

PR profession in Kenya under scrutiny

By [Carole Kimutai](#)

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Kenya's Public Relations sector is one of the fastest growing in the East African region; but a recent report on the practice of PR in Kenya has revealed serious gaps in the profession. The report highlights three areas of grave concern; a general deficiency in understanding of PR, lack of standardised training, and puny PR ethics, regulation and standards.

The study was commissioned by the Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK) and conducted by researcher Kentice Tikolo.

"The place of Public Relations in Kenya is under severe scrutiny. This is the time when practitioners are striving to find their place among peers in other professions. While there have been various thoughts about the status of the profession, this study has for the first time in the history of the profession in Kenya, provided a scientific basis upon which benchmarks can be made," says Peter Mutie, chairman of PRSK, that will be marking four decades of existence this year.

Kenya's PR landscape

According to Kentice, it is not easy to quantify the size and scope of Kenya's PR industry partly due to uncertainty over characteristics of small consultancy organisations, and especially stand alone consultants. "The breadth of the international agencies and independent consultants also add to this lack of clarity with regard to size of the industry," she says.

Broadly, Kenya's PR industry comprises two primary groups; employed PR practitioners providing in-house services, and consultant PR practitioners. Kentice notes that PR consultancy in Kenya is growing, although it is not to the standards in developed countries.

"It consists of relatively fewer large consultancy firms, some medium sized firms and an overwhelming majority of small firms. The distribution of large, medium and small consultancies has remained broadly similar over the years, with a degree of consolidation increasing the number of medium sized consultancies."

An interesting trend in Kenya is that of advertising agencies creating PR arms and positioning themselves as 'integrated communications solutions', at the expense of strategic PR and communications practice.

In terms of output, PR in Kenya continues to be defined based on the amount of media coverage provided to clients.

"This has had the effect of keeping PR and communications at the rudimentary press agency level, with events taking up a lot of the activities carried out to create a buzz around brands. Media buying has therefore become a dominant PR activity,

with Advertising Value Equivalent (AVE) being the key evaluation method for PR activities. This is in stark contrast to the world trends of measuring outcomes and impact of strategic PR," notes Kentice.

Findings

The findings of the report were responses from 61 practitioners; 43 in-house practitioners and 18 from PR consultancies. The highest percentage of the in-house practitioners are employed in the public sector - government ministries and parastatals. 72.7% of the respondents were in consultancy agencies while 27.3% were freelance practitioners. Consultancies seem to have dominated the PR service market.

There were more women respondents than men with the percentage of men in PR firms higher than in-house practitioners. Women constituted 72.5% compared to 27.5% in the in-house practitioners category. The study found more women than men in the PR consultancy category at 52.9% compared to 47.1 % men.

In terms of academic qualifications, for in-house practitioners 57.5% have a masters degree, 35% a Bachelor's degree, and 7.5% a diploma. For consultants, 46.7% have a masters degree with an equal percentage with a bachelor degree, and 6.7% have a diploma. None of the respondents had a PhD degree. The experience of PR practitioners ranged between one and 32 years being the highest in PR firms. Twenty three years experience was the highest for in-house PR practitioners.

The respondents were asked to rate the extent to which top management supports the PR communications functions on a scale of one to six. An overwhelming majority highly rated the management support. On budgetary allocations, 33.3% stated a budget less than KSh 5 million, 15.2% between KSh 5 and 10 million, 9.1% between KSh 15 and 20 million, and another 9.1% between KSh 20 and 30 million.

When asked what basic salary their organisations pay, 33.3% of the respondents said they earn a basic salary of between KSh 20 000 and 50 000; 16.7% between KSh 50 000 and 100 000; 25% between KSh 101 000 and 200 000; 8.3% between KSh 301 000 and 400 000; and 16.7% earn above KSh 500 000. Compared to PR firms, in-house PR practitioners earn lower salaries.

When CEOs were asked about the main purpose of PR/communications, they said, media relations, relationship marketing, to keep in touch with customers, corporate image, promotions, customer service and advertising, image management, dissemination, developing communication programs to support operations, guiding on matters dealing with communication and reaching internal and external public, and advising management.

In the area of training, PR as a course in Kenya is offered by a clique of institutions ranging from middle level colleges to universities. Locally, only 40% of organisations offer formal professional training and development programmes that practitioners can make use of while a greater majority (60%) do not. The survey noted that most of the people interviewed got their PR training outside Kenya from different institutions in the UK, South Africa, and USA.

When asked whether they belong to any professional body, only 28.6% of the respondents did not belong to any professional body and therefore their practice of PR was not governed by professional ethics. 71.4% of the respondents are members of PRSK, 14.3% are members of the International Public Relations Association, and 7.1% are members of Federation of African Public Relations Association.

"The society is now well placed to provide the much needed direction on the standards of the practice in relation to accreditation, training and continuous professional development. This will be critical in providing the much needed confidence in public relations as a management function," says Mutie.

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