

Galloway, C., & Kwansah-Aidoo, K. (2005). *Public relations issues and crisis management*. Melbourne, Australia: Thomson Social Science Press.

Reviewed by: Tony Jaques

When a sportsman or a musician or a painter or a Chief Executive wants to perform at peak level the usual advice is to study the very best in the field.

By contrast, with Public Relations in general, and Issue and Crisis Management in particular, there appears to be a real urge to focus attention not on the very best in the field, but to highlight case studies of newsworthy, high profile management disasters.

There are some obvious and even simplistic reasons for this seemingly counter-intuitive approach, but this new volume largely succeeds in resisting the urge to focus on failure.

Contrary to its apparently comprehensive title, the book is in fact primarily a brief compilation of case studies from a handful of contributors in the Asia-Pacific region.

There is also an introductory chapter by the editors which attempts to summarise the context and definitions of Issue and Crisis Management. This very brief section disappoints, not only because it is inevitably superficial due to the space allowed, but also because the authors appear to accept the assertion that 70-80 percent of all activity in a crisis or emergency situation relates to communication. This is unfortunate, as it colours the entire book.

Communication is self-evidently an important part of both Issue and Crisis Management, but the editors lost an opportunity to emphasise that both these mechanisms operate most effectively when communication is recognised as just one element of a much broader management discipline. In fact the book regrettably seems to use the terms Issue Communication and Issue Management, as well as Crisis Communication and Crisis Management, almost interchangeably, which does a disservice to a full understanding of the topic.

The case studies themselves are very much a mixed bag. The editors assert that nearly all PR textbooks come from American or European writers and their stated intention was to bridge the gap by presenting cases drawn from experience in Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

Geographical location however should not divert from a core materiality of case studies ? namely that the case study not only provides the central facts but that it also offers insight and expert perception to assist in analysing what took place and how it might have been different.

Unfortunately, several of the case studies included contain little more than a recitation of the facts.

However this is more than balanced by first-rate analysis of some other cases, including a GE lobby group in New Zealand; communication challenges in relation to the 2003 Canberra bushfire; and a news media perspective on the New Zealand cornflour contamination issue in 2004.

Perhaps the most interesting and instructive case study is the comparative analysis of how McDonalds in the United States and McDonalds Australia responded to the 2004 movie *Super Size Me*, which featured a foolhardy individual who attempted to make some points about nutrition by spending a month eating nothing but meals offered by the fast food chain.

Regardless of the merits or motives of the movie, Melbourne academic Mark Sheehan has written a very thoughtful analysis of how the company responded to the issue on opposite sides of the Pacific ? in America the company tried to minimise its response to the film to avoid becoming a lightning rod for the obesity issue whereas in Australia the company decided on a proactive, confrontational approach to the film and its touring star and producer.

The case as presented certainly provides nourishing food for thought, both for managers and issue professionals, on the often very difficult strategic question of whether involvement in an issue adds value or simply gives oxygen to the opposition.

Case study analysis is very important in teaching and understanding Public Relations and this book makes a helpful contribution by showcasing some local cases. But that contribution could have been improved had the

standard and number of cases discussed been greater in a book extending beyond just a bare 100-plus pages. And perhaps with a title which better described its purpose and contents.

Purchase information: This book is available from all good booksellers, or can be purchased direct at <http://www.thomsonlearning.com.au/higher/communications/galloway/index.asp>

About the reviewer: *Tony Jaques, FPRIA, is Asia-Pacific Issue Manager for a multinational corporation, with responsibility for Issue and Crisis management throughout Asia-Pacific. He is also an international presenter on Issue Management to audiences including Corporate and professional organisations, not-for-profits and trade associations. He teaches in the Masters programme at RMIT University, Melbourne (where his courses include Advanced Case Studies) and has been published in leading academic journals. His book Dont Just Stand There - the Do-it Plan for Effective Issue Management features a unique business model for delivering bottom line results.*