The PR process can be as simple or complex as you’d like. Yet if you want to have a strong and mutually beneficial relationship with your publics, it’s going to be a somewhat involved practice.

What is symmetrical communication? This model as described in Grunig's Excellence Theory, is the process of ensuring that decisions made by organizations are mutually beneficial between the organization itself and it's audiences. This means using strategic communication to negotiate with your audience, resolve conflicts, and promote mutual understandings all backed with thorough research. This type of system is put in motion when generating a strategic PR Plan.

While there are multiple variations of this PR process, the two most common are R.P.I.E. and R.A.C.E. Though both are found to be equally effective, we believe the R.A.C.E. process to be a more in-depth and evaluative process. For that very reason we will be going over the basics of R.A.C.E.

**WHAT IS RACE IN PR?**

RACE is an effective process to follow when developing a strategic PR plan if you want to have a strong and mutually beneficial relationship with your publics. The R.A.C.E process encompasses the following 4 phases: Research, Action and planning, Communication and relationship building and Evaluation.

Now, let's take a look at each step.

**RESEARCH**

Both formal and informal research with internal and external stakeholders is required to define the problem or opportunity.

You should be able to answer the “Who?” “What?” and “Why?” for your organization’s situation. A good starting point in gathering research is noting what other organizations have done in the past given similar circumstances. How can you ensure your findings are reliable? Make sure you are gathering your information methodically. It is important to mention that in this phase you should search for any possible assumptions and consequences the public might make.

**ACTION AND PLANNING**

This step is essentially strategizing and creating the plan. Dr. Hongmei Shen, PR author and researcher, recommends using S.M.A.R.T. objectives to set goals for a program based on research and analysis. Shen recommends having a:

* **S**pecific (purpose)
* **M**easurable (outcomes)
* **A**ttainable (objective)
* **R**ealistic (goal)
* **T**ime (available and necessary)

 Following this model allows for structure and a clear estimation of a goal's attainability. Your action and planning are necessary to gage measurable results! Follow these S.M.A.R.T. objectives and you'll avoid falling off track.

**COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING**

Relying on that two-way symmetrical communication, build mutually beneficial relationships with your publics. Full disclosure, honesty, and transparency are vital to building consumer trust. It’s not enough to just send messages anymore, there should be an ongoing conversation. Maintaining focus on social responsibility should be a high priority in creating positive relationships.

Communication is the foundation of PR and where you go to relay your information determines how people will receive your news. Knowing your target audience plays a huge role in the success of your PR plan. Zero in on demographic information, find where you target audience goes to for their source of information, and what they like to see. Understanding who you're talking to is just as important as how you're talking to them. Depending on your audience your channel of communication can vary (ex. television, magazines, social media, etc.)

**EVALUATION**

The evaluation phase should focus on your campaign results, be aligned with your primary objectives, and guide you in preparing any additional steps for the future. It should be an ongoing process that is measured against your previously set goals to analyze overall effectiveness. Need a good way to prove growth? Determine your ROI. Monitor any press generated from your campaign, give a rough estimate for the value of that press, and compare it to any expenses affiliated with producing that PR. Here are additional ways to monitor and measure the success of your campaign:

* Secondary Data – (PRSA, IPR, etc.)
* Case Studies – Best practices, methods of crisis communication
* Press Clippings – How much coverage was generated
* Advertising Value Equivalent – Editorial coverage value (Column length/air time x Ad rate)
* Media Content Analysis – Tracking past and future success and failure
* Readability Test – Years of education required to understand campaign
* Audience and reader surveys
* Focus groups and interviews

To avoid faulty results, all four steps of the R.A.C.E. process should be continuously monitored. The best results come from persistent data collection. If the RACE model doesn't particularly interest you, remember it is just one version of the PR process, but most share a similar concept. Get informed and choose the one that best fits your organization's vision.