

# Use Your Powers for Good, Not Evil

Posted by [Alex](#) on November 30, 2010 · [Leave a Comment](#)



*Star Wars* is a convenient (and yes, overused) pop culture touchstone. Let me state for the record that I enjoy the movies, but aside from a fascination with Darth Vader in my pre-teen years, I am not one to quote lines from the movies.

Well, okay, except for “these aren’t the droids you’re looking for,” which I say accompanied by a bizarre hand gesture. Actually, I replace the word “droids” with whatever topic the conversation is orbiting, which could be anything from “delicious martinis” to “diapers” to “male pattern baldness solutions.”

Anyway, one thing public relations professionals have to be keenly aware of is (as the man said in *Star Wars*) using their powers for good, not evil.

Case in point, Institute of Public Relations Malaysia president Datuk Mohd Hamdan Adnan, who made no bones about it: “Among the negative activities of certain media practitioners are spin doctoring, flacking, astroturfing, opponent defining and fronting. All these can threaten peace and order in the country.”

Hamdan continued (source here):

*“Presently, almost all organisations require various PR expertise and as such, PR practitioners must have the skills to fulfill that need.”*

*He said among the benefits from the creation of a Public Relations Profession Act would be recognition and prestige for the profession in Malaysia, monitoring of the practices and developments of the PR profession and industry, and ensuring PR practitioners had acquired the education, and suitable training and experience before being recognised as qualified PR practitioners, in line with other professions that were protected by statutes.*

Sounds like the way lawyers and doctors administer their profession in the U.S., eh?

Not a bad idea, especially if you agree that the abuse of information, facts, and the warping of motive and intent can be disastrous. In the United States, there is no such governing body for the profession, aside from the purely voluntary

standards and codes of ethics as set by the Public Relations Society of America or the International Association of Business Communicators.

Both codes are admirable, forthright, and necessary—though completely unenforceable. Just as it was in the Wild West, any modern-day snake oil salesman can sell elixirs with malignant properties across the electronic frontier. Corporate mistakes can be hidden under layers of spin; governmental lies can be excused by propaganda; customer complaints may be expunged from the “public” website.

This is the way any skilled—and unscrupulous—public relations professional can use their powers for evil. Instead of owning up to mistakes or misjudgments, clients can activate the PR machine and through “spin doctoring, flacking, astroturfing or opponent defining and fronting,” come out smelling like a rose.

It is easier in a way. Clients who want that sort of thing will love their “PR man” for it. However, in the long run, is it the best thing?

I mean, is there any doubt among serious minded people that BP’s PR mission was not one of transparency, but obfuscation and deflection? Okay, and just how *do* you feel about BP? BP is only one example of the misuse of PR in a culture rife with the warping of facts to turn public

opinion. What is the culture of spin doing to our country? Indeed, to our *selves*?

I am not saying you throw your client to the wolves when the going gets tough—but you don't take the easy way out and commit lies of omission or commission, either.

What's hard is to have the courage to tell that high-paying client when they are indeed wrong—when these are indeed not the droids they're looking for.

If they made a mistake or did harm, clients should be advised by PR professionals that a policy of honesty, contrition and a desire to do better is in their best interests and indeed the interests of society as a whole.

Ultimately it's the client's decision, but public relations professionals shouldn't enable shifts to the Dark Side.

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### **About Alex**

Alex has earned a reputation for success and ingenuity from his more than twenty years experience in public relations, journalism, marketing and broadcasting. His career has spanned several industries including healthcare, television, non-profit organizations and higher education. His work in the news media includes positions as an editor, journalist, host of a radio talk show and vice president of Kansas City Public Television. Alex left the television industry to create a communications division for one of Kansas City's leading special events firms. He founded AlexanderG Public Relations, LLC in January 2010. Alex is also the author of the novel "Pilate's Cross" available at the iPad iBook Store, BarnesandNoble.com, Smashwords.com, Sony Reader Store and Kobo.com. Visit the website [www.PilatesCross.com](http://www.PilatesCross.com).

# **Proposed PR Act revisited**

**By M. HAFIDZ MAHPAR**

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IT was nine years ago this month when the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM) president Prof Datuk Hamdan Adnan talked about the need for a Public Relations Profession Act at a PR conference. Today, the Act remains a dream.

There has been strong opposition to the proposed Act, which would make it mandatory for PR professionals to be accredited with the IPRM in order to practise.



Prof Dato' Mohd Hamdan Adnan

News about the Act has resurfaced on and off over the years, and last week the Information, Communications and Culture Ministry held a dialogue in Kuala Lumpur with PR practitioners to get their feedback on it.

Hamdan tells *StarBizWeek* that while IPRM already has an accreditation scheme for PR practitioners, it is important to have a legislation to make the profession more respectable. “If you have something that is not enforceable, then you’ll have a problem,” he says in a telephone interview.

On the opposition, Hamdan says: “What’s wrong with having someone to protect your interest (as PR practitioners)? Why are you so afraid to be controlled by a body that wants to upgrade the profession? “Other professions also have Acts which, if people contravene them, they’re punished. Without the Act, there would be more crooks in the profession.”

Hamdan also mentions the possibility of foreigners flooding the market if there's no control, adding, however, that qualified PR professionals from overseas can still come here and practise. "We want to ensure that only the best come to this country," he says.

One of the main points of contention is Article 21 of the draft which states that "no person unless he/she is registered as a public relations practitioner under this Act (i.e. registered with IPRM), and has his/her principal or only place of residence within Malaysia" can practise PR in the country.

Any person contravening the Act may be fined up to RM5,000 or imprisoned up to one year, or both.

Public Relations Consultants Association of Malaysia (PRCA Malaysia), which is strongly against the proposed Act, contends that this violates the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) treaty under the World Trade Organisation.

Hamdan admits that Article 21, as it currently stands, bars non-residents from practising PR in Malaysia, but he says this could be modified later.

"IPRM is more than willing to talk. I find (those opposing the Act) unreasonable. They are welcome to give their input and help us make the Act fair for all," he says.

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# **KERAJAAN SEDANG MENGKAJI UNTUK MENGGUBAL AKTA PROFESION PERHUBUNGAN RAYA**

KUALA LUMPUR 25 Nov. 2009 - Kerajaan sedang mengkaji untuk menggubal Akta Perhubungan Awam bagi membolehkan pengamal profesion itu mendapat pengiktirafan setanding negara maju.

Menteri Penerangan, Komunikasi dan Kebudayaan, Dato' Seri Utama Dr. Rais Yatim berkata, bagi penggubalan akta itu, Institut Perhubungan Awam Malaysia (IPRM) dan Jabatan Penerangan akan terlebih dahulu mengkaji kuasa seorang pengamal perhubungan awam di negara ini.

"Selama ini masalah yang dihadapi untuk mewujudkan akta berkenaan adalah definisi perhubungan awam di Malaysia, jadi menerusi IPRM kita akan kaji mengenainya.

"Penggubalan Akta Perhubungan Awam merupakan berita baik kepada golongan wartawan, pegawai perhubungan awam dan penyiar di negara ini," katanya.

Beliau berkata demikian selepas menyampaikan ucapan bertajuk Peranan dan Tanggungjawab Pengamal Perhubungan Awam Dalam Merealisasikan 1Malaysia di Jabatan Penerangan, Wisma Sime Darby di sini hari ini.

Dalam pada itu, menurut Rais, IPRM dan pengamal perhubungan awam perlu aktif menjalankan kegiatan menerusi blog dan Internet.

"Ini selaras dasar kerajaan supaya masyarakat Malaysia memberi perhatian kepada kegiatan melalui Internet.

"Pengamal perhubungan awam juga perlu menentukan peranan mereka dalam menjayakan gagasan 1Malaysia," katanya.

Pada majlis itu, Rais melancarkan dua buku, *Perkembangan Perhubungan Awam Kerajaan serta Politik Malaysia* dan *Pengamalan Perhubungan Awam Kerajaan dan Politik Malaysia* tulisan Presiden IPRM, Profesor Dato' Mohd. Hamdan Adnan.

Beliau turut menyampaikan Anugerah Felo IPRM kepada enam pengamal perhubungan awam terkenal di negara ini termasuk Timbalan Ketua Pengarah (Operasi) Jabatan Penerangan, Datuk Poziah Abdul Rahman; Naib Presiden IPRM, Dato' Mohamad Salleh Rafie dan Aisha Rashid.

(Utusan Malaysia)