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Everything You Wanted to Know about Being a Communications Director

[By Robin Salisian]

Summary: As a communications director you will need a degree, field experience, teamwork skills, and good communication to thrive in the industry.

If you're interested in earning up to \$150,000 a year, keep reading.

Did that get your attention? It'd get mine — \$150,000, after all, is a competitive salary in any field. But what would you say if I told you that you could earn that much as a communications director in PR?

One person who thrives in the PR industry as a communications director is Julie Wohlberg. During an interview conducted by PRCrossing, Wohlberg shared with us what kinds of experiences are helpful, what kinds of skills are needed, and what kind of advice she has for those interested in a career in PR. While she may not reveal what she makes in a year, she does reveal smart and helpful tips that will help better your chances of landing a job as a communications director.

Qualifications: Communications Directors Need a Degree, Field Experience, and Teamwork Skills

Education: Every company seeking to hire a communications director is going to require a BA or BS. Major in marketing, advertising, communications, English, or public relations, or, like Wohlberg, get your degree in journalism. Throughout her journalism career, she found many similarities between journalism and PR — lots of writing, lots of creativity, and lots of interaction with others.

Experience: Many jobs require communications directors to have between eight and 15 years of experience in the field. This can

include experience in all areas of communications from communication strategies to marketing to media relations to journalism. For Wohlberg in particular, a background and several years of experience in journalism helped tremendously.

"I can't tell you how many times I had a publicist say, 'Oh, I'll get this to you in 20 minutes,' knowing that you're on deadline and waiting for an image or a quote for a story, and they never get back to you," Wohlberg says. "Then it's your job to explain to your editor, 'Well, I was waiting for the publicist.' It becomes your problem. You learn to keep your word and be respectful of deadlines [and] mindful of when people are on deadlines; you don't bother them on the phone."

Skills and Abilities: Strong writing skills, communications skills, and team-working abilities are essential for those interested in becoming communications directors. Because communications directors have the opportunity to work with international companies, knowing a second or even third language can also be helpful. As Wohlberg notes, "I'm half Cuban, so [Spanish is a language] I learned the same time as English."

She also says that someone interested in working in PR must have an outgoing personality. As a communications director, you *will* have to deal with angry, frustrated, and difficult people. Having an outgoing

personality will help you deal with all kinds of situations and all kinds of people.

"People don't like doing the dialing and having people tell them that they're busy or snap at them or hang up on them. You certainly have to have a thick skin, because you're dealing with reporters who are on deadline. Sometimes they will hang up the phone on you or tell you they're not interested or tell you that it's not a good time and remind you that they told you that before. You certainly have to be able to brush it off and keep going."

The Responsibilities of a Communications Director Include Managing Departments and Communicating with Companies

Managing Departments: A communications director is responsible for managing both the company's internal and external communications. She often manages a PR staff and/or the communications department, also known as the public affairs department.

Communicating with Companies: Another responsibility of a communications director is communicating not only with U.S. companies, but with international companies as well. Even the strongest of communications skills might not prepare you for the cultural differences, so be cautious when starting out. Make sure you invest time in learning these differences



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like Wohlberg did: "I've learned a lot about foreign cultures [by] working for an international company. You learn a lot about how things work in the United States and what's appropriate for press outreach. As soon as you start reaching out to reporters in different countries, you find out that there are certain things that are acceptable in the United States that are not acceptable in other countries. It has been a very interesting cultural experience; I've learned quite a bit from my coworkers and colleagues about foreign cultures.

"For example, whenever I do press outreach in the United States, I was always told that it's best, if you are addressing someone for the first

time — especially by email — [if] you refer to them by their first name," she continues. "It's more personal; people tend to pick up on [it] when they see their first name in an email. Their eye goes instantly to that word, and it makes them read on a little more. I found out that that is very inappropriate in European cultures — luckily before I actually sent out any emails! In European cultures, you must address somebody formally. You cannot address them by their first name until they give you permission to do so."

What the Current Job Market for a Communications Director Looks Like

According to Salary.com, the average communications director is making between

\$101, 215 and \$150, 831. But that's not all. Average bonuses for communications directors can boost one's salary by \$10,000 to \$30,000.

Conclusion

By receiving a degree, obtaining field experience, and honing your teamwork and communications skills, you'll be working as a communications director in no time.

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