

Transcript

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Presenters: Zoe Brown, Simon Morgan

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Zoe Brown

Welcome, everybody. Thank you so much for joining us today. My name is Zoe Brown. And I am the international recruitment manager for the faculty of Health, Arts, and Design. And it's a great pleasure to have you with us today. We'll be talking about public relations 4.0.

So today, in terms of the content we'll be discussing, it will be around the dynamic world of PR, the important links between PR and industry 4.0. And we'll also look at how COVID-19 has changed the media landscape and, in general, reporting world issues as well.

So I'm very pleased to have a very special guest speaker with us today. Today we have with us Simon Morgan. So Simon, I will hand it over to you. Thank you.

Simon Morgan

Thanks very much, Zoe. And let me add my warm welcome and thanks to all for the tuning in. I hope that I've got something to say that will be worthwhile for you and that you take something away that's quite innovative and interesting.

I suppose the first question is, why did we dub this the PR 4.0? The fundamental point here is that the world is changing. And by 2022, the fourth Industrial Revolution will descend upon the world. And that includes manufacturing, business, the rollout of the internet of things. But of course, that's going to affect public relations and communications very deeply.

Swinburne works very closely with the industry. And we're also leading within the public relations industry. In fact, we presented to the national conference in September of last year of the Public Relations Institute of Australia in how industry 4.0 is going to change what we do and the way that the world is shaped.

OK. We might move on to the second slide. What is PR? And most people have heard of it, but few really understand it. I think this is really an important comment to make-- that PR professionals help an organization or individual cultivate a positive reputation with the public through various unpaid or earned communications. And that includes traditional media and social media and in-person engagements. We also help clients defend their reputation during any crisis that threatens their credibility. And under the Swinburne model, we do this ethically.

So a little bit about my background-- I'm an industry expert. And I've only been in academia full-time for three years. I still consult to the New York-based AT Kearney, the management consultants, and also to Mariner Financial Group here in Australia. I'm on the board there as well.

My background is principally in financial services. I worked in mergers and acquisitions in the UK and then for a number of banks as their spokesperson in Australia before moving to the insurance and financial services area. I've also run a small public relations firm here in Melbourne along with my wife.

Academically, I hold a bachelor of arts in public relations, a graduate certificate in learning and teaching, a graduate certificate in financial planning, and also a diploma of management from INSEAD in France. I've also lectured internationally and on four different occasions at the Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine.

So that's enough about me. Perhaps we could move on to the next slide. I think we've missed a slide there. I beg your pardon. I jumped ahead. This is where I want to be.

Now, there's nothing that brings to life more a concept such as communication than, perhaps, real-life examples. Indulge me. The person in the white shirt that you can see on the screen is actually my younger brother, Dr. Dominic Morgan. He's the ambulance commissioner in the state of New South Wales in Australia.

Now, Dominic's PR team, his communication team, work with him to develop key messages-- in this particular case, about when to call an ambulance for breathing issues and how to treat an affected person when there's bushfire smoke in the air. Now, the communication team then uses the messages that they've developed with their CEO or the commissioner in all their other communications. Might be in tweets, on Facebook, on Weibo, in media relations, in educational brochures, in speeches that other ambulance officers give. So the public relations team are defining the message and managing its distribution to the right audiences.

The second picture, the one below, is of US president Barack Obama-- former president-- and his speechwriter, Jon Favreau, who Obama called the "mind reader." PR and comms people are very often close counsels to the C-suite or the leadership team or the bosses. We often help craft their words. And we advise them on what to say and to whom.

Part of the skill set that we have is what we describe as "boundary scanning," knowing what is ahead of the curve. And we develop this skill by doing deep research into social and traditional media and getting a sense of, what are the big issues coming down the pipeline?

We tend to have a lot of influence in organizations due to our access to the top. And our role is sometimes as chief of staff to the chief executive. We might go to the next slide. Thank you. That's one.

So what are PR people doing right now? Obviously, they're advising on and preparing and distributing coronavirus or COVID-19 information for different audiences. Once again, I'm being a little bit indulgent. This is the second Dr. Morgan-- in this case, my 25-year-old son, Dr. Evan Morgan, who is a front-line emergency department medico.

The role of PR and comms people in a hospital setting is another great example of what we do. Think about the layers of ability within the staff in a hospital. You have junior doctors with high energy and, dare I say, brilliant minds. But you also have cleaners and cooks and nurses, admin people, physiotherapy people, and brain surgeons, who have seen it all before and only want to do things their way.

Now, in a migrant country like Australia, there are 160 languages spoken. From my research, I understand that in India, there's 22 languages spoken, I'm sure many more dialects. And in China-- 276 indigenous languages.

The PR team needs to take all this into account and also think about the different education levels of the audience. There's no point sharing information about viruses that interest young doctors with cleaners who barely have any education. Maybe you need to make a video for the cleaners, maybe a cartoon, maybe a face-to-face briefing that has been crafted for their level of understanding.

So as you can see, public relations and communication are multilevel thinking exercises. We also need to be good writers and creative people and people who are persuasive. Thank you, Zoe.

We also need to be aware of where our audience are. Do they access traditional media, such as radio, TV, newspapers, and the like? Or are they on social media? Or are they in both? And you also need to understand all these mediums, how to access them, and when. It's not just a task. It's a detailed skill. Sometimes I think it's a bit like conducting a communication orchestra.

Now, I touched on this briefly. But the world is on the cusp of the fourth Industrial Revolution. And it will change as much as it's done in each of the other revolutions. And public relations will be at the forefront. 5G technology is 50 times fatter than 4G. Can we go to the next slide, Zoe? Thank you. And that is just the start.

Now, Swinburne University has recently participated in an experiment with others where 44.2 terabytes of information per second were transmitted. That's the equivalent of receiving 100 high-definition movies in a second. Information floodgates will soon be opened. The internet of things will be enabled.

Now, the fun example of how this might operate is where the driverless car picks you up from work and safely drives you home without stopping at red lights, where, when you leave work, your oven turns on to cook you the meal prepared by the in-house virtual assistant. Meanwhile, the house is cooling up or warm or-- sorry, cooling down or warming up.

And your favourite music's turned on. Your cat is fed. And so all the usual chaos and business of getting home from work is put to one side. And you get the opportunity to relax and talk to the people who you love. It's a lovely utopian thought about the internet of things operating.

But more than that scenario, we'll also have a world where there's more fake news, more manipulation, more spin, which is the opposite of the Swinburne approach. We're teaching our students that only deep openness will allow people to trust. So in our view, organizations need to be transparent to their core and to be honest.

This will allow deep searchability of information. And with that searchability comes credibility. Now, one of the fun things about industry 4.0 is it's going to allow tailoring. For example, if you wanted to have a melon-coloured car with fur-lined seats, three rear-view mirrors, and a hydrogen-powered engine, it can be done easily for you in a factory that also manufactures motorcycles and four-wheel drives and electric cars. Manufacturing-wise, you can very easily tailor.

But from our point of view as communicators, public relations people will be able to use AI, or Artificial intelligence, to tailor a communication message directly for the individual and based around their interests and their abilities. We'll also be able to deploy AI in the hunt for misleading information, such as COVID conspiracy theories. I'm amazed by the links that some fools have made between it and 5G and the general push from the antivaccine community, where they deny the proven science.

Now, during a crisis, people need our skills. But Swinburne demands ethical approaches to our peer in communication at work. Might we move on to the next one?

So what is the future for public relations and communication? Well, the good news is that it is a very well-paid area of work. It's female-friendly. There is no glass ceiling. It also has the benefit where, because of family circumstance, perhaps the mother chooses to work on a part-time basis. You can still work in this industry as well.

There are growing employment opportunities in public relations. It has international flexibility. It's creative and rewarding. And industry 4.0, as I hope I've persuaded you, means that there are going to be major changes heading our way quickly. And public relations people are going to be needed even more than they are today.

So where do we specifically add value? I think we go to the next slide. It's in our ethical third-person persuasion, including persuading people such as journalists and, increasingly, online influencers, the gate-keepers of information, about a particular point of view. And we will continue to be about ethical education and ethical persuasion.

So what is the end result? What does a career in PR look like? It's exciting because you're using your creative and strategic skills. It's powerful and influential because, at an early age, you're advising and guiding organizational leaders and sometimes politicians.

As I've said, it's well-paid and equally good for women and men. It's international. And if you choose, it's easy to start your own business and succeed. This has very low capital requirements. And I must say, from a personal point of view, it's very satisfying as well.

OK. So how does Swinburne prepare students to be job-ready? Industry experts like myself teach the courses. We have practitioners come in regularly as guest lecturers. We maintain excellent after-university links with our alumni. And they provide feedback into how the course should be evolving.

Our course is accredited by the Public Relations Institute of Australia. That's one of the few that are within this country. And we encourage and support work experience, internships, and placements. We want people to get as much industry experience as they possibly can. Thank you very much,

everybody. And Zoe, maybe you or others might have some questions or thoughts that they'd like to put forward.

Zoe Brown

Right. Thank you very much, Simon. That was really insightful. And I'm sure our audience have learnt a lot from today's session, especially the links between PR and technology and industry 4.0. We know that we, just in day-to-day life, use our technology. But it's really, how do we use it? So thank you very much.

So yes, I'd like to reiterate what Simon said. And that is if you have any questions, we'd love to answer them. And so I'll invite anyone, if you'd like, to go into the Q&A box. And you can type in a question there if you have any regarding our course or any questions that we can elaborate further on.

Simon Morgan

Now, while people are thinking about that, an obvious question to me is, what about my English skills? How important are they? And look, to be honest, I would say English is important. And the course is designed for people who are competent at English.

But the skills that you'll learn in this course are not just reliant on your ability in English. The skills are immediately transferable to any country. And they operate in the same way. The thinking that we will encourage people to develop is more important than their written skills, although they will be required to do writing in English while they do the course.

Zoe Brown

And so Simon, something else that may come to mind to some of our students today and our counsellors is, what is the difference between PR and journalism? Because a lot of us would assume they intertwine. And they've got similarities in the role and the job scope. Could you perhaps explain the difference?

Simon Morgan

Yes, yeah. Both areas provide opportunity for people with writing skills. Journalism is writing either for a newspaper or television, radio, whatever, script, and very writing-oriented. Public relations also relies on writing. But it also relies on other creative skills and strategy development.

We develop those skills amongst our students by exposing them to study about issues crisis and risk communication, looking at case studies from around the world. Public relations is much more creative and flexible. Your skills could be used towards producing a press release, a tweet, a comment on Weibo or Facebook.

But equally, you could be developing a video or writing a speech or, actually, being the spokesperson, as I have been for three different banks, where you're in front of the camera, answering on behalf of the organization. So it's a very broad kind of occupation, while journalism is more linear and perhaps just focuses on the writing skills predominately.

Zoe Brown

And so would you say, then-- I guess depending on the type of PR role, if you're, obviously, a spokesperson and you're in front of the camera or speaking to press or whoever, that would really require quite a confident personality. But perhaps what about those who maybe are not quite so confident in that communication style? They can still do the PR part but more maybe from a writing perspective or the preparation involved.

Simon Morgan

Absolutely. Look, there are niches for all personalities. And certainly, not everybody wants to be a spokesperson for a bank. And I did and enjoyed it very much. But equally, I have colleagues in the same department who spent their time as public relations people working on developing government policy and trying to create change that positively supported our particular employer's interests. So you don't need to be in front of the camera. You could also be in the background.

I'll also say that there's a lot of public relations jobs in the not-for-profit sector as well. I particularly come from the finance area. But there's also jobs available for people who are interested in health communication, which is vitally important, environmental communication, education, you name it across the board, also charity work. Now, there's a huge demand from charities for people to get their message across to the right audience in a very accessible way.

Zoe Brown

And so would you say, in terms of work experience for our students, do they get lots of different types of, I guess, exposure with their either placement or internship or WIL?

Simon Morgan

Yes. WIL-- Work-Integrated Learning. There are opportunities. But I'll always say that these opportunities don't come easily. What you need to do is put yourself forward. A little tip I would say to anybody watching this is to encourage any student who comes to a university in Australia to get to know the staff. The staff tend to be very well-connected with the industry and with the university. And they will make life much easier.

There's some cultural issues here, I realize. And Australians tend to be very relaxed and informal. Often, the academic staff are known by their first name. So my students will often call me Simon. And I know that can be difficult for some students.

But when you actually make that link, you'll find often that the lecturers and the tutors will go out of their way to help you navigate these paths towards getting internships, placements, and work experience opportunities. Never easy, but there's always students who do find the way because they've built that extra link. And we encourage it. It's actually a personality trait that we tend to have. And I would warmly encourage people to get to know the staff.

Zoe Brown

Yes. I agree. I think that's really important. And speaking from personal experience as an ex-Swinburne student myself, investing that time with my teachers and the academics, getting to know

them, and allowing them to get to know me when I was a student-- that enabled me to be chosen to go on an internship through Swinburne University.

So I think, yes, absolutely. It's something that's really important. And as Simon has mentioned, we're quite relaxed. We're Australian, so we're always happy to talk. And at Swinburne as well, we are a smaller university, which I think is a great thing because that's our culture as well. We're like a big family. Everyone knows everyone very well. And the academics are extremely supportive. So that's something that I can attest to.

We do have a question from Ravindra. And Ravindra said, can you think of any sector where PR guys are relatively more important than any other sector?

Simon Morgan

Look, I would say where PR people really come into their own is during a crisis. They're often managing the crisis on behalf of the organization, sometimes being the spokesperson, sometimes managing what's being said on social media or to traditional media, giving speaking points to the chief executive, and also managing the way the organization gets the message out.

I think often PR people tend to be the-- it's a terrible expression. I wish I could think of something better-- but almost the puppeteers. They often work in the background but to help the chief executive to be the best they can be. Often you'll find a chief executive is from an accounting or a finance and legal background. And naturally, they don't develop the communications skills in those roles.

So our job is often to be the counsellor to tell them what the big issues are, to give them succinct speaking points, to tell them what is important and how to say it and to who to say. Often we'll write letters or speeches or Facebook posts for them. We'll ghost write them. They'll sign it off. But it puts us in a position of great responsibility and great influence as well.

Zoe Brown

So Simon, what I gather is it's also really important, then, for anyone in PR to have a good level of EQ, or emotional intelligence, to really understand not just the messaging, but the deeper feeling, thinking impact of all the diverse people that the message is going out to.

Simon Morgan

EQ is enormously important. But so is this boundary scanning. And the thing I'd like to say is that we can help you develop both those skills. If you're brave enough to come to another country, then you've probably got a pretty high level of EQ. And you really do understand more about how the world works. And going to another country really reflects that well.

And boundary scanning-- for the students who are motivated, this is such an exciting opportunity to study a course like this because it's so diverse. It gives them an insight into what's happening in the world. And that's really powerful.

Zoe Brown

Well, thank you. All right. Well, do we have any other questions from anybody in the audience? Please feel free to ask in the Q&A box. Oh, we have a question. Oh, that was a thank you. OK.

All right. Well, Simon, I think-- yes. I want to say thank you again for coming on as our guest speaker for today and educating myself and the audience on PR of the future and how we run it at Swinburne. It's a really dynamic course and lots of opportunities, particularly jobs in the future. And obviously, fantastic to be able to have such a multilevel opportunities within the PR realm, including the technology and industry 4.0 to complement effective public relations events. So thank you very much.

Simon Morgan

It's been lovely to have everybody in my home.

Zoe Brown

All right. Well, thank you all for joining us today. And if you have any questions, I'll just put up my email. If you have any questions that you'd like to ask myself or Simon, please don't hesitate to contact me at zabrown@swin.edu.au. We'd be happy to answer any further questions that you may have.

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