

Public Relations Industry Paper

[K]overt Creative CEO and Co-Founder Lewis Kay

S.I Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University

PRL 206: Public Relations Principles and Practices

Professor Brad Horn

April 24, 2025

Public Relations Industry Paper: [K]overt Creative CEO and Co-Founder Lewis Kay

Public Relations is a constantly changing field that has lasting impacts on society and is extremely important no matter where you are from. In my opinion, I believe the world would not be able to function without public relations. Across time, public relations has expanded and is still constantly evolving across many fields, working to help shape narratives and build relationships between an organization and their public audiences. PR to many might be viewed as managing public images and handling crises but this field of work truly is much more specific than that. PR industries all around the world work towards consumer growth and becoming more interconnected within society. The entertainment sector of PR is a specialized field that requires creativity and a lot of fast paced strategy. It includes a wide range of specific management within the different parts of talent publicity. Whether working on brand partnerships or crisis management, these important roles mold public opinion and shift perspectives in favor of organizations and celebrity clientele. This skillset is particularly important in the field of entertainment public relations, where public perception can make a tremendous difference in one's career. Representing celebrities is more than just publicity: It requires successful management of both the individual's life and public's perception simultaneously. Practitioners must work to create narratives that support their clients' beliefs and goals, while at the same time working to limit controversies. Practitioners must also find ways to be creative and keep their client well-known and relevant amongst others in this extremely judgmental and competitive industry.

In the entertainment industry, public perception can alter within seconds. PR is used as a tool to help maintain positive public images for these individuals. To understand more about this industry and what it takes to be successful in the world of entertainment, I was fortunate enough to interview Mr. Lewis Kay, CEO and Co-Founder of [K]overt Creative. Having the honor of speaking with Mr. Kay, I was able to hear about his career journey, combined with the insights he shared about the Public Relations industry, which offered an inside look into what it truly means to work in communications. Listening to his experiences, I gained a greater understanding and perspective for what it takes to have a successful career in this field. For young PR professionals like myself, his advice was extremely valuable and provided me with not just guidance but also a deeper understanding of what may come with building a career in this dynamic field.

Lewis Kay graduated from the University of California, Santa Barbara with a bachelor's degree in communication. His entry into PR was not as simple as one may think, since he "fell into" this industry. Mr. Kay said, "I was a communications major, starting in marketing, and discovered that PR came more naturally to me" (L. Kay, Personal communication, April 17th, 2025). His early on experiences in marketing gave him foundational skills that he later applied after his transition to PR. Mr. Kay began his PR career at PMK*BNC, a large scale global public relation agency based out of Los Angeles, where he worked for almost 20 years in the Entertainment Division. Rising the ranks, he finished his time as Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer. During his time with the agency, Mr. Kay notably coordinated PR on behalf of the Emmys and Grantland's debut (Kovertcreative.com). In 2016, seeking change and continuing to flourish, Mr. Kay Co-founded [K]overt Creative alongside Joseph Assad, a former colleague of Mr. Kay's at PMK*BNC. He has now worked in this position for a little over 9 years. Mr. Kay's work aligns with the definition by Public Relations Society of America

(PRSA), which describes PR as a “strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organization and its publics,” (PRSA, 2025) since he transforms close relationships with his clients into positive public perception.

Mr. Kay established his professional career by dedicating himself to forming trustful relationships between clients and public audiences. He uses strategic methods which includes developing media and fan relationships for his clients. Through his company [K]overt Creative, Mr. Kay represents himself by showcasing his work through top projects such as “Jimmy Kimmel Live!” where Mr. Kay works directly with Jimmy Kimmel as his publicist. I was fortunate enough to also hear about Mr. Kay’s experience traveling around throughout the production of the Box office breaking, Minecraft Movie, alongside his client, Jack Black. Through this direct line of communication with his clients, Mr. Kay develops a public image that not only creates a positive perception in the media but also matches his clients’ professional values and personal brand/career goals, while at the same time working to have good perceptions in the media. Mr. Kay develops and maintains personal brands which cultivates their strength with nonstop public attention. He is responsible as the trusted practitioner who helps his clients reduce risk of poor reputation by using strategic approaches to develop messages that guide them through challenging situations such as crises. He must remain collected, which creates trust with his clients during critical moments. By properly adapting to new and upcoming trends and cultural changes, Mr. Kay successfully maintains his clients’ success while keeping their public image intact with their personal values and requests.

[K]overt Creative is different and stands out in the entertainment PR world. As a boutique agency based in Los Angeles with around 20 employees, [K]overt works for personalized approaches to communication strategies for some of the world’s most recognizable names,

including Jimmy Kimmel, MrBeast, Jack Black, and Tracy Morgan and many more. In his current position, many of his responsibilities include dealing with crisis management, coordinating events, and working on strategic messaging and branded content. When asked about the nature of his job and what his normal workday looks like, Mr. Kay explained to me that there is no such thing as a typical “day-to-day” in his field of work. He also explained to me that the most important thing is to “be proactive because no two clients or days are ever alike” (L. Kay, personal communication, April 17th, 2025). He also described the hectic, fast-paced nature of entertainment PR, as he shared that a beneficial skill to have in this industry to learn to be successful from day to day is to “be good at managing multiple things at once, keeping everything at the top and not slipping through the cracks” (L. Kay, personal communication, April 17th 2025). This mirrors Tom Kelleher’s view of PR in *Public Relations-2nd addition*, as he states that “it takes more than just enthusiasm to keep up with the 24/7 ups and downs of Public Relations jobs in sports and entertainment” (Kelleher, p.387). Mr. Kay’s work changes based on current issues whether that being personal issues of a client, or issues within media.

[K]overt differs in size from larger scale agencies, but its concentration on smaller groups means that they can form more intimate and well-rounded relationships with their clients. Because his work is so specific, Mr. Kay works directly with his clients, working to improve overall success. These close relationships enable him to better understand his clients' personal experiences, which helps him solve issues faster. Organization and networking are key tools that Mr. Kay has used to thrive in this industry. As he stated in the interview, “Networking is everything, almost everything in PR. Pay attention, read everything, and meet everyone you can” (L. Kay, Personal communication, April 17th, 2025). He stressed that it is important for young people in PR to look for all internship opportunities and to get into any agency possible, no

matter the size as any experience is good experience. A statement of Mr. Kay's that has stuck with me since our interview is, "Get your foot in the door and don't let them close it" (L. Kay, personal communication, April 17th, 2025). True relationships in this industry are what keeps jobs and opportunities circulating. Without relationships, jobs become almost impossible. Beyond helping with job opportunities, building strong relationships in communications is crucial to success in PR. For example, having a good rapport with a journalist might hold them off from releasing a story, giving a publicist time to prepare for a response (Brad Horn, Lecture, 2025).

A topic that I brought up with Mr. Kay that we spent a good amount of time speaking about was the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) in communications. While many people may predict that AI will harm jobs, Mr. Kay did not seem to be worried about the increasing prevalence of this technology. He shared his belief that AI is "overblown" and that he does not see the concern because of how much of PR is human based. "Computers cannot build relationships" (L. Kay, personal communication, April 17th, 2025), he said, and because of this PR will continue to be practiced by real people. He also highlighted that authentic human interactions and human emotional appeals are quite literally impossible to replace. Additionally, with the use of AI and computers, trust may be at fault. Trust requires human connections. Artificial intelligence also faces challenges when creating content, especially content that is made in an attempt to persuade readers or gain emotional responses. Public relations require this type of storytelling because it establishes trust while molding public understanding and strengthening audience connections. AI lacks the ability to create messages which feel genuine and connect with real people effectively beyond basic facts (Brad Horn, Lecture, 2025). However, as public relations continue to evolve, it is clear that certain industries have been

increasing their usage of this technology. For instance, a study produced by J.G Navarro states that, “As of January 2025, approximately 20 percent of public relations (PR) firms surveyed worldwide reported considering the technology industry a sector with growth opportunities” (Navarro-Statista, 2025). The increasing interest demonstrates that AI technology will improve specific tools in the field yet human connection remains essential to public relations.

My expectations about entertainment PR before speaking with Mr. Kay were far different. Online information had led me to believe the job mainly involved working on celebrity issues and helping with positive brand images. I failed to realize that most of the work occurs behind the scenes, working with celebrities themselves as well as people within the media. Publicists use their time building relationships, handling multiple clients at a single time, maintaining attention to details, and preparing for unexpected problems. Because [K]overt is a smaller-scale agency, each employee must focus a lot more time on their individual clients without much wiggle room. Publicists in this field need to handle multiple personalities while observing and predicting how others will react in both the present and the future. The entertainment PR field also has a lot more challenges than those in other sectors of public relations. For example, corporate PR teams handle mistakes without notice and have more time (in most cases) to deal with problems before public awareness. The entertainment industry, in contrast, is much faster, with significantly less time to prepare before information hits the media. (Brad Horn, Lecture, 2025). One single mistake such as a bad tweet or controversial interview can lead to an instant viral spread across the news and social platforms. The public media can create an intense pressure that affects both the celebrity/public figure and their publicist who handles the crisis.

With my first year of college coming to an end, and still early in my public relations career, my interview with Mr. Kay has completely changed my perception of PR, especially

entertainment PR. Entertainment PR contains multiple layers which extend beyond a single job type or daily work activities. The responsibilities in entertainment PR differ significantly between small boutique agencies and large high-profile firms. Employers' jobs are also based on the client's needs, which makes the day-to-day, even for those with the same job title, vastly different. Entertainment PR stands out to me because it requires high sensitivity to both changing public opinions and shifting societal trends. This sector of PR operates at a rapid pace because it depends heavily on media coverage, cultural trends, and online reactions. The rapid spread of social media trends creates immediate consequences for how entertainment PR operates.

My discussion with Mr. Lewis Kay provided me with a newfound understanding of public relations in the entertainment industry and a more realistic understanding of what it truly means to work in this field. Public relations involve more than creating good public images or manipulating information to gain positive public attention. Instead, the true practice of public relations involves creating enduring connections between individuals and the public, all while establishing trust and guiding clients through shifting media environments. The advice Mr. Kay shared about his early work in PR, as well as his networking and business expertise, has greatly expanded my knowledge of the industry and will guide both my academic and career growth.

Works Cited

- Horn, Brad (2025) Public Relations lecture/ PowerPoint slides
- Kay, Lewis, (Personal communications, April 17th, 2025)
- Kelleher, Tom. *Public Relations*. 2nd ed., New York, Ny, Oxford University Press, 2021.
- Kovert Creative. “Kovert Creative.” *Kovert Creative*, 2025, <https://kovertcreative.com> Accessed 27 Apr. 2025.
- “What Is Public Relations | Learn about PR | PRSSA.” *Www*, 2024, https://www.prsa.org/prssa/about-prssa/learn-about-pr?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Navarro, J.G. “Most Promising Sectors according to PR Firms 2024 | Statista.” *Statista*, 2024, www.statista.com/statistics/1394384/top-industries-opportunities-pr-firmsworldwide/.