Scott Wilking

Public Relations Principles

Practitioner Interview

 Rebecca Martin is the director of marketing and operations at Beehive PR, a public relations agency located at 1021 Bandana Blvd E, Suite 226 in St. Paul, Minnesota. Her email address is RMArtin@BeehivePR.biz. She has worked in the public relations industry more than 12 years. Her current job entails utilizing public relations skills in numerous facets of the agency’s business.

 “For me, doing public relations for Beehive is making sure people know that we are a great place to work, we have a great culture, and we have high retention rates,” Martin said. “We also want to get attention for the brand to help grow our agency’s bottom line.”

 Some of the key marketing strategies that Martins heads are keeping the agency’s website refreshed, activating their digital social strategy and building Beehive’s brand visibility with their target stakeholders. She is also responsible for search engine optimization and website analytics to determine where their site is receiving traffic from and what they can do to gain the most exposure. A major project she is currently working on is developing a mobile version of the firm’s website so it can be tailored to smart phone users.

 “Promoting the Beehive brand overall is another piece of it,” Martin said. “That is working on key messages and making sure that all the people in our agency are using the same language to talk about the brand when they’re talking to clients or prospects or out in the community – that everyone’s sort of using those same messages.”

 Martin helped develop a brand voice style guide for Beehive, which the agency uses to ensure the online writing or marketing materials created by employees is cohesive to Beehive’s overall brand messaging. She also monitors the agency’s blog and social networking presence, making sure they are active on Twitter, and that they have a solid Facebook strategy. Martin is also in charge of making sure the news room on the website is up to date and has relevant information for the news media and anyone else that visits the page.

 The media relations strategy is another area in which Martin leads. This consists of pitching to local, trade and industry media, ensuring the agency is represented on lists for the best public relations agencies in the Twin Cities area, and drafting press releases announcing new clients or awards won by Beehive employees.

 The final aspect of Martin’s job is promoting Beehive’s promotional and community visibility. According to her, there are many things that everybody associated with the agency can do to make Beehive more visible.

 “Are we getting our CEO and vice presidents and our other subject matter experts out there, speaking at industry events?” Martin said. “Are we sponsoring things? Are we making sure that our team members are part of professional organizations and have some visibility there for the Beehive brand?

 After graduating from the Minnesota State University, Mankato with a degree in English, Martin started working accounts at Weber Shandwick in 1999 when a friend of hers who worked at that agency convinced her to apply despite the fact that she was interested in getting a job in publishing at the time. She followed his advice and soon found that the field of public relations played to her strengths in writing, communications and critical thinking.

 After six years at Weber Shandwick, Martin took a job at Beehive PR in 2005. She started as an account coordinator, then an account supervisor before becoming the director of marketing and operations.

 Martin is a member of Minnesota Women in Marketing and Communication where she is the vice president of the professional development committee. She is also a member of the American Marketing Association.

 Ironically, what Martin finds to be the most challenging aspect of public relations is also what she enjoys most about it.

 “There’s lot to do,” Martin said. “There’s a lot of variety. This is one of the most interesting jobs you can have. Every day is different and you’re always challenging yourself to learn new things – specifically in some of the emerging digital and social areas. There’s something new to learn every day and it keeps it fresh and exciting and interesting. It can be overwhelming if you let it be. There’s an element to this job where you can’t get too comfortable; you have to remain really flexible and open to changing a plan at a moment’s notice. The same thing that makes you excited and love your job can also be the thing that frustrates you and can make it really challenging.”

 The main advice Martin would give to someone looking to find employment in public relations is to get an internship. Additionally, she suggests that having digital and social media skills are a must, as well as developing an online media writing ability. In hiring new employees at her agency, personality and attitude during the interview process go a long way in determining a person’s chances of being hired. Lastly, learning how to network with other professionals is something Martin sees as critical.

 “Do as much networking as you can,” Martin said, “because a lot of times you’re not going to find the job on a job listing. It’s going to happen a little more organically and through people that you know.”

 As far as being able to find a healthy balance between a personal life and a public relations career, Martin believes that where you work can make all the difference. She has friends who work at other agencies that still work 60 hour weeks and have not been able to find that proper balance.

 “I have two kids, a husband, a house to run,” Martin said. “Beehive is a place that really emphasizes a work-life balance and gives us a lot of flexibility with our schedules and a lot of technology to help us work where and when it makes sense to us, with laptops and smart phones. So, I have found that, at least in this agency, it’s been very much doable for me to have a work-life balance.”

 Martin has certainly taken notice of the big changes in public relations since she started in 1999. Advancements in technology and the speed in which communication occurs have dramatically altered the business in the last few years.

 “When I started,” Martin said, “for an example, interns and entry-level people would stand at the fax machine and fax out news releases and media advisories for hours at a time. We did a lot of hard media kits; making hard copies of media materials and stuffing them into folders and doing mass mailings out to media were everyday activities for us, whereas now I would build an online newsroom and pitch someone in the media and send them a link and they go right to that newsroom.”

 She also believes that public relations practitioners have become much more business-minded. Instead of just being the doer for clients and fulfilling their requests, they now have more of a seat at the table in working on the strategy. In her eyes, they’re much more involved in the decision-making than they used to be.