

AUT

A FUTURE IN
PUBLIC RELATIONS



WHAT IS PUBLIC RELATIONS?

Imagine organising a top-level celebrity to promote an exotic resort, working with an international health organisation to highlight the importance of disease prevention, briefing business leaders on a company merger, or lobbying the government to change regulations on behalf of a charity.

Public relations communicators plan, develop and manage communication and media strategies for organisations and people, from businesses, nations, cities and communities, to charities, politicians, celebrities and individuals.

The development and maintenance of mutually beneficial relationships is at the core of public relations. This includes not only creating a positive and proactive image or impression of the client (whether an individual or organisation), but also finding ways to turn negative opinions and responses into positive outcomes.

Public relations professionals keep lines of communication open internally (staff and employers within the organisation) and externally (clients, customers and the general public).

Are you a great communicator with the ability to build relationships? Can you make a persuasive argument verbally and in writing? Are you good at problem-solving and working under pressure? Then public relations may be a great career for you.

OUTLOOK AND TRENDS

Growth of social media

Demand is generally steady for public relations professionals in New Zealand. The biggest area of growth is in the use of social media for public relations. Professional communicators require a sound operational understanding of digital and online approaches, including all relevant social media and networking platforms. Those with solid digital capabilities will be at the forefront of public relation employment opportunities.

24/7 access to information

There is now unlimited access to information and media content which means organisations need strong communication strategies, relationship building skills and the ability to react quickly. Think of how constant surveillance (cell phones recording crises, tweets and Instagram offering instant commentary) is attacking organisational and personal reputations.

Financial knowledge

Skills of interpreting and understanding budgets, spreadsheets and financial reports is increasingly desirable within public relations, along with the study of measurement and evaluation.

Communication and change

A need for corporate communication experts is growing as businesses undertake transformational projects. During periods of time, organisations need communication specialists who can execute strategies and deliver sound communication. Poor communication impacts negatively on corporate reputation.

Multiple skills required

The line between communications and marketing continues to blur. Companies with small teams and budgets are increasingly looking for people with hybrid skills to cover multiple functions. Large corporate organisations tend to prefer more specialised skill sets, while small and medium businesses look for strong generalists.

Sources: AUT public relations curriculum leader Dr Averill Gordon/ Hudson Sales, Marketing & Communications Salary and Employment Insights



WORK SETTINGS

Public relations graduates find work with communication teams within large organisations, or as the communications representative in a smaller organisation's marketing, human resources (HR) or community relations team.

Alternatively, many graduates find work with specialist public relations consultancies, or agencies, providing public relations support for a range of companies and clients, such as sporting bodies, charities, hospitals and global corporations.

Auckland has a large number of consultancies, while Wellington tends to have more governmental communications roles.

CAREER ROLE EXAMPLES

Typically public relations graduates enter roles as communication or PR consultants/co-ordinators (in-house) or junior account executives (consultancies), helping to plan and organise public relation strategies for companies and organisations.

Public relations professionals are not desk bound. The role also involves a lot of preparation and attendance of events and meetings with staff, clients and the media.

Not all PR roles are titled public relations. Public relation graduates have transferable skills that lead to many career options, including community relationship advisor, online community assistant, social media manager, fundraising manager. Role examples include:

PR consultant/co-ordinator/executive – implements communication solutions, such as running a media project, publicity campaigns or an event for a client or your own organisation. Involves developing communication goals and talking to diverse groups of people, including the media, clients or people within your organisation. PR consultants liaise with the media, write reports, proposals, speeches, social media content and media releases.

Social media executive – involves devising campaigns that create dynamic and ongoing social media content for an organisation. This can include identifying and working with influencers on behalf of an organisation and responding quickly to online conversations. Can also include design and production elements as well as finding creative ways to work with online platforms and online communities.

Stakeholder relationship manager/Community relations manager – requires effective communication with various groups of people through writing, presentations and individual meetings in order to build relationships. Includes identifying the needs of different communities and creating media opportunities and events to support initiatives.

Marketing and communications advisor – focuses largely on communication with consumers. Involves analysing the market and promoting products to specific groups of people. Includes working with other disciplines such as advertising to present information positively within the marketplace and the media.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

PR professionals must have a love of writing, be good conversationalists and great networkers. They also need the ability to:

- Understand, access and communicate effectively through the full range of communication and relationship building media available, particularly social media.
- Apply appropriate strategies in a range of professional situations and coaching and building up staff communication skills, eg media interviews.
- Use suitable technologies and media to present complex information in formats (including news writing) accessible to non-specialists.
- Research and strategically plan sponsorship and fundraising events.
- Adapt personal communication style to suit a variety of contexts, audiences and purposes.
- Demonstrate ethical responsibility and accountability as a communication professional working in a diverse environment.
- Run campaigns, including building, planning and publicising events.
- Respond to varied audiences/publics/stakeholders (including bi-cultural, multicultural and international groups) and advocate successfully for them and to them.

PERSONAL QUALITIES

- Strategic thinker who finds multiple solutions to problems
- Strong writer who can simply convey complex information
- Confident speaker and visual communicator
- Good organiser who works well under pressure
- Collaborative team player

SALARY GUIDE

Pay rates vary according to the location (North or South Island), size of companies and/or the status of clients.

	Salary (per year)
Communication coordinator/assistant	\$40,000-\$50,000 (0-2 years)
Communication advisor	\$50,000-\$65,000 (3-5 years)
PR or communication manager	\$70,000-\$120,000
Public corporate affairs manager	\$90,000-\$150,000

Sources: Hudson Sales, Marketing & Communications Salary and Employment Insights, 2018/Robert Walters Salary Guide 2018

Salary range is indicative of the New Zealand job market at the time of publication (late 2020) and should only be used as a guideline.

PROFESSIONAL REGISTRATION

Although not compulsory, it is recommended graduates join the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ) and undertake the accreditation in public relations programme (APR), which increases opportunities for access to managerial roles and higher status.

THE AUT ADVANTAGE

Final year PR students gain real-world experience and a work portfolio through live client projects on the student-led public relations agency, Outside The Square.

Strong industry connections mean students have opportunities to apply for paid PR internships and graduate positions within NZ. There are also valuable PR internships through AUT Internz.

The Public Relations major sits in the School of Communication Studies providing a strong emphasis on communication skills and personal development.

FURTHER STUDY OPTIONS

There are a range of postgraduate study and research areas available in public relations. The Master of Communication Studies and PhD can be done as a straight research thesis, a thesis by publication or by completing a project-based thesis.

Research topics include public relations strategy and practice, international public relations and social media and public relations.



CASSIDY MEREDITH

Group Account Director for Spark PR and Activate

Postgraduate Diploma in Public Relations

“Public relations has changed hugely since I graduated. The remit now covers influencer engagement, sponsorship, corporate communications and content creation, media integrations, the list goes on.

A lot of my time as a group account director involves team development, building relationships with clients and media and client service. I talk to clients and media suppliers on a regular basis – a coffee/beer and chat really goes a long way.

Innovation is a big part of what we do. For example, the beer bottle sand project with DB Export and Colenso. There is a huge global sand shortage and DB Export had this innovative idea of breaking down recycled bottles to make sand that is legal for buildings and other products that use sand. Rather than do a press release and media kit, we seeded the story to global media of a little country finding a solution to a big problem. CNN and others picked up on it and that then attracted local media. We only put a little bit of budget behind it and it went nuts.

A big challenge for PR is that the scope changes every year because of technology. Look at Facebook. It used to be about likes and engagement but now it has simply turned into an advertising platform.

My first job after graduating was at Eleven PR, part of the TBWA group. I started as an account executive helping on the PlayStation account. I was there for about three years working mainly in the creative agency’s PR arm, but occasionally being a ‘suit’ on certain projects. Eventually I had to choose a pathway and chose PR because of the human interaction and engagement – it is all about getting out there, talking to people and telling a great story.

My progression has been huge because I went into an agency role, rather than an inhouse role.

There is a massive opportunity for Pacific Islanders and Māori to get involved in the industry – I currently know only two other Pacific Islanders in PR at the moment, yet I see so much talent out there. I’m hoping to have some impact over the next five years on this kind of stuff through being on the inclusion and diversity committee for the Commercial Communications Council.”

ADVICE TO GRADUATES

“Be prepared to work. Chase the experience and knowledge before the money – the money will come if you upskill, and do above and beyond with every project. That is what you need to do.

Finding a mentor has definitely helped me progress well in my career. My boss, our client services director, is my mentor and she has really helped me move forward.”

USEFUL WEBSITES

Public Relations Institute of NZ (PRINZ)

www.prinz.org.nz

Outside the Square AUT

www.aut.ac.nz/study/study-options/communication-studies/student-run-pr-agency-outside-the-square

Global Alliance

www.globalalliancepr.org

PRism Journal

www.prismjournal.org

HowStuffWorks - How Public Relations Works stuff works

<https://money.howstuffworks.com/business-communications/how-public-relations-works.htm>

Institute for Public Relations

www.instituteforpr.org/about

FURTHER INFORMATION

For the most up-to-date information on studying public relations and the Bachelor of Communication Studies, visit www.aut.ac.nz/PR-study

FUTURE STUDENTS

Contact the Future Student Advisory team for more information: www.aut.ac.nz/enquire

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For other Future Career Sheets visit:

www.aut.ac.nz/careersheets

For employability and career support, AUT students can book an appointment through

<https://elab.aut.ac.nz/>

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The information contained in this career sheet is correct at time of printing, September 2020.

