

Slovak Journalists Survey July 2003

Introduction

The term “media relations” can probably be found among the services offered by all PR agencies. Judging by their criticism of each other, however, the relationship between journalists and PR executives is a somewhat unbalanced one. Although PR agencies believe their aim is to serve journalists as a source of information, some of them claim they can get by without them. Happily. This begs the question: Why?

Why shouldn't relations between journalists and PR executives be correct? Why do they suspect each other of behaving badly? Why do some PR executives sell their goods under the counter and after closing? Why do some journalists spurn transparently submitted and verifiable information just because it's from a PR agency that has signed the press release? This is the reason we conducted this research into opinions of Slovak print media representatives. In it we focused on one of the most common methods used by companies and PR agencies to communicate with journalists – the press release.

I have always claimed that a PR agency's job is to serve print and electronic media only as a supplementary source of information, which the media should, and perhaps even must use as they see fit. If this is to happen, however, nobody can interfere with communication between PR agencies and journalists.

I would like to thank all the journalists who took advantage of this opportunity and shared their opinions with us. I sincerely hope that it is the first step towards improving relations, deepening trust and mutual respect between journalists and respectable PR executives.

Michal Donath
Donath-Burson-Marsteller

Prague/Bratislava, August 2003

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Methodology

Aims:

- Find out how the press and electronic media use supplementary information sources like press releases.
- Make a representative evaluation of the frequency of use of electronic communication as compared with traditional methods.
- Contribute to an improvement of relations between journalists and PR employees.

Survey in an International Context

This survey is the first Internet-based poll conducted among journalists in Slovakia by Donath-Burson-Marsteller. At the same time a survey was done among journalists in the Czech Republic. The research is comparable with a UK poll of journalists' attitudes conducted in 2002 for [Burson-Marsteller](#) by [The Survey Shop](#). Results of the poll are available in English. Another similar survey was performed by Donath-Burson-Marsteller in the Czech Republic at the same time. The results of the Czech poll are available at <http://www.dbm.cz/pruzkum>.

Questionnaire system

The survey was conducted using Donath-Burson-Marsteller's own Internet-based querying system. The system creates questionnaires and distributes personalized invitations to participate in the survey, to ensure that statistically relevant data is collected.

Sample

In order to select a representative sample of journalists working for the most influential print media, 410 journalists were requested to participate in the survey. Because they work in a different way, no TV/radio journalists were included in the sample. Querying was done by means of a questionnaire made available on the Internet to the invited respondents.

Media and Sector	N	n	n (% of N)
Daily press	293	48	16%
IT media	25	5	20%
Trade press (media, PR)	11	2	18%
SITA	6	2	33%
Society weeklies	32	5	16%
Economy weeklies	43	8	19%
Total:	410	70	17%

Key: N = total journalist population, n = sample

Respondents

The respondents were journalists who published at least one article between April and June 2003 and have access to a central office e-mail address. The survey was carried out between July 1st and 31st, 2003. The response rate (17%) is above the minimum response required for Internet surveys (according to TNS: 15%).

Free Distribution

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As Dead As Fax

How to communicate with journalists?

What form of press releases and invitations to press conferences is preferred by journalists? The respondents selected from the following options, including their combinations:

"I cooperate with the PR agencies, I take them as a possible source of information and often they help me discover a very nice topic for our magazine."

Dagmar
Krištofičová
Profit

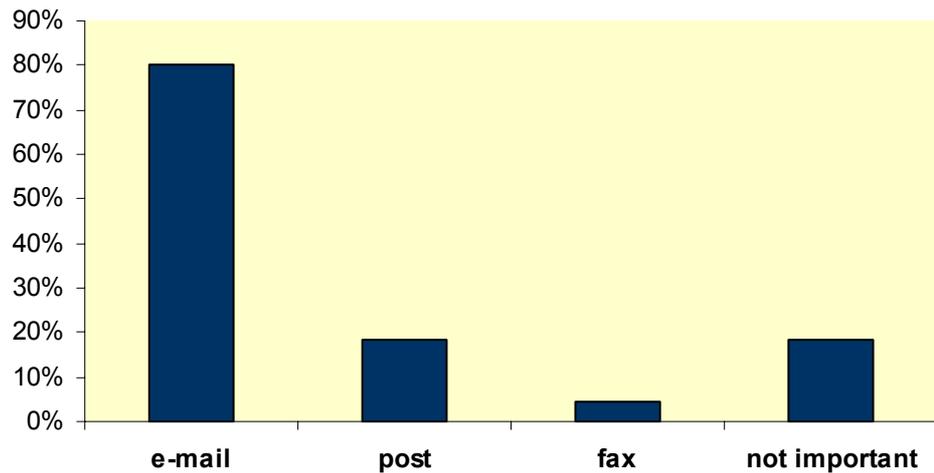


Chart 1: 80% of journalists prefer e-mail or a combination of e-mail and other methods of communication, whereas only one journalist prefers post. One respondent preferred fax alone.

Move With the Times

E-mail can be the main method of delivery of press releases and invitations for nearly all journalists (99 percent, including those respondents who prefer e-mail and those who had no preference). Those with a good memory will confirm that press releases were mostly distributed by fax only five years ago.

Selective Reading

Making Decisions

How much of a press release does a journalist usually read before deciding if it contains useful information? (including combinations)

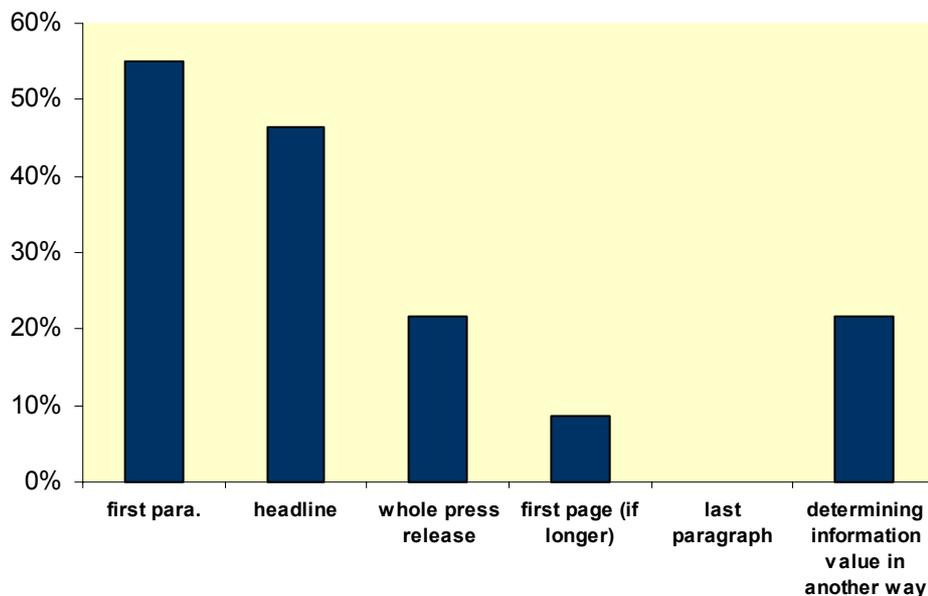


Chart 2: Only one third of the journalists (30%) read beyond the header or the first paragraph of a press release to make up their mind whether the release contains any valuable information or not.

Sure Bet

The last paragraph is not the place for important information. Only a small proportion of journalists (22%) read all press releases to the end before they decide whether to throw them out. One in five journalists has a 'different method' of determining whether a release is newsworthy, but that is hardly anything to go by.

There is almost no difference between Slovak and Czech journalists when it comes to their habit of reading no more than the first few lines of a press release. In the UK even less of them (18%) read beyond the first paragraph.

Lovely SPAM

The Journey of the Press Release

Press releases are sent to journalists in various ways. How many does a journalist receive on average per week?

“There are too many different topics to cover them all. So, unless it’s of crucial importance to all our readers, we can hardly deal with a single topic more than once.”

Soňa Rebrová
SME

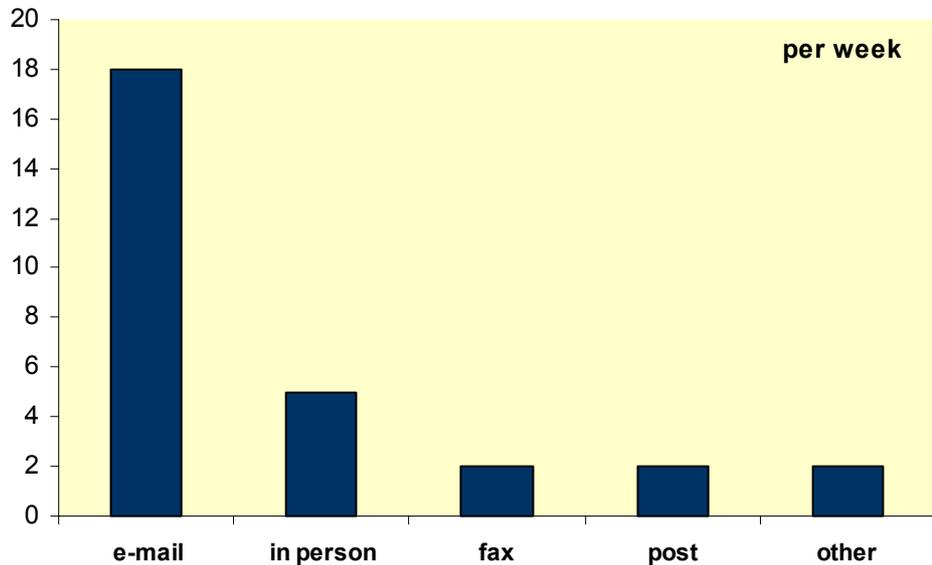


Chart 3: A journalist receives on average 29 press releases per week. Nearly all journalists (98.5%) receive press releases by e-mail.

Great Variability

Journalists reported receiving from none to 330 press releases. In the Czech Republic journalists receive on average 46 releases and in the UK 185 releases per week, six times more than in Slovakia.

Too Much or Too Little?

The number of press releases received by journalists is:

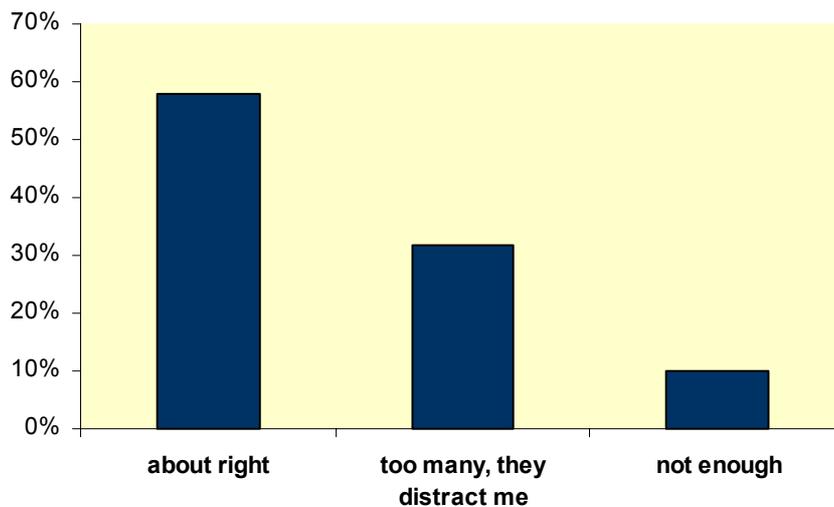


Chart 4: Most journalists (58%) are satisfied with the amount of press releases they receive. Every tenth journalist would even like to receive more. The remaining 32% would like to see less of them in their Inbox.

Critical Eye

On Press Releases

Journalists were asked to give the percentage of press releases which contained the following mistakes:

“Releases linked to a particular company have no value for journalists, but they’re still in the majority.”

Gabriela Bachárová
Pravda

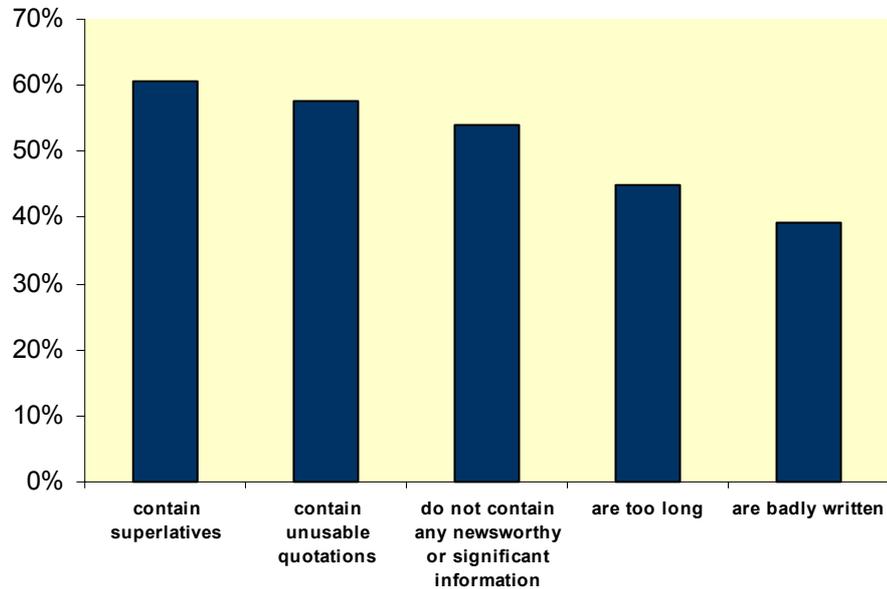


Chart 5: On average 61 per cent of press releases contain superlatives. Journalists claim that about one half (54%) of press releases do not contain any newsworthy information.

“Often the content of press releases is technically incorrect.”

Juraj Hruz
Trend

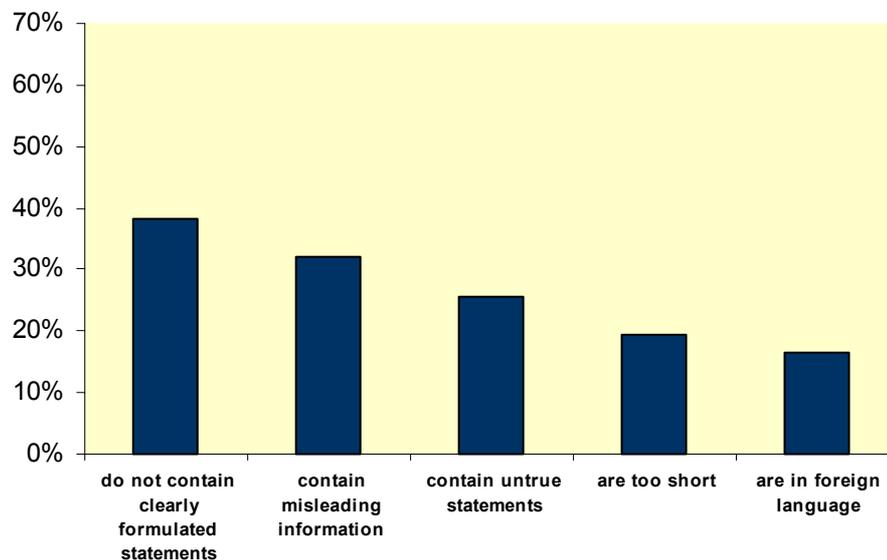


Chart 6: One quarter of press releases (26%) contain false statements, according to journalists. They also believe that one fifth (20%) are too short.

Comparison

Journalists in the UK report that 62 per cent of press releases do not contain any newsworthy information. Czech journalists reported the faults of press releases in the same sequence as their Slovak colleagues.

Journalists about PR Tools

Objective Assessment

We tried to find out how useful these tools and forms of communication were to journalists, on a scale of 1 (completely useless) to 6 (very useful):

“Being more humble and insightful would probably not do PR agencies any harm.”

Vojtech Gossányi
Hospodárske
noviny

“PR agencies often annoy people by sending the same materials to all journalists they have in their database.”

Juraj Hruz
Trend

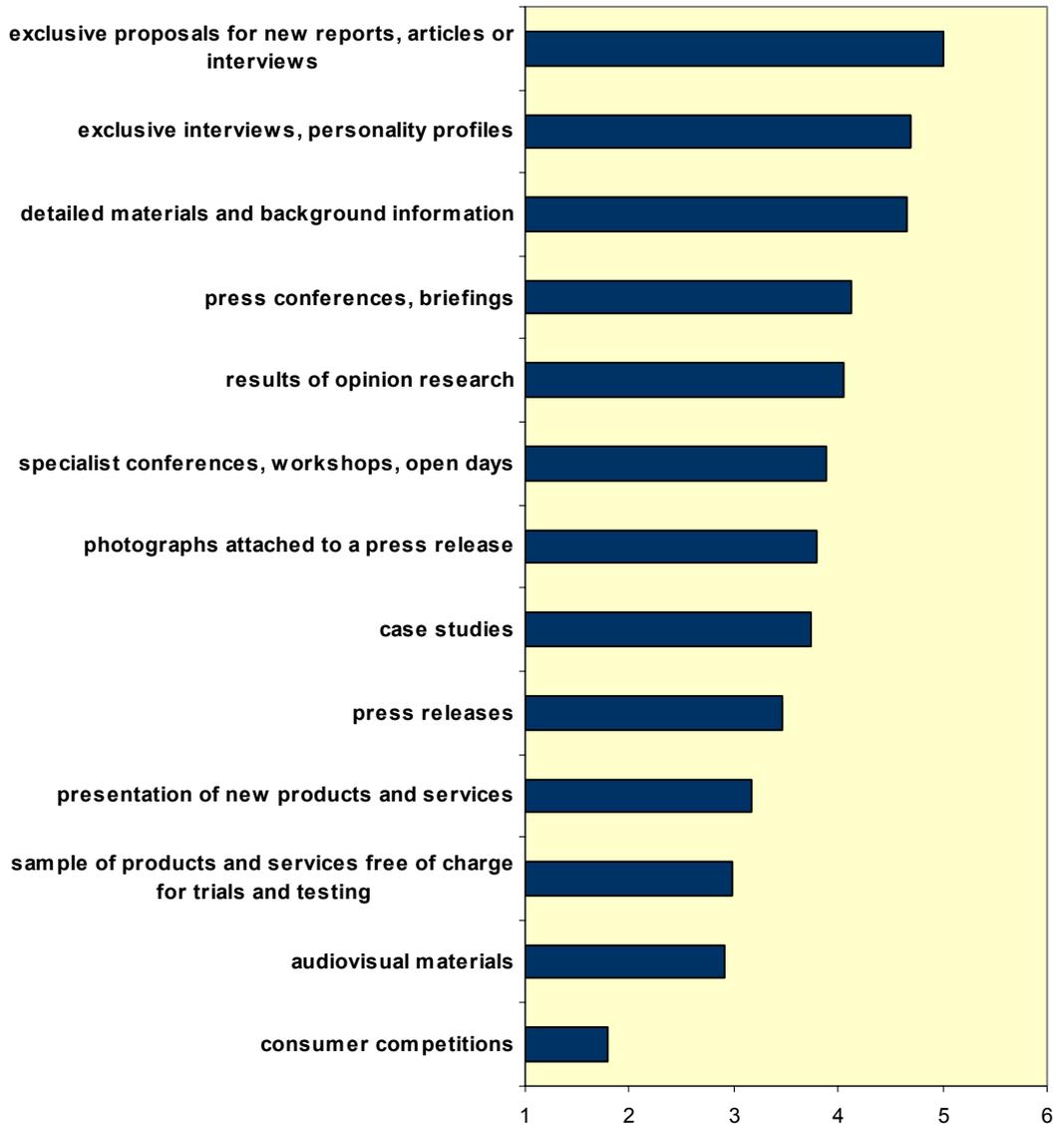


Chart 7: The score is an average value. IT media journalists gave a significantly higher mark to product sampling and free trial and testing services (average for IT media: 5.2), thereby rating this PR tool significantly better than other journalists (average for all: 3).

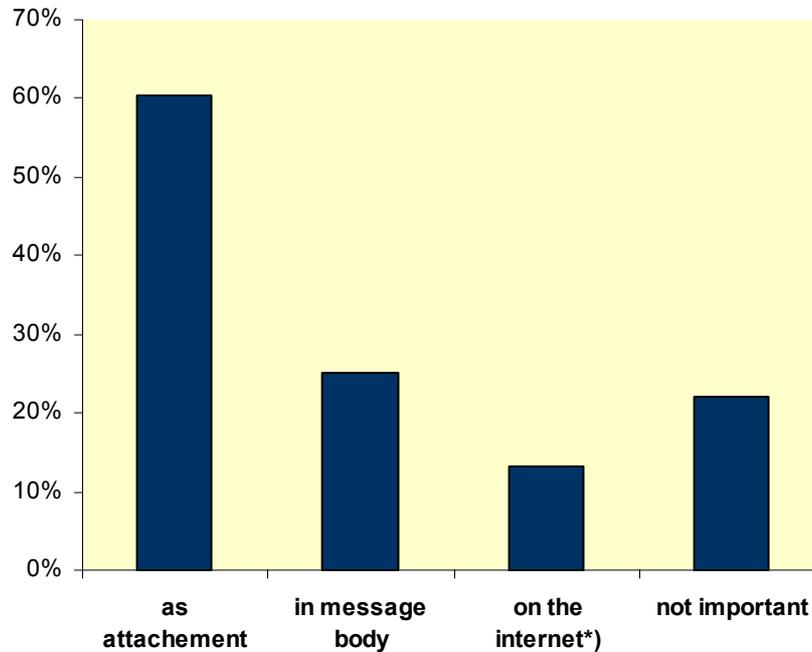
Individual Approach

Journalists working in different sectors and sections assess PR tools in different ways, according to their needs and focus.

Body or Attachment?

E-mail Wrap

What is the best way to send a press release by e-mail? What form do journalists prefer?



*) e-mail contains a link to the press release

Chart 8: Most journalists (60%) prefer to receive press releases as an attachment. One tenth of journalists (13%) reported they would prefer only press releases sent in the body of an e-mail.

E-mail Diversity

Both Slovak and Czech journalists, contrary to their UK colleagues, prefer attached press releases to press releases embedded in the body of an e-mail. In the UK 55 per cent of journalists prefer press releases in an e-mail's body. Not one Czech journalist, unlike the Slovak and British counterparts, only wanted embedded press releases.

Monopoly on Format

One Ring to Rule Them All

If an e-mail contains a press release in an attachment, which format do journalists prefer?

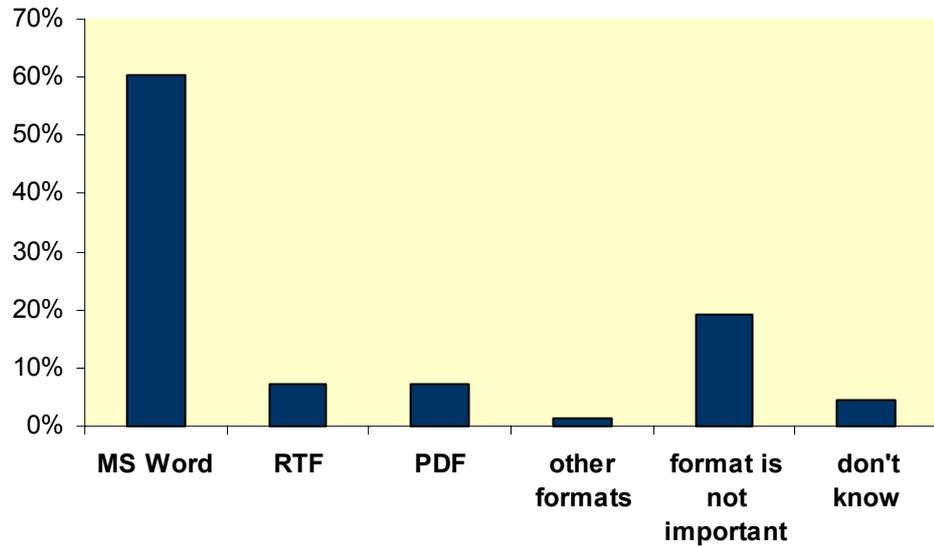


Chart 9: Seven in ten journalists (68%) prefer Microsoft file formats (MS Word and RTF). If we add those with no preferred format, nearly all journalists can work with attachments in a Microsoft format.

One Ring to Bind Them

The main characteristic common to all Slovak editorial offices is the unification of the file format they use. This reflects the word processor market, which is dominated by Microsoft and its MS Office software suite. Despite this, seven per cent of journalists prefer PDF.

Central E-mail? Aim to Win!

Central E-mail Addresses

Do journalists use press releases delivered to the shared central e-mail address of their office?

“PR agencies often lack staff who understand how a newspaper is made – distribution of topics, deadlines, good timing, etc.”

Juraj Hruz
Trend

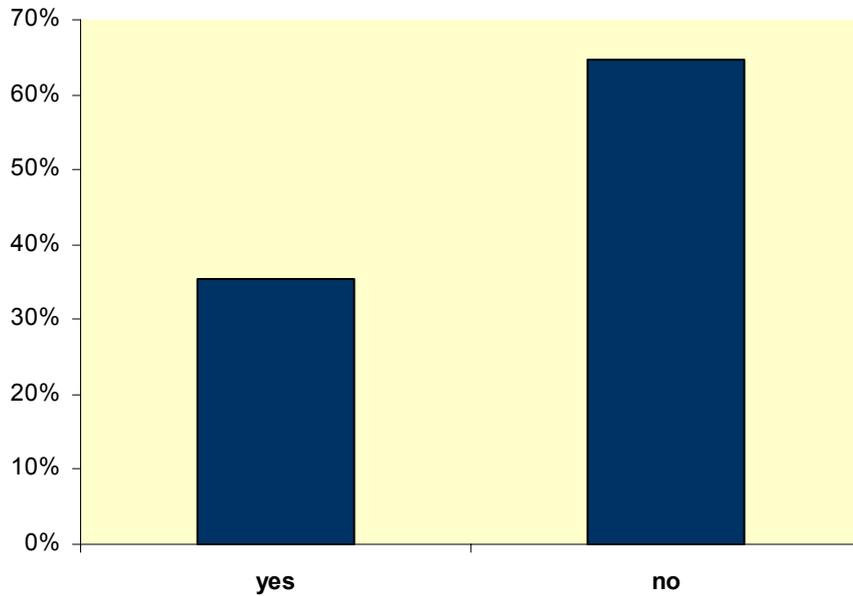


Chart 10: Those who do not use press releases delivered to a shared e-mail address of the office are in a vast majority, compared to those who do use such press releases. By a margin of twenty-nine per cent.

Event Horizon

Most journalists (64 per cent) do not work with press releases delivered to a central office e-mail address. On the contrary, most journalists in the Czech Republic (56 per cent) do use these releases.

Each to His Own

Topics and Journalists

Do journalists reject press releases? What releases would interest them:

“I personally am most irritated by releases which are completely unrelated to the topics I cover.”

Pavol Sud'a
Trend

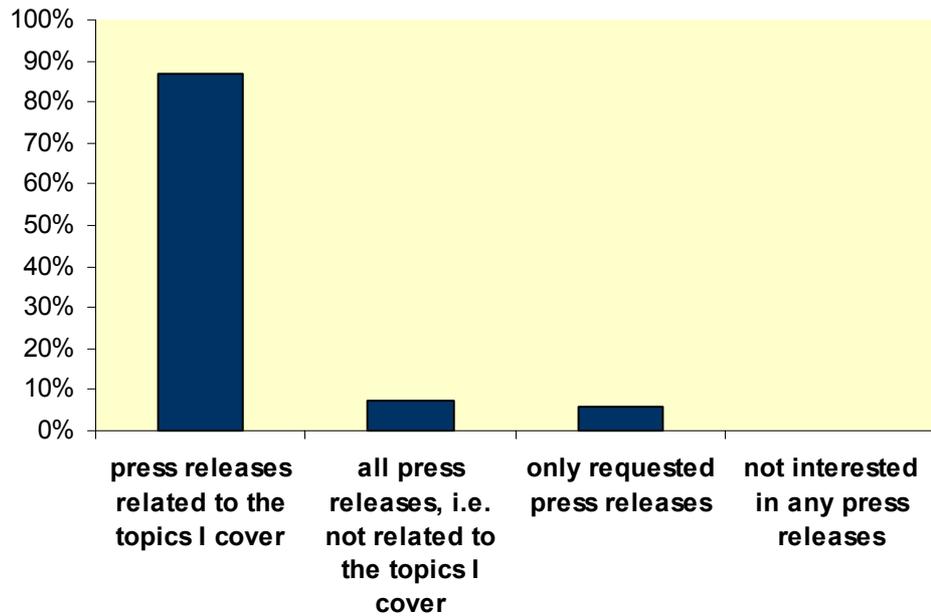


Chart 11: Nearly all journalists (87%) are only interested in press releases related to the fields they cover. Some (6%) are even interested in any and all.

“Firstly, I am irritated by the influx of information related to commercial messages of various companies.”

Arpád Soltész
Národná obroda

Distribution Pitfalls

Because a majority of journalists only want press releases related to their field of work and most of them do not work with press releases delivered to the central office e-mail, it is necessary to produce sophisticated and detailed distribution lists of the proper recipients. The downside is that as journalists change jobs and other staffing changes are made, the distribution lists become obsolete and will generate a huge number of unsolicited e-mails.

One Page Rule

Waste Not

Can the size of a press release annoy a journalist? What size is right?

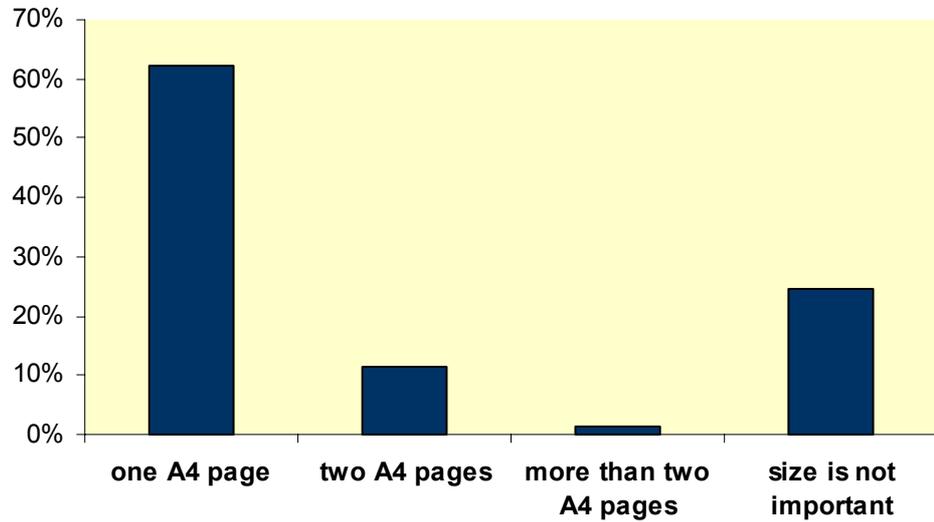


Chart 12: Most journalists (62%) believe that a press release should have one page. A quarter (25%) think size is not important.

Want Not

Three quarters of journalists (74%) believe that a press release should not exceed two A4 pages. Clearly, longer press releases lose their original purpose: fast and effective communication.

In Press Release We Trust

Low Awareness

Are journalists aware of the possible misuse of the sender's identity in the distribution of press releases? Do they verify the authenticity and origin of press releases?

"We often see the work of a PR agency as an effort to blur reality and distort facts."

Juraj Hruz
Trend

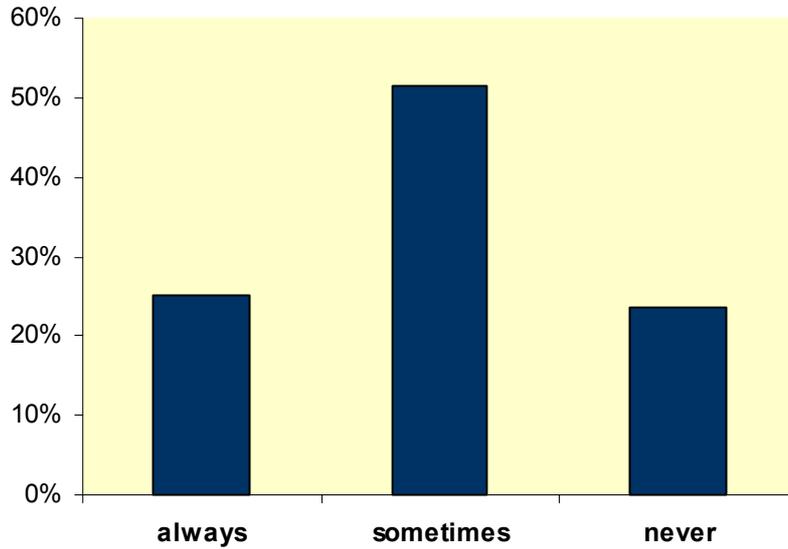


Chart 13: Only a few journalists (25%) verify the identity of the sender or the authenticity of a press release. The rest only do it sometimes (51%) or never (24%).

Too Much Trust

Due to its simplicity and large volumes, electronic communication can be a potential danger to the media if the sender and the content of a press release are fake. This could lead to the publication of misleading information or even hoaxes.

Cell Text Messages? Not yet!

Trends

Are journalists interested in receiving notification of press releases and conferences by text message (SMS)?

“I recommend agencies check if people are coming by phone shortly before a press conference – several times that helped me to come to a press conference I would otherwise have forgotten about or not noticed at all.”

Pavol Suda
Trend

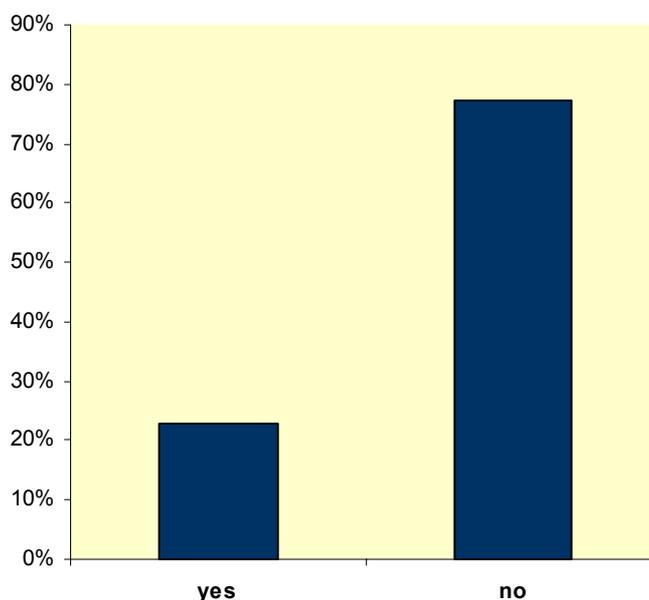


Chart 14: Only one quarter of journalists (23%) were interested in receiving information by text message.

What Comes after E-mail?

Penetration of mobile phones in Slovakia is growing rapidly. People are also used to using services other than voice calls. Despite that, only 23 per cent of the journalists can imagine text messages being used for notification of current press releases and for sending invitations to press conferences. The situation is similar among Czech journalists.

On the Catwalk

“Unfortunately the only thing a PR agency does is arrange a room in a hotel, order coffee and snacks, pack some ‘presents’ in plastic bags, call the papers and then let their client stammer something about his company’s marvellous product.”

Arpád Soltész
Národná obroda

Concept

From the information collected in our survey we attempted to create a model Slovak press journalist. The characteristics were obtained from averaged values. Similarity with living persons is purely coincidental.

The Typical Journalist:

- is more often a man than a woman (57 per cent of respondents were male),
- prefers to receive press releases by e-mail,
- reads the first paragraph of a press release to evaluate its newsworthiness,
- receives 29 press releases per week,
- believes that more than one half of press releases are stuffed with superlatives, useless quotes and no newsworthy information,
- appreciates press conferences, exclusive ideas for an article or interview, will also be pleased by detailed background materials, press releases and results of various opinion polls,
- does not need multimedia materials or results of consumer competitions,
- will appreciate if a press release is in MS Word format and sent as an attachment to an e-mail,
- definitely does not read all press releases delivered to the central office e-mail,
- is mostly interested in press releases related to his/her field of work,
- will not even look at a press release longer than one A4 page,
- trusts e-mails; seldom checks their authenticity,
- is not interested in getting text message notification,
- is nearly identical to the typical Czech journalist, as far as the surveyed characteristics go.

Reality Check

There is no model Slovak journalist, everyone has specific needs. Yet even the individual does share certain traits and requirements, or opinions on PR tools, with the others. Slovak journalists are very critical of PR tools. To sum up: Slovak PR agencies and other companies which communicate with the journalists may not have come out of the evaluation of their work with full honours, but are still fairly comparable to the Czechs or the Brits.

Contact

If you are interested in more information about the research or the services offered by Donath-Burson-Marsteller, please contact Jiří Šebek (GSM: +420 602 661 336, jiri_sebek@cz.bm.com) or Michal Donath (GSM: +420 602 222 128, michal_donath@cz.bm.com). You can find information about DBM at: <http://www.dbm.cz/>. The company has been building public relations in the Czech Republic and Slovakia since 1991.