

## Behind the Headlines With David Landis

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**Your PR campaign won't be successful if you're only focused on one thing. You need a combination of media, including paid, earned, owned and shared.**

**David Landis, president and CEO of Landis Communications Inc. (LCI), stresses the importance of an integrated campaign where all communication channels support each other.**

**In this interview, David discusses the importance of good writing skills, how technology has transformed the industry and how to stand out in today's crowded marketplace.**



**How did you get your start in PR?**

Like everyone else, I started as a classical pianist. Seriously, I studied piano at Northwestern University, and one of my first jobs was answering phones at the Ravinia Festival (where the Chicago Symphony plays in the summer).

When Beverly Sills canceled, the PR director heard me talking on the phone to a disgruntled customer and asked me to join the PR team. I knew I'd found my calling.

I like to tell people entering the business the most important thing you can do to be a successful PR professional (besides perfect your writing, see below), is to be well-rounded. You never know where your life experience will lead you.

**I understand Landis Communications is celebrating its 25th year of business this year. How has the PR industry changed since you first started?**

Yes, LCI is 25+ years young now. Let's put it this way. My first office had a Selectric typewriter, a landline telephone, a fax and my cat Tina who did the filing for me. Back in those days (early 1990), clients wanted to see themselves in columnist Herb Caen's column in the San Francisco Chronicle, and there were basically only four TV broadcast channels (CBS, NBC, ABC and PBS).

When I worked in television (at KPIX TV, the CBS affiliate in San Francisco), the station had one fax machine. The biggest change, however, has been because of technology. In the old days, there was a big separation between paid and earned media and that line has increasingly become blurred.

Nowadays, a campaign can only be successful if it's integrated, where all channels of communication support each other. To be successful in PR now, you have to be an analytics professional, a social media guru, a content marketing creator, a media relations pitcher and a great writer – plus you have to know and understand search engine marketing and search engine optimization.

**Where do you think the PR industry is headed?**



I think technology will continue to re-define the industry. Unlike others, I believe that PR will not only survive, but also thrive. PR, social media, digital and marketing will continue to overlap, and the line between editorial and advertising will also continue to evolve.

While journalism continues to shrink, PR will continue to grow. But I think it will be important for all PR professionals to embrace metrics and ROI in ways we never did before and clients will require that.

**Out of all of the campaigns you've worked on, what has been your favorite or most memorable?**

Probably my most favorite was a campaign we did last year for the [Brain Health Registry](#), which enrolls people online for free to help accelerate the clinical trial process for Alzheimer's disease.

We partnered with restaurateur and TV host B. Smith, who had been diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's. Not only did she do a PSA for the campaign, but she appeared on both the "Today" show

and the “CBS Evening News.” Inside of four months, we were able to triple membership in the Registry and also increase African-American participation by 12 percent.

We’ve now expanded that campaign and joined forces with Ron Reagan, Leeza Gibbons, Linda Gray and Paula Abdul to get the word out about how everyone can help fight this debilitating disease. Watch for our latest campaign for this client – it’s called #MemoryStrings.

### **What are some of the key components of a successful PR strategy?**

First and foremost, it’s important that you sit down at the outset with a client and agree upon goals. You may think getting your client into the Wall Street Journal is a home run, but if they’re looking to increase their search results, that tactic may or may not work.

Once you agree on the goals, it’s imperative to create a strategy that supports those goals and identify the audiences who you want to reach. From there, you still identify where those audiences consume information – it’s just that a lot more of it these days is digital or social. Then, and only then, do you outline the tactics.

At LCI, we’ve pioneered an ROI metrics program called Promised Results which shows a client at the end of the project how their investment paid off for the business. Metrics are key.

### **With so much content saturating the marketplace today, how can brands stand out?**

It’s important to be honest with who and what you are as a brand. If your brand is cheeky and cutting edge, it’s okay to have a sense of humor. But with Fortune 100 companies, you have to be true to the brand promise, which may mean being a bit more traditional.

Standing out these days means being everywhere your customers consume information. You can’t just be in one place or media outlet and hope for the best. I remember I had a client in the early 1990s who actually told me, “We don’t do PR. We just open the doors and the customers will come.” That strategy will never work in today’s crowded marketplace. To truly stand out, you need creativity, innovation and originality.

### **What advice do you have for those looking to begin a career in PR?**



First and foremost, learn how to write. An emoji or an acronym is not proper English and can be easily misinterpreted. I wish more English teachers would go back to teaching students how to diagram a sentence so they understand sentence construction.

Once you know how to write, practice. Everyone can be a publisher these days, and at LCI we're most impressed with job candidates who come to us not only with a portfolio of writing but also a blog that demonstrates how they think. Everyone applying for a position in PR should be writing a blog. Third of all, get experience not just in media relations, but in digital analytics, content marketing, social media and community relations. As a PR pro, you have to know how to do it all – well.

### **Rapid Fire Round**

1. I always thought I'd be...a concert pianist.
2. My biggest pet peeve is...bad writing.
3. If I could have lunch with anyone, it would be...Broadway composer Stephen Sondheim.
4. My hobbies outside of work include...theatre, hiking, fine dining, travel, music and my two adorable rescue dogs, Gaston & Alphonse.
5. My favorite social media platform is...Facebook.
6. The thing that gets me up in the morning is...Gaston licking my face.

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