share their experiences with the online community. Through the use of media content production techniques, an interactive website and online archive have been produced providing a source of medical and public health information and a platform for personal stories to be told. Drawing on principles of effective website design (Kent et al, 2003), user interactivity (Gustavsen & Tilley, 2003) and website usability (Hallahan, 2001) in public relations, the website incorporates new media elements such as an interactive online community and research forum and interactive archive.

This paper will analyze the initial stages of web and content development for Asbestos Stories and its current iteration known as the Australian Asbestos Network. The paper will discuss the role of the public relations practitioner as the primary mediator of multiple discourses between various professionals involved in the development, design and management process. It will attempt to define and explain some of the challenges faced by practitioners when working in the online space. The discussion will first explore the literature on the use of new media technology in public relations practice and the challenges associated with the application of technology in engaging communities online, followed by a first person narrative account of the case study. The paper will culminate by posing a conceptual framework (Figure 1) by which to further research the process of developing an interactive media website to engage an online community through the mobilization of a public relations campaign, supported by a web production environment that fosters creative collaboration and utilizes a range of web technologies to achieve the intended goals.

**Literature review**

Over the past decade, rhetoric surrounding the use of new media in public relations has focused on the fast mobilization of technology to meet organizational communication goals. As described by Argenti and Barnes (2009), the Internet developed from a mass communication medium that generally only facilitated one-way interactions with users, commonly termed Web 1.0, to what we understand the Internet to be today, commonly referred to as Web 2.0. In response, the public relations industry has been required to keep pace with the implementation of emerging new media as online stakeholders increasingly take control over the way in which content is produced for and delivered to them. In a 2008 report by the Society of New Communication Research (SNCR) conducted to determine how new media is impacting on marketing and public relations, it is suggested that one of the key challenges for the industry centres on the role of stakeholders and consumers as new influencers.

> While mainstream media continues to play a vital role in the dissemination of information, even these traditional channels are increasingly being influenced by online conversations. The “new influencers” are beginning to tear at the fabric of marketing as it has existed for 100 years, giving rise to a new style of marketing that is characterized by conversation and community. (p. 11)

As the communications industries that, in the not so distant past, were used to the balance of power and control over information dissemination being squarely in their court, this shift has seen a distinct change in the way in which organizations react to the emergence of new media (MacNamara, 2010). This has meant that in public relations, the selection of appropriate channels for specific publics and stakeholders, traditionally conducted through a process of research and evaluation, has been potentially sacrificed in favour of fast and efficient uptake of the latest and newest technology available. Thus the professional and academic conversation surrounding the transformative power of new media technologies on the media industries, including public relations, has begun to gain traction (Flew, 2008; MacNamara, 2010).
As discussed by Wright and Hinson (2008; 2009; 2010), there is still a distinct lack of empirical research available in the literature on how the pace of new media development is impacting on traditional public relations processes. However, there is an increasing amount of academic and industry commentary revolving specifically around the use of weblogs and other social media as organizational communications tools. They suggest that the uptake in new media use, specifically social media, may be because of its ability to meet traditional strategic communications objectives that focus on building two-way symmetrical relationships, as suggested by Grunig in the Excellence Study (1992; 2002). Wright and Hinson report that a recurring theme in their 2008 analysis was that practitioners appear to believe that “blogs and social media have had a huge impact, moving public relations into the direction of facilitating more two-way communication by opening up direct channels of communications between organizations and their publics.” (p. 19). In this it appears that practitioners are attempting to work with new media, specifically, web technologies, in order to achieve public relations objectives that would otherwise be set for offline strategies.

**New media technologies and public relations practice**

The public relations industry has attempted to keep pace with the changing technological landscape by adapting strategies and tactics to incorporate the variety of new media options available. According to Flew (2008), the interactive nature of Web 2.0 has been popular with industry because of its unique features including “...participation, interactivity, collaborative learning, and social networking...” (p. 17). He suggests that as the quality of online participation increases so does the number of online participants thus attracting more users to websites. This is understandably an attractive element of Web 2.0 for the public relations industry, whose role is to build relationships with key stakeholders but have found the task of locating them in the physical world notoriously difficult.

The public relations departments of organisations have had the primary responsibility for filling websites with content to be delivered online to audiences within a planned strategy, not unlike the traditional use of brochures, posters and advertisements in the offline world (Gregory, 2004). However, the role has not been in control of the development of the software that is responsible for turning text, audio and images into web readable formats. Thus until the movement from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 got underway at the turn of the 21st century, the public relations practitioner did not have direct input into how content was developed and displayed online. However, the role of the practitioner in shaping websites and their associated software packages has begun to strengthen, yet is underpinned by a number of barriers to the use of web technology in practice.

**Barriers to new media uptake in public relations**

According to Fitch (2009), in her study of practitioners’ use of new media in Singapore and Malaysia, there are several issues that appear to be contributing to these barriers, including general anxiety towards the use of new media, the implications that new media has on the everyday role of the PR practitioner in terms of pace and workload, and the perceived ways in which new media will change the profession. Of particular interest is that some of the practitioners who were interviewed acknowledged that the communications environment is changing as new media grows and that the industry has to change with it, even if practitioners themselves don’t want or like the idea of change. Several interviewees suggested that anxiety towards the implications of new media surrounding the lack of interpersonal interaction with stakeholders in online communication, as well as their lack of understanding of how new media can be used as a strategy, were also reasons for the apparent lack of uptake by practitioners. One interesting point was that in Singapore and Malaysia, practitioners who were concerned about the speed of new media because of their lack of experience, saw the “domain of the young” (p. 27).

However, Porter and Sallott (2003) suggest that the use of web technology may not be due to personal anxiety over competence, suggesting that “the World Wide Web is playing a increasingly prominent part in the strategic practice of public relations, and the various professional roles practitioners play and their status is linked to their varying levels of Web use.” (p. 615). They suggest that managers use the web for research and evaluation, as well as for personal networking, more than technicians but that overall, practitioners are not technology-phobic or ‘laggards’ as other writers would suggest.

Gregory (2004) argues that there are other barriers to the use of new media in public relations but a key theme is the lack of technological progress specific to practice.

Despite major advances, there are, however, significant barriers to further progress. One is based on to develop and promote technological advances. This is not always straightforward since a technological edge could be regarded as a competitive advantage. The other is based on some specific technological issues; for example, one of the principal barriers to Internet and electronic communication is the plethora of hardware and software systems that exist and their incompatibility. Communication between them can be difficult and sometimes impossible. The situation is further compounded by the abundance of legacy systems and archive documentation, which can be inaccessible to the latest systems. (p. 247)

In this analysis, Gregory has highlighted the direct impact of the diversity and complexity of technology on the practice of public relations rather than the personal experience or emotional attitudes of practitioners. This is a key piece of evidence that could help to develop a framework for online public relations.
practice, which links the use and understanding of web technology to traditional notions of effective relationship building specific to online community engagement.

**The challenge of engaging online communities**

There is agreement in both industry and academia that new media is changing the way public relations is practiced. Fitch (2009b) states "The very idea of communication management is challenged in a society in which anyone is potentially a producer of information and as such information can not - and, indeed some would argue should not - be managed in a controlled top-down sense." (p. 337). According to Fitch, one of the key challenges is to engage the online audience in authentic, open dialogue without domination from the corporation or institution. In her discussion of how new media may be mobilized in community engagement, what she terms e-engagement, Fitch highlights several other factors that add to the difficulties associated with utilizing the online environment for relationship building including representation of demographic groups, ability to authenticate interactions with stakeholders and requirements to comply with legislation regarding the use of technologies such as email.

Researchers outside of the public relations academy also reflect this difficulty in defining and determining how to enact the online environment for community engagement. Preece (2000) attempts to define the use of the term ‘online community’ as a way of describing how people come together in a virtual space in response to a shared interest. Foreshadowing the difficulties in defining what the term community means in the real world, Preece provides four elements of a working definition of online community. This framework is useful in understanding how online community engagement might be achieved through public relations processes by outlining the necessary elements of online community website strategy (p. 10).

- People, who interact socially as they strive to satisfy their own needs or perform special roles such as leading or moderating.
- A shared purpose, such as an interest, need, information exchange, or service that provides a reason for the community.
- Policies, in the form of tacit assumptions, rituals, protocols, rules, and laws that guide people’s interactions.
- Computer systems, to support and mediate social interaction and facilitate a sense of togetherness.

However, when analyzing the public relations research, it appears this approach is not evident in practice. Instead the focus is on the management of online stakeholder relationships to meet organizational objectives (Debussy, Watson, Pitt & Ewing, 2000; Chia, 2004; Vorvoreanu, 2006; Xifraa & Huertas, 2008). This is useful in linking public relations concepts to the use of websites and other new media but doesn’t focus on the opposite end of the relationship implicit in Preece’s definition. That is, the power of the stakeholder in the community to choose to engage with the organization or not. Social media in particular has provided a forum for online communities to develop around issues involving organizations but without the need to include the organization in the conversation. The new challenge that public relations practitioners face when trying to enact online community engagement campaigns is how to get invited into the community.

Waters, Burnett, Lucas & Lamm (2009) investigated this phenomena in their study on how non-profit organizations use Facebook to engage with stakeholders. They found that most of the organizations they studied were being “open and transparent about disclosing who ran the site and what they sought to accomplish” (p. 105). However, they did not know how to enable and enact the interactive nature of social networking forums, whether they be independent from the organization such as Facebook or linked directly to the organization’s own website. This poses a significant challenge for the development of a useful framework for practice. In order to understand how to use the technology, the public relations practitioner must first understand what the technology does and how to mobilize the various interactive elements of Web 2.0 into strategies that are based on the needs of the community.

Carpentier (2009) brings an important perspective to this discussion in his analysis of how the online audience perceives the notion of participation in new media and the role traditional mass communication channels have in developing participation in the online world. Importantly, Carpentier highlights the importance of mass communication in the offline world to enhance the participatory nature of new media on the Internet.

The development of the Internet, and especially the web, would not only render all information available to all, but would also create a new communicative paradigm with, in its slipstream, the promise of a structural increase of the level of (media) participation. In the meantime, this dream seems to have come true, at least at first sight: while at first people still had to make the effort of constructing their own web pages, the Web 2.0 technologies now provide popular and accessible ways to publish texts, images, and audio and video material. (p. 410)

This adds strength to the notion that the development of web technology for community engagement should be developed collaboratively in order to maximize the potential of the technology to attract people and engage them in the production of content contributed to the community through existing platforms such as Facebook.
Scott Poole (2010) discusses this in his analysis of how web technology is being used to foster communications research. He discusses the importance of understanding the collaborative nature of web technology in order to maximize its potential as a facilitator of engagement and interaction.

In today’s world, with so much of people’s everyday interaction dependent on technology and its functions, learning how to use technology to communicate, research, and interact effectively with others is now, more than ever, at a premium. We may safely assume that future technological reliance will not decrease or diminish anytime soon. (p. 758).

He goes on to pose three challenges, which mirror those in the PR literature: determining if communication technology can really promote collaboration; determining the implications of the rapid pace of technology development on research; and determining how to use the technology to transform the way in which research is done online.

This paper will now investigate how web technology can be used to promote engagement and what the implications are for public relations practitioners as collaborators in the technology development process. This question will be further explored in the following case study analysis and discussion.

Case study: The Australian asbestos network

Methodology

The following discussion looks at the process undertaken by the Asbestos Stories research group in planning, developing, producing and managing the website and online archive and associated media content. In order to begin to develop the elements of the conceptual framework (Figure 1), an analysis of the differences and similarities in discourse interactions between the individual research group members and between the research group and the web production and design team was undertaken as ethnographic observation, a qualitative technique employed by researchers “where the communication behaviour they wish to study is embedded in a particular social context” (Frey, Botan, Freidman & Kreps, 1992, p. 255) was selected as the most appropriate methodology.

Following an exploratory field research methodology, I became a participant observer due to the multiple aspects of my involvement in the project.

1. As the public relations research group member.
2. As the public relations practitioner and project manager.
3. As the researcher.

The following narrative is constructed from the first hand experiences I encountered and as such, the case study is structured around personal observations within the various roles I played, as detailed above. The key limitation is the narrow perspective through which the phenomena are being scrutinised and the subsequent personal judgments made in relation to each item of investigation. The key advantage is the opportunity presented by this unique position to investigate the phenomena through the lenses of both the practitioner and researcher in the process of designing, building and implementing the case study under investigation. Thus the case study is ‘live’ and being created in conjunction with the research process and in some cases created by the research process itself.

It is therefore important to highlight that this case study is a narrative description of my experience of the process that was undertaken in the first NHMRC grant project and is continuing in a second NHMRC grant project, and provides a basis for further research in the coming stages of the PhD research. This discussion will be enhanced by both quantitative survey and qualitative interview data collection with the various research and production group members to further analyze the themes that have arisen from this initial exploration.

Developing the technology and building the website

In 2007, the NHMRC (National Health and Medical Research Council) granted funding to a consortium of Australian medical, public health and epidemiological researchers with the purpose of investigating the causes, treatments and ultimately potential cures for diseases related specifically to Asbestos exposure, which included the cancer Mesotheioma and lung disease Asbestosis. This consortium was called the National Centre for Asbestos Related Disease (NCARD) and was funded for three years until mid 2010. NCARD described its vision on its website.

Our hope is to have a positive influence on health care and social policy by adopting a multidisciplinary, collaborative approach to asbestos related research. Our national and international links will ensure the development of high quality research and clinical collaborations and our commitment to the dissemination of knowledge about asbestos related diseases to the scientific, health and wider community will ensure greater awareness of asbestos related diseases.” (National Centre for Asbestos Related Diseases)

In order to achieve the latter part of the group’s vision, the epidemiological researchers, based at the University of Western Australia in Perth, collaborated with a specialist research group comprising academics from radio and print journalism and history, based at Murdoch University. This group conceptualized the development of an interactive media website and historical archive that would be available to the Australian community via the Web. The primary purpose of the initial concept was to tell the stories of people who had been affected by Asbestos-related disease, particularly those who had worked in Wittenoom and
surrounding areas in northern Western Australia from 1943 to 1966. Some of these stories were originally collected for the radio documentary ‘Deadly Dust’ commissioned by the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Authority) and aired in 2008. They were then produced for the online environment and would be paired with both visual imagery and text in the Asbestos Stories section of the website. In addition to recorded interviews, the team was also assembling in one place as much historical material as could be found in local libraries and archives.

**Developing the web production plan**

As the production of the media content was undertaken, the task of bringing together such a broad range of content from various sources into a fully functional website was a significant challenge. The group had contracted a web designer who had designed the software for the archive but as the content expanded it became clear that the project required specific expertise in both web development and communication. To meet this need, the group seconded a public relations academic, with industry-gained online communications experience, to develop a tailored framework for delivering the content they had collected to date.

A second stage of web development was undertaken to integrate two forms of web software that would work together to deliver a rich experience for the intended online audience. This included a thorough interrogation of appropriate design concepts, technological platforms and content formats based on the premise that the website needed to pay respect and highlight the stories of those people who had been interviewed, some of whom were gravely ill, and achieve the overall strategic goal of engaging the Australian community on the issue of Asbestos-related disease. With this in mind, the group embarked on a production trajectory that focused on merging the audio and visual elements that had been the drivers of the initial website, into a media rich, interactive experience based on the principles of effective audience engagement.

At this point in the project, it was becoming clearer that the website had the capacity to be not just a repository for information but also the focal point of an emerging online community. This would necessitate the development of an engagement strategy within a traditional issues management framework. What made this website different from others was that it was not owned by a corporate entity with a particular commercial interest in the issue. Instead it was being developed, produced and managed on behalf of medical and public health researchers whose intention was to curb the ongoing negative affects of Asbestos in the Australian built environment. It was hoped that by gathering together an online community of interest, based around the personal asbestos stories and by providing an interactive platform for public health and medical information to be disseminated in one place, a forum for community engagement might be possible.

**Developing a productive web development environment**

The key challenge for the research group was to determine which web technology platforms would be the most appropriate in delivering the intended outcomes of the final website. However the multi-disciplinary research team, as experts in the discourses characteristic of their respective fields, found the discourse used in web development and design foreign to them. The public relations group member therefore assumed a central and crucial role. With her background as an online communications practitioner, who had worked closely with web software development and web design practitioners in a commercial environment, she assumed the role of mediator, and in some cases translator, of these multiple and at times conflicting conversations. Her practical skills and the knowledge of the processes involved in developing interactive websites and associated multimedia coupled with her experience as a public relations practitioner and content developer helped the group as a whole to adjust to the demands of working in the online environment.

The public relations practitioner liaised with two web development and design consultancies in order to pull together the functions and design of the website. In order to tell the story of Asbestos in audio and video, text and photos, the software needed to be flexible so as not to put restrictive boundaries around the creative content development process. The software was designed based on two custom content management systems that would deliver a seamless experience but provide a broad range of components that would allow the content developers (the journalists and historians) to freely explore the multiple ways in which to portray the various elements of the story.

One of the main issues in choosing the most appropriate technological platform to use was the group’s lack of knowledge of how to apply the web technology to more traditional media production modes such as editing text or sound for radio and the selection of text and images for print. This presented a number of challenges including the content producers’ lack of technical knowledge of the online environment, the web developers’ lack of awareness of content production challenges and providing definition of these through the mediation process. This became more evident as the project progressed and the mediation role further developed to involve translation of the web development discourse into media production discourse so as to ensure the group members were aware of what the technology could achieve and therefore engage with the technology as a creative enabler rather than inhibitor.

**The role of the public relations group member**

Throughout the process of developing the media website and archive, the public relations group member’s role was integral to the successful translation of the media production members’ goals and communication needs. The creative
process was enabled and enhanced by this mediation role as it took on the responsibility to ensure that the web development and design consultants were accurately briefed at all stages of the development process. This meant that the content producers could focus on the content with the knowledge that the technology could be designed to suit their varying needs.

The public relations group member's relationship with the web development and design team and ability to clearly communicate the objectives of both the media and archive websites, was crucial in guiding the project towards its intended outcomes. The most important of these outcomes was the development of the website to create a platform to attract and engage an online community of interest, specifically for the development of an online communication forum aimed at communicating the legacy of Asbestos-related illness in Australia, the current impact on society and the education of Australians on minimizing the risk of exposure and therefore reducing the risk of illness in the future.

In late 2009, the project was given a boost by a second successful NHMRC grant bid. This grant will focus on developing the community engagement aspects of the site including the interactive community research forum. This will be the focus of the PhD project linked to the ongoing development of the website and the associated public health communication initiatives in the offline environment.

**Discussion: A conceptual framework for future research**

The above account of the development and production of the interactive media website poses several items of investigation, which have been depicted in the conceptual framework below and introduced in the literature review.

![Conceptual Framework](image)

This conceptual framework provides a map for research into the specifics of the design and development process of an online community engagement website utilizing several new media technology platforms and gives rise to questions for future investigation detailed below, which will be researched in the PhD study associated with the NHMRC grant.

**Selecting and enacting new media communication platforms**

The challenge of selecting appropriate web technology to enact online communication campaigns appears to be a barrier to the uptake of new media by practitioners. As Gregory (2004) discusses this could be a direct function of the lack of web technology being developed specifically for industries such as public relations and the lack of engagement in the web development process between web and PR experts. As such, the question can be posed that if the PR industry, represented by practitioners and researchers, began to engage with the web development industry to design software specific to strategy, such as online community technology, would the outcome of such campaigns be different to what is being enacted currently and would this be any more beneficial to practice than what is currently achievable?

**Engaging an online community of interest**

To date, the concept of online community engagement is proliferated throughout disciplinary areas such as public relations, community development and public health. This is not surprising considering as Preece (2000) discusses, community engagement in the offline world is also a diverse concept enacted by a wide range of disciplines to communicate and build relationships with people around their specific interest in an societal issue. However, it can be argued that the process of engaging a community on a public health issue in the online environment, for the purpose of education and long-term behavioural change, should be positioned in public relations and public health. Thus the question can be posed that if the web technology is developed based on the requirements of a public education campaign, designed to engage people on a public health issue such as Asbestos-related disease, would the outcome be any different to utilizing new media that is freely accessible by the wider online public, such as social media networking forums including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube?

**Developing and enacting the public relations campaign**

Further to the above, as online communication emerges as a key sub-discipline of public relations, the paradigm shift from traditional media use to new media use must be addressed. As Fitch (2009) and Gregory (2004) discuss, there are several barriers to the uptake of new media in public relations practice revolving around the speed of technology development, the everyday impact of new media on the practitioner's role and the engagement of the industry in the development
Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal, Vol. 11 No. 2

of communications-specific web applications. The question can be posed that if a community engagement programme was developed, where the web technology was the driver of the communications strategy, would the outcome be different to a programme where the web technology was a tactic, developed to enable the strategy?

**Mediating multiple discourses during the production process**

As outlined in the case study narrative, the interpersonal communication between the professionals involved in the development of a media website and the mutual understanding of the differences and similarities in the discourses used by these professionals, is crucial to the successful translation of the intended outcomes into reality. This paper aims to highlight the central role that the public relations practitioner plays in mediating this process in order to provide a production environment conducive to the design of a successful online community engagement campaign. The question can be posed that if the mediator is not the public relations practitioner, who is responsible for developing the communications strategy and driving the design of the web technology to meet communications goals and objectives, can this process be successful?

**Conclusions: A new research trajectory**

This experience has highlighted some key areas for further research that are evident in the existing literature and some that are not yet fully understood. It is evident that many media practitioners are not comfortable working in the online environment, which includes the inevitable interactions with professionals in the web industry. The role of the public relations practitioner is in the web technology development process to mediate the discourses associated with the development and design of web technology so as to ensure the end result meets their communications goals, rather than relying on the web professional to translate their briefs.

What is not as straight forward is changing the way in which new media is viewed in public relations practice. By positioning the mobilization of new media technology as a strategy, rather than tactic within a strategy, the emphasis is placed on the importance of understanding what the technology can do thus elevating the role of the public relations practitioner in the web development process to technology designer rather than technology user.

It is clear that there is a long way to go in the development of a rigorous framework by which to practice online. However, there are some key drivers for research that could be developed into a theoretical paradigm for analysis of the transformation of public relations discourses, such as community engagement, due to the continuing development of web technologies.

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