

Public Relations Techniques

Episode One

March 28, 2025

Strategic Communication with Brittany Paxman

How can organizations craft impactful messages and build trust through strategic communication? In this episode of *Public Relations Techniques*, we sit down with Brittany Paxman, managing partner at Communications Consultancy Point 600, to explore the evolving world of PR strategy.

Brittany shares insights on measuring communication success, the importance of PR, and some examples of successful and unsuccessful crisis aversion. We also discuss the key skills students need to thrive in the industry.

 Learn more about Brittany Paxman: [Faculty Bio](#)

 Connect with Brittany on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/brittanylpaxman/>

 Thanks for tuning in. We hope our conversation was insightful and informative—see you next time!

Interview Questions

Interviewers: *Carly De Girolomo, Mary Nelson, Melanie Rocha and Macy Smith*

Interviewee: *Brittany Paxman*

- Lecturer at the University of Texas at Austin

Could you share a bit about your career journey and how you became involved in strategic communication?

How do you define strategic communication, and why is it essential for organizations today?

What do you think “good” communications measurement looks like today and where do you see most organizations falling short?

In a crisis situation, how can strategic communication help organizations maintain trust and credibility?

Can you share an example of a time that a company used strategic communication to improve its reputation or brand image?

How do you see AI and emerging technologies influencing the future of strategic communication?

What trends do you see shaping the future of communications strategy at the enterprise level?

What skills do you think are most important for students who want to pursue a career in strategic communication?

You've worked with a diverse portfolio of clients like Home Depot, Southwest Airlines, and PepsiCo. When developing a communication strategy for such large organizations, what are some of the core principles you follow?

What advice would you give to students who want to stand out in the field of PR and communications?

How do data and analytics influence the development of strategic communication plans?

Transcript

Macy Smith: Hi. Welcome to our podcast, public relations techniques, where we get down to business of all things PR related. I'm your host, Macy, along with Mary, Melanie, and Carly. So a little bit about my co hosts and I. We are public relations students at the University of Texas at Austin. We're all currently enrolled in the public relations techniques class together here at UT, under the guidance of professor Monique Farmer, this class focuses on PR techniques that guide development of strategic messages and multimedia tools for diverse audiences and client scenarios to equip us for a successful year career in the ever developing industry of PR. So today, Friday, March 28, we are so excited to welcome our guest, Brittany Paxman, as we discuss strategic communications. So thank you so much, Professor Paxman. Professor Paxman also graduated from the Moody College of Communication here at UT, and today she works as a managing partner at Communications Consultancy Point 600. She leads communications measurement and analytics for clients such as the Home Depot, Southwest Airlines, Intel, PepsiCo, and the list could go on and on. So we're so excited to discuss effective communication strategies today. Thank you so much again, Professor Paxman, for joining us.

Brittany Paxman: Thanks for having me.

Macy Smith: Could you share a bit about your career journey and how you became involved in strategic communication?

Brittany Paxman: Sure. So, as you mentioned, I studied PR at Moody College at the University of Texas at Austin, so I was a PR major, and I also did the Computer Science Foundations Program, which I think was really transformational for me in terms of my career. Right after I graduated, I joined a communications consulting firm called points. Are called the Pulse Point group, and I was there, I guess, for about 13 years. We were acquired twice, and so that was just an incredible experience and opportunity for me. For a few reasons, I joined, and the company was really, really small, that meant I wore a lot of hats. And then I say I wore a lot of hats, I really mean that in my first month on the job, I ordered laptops, I booked travel for my boss, and I presented to the Chief Communications Officer of Delta Airlines. So it was truly everything from really advanced senior level work to, you know, assembling desks. And that was really excellent for me, because I got to see how a business runs, and a lot of people don't get that experience, because you go into a big organization and there's an HR department, there's a IT department, there's someone to help you with each and every little thing that you need. It was really exciting for me to get to join a small organization that didn't have all of those things, so I had to learn them myself. So in terms of strategic communications, that's what the firm did. We were an advisory firm that helped really large organizations come up with effective communication strategy, and that was 2010 and so this was only a few years after Twitter launched. Instagram wasn't around yet, right? So it was a really early time in social and digital media, and so I really got to learn those skills right at the forefront as they were coming online.

And from that, I led communication strategy for really big organizations. I mentioned Delta. I worked with a lot of other companies across a lot of industries, a lot of pharma, a lot of technology, and I, then we the company was acquired twice, so first by an advertising agency that was based in the Midwest called Olson, and then Olson was acquired by a really large communications and consulting organization called ICF, that does both commercial and government work, and so I've always been on the consulting and agency side of helping many, many clients build effective communication strategy.

Carly DeGirolomo: Wow. Thank you so much, very impressive work that you've done. Thank you. So just bringing it kind of back to the basics for our listeners, we were wondering, how do you define strategic communication, and why do you think that's essential for organizations today?

Brittany Paxman: Good question. You know, strategic, or strategy is a term that I think gets thrown around a lot. We feel like it means doing smart things. I think it is sometimes, and sometimes people distinguish between strategic and tactical. For me, I think that strategy means making choices. And in communications, it usually means a series of guiding choices or guiding principles. So that's how I would distinguish it from, say, tactical communication, which is the actual execution of the work, which is also very, very important. Does that answer the question?

Melanie Rocha: Yes, it does. It was a great answer. And so I wanted to ask, What do you think good communication measurements look like today? And where do you see most organizations falling short with that?

Brittany Paxman: I think good communication measurement measures the outcomes. Something everyone's going to say. What do I mean by outcomes? I think that communication is designed to persuade people. It's designed to the intention or the need behind communication is to share information and hopefully shape and influence people's perceptions about a company or a topic. So a lot of measurement today focuses on outputs. Did we get media coverage? Did we get an influencer to talk about this? How many people watched our podcast? And that's good, and you should have that, but I think that really effective measurement also needs to have survey based data that is actually checking to see what do people actually think about a company that can also mean focus groups and some of the qualitative data. There's also some really interesting measurement techniques out there using AI. There's a company, and I'll have to look up the name, but they essentially have ingested a bunch of survey data, and they have AI bots that mimic survey takers, and then they have those bots take surveys as a cheaper way to get at potential perceptions. But the main point being, you really need to actually know what people think. It can't just be how many people consumed content, because you don't know if that content is actually moving the needle on perception.

Mary Nelson: I'm sure in your career, you've had one or, I mean, a few crises, maybe just like every other PR job. So in a crisis situation, how can strategic communication help organizations maintain trust and credibility?

I think that the most effective, most important thing that strategic communications can do before a crisis is have a decision tree. We call them issue escalation decision trees, or just decision trees, and that doesn't mean you have to follow the decision tree Exactly. You know, there is still human judgment in a crisis, but being able to set some guardrails and some thresholds for what actions you will take when you are clear headed, when the emotions are not so heightened, I think, is very important. And the way that we do that is we use case studies. We look historically at past crises, both in this industry and in other industries, to say what's typical volume, what typically happens, what are some signs that we might be entering a crisis, and then use that to help set some of those thresholds.

Carly DeGirolomo: Awesome. Okay. Thank you so much. And then last question, can you share an example of a time that a company used strategic communication to improve its reputation or brand image?

Brittany Paxman: Sure, the one that always comes to mind, and I'm sure you've heard this in your classes, this one's not new, but I think it's Tylenol. They're really seen as such a great example, because they took a crisis and they made better outcomes from it. And I actually apply this in my personal life as well. I think to myself, you know, if something goes wrong in my life, I think, be Tylenol. How can I make things even better than they were before? How can I turn the crisis into something with a more positive outcome? And I think the thing that makes communicators point to that example. So clearly is that the Strategic Communication went beyond just traditional communication tactics, meaning the company didn't just put out press releases. They didn't just hold press conferences, or, have you know, announcements. They changed their business practices. And the reason that still relates to strategic communications is that a whole lot of strategic communications is actually unseen. It is the influence of the key business decision makers. Communication should be inside the company, where no one else can see them, saying, in order to have the best reputation, our company needs to take X, Y or Z steps. And it's very clear in that example that that was happening. More recent examples that I've been more involved in, I've seen a lot of airline issues, and I've seen airlines take really, really fast action. You can imagine, there are 1000s of flights a day. There's going to be something that goes wrong on some of those flights. You know, someone's going to be unhappy, someone's going to say the wrong thing, and I've seen the airline industry as a whole do a really good job, one of having their employees backs, of saying, We're going to first defend our people. We're not going to throw them under the bus. We are going to listen with care and compassion and assume that our people are doing their best, then if something has gone wrong, we're going to investigate it. We're going to do that quickly, and we're going to communicate openly, meaning that they're going to say we're aware that this has happened. We have a protocol in place to investigate it, and

we will share information when we have it. And I think that that's an industry that has been forced because they are so public facing. Everybody has phones and cameras now, and flying is such a time of emotional stress that it puts people in these situations where they are more likely to have conflict. And so I think that's an industry that has done a really good job. And the principles of strategic communication that they've used is, one, being prepared ahead of time, having a process, having a playbook. Two, communicating acknowledgement, even when they don't have all of the information. Too many companies wait until they have all of the information to start communicating, and then having predictable communications, meaning they would say we're going to respond again in two hours, and then actually responding in two hours, even if there's not another update, those sort of things, especially during a crisis, can be very, very helpful.

Melanie Rocha: Yeah, I agree, definitely. And so that'll wrap up today's episode, and I would like to thank Professor Paxman for sharing her incredible insights on strategic communication. And so if you enjoyed today's episode and would like to learn more about Brittany Paxman, feel free to check out her LinkedIn. You will also add information and resources for you in our show notes. Thanks for tuning in and thank you again, Professor Paxman for joining.

Brittany Paxman: Thanks for having me. Take care.

All: Thank you. Bye!