Public Relations and Crisis Management in the Construction Industry

Paul Wilkinson BA PhD FCIPR
pwcom.co.uk Ltd
@EEPaul
Agenda

- Who am I?
- Introducing CIPR, CAPSIG
- What is PR?
- “The image of construction”
- Crisis communications in a web 2.0 world
- Freelance tech journalist, blogger and writer
- Social media advocate/trainer
- Independent PR practitioner
- Active in Chartered Institute of Public Relations (Fellow, Council, Board, chair of PCC and CAPSIG)
- Constructing Excellence steering group member
- Deputy chair, ICE information systems panel
- Partner, EthosVO and comms lead for SkillsPlanner project
Chartered Institute of Public Relations (est 1947)
c.10,400 members
all governed by CIPR's Code of Conduct
45% work in PR consultancy, 55% in-house
55% members are female
Construction and property special interest group
CAPSIG: one of 11 sectoral groups in CIPR

- c. 400 members

- in-house, consultancy, independents

- Working in/for organisations across construction and property in UK (some overseas)
Public relations is NOT

- Advertising
- Promotion
- Publicity
- Propaganda

- ‘Spinning’
- ‘Press relations’
- Marketing
Public relations is the discipline that looks after an organisation's reputation. Its aim is to win understanding and support, and influence opinion and behaviour. It establishes and maintains goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics.
PR sectors include:

- Corporate and financial relations
- Education and skills
- Not-for-profit
- Public affairs
- Internal comms
- Local public services
- Marcomms
- STEM
- (social media)
Managing your company’s ‘image’

Public relations is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you.
If public relations is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you….

… you can only control some of what you* do and some of what you* say, and might only influence some of what others say about you.*

* = company, directors, etc, but also employees, subcontractors, etc
'Cowboy builder charged £49,000 to turn our home into a deathtrap': Couple who planned to foster children had savings swallowed by shoddy work

- Couple ordered William White off their property after seven months of chaos

Sexist builders in Stoke Newington face sack after harassing women

17:14 30 May 2012  by Chloë Mayer

»A group of workmen are facing the sack this week after subjected women to a daily ordeal of sexual and racist abuse at Stoke Newington railway station.

Bodging builder jailed for £96,000 VAT fraud

A West Midlands builder who set up multiple fake companies to commit a £96,000 VAT fraud, and left some of his customers with unfinished work, has been sentenced to 16 months in jail following an HMRC investigation.
Adversarial barriers blacklisting over-budget boots bricks bureaucratic casual conservative concrete contractual cowboy builder cranes dayglo deaths delays dirty diggers dodgy dusty environmentally unfriendly fragmented glass ceiling not green helmets homophobic injuries inconvenience not innovative JCBs kills cyclists ladders legalistic late lax loud male mud noisy old old-fashioned out-of-date pale late payment paper-based low-paid low productivity low trust racist risky roadworks sexist short-term silo mentalities stale site-based skills shortages low-tech trades traffic unhealthy unsafe unskilled wolf whistles
Perceptions changing?

Considerate Constructors Scheme

2010: 5.5 in 2009

PUBLIC'S IMPRESSION OF INDUSTRY

6.2 in 2010

2015: 6.4 out of 10… but (2016)…

YouGov poll finds two-thirds of public would not consider career in construction
14 mentions of the industry's “image”

... and 4 mentions of “reputation”

Chapter 3: Drivers of Change

To deliver these strategic priorities fundamental changes are required in the way the construction industry operates. Responsibility percolates throughout the supply chain and Government has an important role to play.

Key drivers of change to deliver the vision of an industry with a reputation for world leading efficiency and for attracting and retaining the people we need are:

1. Improved image of the industry.
2. Increased capability in the workforce.
3. A clear view of future work opportunities.
4. Improvement in client capability and procurement.
5. A strong and resilient supply chain.
6. Effective research and innovation.
“Poor image”

“... fundamental change is required in how the construction industry is perceived by the general public.” (p.40)

“... major parts of the construction industry suffer from a poor image amongst the general public.” (p.41)
Construction 2025: The image of the industry

“There are four areas where action is needed to reform the image of the industry.”

- Engaging young people and society at large
- Safety and Occupational Health
- Diversity
- Domestic repair and maintenance market
Campaigns: Engaging young people and society at large

In 2013, *Construction 2025* mentioned:

- Open Doors
- CITB’s Positive Image
- Design...Engineer...Construct
- STEMNET
- See Inside Manufacturing
- CIC: Professional Career in the Built Environment
- the Big Bang Schools Fair
More campaigns …

In 2016:

- Open Doors
- CITB’s Go-Construct
- Construction United
- etc, etc

National Apprenticeship Week: The real story or just PR?

6 APRIL, 2016 | BY JULIE ANDERSON
My view

“... fundamental change is required in how the construction industry is perceived by the general public.” (p.40)
My view

• Fewer ‘PR’ campaigns
• More *industry* change

(*tackle the complex causes of the reputation, not the symptoms*)

• Don’t think short-term, or in silos
• Think long-term and pan-industry
  (eg: ongoing BIM implementation, new models of procurement, Digital Built Britain, etc)
Crisis communications in the pre-web world
Crisis communications in the pre-web world

Printed (trade) publications

- Longer news cycles
- Limited editorial capacity
- Limited scope for first-hand reporting
- Heavy reliance on official/corporate sources

Broadcast media

- Can break (and update) a story quickly
- Otherwise, broadly similar to print media
Building faults found at more Scottish schools

More problems discovered with missing wall header ties as surveys continue on 17 shut schools

Go-ahead for Berkeley 3,750-home London gasworks scheme

Extensive enabling works to start this year on 99-acre Southall Gasworks site

Breeden to offload ready-mixed concrete sites

Competition watchdog raises concerns about 27 sites in Breeden takeover of Hope Construction

British Steel returns as Tata sells Scunthorpe plant for £1

Greybull strikes deal to rescue Tata long products steel business

Subcontractors wanted for Ipswich sites

Construction online hosts Meet the Buyer event at Portman Road; Register now

Construction boss jailed after worker buried in trench

Builder buried alive during infrastructure work on housing site

Job of the Day: Finance Director

Steel specialist Builders Beams is adding to its senior team
Communication in a web 2.0 world

Web 2.0 (or social media)
• “globally distributed, near instant, person to person conversations”

The media landscape
• Broadcast/print distinction eroding
• Capacity expanding
• Timescales shrinking, borders disappearing
• Diminishing “control of the message”
Crisis communications in a web 2.0 world

Now just ‘media’

- 24/7 news machines
- Expandable editorial capacity
- Source content from ‘citizen journalists’
- Re-use content across channels - broadcast, print (incl website, apps, email) and social
- Less reliance on official/corporate/PR sources
- Less reliance on traditional media
- More viewer/listener/reader participation
UK: SOCIAL INDICATORS

- Social Media Penetration as a Percentage of the Total Population: 76%
- Average Time Social Media Users Spend on Social Media Each Day: 1H 51M
- Percentage of Mobile Users Using Social Media Apps on Their Phone: 45%
- Percentage of Mobile Users Using Location-Based Services: 9%

We Are Social • Sources: US Census Bureau, GlobalWebIndex Wave 11
http://twitpic.com/135xa - There's a plane in the Hudson. I'm on the ferry going to pick up the people. Crazy.
US Airways Flight 1549

- Downed by birdstrike, hitting water at 3.31pm on 15 January 2009
- First tweet about crash sent at 3.35pm
- Tweeted photo from ferry sent to just 170 followers (shared/viewed over 43,000 times within hours)
- Krums interviewed on MSNBC 34 minutes later
@BPGlobalPR

- Gulf of Mexico oil spill, April 2010
- BP parody account starts using hashtag #BPcares
- Two months later, had 10 times the following of official BP account
Social media monitoring (and news gathering)
A crisis is not the time to be learning about social media, or to be needing some ‘social capital’.
Construction crisis communications in a web 2.0 world

• In a world of 24/7 mobile news, almost anyone is a potential journalist, a potential broadcaster

• Controlling the message impossible - but you can influence it (‘social capital’ helps)

• As always, preparation for a crisis is essential. Have a plan. Manage. Rehearse. Monitor.

• PR no longer just about words – need to be multi-media, and digitally- and data-literate

• Be the go-to informed source. Never lie.