

# Media Gurus

---

Media Gurus po box 4164, kingston, act 2604 tel:02 6260 3055 fax: 02 6260 3054  
email: [pmirchan@ozemail.com.au](mailto:pmirchan@ozemail.com.au) Web: <http://www.mediagurus.com.au> ABN: 87 254 388 664

Date: 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2007

To: The Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Sub: Inquiry into the nature and conduct of Australia's public diplomacy.

From: Prakash Mirchandani, Managing Director, Media Gurus.

---

## KEY POINTS OF THIS SUBMISSION

- **Establish a Public diplomacy Advisory Board.**
- **Fund communications-related research in strategically important countries.**
- **Determine critical messages for specific countries.**
- **Develop criteria to measure the effectiveness of public diplomacy in selected countries.**
- **Ensure all major diplomatic and other national initiatives are supported by specific public diplomacy strategies.**
- **Identify foreign media of importance to Australia's public diplomacy efforts.**
- **Establish a database of major cross-government public diplomacy activities.**
- **Mandate public diplomacy training for senior Public Servants posted overseas and facilitate similar training for senior corporate executives who regularly do business overseas.**
- **Establish a school of languages to support national public diplomacy efforts.**
- **Exploit new media opportunities to deliver Australia's messages.**

## **Our Credentials**

- We are an organisation specialising in the delivery of public diplomacy, public advocacy and strategic communications training and consultancies to Federal Government Departments and Agencies.
  - We conduct public diplomacy workshops for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and have written a Public Advocacy handbook for DFAT which was released for departmental use late in 2006.
  - We also run Strategic Communications workshops and consultancies for a range of other Government clients as well as, in the recent past, for SES officers through the Australian Public Service Commission.
  - Our expertise is in the 'hands on' field of public diplomacy and since we do not have a Whole of Government insight into Departmental and Agency activities, ours is necessarily a snapshot of what we believe to be the extent and effectiveness of current public diplomacy programs and activities.
  - Media Gurus' Managing Director, Prakash Mirchandani has worked in several countries as a journalist and foreign correspondent: India, the United Kingdom and Australia, with the BBC and the ABC. As such he had an insight into government PD programs. In addition, as the first Head of News for the Australia Television Service into Asia Mr Mirchandani was able to observe the impact of Australia's image in parts of the Asia-Pacific region.

## **The current position in Australian Public diplomacy**

Over the past years we have seen a definite increase in the tempo of attention paid to public diplomacy in departments – particularly with DFAT activities. We also note that the Australian Federal Police, the Defence Department and DEST have all ramped up their engagement with external stakeholders in one form or another.

In the Arts and cultural relations field too, Australia has definitely enhanced its positioning and undertaken vigorous activity in promoting itself overseas. The same applies with positioning at the various international Trade Fairs and Expos.

Having acknowledged the increased efforts being made, and in the absence of quantitative and qualitative surveys, anecdotal evidence suggests that the Australian image in overseas audiences (other than in very special bilateral groups i.e. diplomat to diplomat or educator to educator or scientist to scientist) is still a rudimentary one of sunshine, beaches, kangaroos and desert, – particularly in Europe and the Americas.

Knowledge of Australia is greater in the Asia-Pacific region, thanks to closer economic, security and development assistance links and increasing people-to-people exchanges. There is, however, considerable scope for misunderstandings and negative stereotypes about Australia's perceived role in the region.

There appears to be, in target countries, little knowledge of the work that Australia has done in relation to (for example) the control of Terrorism in Southeast Asia, the

monitoring of Nuclear non-proliferation, advances in forestry and water management and so on.

We believe there are a number of challenges which lie ahead if Australia is to achieve Public diplomacy objectives. As the publication: "British Public diplomacy in an age of schisms" notes :

"In an age of growing democracy and mass communications, it is increasingly important for governments to be able to go beyond official communication with other governments to pursue their own important interests. Whether it is putting together – or maintaining – International coalitions on political or military issues, or trying to compete for a share of global trade, tourism or investment, Governments are increasingly having to learn to communicate to mass audiences (the public) and trying to extract a premium from their national reputation."<sup>1</sup>

**Setting priorities:** While we acknowledge that DFAT has made some progress in setting PD priorities, we believe considerably more can be done on a whole-of-government basis.

We recommend that the Government set priorities by way of both target countries and specific messages to those countries, so that those engaging in public diplomacy have a clear idea of the outcomes needed and hence a benchmark too of evaluating whether or not that diplomacy is working. An example is the sort of prioritizing set by the United Kingdom with its Public diplomacy Challenge Fund:

#### **“Aims of the Public diplomacy Challenge Fund**

The Public diplomacy Challenge Fund is a project fund that enables Posts worldwide to undertake imaginative and innovative public diplomacy activity in support of their local public diplomacy objectives and FCO strategic priorities, to project a modern, creative, diverse and relevant UK. Activities should deliver outcomes that support the strategic priorities, which are:

- A world safer from global terrorism and weapons of mass destruction
- Protection of the UK from illegal immigration, drug trafficking and other international crime
- An international system based on the rule of law, which is better able to resolve disputes and prevent conflicts
- An effective EU in a secure neighbourhood
- Promotion of UK economic interests in an open and expanding global economy
- Sustainable development, underpinned by democracy, good governance and human rights
- Security of UK and global energy supplies
- Security and good governance of the UK's Overseas Territories.

The PDCF supports individual Post, country or regional projects, generated by the Posts

---

<sup>1</sup> *British Public diplomacy in the 'Age of Schisms'* Mark Leonard and Andrew Small with Martin Rose. Foreign Policy Centre, London. February 2005 <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/407.pdf>

themselves. In designing and implementing projects, Posts are encouraged to work with other public diplomacy partners, such as the British Council, UK Trade & Investment and VisitBritain.”<sup>2</sup>

**Working Together:** Even at the current Inter-departmental Committee level in Canberra, it appears that many disparate ‘silos’ exist, with information carefully guarded and husbanded. Greater coordination among agencies in Canberra is required, and this improved coordination needs to be reflected at Australian diplomatic missions overseas, particularly in our bigger embassies/high commissions, many of which have representatives from a range of key agencies, including the Australian Federal Police, Defence, Immigration, Austrade, Education etc.).

It should also be mandatory to have a public diplomacy outline (and outcome) attached to key activities and issues. This would make subsequent evaluations much more effective allow for better coordination of scarce resources. This would ultimately place considerable onus on the Heads of Mission to take a personal and direct interest in PD, in addition to their focus on bilateral relationships.<sup>3</sup>

While we understand that DFAT does have such mandated activities in place for its missions, we believe that these are of necessity constrained by resource limitations, and could well merit a second look. We suggest a qualitative evaluation of Whole of Government messages in target countries to specifically measure whether the outcomes initiated by missions, have actually changed perception about Australian policies in those countries.

We note that the principles of stakeholder engagement **within** Australia, have received a vigorous boost, such as with the Departments of Immigration, Health etc. but these have not been reflected for overseas audiences.

**Language expertise and the two-way process of public diplomacy.** Australian agencies have a range of expertise in languages which are currently largely being used for intelligence and related security roles, rather than in strategic communication. It would be of immense value if these language skills were harnessed in the greater sphere of public diplomacy. (An Australian voice, speaking in fluent and idiomatic Arabic on, say *Al Jazeera*, would carry much more weight than that voice speaking in English and having a translation appear as a subtitle – a translation which may not be as nuanced as the speaker would like.)

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/PDCFreport0405.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> “Governments are adept at conveying their stances on particular issues (whether tariffs on steel or peacemaking in the Middle East), but officials are much less effective at managing overall perceptions of their country. One reason for this failure is that different institutions have been responsible for dealing with politics, trade, tourism, investment, and cultural relations. It is important to set a number of strategic messages and plan a series of activities over a year or so to reinforce them; all public diplomacy organisations must have a stake in the totality of messages and a sense of how they can cooperate on promoting them”. *British Public diplomacy in the ‘Age of Schisms’* Mark Leonard and Andrew Small with Martin Rose. Foreign Policy Centre, London. February 2005 <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/407.pdf>

It would also keep skills (and interest) current for those whose language abilities are no longer being directly used - as a result of promotion, posting or even early retirement into consultancies.

Indeed the creation of a school of languages for the specific purpose of Public diplomacy would be an attractive career to many of today's school leavers and could easily fit into current curricula of Universities or Communications courses.

Anecdotally, we believe that much more work needs to be done in understanding the way our target audiences think and respond. There appears to be no effective mechanism for getting 'emotional intelligence' on what specific audiences might already perceive about issues which Australia wishes to discuss, or positions it has taken. The only methodology that seems to recur is that of media monitoring, and even that does not take the next step of provision of media *analysis*.<sup>4</sup>

**The Diaspora as a powerful ally:** The Australian Diaspora is far-flung, influential and well-disposed. The various elements of it (business and cultural associations, individual networks etc.) all need to be harnessed and coordinated to take full advantage of their position, so that different agencies are not knocking on the same door at the same time.

More thought too needs to be given to what can be provided by way of return of effort that they might put in on Australia's behalf.

This is an area where the Private Sector can partner effectively with Government.<sup>5</sup> There already exist specific bilateral business groups between Australia and a number of countries, through the aegis of DFAT. These could be used to provide more effective communications of critical messages.

For example, the U.S. Government Accounting Office in its report on: "**State Department Efforts to Engage Muslim Audiences Lack Certain Communication Elements and Face Significant Challenges**" remarked:

"GAO's fieldwork revealed that posts' public diplomacy efforts generally lacked important strategic communication elements found in the private sector, which GAO and others have suggested adopting as a means to better communicate with target audiences. These elements include having core messages, segmented target audiences, in-depth research and analysis to monitor and evaluate results, and an integrated communication plan that brings all these elements together."<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> "Foreign ministries tend to accept the principle of 'the need for dialogue' while often having difficulty accepting it in practice, establishing structures with a patina of two-way communication where the real aim is simply to get a point across. Successful dialogue means understanding that the objective is to establish, protect and nurture a healthy, frank, equitable process of communication – and not to dictate outcomes. Where we tend to judge success by the outcome of a conversation, we must learn that for our interlocutors the quality of the process is often more important. Any cultural bridging strategy requires this quality of mutuality, rather than the assumption that we understand others -but that they do not understand us". *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.businessfordiplomaticaction.org/> is a rudimentary website for US Business and PD which can provide a framework for an Australian model

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06535.pdf>

**Corporate Memory and Public diplomacy skills:** Federal Government agencies are not alone in experiencing considerable 'churn' in staff. Our experience across the board shows a loss of corporate memory about every 24 months, as officers are posted and departments reorganised.

This results in varying levels of enthusiasm for a particular project or issue which is pinned to a particular officer's energy of focus, as well as in a loss of sight of much hard work that has been done in the past related to those issues. We believe leadership is needed at the very highest levels, to ensure that corporate memory is not bled away.

Equally, it needs to be recognised that while bureaucrats have many and varied skills in the Australian Public Service, the particular skills of public diplomacy do not automatically come with promotion to higher office.

Strategic thought related specifically to strategic communication can only come by way of intense training, in an environment where that training yields specific outcomes in partnership between organisation and officer: i.e. training needs to be looked at as a process with clearly negotiated outcomes: 'if I train in this and do well and meet milestones, I can expect to benefit in the following specific ways'. It should be viewed by the same criteria as performance related pay.

Additionally, serious consideration needs to be given to having more specialist communicators and PD practitioners attached to departments and agencies that have international promotional responsibilities.

**Bringing it all together:** Past experience has shown (as in the creation of the Policy Implementation Unit by PM&C) that coordination and commitment at the highest level is necessary, if the silos mentioned earlier are to be broken down and a 'team Australia' approach taken. We would recommend the creation of a high level Public diplomacy Strategy Board along the lines of the U.K Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which is tasked along these lines:

"The Public diplomacy Board will:

- Agree a list of 25 (or so) priority countries for public diplomacy.
- Agree comprehensive medium-term (3-5 years) public diplomacy strategies for the priority countries, with key outcomes that support the delivery of the government's international Strategic Priorities.
- Agree geographical priorities, target audiences, priority themes, action plans and measurable outcomes as appropriate and in line with Lord Carter's recommendations.
- Ensure that each partner allocates resources to those priority areas.
- Evaluate and monitor the impact of public diplomacy activity over time, through a centralised measurement system. Make recommendations concerning future funding as appropriate.
- Seek to ensure maximum synergy between public and private sector activity, and draw on relevant private sector expertise where possible."<sup>7</sup>

**Summary:** Public diplomacy in the modern world has seen much frenzied activity, particularly in the wake of the events of 9/11 in the United States. As Australian Army

---

<sup>7</sup> Public diplomacy Board Terms of Reference: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/TORs,0.pdf>

Officer David Kilcullen, seconded to the U.S Counter Terrorism program says: “it is on the level of influencing perceptions that these wars will be won or lost. The international information environment is critical to the success of America’s mission,”<sup>8</sup>

Coupled with a rolling 24 hour news agenda, the rise of multilateralism and the need to address many audiences for whom English is not necessarily a language of conviction, it poses a challenge for Australia if our voice is to be heard in the cacophony of others.

Australia has a good and positive story to tell and can be a powerful, if niche influence in the world, if it harnesses its resources smartly. A coordinated, committed high-level approach, along with a series of training programs, is vital, if this story is to be told, and told well.

### **Recommendations:**

1. **Set up a Public diplomacy Advisory Board** with representation from major Departments, NGOs as well as Private Sector Bodies and Companies active in the International field, along with SBS and Australia Network representation. The Board could either come under the aegis of DFAT, or it could be housed in PM&C to canvas Whole of Government areas.

The Board would oversee the following activities:

- Fund research in target countries to gain qualitative feedback on Australia’s current image, as well as identify which are the most effective forums in those countries for disseminating Australian messages (for example, in some Arab countries, the use of public gatherings such as the ‘Diwaniyah’ can be more effective than placement in any media.)
  - Formulate critical messages and link them to countries where those messages can be delivered and then oversee a coordinated PD effort made to place those messages.
  - Research the most effective form of evaluation to ensure messages are reaching their targets.
  - Enter into collaborative research with the SBS to create a dynamic database of the critical media forums in the international arena.
  - Ensure that there is a dynamic and ongoing database of all PD activities across Government and industry, to ensure continuity and prevent loss of Corporate Memory
2. Portfolio Secretaries to be additionally tasked with helping formulate critical messages and ensuring their delivery through coordination at IDC level and at departmental level.

---

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/061218fa\\_fact2](http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/061218fa_fact2)

3. Public diplomacy training be mandatory for all relevant Public Servants being posted overseas, as well as facilitated for private sector employees sent abroad. This can be done through the aegis of current DFAT programs or through an expanded curriculum at the Australia and New Zealand School of Governance.
4. Public diplomacy training be offered through a subsidised program at selected international locations, for key private sector organizations and individuals to help deliver the Australian message.
5. There should be as wide an audit as possible of language skills within the Australian Public Service and within industry, to see how these can best be harnessed to further National PD goals.
6. That the ADF school of languages be expanded and funded to cover specific PD needs of departments as well as allow for private sector students to attend That similar expansions be considered for the DFAT language unit and the language training conducted by the AFP.
7. That language expertise in the use of PD be rewarded financially. We suggest that the language proficiency allowance model of DFAT be extended to all other Departments and agencies with a major overseas focus
8. Create a coordinated program through the private sector, using the Australian Diaspora (organizations such as 'Advance'<sup>9</sup> already exist to provide such portals) to more effectively bring the Australian message to external audiences.
9. Consider an addition to the Australian Honours list of a category of 'services to Public diplomacy' as an incentive for the Diaspora and other Australians.
10. That a technically savvy team be formed as a central access point for the delivery of messages using all the arsenal of opportunities offered by New Media as so successfully demonstrated by the way Al Qaeda has used this means to reach its own target audiences.<sup>10</sup>
11. Serious consideration to be given to having more specialist communicators and PD practitioners attached to departments and agencies that have international promotional responsibilities.
12. Public diplomacy be added to the courses on offer at Universities such as the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy at the Australian National University.



---

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.advance.org/>

<sup>10</sup> "Communication and Media Strategy in the Jihadi War of Ideas"

[http://www.asu.edu/clas/communication/about/terrorism/publications/jihad\\_comm\\_media.pdf](http://www.asu.edu/clas/communication/about/terrorism/publications/jihad_comm_media.pdf)



Prakash Mirchandani