Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of *Public Communication Review*.

Borrowing an approach from journalism, it is appropriate in this first issue to briefly explain the who, what, where, when, why and how of this publication.

Who and where?

Public Communication Review is published by the Australian Centre for Public Communication (ACPC) at the University of Technology Sydney.

Why?

The Centre was established in 2002 to facilitate research in the field of public communication and to engage with industry and the professions through the dissemination of research and stimulation of debate on important issues, encouraging innovation, and promoting ethical practice. The ACPC is very much a result of UTS' vision and goal to integrate theory and practice. Along with undertaking partnership and contract research, hosting seminars on key issues, and conducting short courses, the Centre decided that a quality journal is a key channel for achieving its objectives.

When we asked the question 'why launch another journal', the members and the Advisory Board of the Australian Centre for Public Communication agreed that integration of theory and practice and our holistic view of the field of public communication fill a gap in the field.

What?

While recognising and respecting the specialist disciplinary fields of public relations, advertising, journalism and media studies, we use the title 'public communication' to draw focus to the inter-related and inter-dependent nature of a range of public communication practices. We define public communication as comprising *advertising*, *public relations*, *organisational* and *corporate communication*, and *political communication* including campaigns and engagement in the *public sphere*, as well as *media communication* generally. These practices are also closely inter-connected with journalism – albeit, sometimes in a tensioned relationship. We believe that this holistic view brings a new perspective and vantage point for exploring public communication. It recognises convergence and an increasing blurring of boundaries between practices of production, practices of distribution, and practices of consumption in the 'Second Media Age', and it facilitates discussion of common concerns and interests across practices of public communication.

When?

We intend to publish two issues a year.

How?

We have decided that *Public Communication Review* will be an e-journal as this allows research to be distributed more quickly than print publications and it enables the journal to respond to topical issues. Furthermore, it reflects the practices of the digital media age which are a focus of this journal.

On behalf of the Centre and the University of Technology Sydney, I thank the distinguished scholars who have agreed to be members of the Editorial Board and welcome you to *Public Communication Review*.

This first issue does not have a specific theme, but rather draws articles from a range of perspectives and interests. One major area of contemporary focus in media and public communication is interactive social media. In this issue we are pleased to publish two articles reporting research into use of so-called 'new media' in recent national elections. Peter Chen compares research from three national election campaigns held in Australia, New Zealand and Canada in 2007 and 2008 which identifies some of the contextual variables that determine how interactive media are used and challenge universalised views about digital media.

Gwyneth Howell and Bruce Da Silva explore the extent to which first time voters can be re-engaged in politics and present some interesting findings that challenge general notions and assumptions about youth and social media. They report that youth were not engaged by many politicians' and political parties' social media sites during the 2007 Australian federal election. However, they did engage in some third party digital media sites, confirming that it is not simply using digital media that enhances communication with youth; it is *how* they are used that is the key issue.

Karin Geiselhart looks beyond election campaigns to explore how governments are adopting interactive digital media for ongoing public consultation and citizen engagement and notes that, beyond the immediate communication benefits, there are major opportunities to improve governance. She reports that engaging citizens online in monitoring and in the planning and management of issues such as climate change can extend governance across jurisdictions.

A perennial issue for public communicators is handling crises, and Gwyneth Howell and Rohan Miller illustrate how damaging crises can be for communities, individuals, and the reputations of organisations. While not widely publicised in Australia, the 2008 contamination of products produced by Canada's Maple Leaf Foods with deadly bacteria killed 21 people and cost the company $30 million during the recall of 234 products, not to mention ongoing damage to its reputation. However, as Howell and Miller report, the company proactively addressed the crisis and provided a case study which is hailed as an exemplar for other companies and communication practitioners to follow.

Nicole Bridges explores the role of media and public communication in a more personal crisis related to a social issue affecting many women – the issue of breastfeeding in public. This issue escalated into national headlines when Australian MP Kirstie Marshall was ejected from the parliament on 26 February 2003 for breastfeeding her 12-day-old baby. A few months later, television personality Kate Langbroek breastfed her son on the Network Ten television program, *The Panel*. Bridges analyses the public and media debate that followed and the representations of women's breasts and breastfeeding that continue to contribute to public opinion and attitudes.

Contributions on any issue related to public communication are welcome and invited – see our Call for Papers online. And tell your colleagues about *PCR* as scholars all benefit from another publishing outlet for their work.

Jim Macnamara PhD   **Robert Crawford** PhD
Co-editor   Co-editor