

BBS 2009 Media Survey

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BBS is a public relations industry leader with an exceptional reputation for understanding the media and achieving success for clients wanting to secure media coverage. The firm enjoys unparalleled relationships with journalists across the nation.

As part of our commitment to the industry, BBS has conducted an annual national survey of journalists in print, television and radio since 2003.

This year's telephone survey of 52 journalists from metropolitan and regional centres across Australia seeks to understand the media's perceptions of public relations practitioners and identify preferred channels of communication between the two professions.

Journalists from across Australia were surveyed.

The survey extends beyond the capital cities to identify the differences between regional, metropolitan and industry news outlets as well as the differences between 'generational' age groups including Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers.

The survey sought to identify the latest trends, views and practices of the Australian media which, for the first time, included a strong focus on digital media.



2.0 KEY FINDINGS

“the keys to success”

Journalists embrace digital media and are eager for online PR

In 2009, almost three quarters of journalists said digital media had made their lives easier, with a whopping 74% of respondents agreeing that digital media had helped reduce time spent researching and compiling stories.

For online news sources, 34% of journalists said they used Google regularly while newsgathering, and 20% of respondents identified Google as a credible source of information.

Twenty-seven per cent of journalists also liked to source information from other news websites, with 19% of respondents believing these sites were credible news sources.

Journalists said that online press conferences (29.5%), sound grabs/podcasts (23.9%) and webcasts (18.2%) were useful online PR tools.

Relationships and news value are keys for PR success

Ninety per cent of journalists said they were more likely to consider a story idea from a PR person they knew and had successfully worked with in the past.

To complement this, when asked to pinpoint the single most valuable benefit of PR practitioners, “identifying stories” was nominated by almost half of journalists (47%).

Interestingly, Generation X journalists were more likely to believe PR practitioners did not grasp the concept of news value and pitched stories which were not newsworthy.

Generations X and Y dominate newsrooms

Today’s newsrooms are dominated by Generation X and Generation Y journalists.

Half the journalists surveyed were Generation X-ers, 42% of journalists were Generation Y’s, with only 8% Baby Boomers.

Corporate websites and Google the most credible sources of information

Forty per cent of journalists surveyed were more likely to consider corporate websites and Google as the most credible sources of information.

Top issues for 2009

The global economic crisis and environment/climate change will remain the most newsworthy topics in 2009, closely followed by US politics, which will continue to absorb news space.

Finance, business and employment will also dominate this year’s news agenda, particularly job cuts, job losses and job security.





“Exciting” and “unique” won’t grab journalists’ attention

BBS asked journalists to identify the most overused words in press releases and found that “exciting” and “unique” topped the list. Other key words believed to be overused included “new”, “innovative” and even “stop the presses”.

These words were seen to have lost their impact and credibility over time because of their overuse in press releases.





3.0 LESSONS LEARNED

“lessons for all”

BBS recommends PR practitioners and organisations alike should learn from and implement the following key lessons learned from the research:

Develop a digital communication strategy

As journalists are fast embracing digital media techniques to help them with their news gathering, organisations should develop digital media campaigns to support traditional media campaigns.

Much like accompanying a media release with a photograph, organisations could accompany media releases with digital media tools such as online press conferences and audio and video grabs.

As the most commonly used sources in newsgathering, corporate websites play a vital role in the dissemination of information. This demonstrates the value of keeping information on corporate websites up to date.

It will also save journalists the time associated with attending photo opportunities and press conferences and gathering vision for news stories.

Avoid hyperbole and clichés

Words such as “very” and “extremely” are often overused in press releases and, along with the use of clichés, are unnecessary and can be signs of poor writing. These words should be avoided in press releases.

Piggyback off economic gloom and climate change to grab media attention

The state of the global economy is tipped to be the most popular news topic for 2009, closely followed by climate change and the environment.

PR practitioners should therefore seek to ‘piggyback’ stories off these key issues, to increase the chance of coverage.

Invest in media relationships and good quality news

Consistent delivery of good quality news releases and story ideas can work to the advantage of organisations looking to increase their profile through media campaigns. This can also help foster good relationships with journalists.

To ensure the delivery of quality news, organisations and their PR practitioners must thoroughly understand the concept of news value and appreciate the value of saying ‘no’ to their clients when asked to push a story with no perceivable news value.

This will in time ensure good working relationships with journalists and will increase organisations’ profiles.

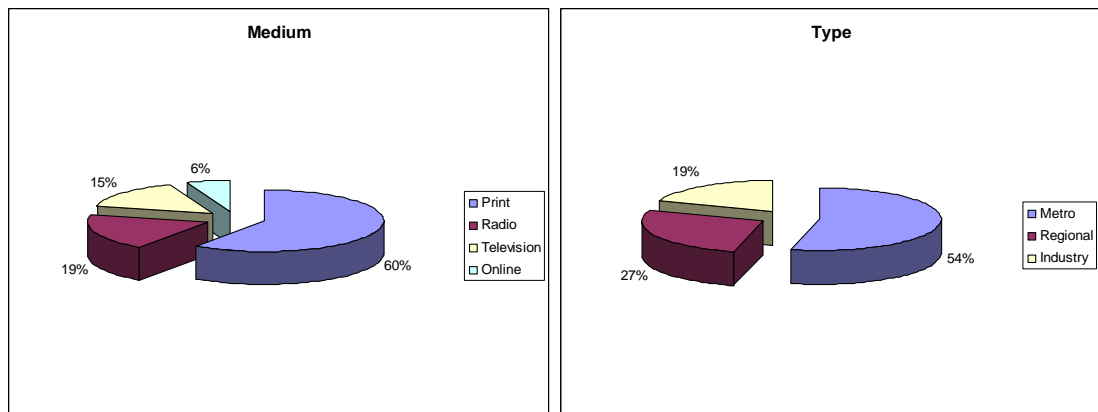


4.0 THE SURVEY

“the who and the where”

BBS surveyed 52 journalists. Of those surveyed 60% were print journalists, 19% were radio journalists, while 15% were television journalists.

Metropolitan media accounted for 54% of respondents, regional media accounted for 27%, while 19% were from industry publications.



Survey questions

1. Which age group are you?
2. How are the bulk of your stories generated?
3. Which websites do you regularly visit while newsgathering?
4. Which news sources do you consider as credible?
5. Has digital media made your job easier?
6. Which of the following digital media techniques would you find useful?
7. What is the most important thing you look for when choosing to attend a photo opportunity?
8. Are you more likely to read and consider a story idea from a PR person you've worked with before?
9. In what way do you feel PR practitioners best aid your work?
10. What is your number one frustration with PR practitioners?
11. What do you think are the three most overused words in press releases?
12. What do you think will be the three hottest issues in 2009?

Findings and statistics included in the 2009 BBS Media Survey report were based on the total number of responses, rather than the total number of respondents (journalists).



5.0 DETAILED FINDINGS

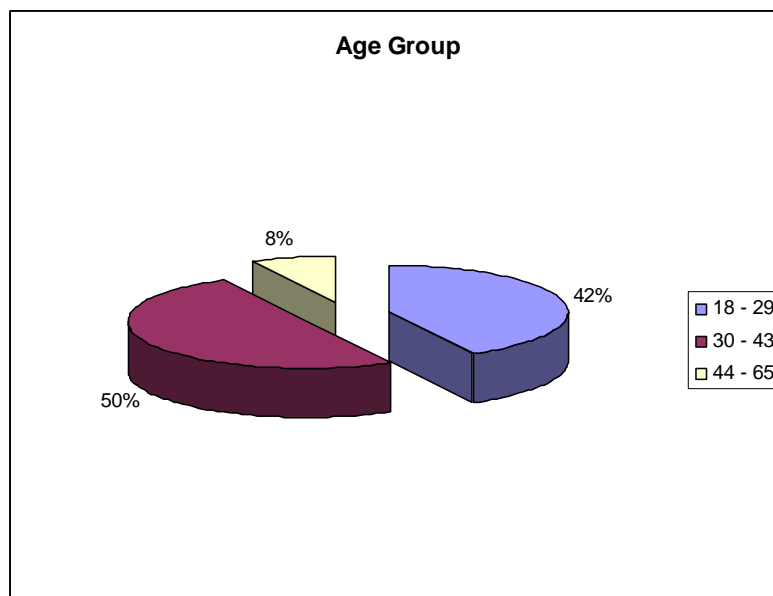
“the results”

Question 1: Which age group are you?

For the first time, BBS asked respondents to identify their age grouping by ‘generation’.

Generation Y’s are those born between 1980 and 1991, Generation X-ers are those born between 1966 and 1979. The Baby Boomer generation was born after World War Two, from 1944 to 1965.

Half the journalists surveyed were Generation X-ers, with 50% aged between 30 and 43. Closely following at 42% was Generation Y, aged between 18 and 29. Baby Boomers made up only 8% of the group, representing those aged 44 to 65 in 2009.





Question 2: How are the bulk of your stories generated?

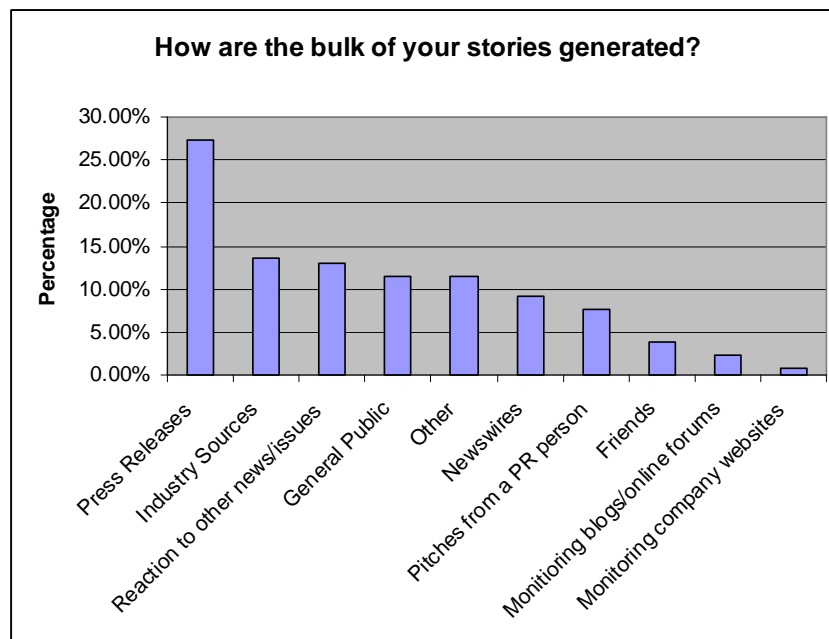
Press releases from PR practitioners remained the largest source of news for journalists, however the media is increasingly taking stories from a broader range of sources. An additional 8% nominated PR pitches.

Twenty-seven per cent of journalists said most of their stories were generated from press releases. This is down from 55% of journalists the previous year who said they relied on press releases as their main source of story generation.

In addition, pitches from a PR person last year rated the second highest source of story generation at 15%, whereas this year, pitches comprised just 8% of responses.

Last year PR pitches and press releases combined held 70% of story generation, which, until this year, had been a growing trend. In 2009, PR pitches and press releases combined represented only 35% of journalists' story leads.

This could be attributed to the current news agenda being driven by major issues of economic trends, government policy and stimulus agendas, and environmental policies (see question 12 responses).



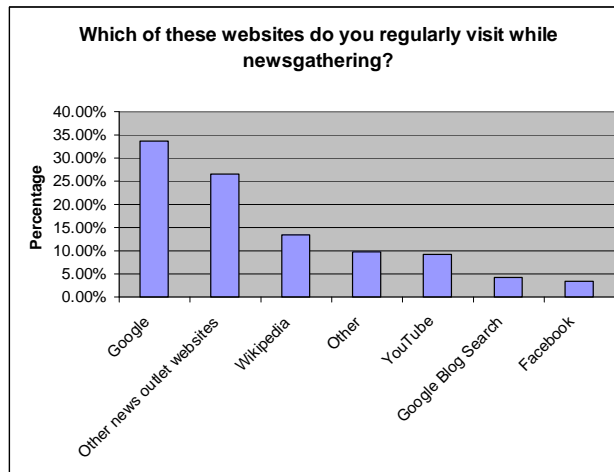


Question 3: Which websites do you regularly visit while newsgathering?

As the digital media world becomes more important in the dissemination of information, BBS asked journalists which websites they regularly visited while newsgathering.

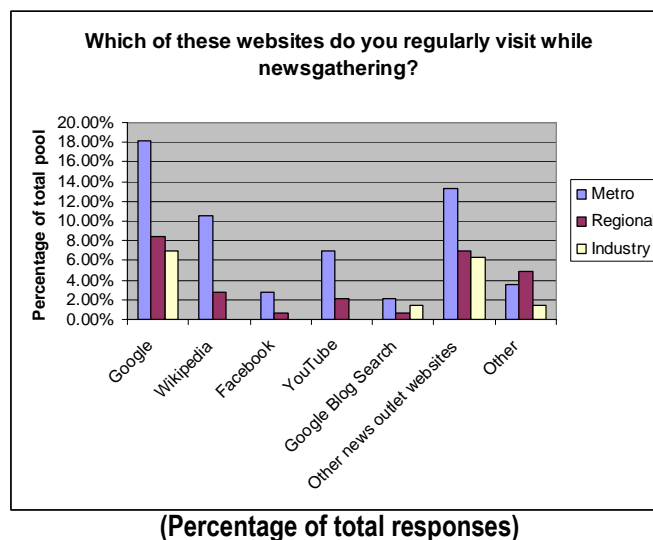
Google was the most popular website, with 34% of journalists saying they used Google regularly for newsgathering, proving the power and popularity of the search engine.

Other news outlet websites were the second most commonly used source (27%), while social networking sites YouTube and Facebook were used by a very small number of journalists, typically when searching for images.



Journalists located in metropolitan areas were more likely to use Google (18.2%) and other news outlet websites (13.3%) when newsgathering.

Regional media also relied heavily on Google (8.4%) and other news outlet websites (7%). Industry journalists were more likely to use Google (7.0%) closely followed by news websites (6.3%), however did not use Wikipedia, Facebook or YouTube in the newsgathering process.





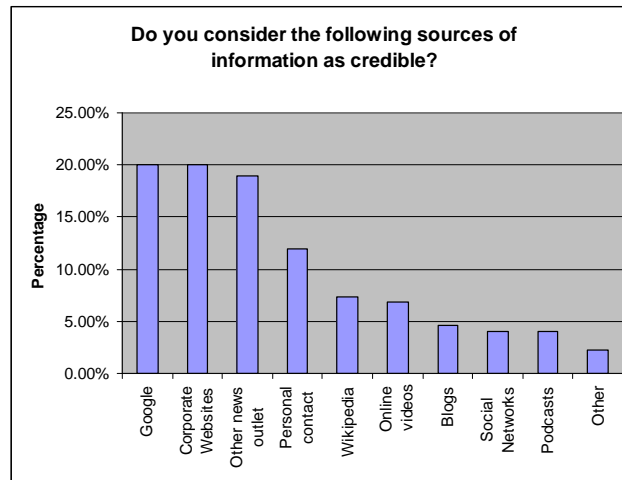
Question 4: Which news sources do you consider as credible?

Journalists were more likely to consider corporate websites and Google as credible information sources along with other news outlet websites.

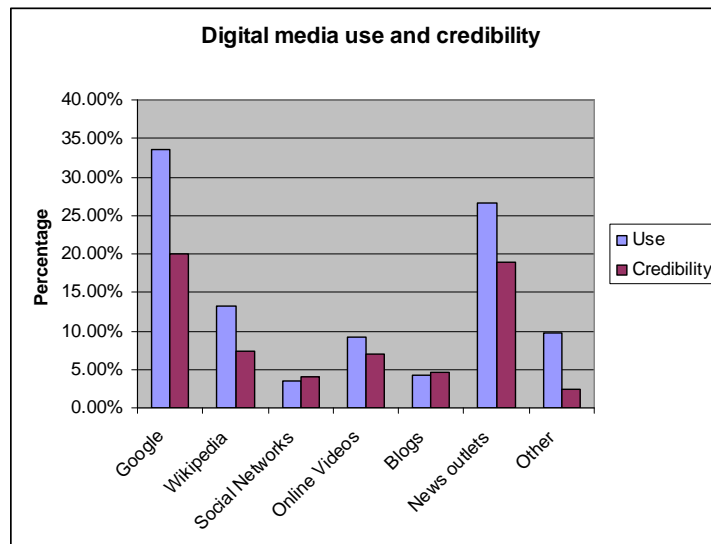
Twenty per cent of respondents believed Google was a credible news source because of its timely, relevant content, and speedy ability to provide links which are pertinent to journalists' research.

Corporate websites were also deemed a source of credible information by 20% of respondents.

Finally, 12% of respondents said personal contact with a member of the public was a credible news source.



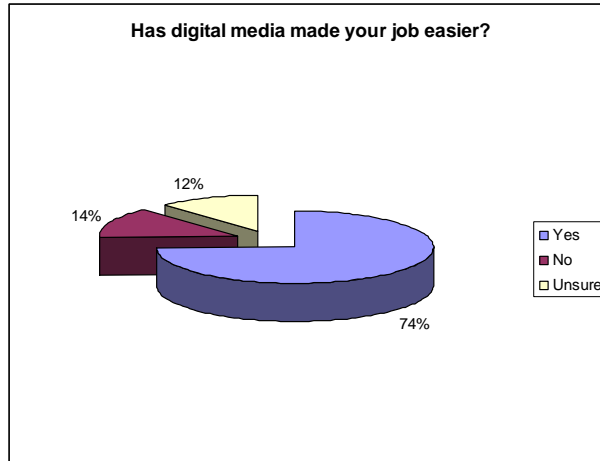
Google (20%), and other news outlet websites (18.9%) were most likely to be used by journalists and were considered the most credible online sources for newsgathering. Social networks (4%) and blogs (4.6%) were considered the least credible newsgathering tools.



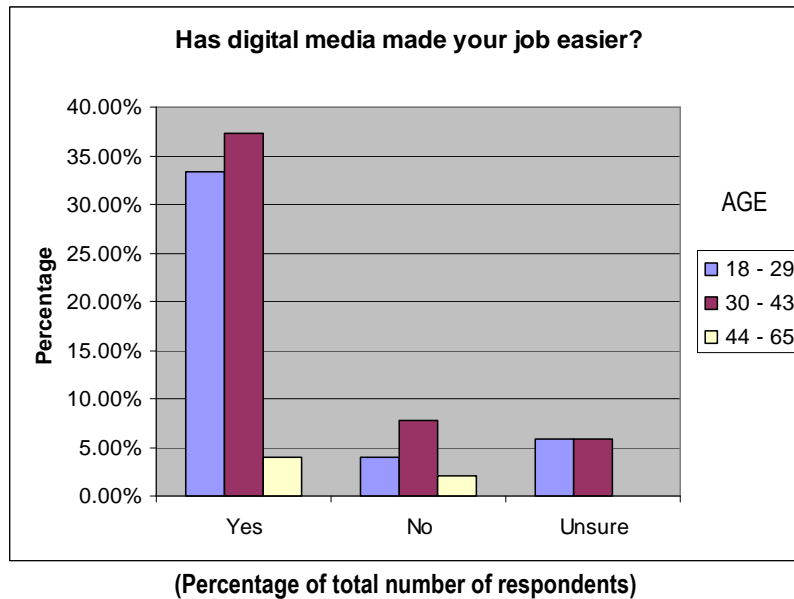


Question 5: Has digital media made your job easier?

Almost three quarters of journalists said digital media made their work easier, with 74% of respondents saying digital media had helped cut down on time spent researching and compiling stories.



Generation Y journalists' aged 18 to 43 were more likely to believe digital media makes their jobs easier. However Baby Boomers had not embraced digital media.





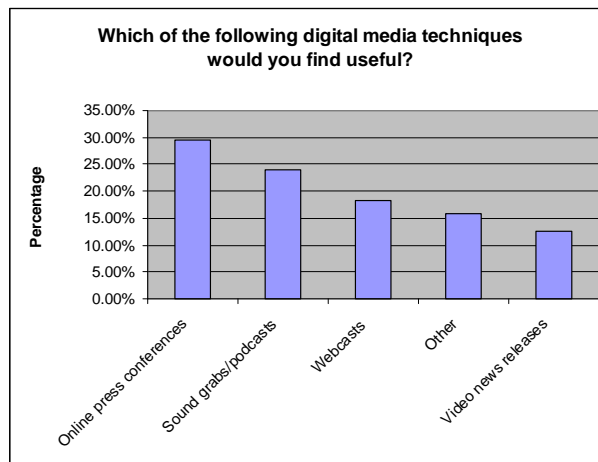
Question 6: Which of the following digital media techniques would you find useful?

Digital media techniques enable journalists to participate interactively like never before. With techniques such as live online streaming and webcasting, journalists can access sounds and images from their desk.

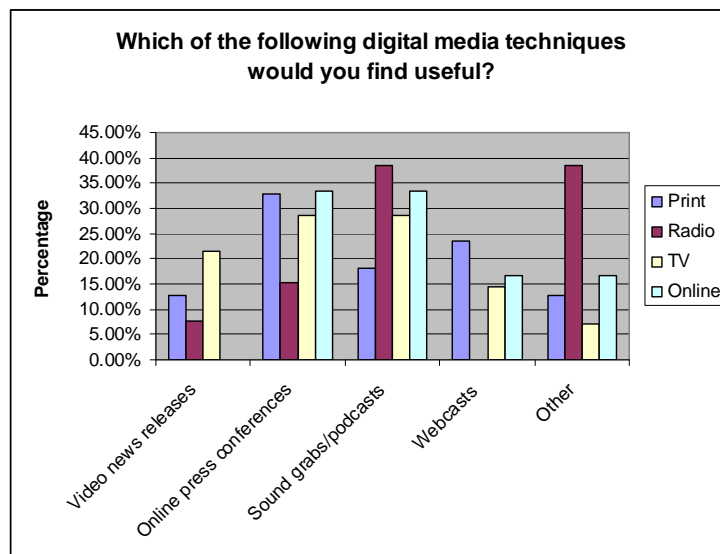
Nearly 75% of journalists saying digital media had made their lives easier.

Mostly, journalists felt that because of their increasingly busy workloads, it was becoming harder to attend traditional press conferences. Providing online press conferences and sound grabs offers an effective and convenient way for PR practitioners to target the ever-busy journalist. Almost one in three respondents said online press conferences would be a useful digital media technique.

Twenty-four per cent said sound grabs and podcasts would assist them in their daily work lives and 18% of respondents said webcasts would be useful to obtain information.



Print journalists largely embraced digital media techniques, with online press conferences and webcasts rating the most useful online technique for this group.



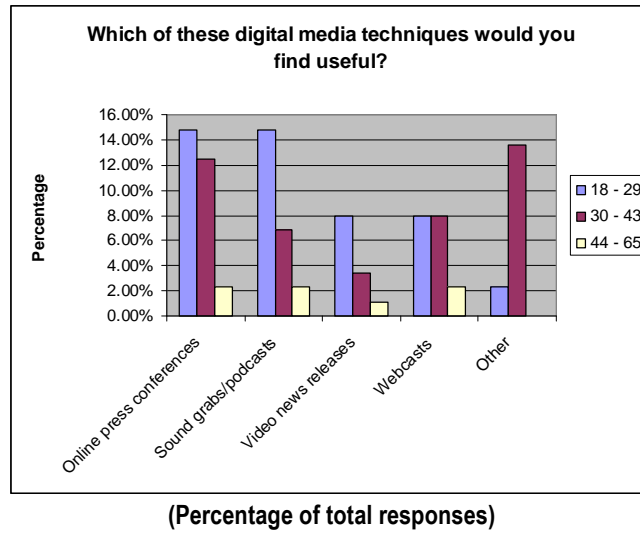
(Percentage breakdown of responses per medium)





Generation Y's aged 18 to 29 found online press conferences and sound grabs/podcasts most useful, while Generation X-ers preferred online press conferences.

Baby Boomers aged 44 to 65 had little interest in using digital media techniques.





Question 7: What is the most important thing you look for when choosing to attend a photo opportunity?

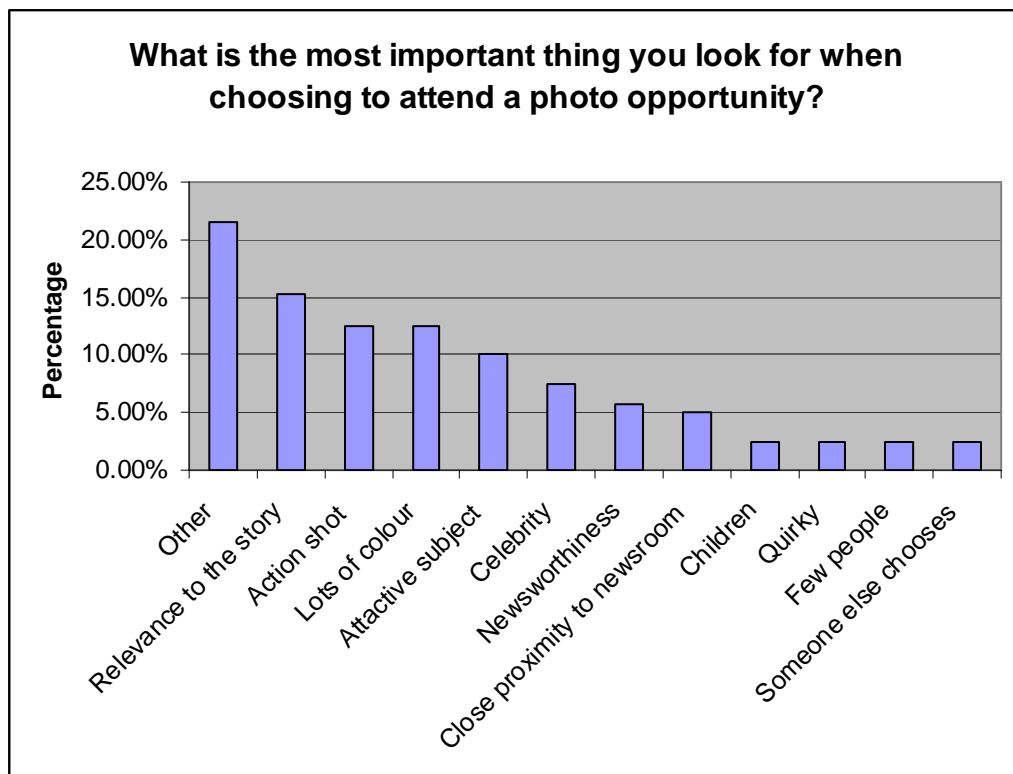
A photo that was relevant to the story (15.3%) was the most common hook for journalists when choosing to attend a photo call. This is a good reminder for PR practitioners to offer photo opportunities which directly relate to the publication, its readership, or a current, topical issue.

Action and colour were the next most commonly cited reason for attending.

Another one in five journalists said newsworthiness (5.7%).

Celebrities were not a major drawcard with only 8% deciding to attend because of a celebrity appearance.

However, journalists often had very individual reasons for attending a press conference, with one in five journalists (21%) surveyed opting for 'other' reasons.



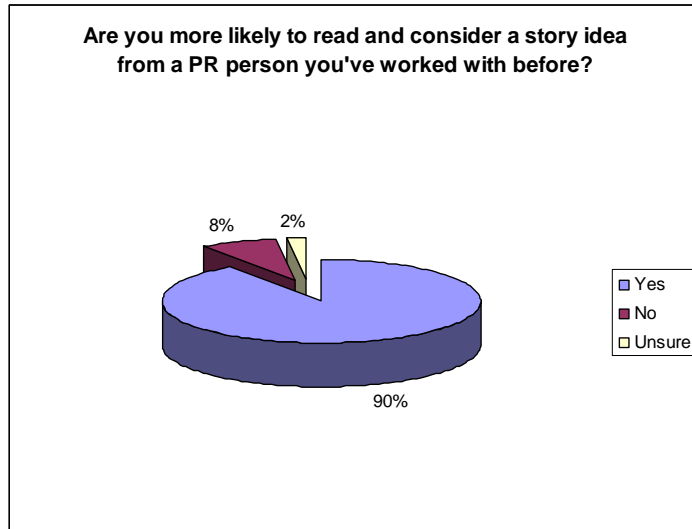


Question 8: Are you more likely to read and consider a story idea from a PR person you've worked with before?

Nine out of ten journalists said they were more likely to consider a story idea from a PR person they knew and had successfully worked with in the past.

This finding has remained consistently high, with 85.7% recorded in 2007 and 90% in 2008.

This is a reminder of the importance of fostering good relationships with journalists in order to successfully pitch a story.



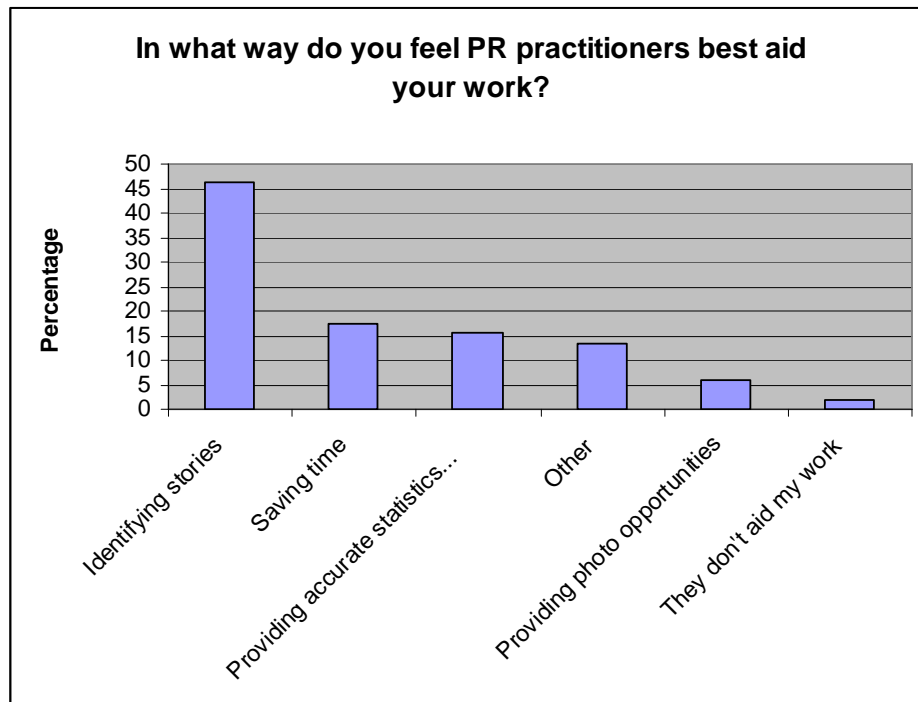


Question 9: In what way do you feel PR practitioners best aid your work?

Overall, most survey respondents felt PR practitioners contributed positively to their work and were valuable sources of information.

When asked how PR practitioners best aided their work, almost half of journalists surveyed (47%) said identifying stories, which is up slightly from 45% in 2008.

An additional 17% of journalists believed PR practitioners saved them time, and a further 15% relied on PR practitioners to provide accurate statistics and research.





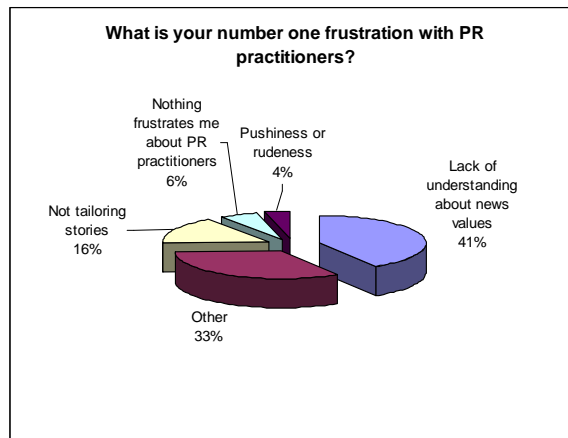
Question 10: What is your number one frustration with PR practitioners?

Journalists still get frustrated with PR practitioners – only 6% of respondents said nothing frustrated them about the work they perform. This is up from last year, when 3.3% of journalists admitted nothing frustrated them about PR practitioners.

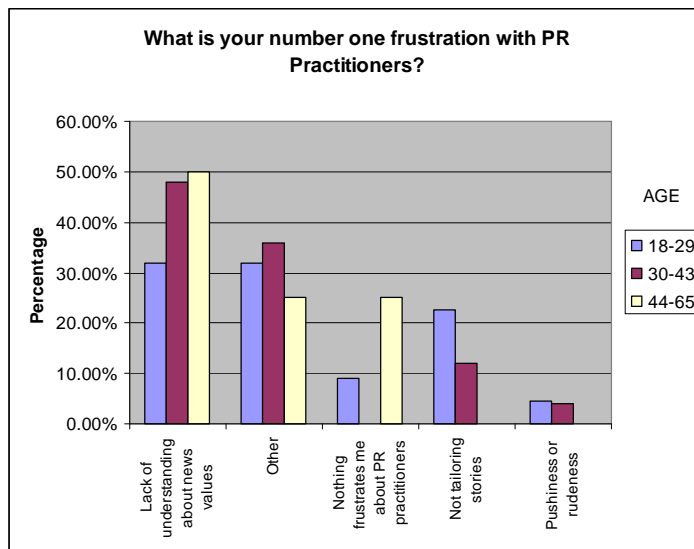
Forty-one per cent of journalists said PR practitioners needed to improve their understanding of news values. This proved the biggest frustration for journalists who complained about receiving irrelevant information from PR practitioners.

Another 16% of journalists said their biggest frustration was with PR practitioners who did not tailor press releases for specific journalists and media outlets.

Other common complaints included PR practitioners who called at inappropriate times such as during radio news broadcast time and issues with those who called repeatedly to ask if they had received a press release.



Generation X journalists (those aged between 30 and 43 years) were the most critical of PR practitioners' lack of understanding of news values.



(Percentage breakdown of responses per age group)





Question 11: What do you think are the three most overused words in press releases?

The word “exciting” topped the charts with 16.9% of respondents saying they believed it to be the most overused word in press releases. “Unique” came in a close second at 16.1% and “innovative” came in third at 8.1%.

Many journalists offered BBS an array of other words they believed to be overused including “new”, “groundbreaking” and even “stop the press”.

Top 6 Overused Words (124 responses)	
Exciting	16.9%
Unique	16.1%
Innovative	8.1%
Green	5.6%
Vibrant	4%
First of its kind/Australian first/world first	4%
Other words	
Dynamic	
Urban	
Contemporary	
Revolutionary	
Carbon offsetting	
Environmentally friendly	
Sustainable	
Global credit crunch/world economic crisis	
Ladder of opportunity	
Partnership	
In consultation with...	
Has joined forces with...	
Announced/announces	
Launched/launches	
Stop the presses	





Question 12: What do you think will be the three hottest issues in 2009?

In 2009, the global economic crisis is tipped to top news agendas, with 22.4% of respondents saying this would be the number one issue to watch. Environment/climate change remains a hot topic at 9.9%, with finance/business at 9.9%.

Furthermore, 8.6% of journalists said industrial relations would be an issue to watch, predicting subjects such as job cuts, job losses and job security would be high on the media's agenda.

Top 5 Hot Topics in 2009 (152 responses)	
Global Economic Crisis	22.4%
Environment/Climate Change	9.9%
Finance/Business	9.9%
US Politics	9.2%
Industrial Relations	8.6%

To ensure a greater chance of media coverage, PR practitioners should focus on identifying stories that piggyback on these issues.

In the 2008 BBS Media Survey, journalists predicted the top three issues would be environment/climate change, water and council amalgamations respectively.

