

Survey finds majority of Wikipedia articles about companies contain factual errors

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Sixty percent of Wikipedia articles about companies contain factual errors, according to research published today in the Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA) scholarly publication, *Public Relations Journal*. Findings from the research will help establish a baseline of understanding for how public relations professionals work with Wikipedia editors to achieve accuracy in their clients' entries.

The research was conducted by Marcia W. DiStaso, Ph.D., co-chair of PRSA's National Research Committee and an assistant professor of public relations at Penn State University in State College, Pa. DiStaso surveyed 1,284 public relations professionals from PRSA, the International Association of Business Communicators, the Word of Mouth Marketing Association, the Institute for Public Relations and the National Investor Relations Institute to assess their working relationship

with [Wikipedia](#). The Arthur W. Page Center at Penn State's College of Communications funded the research.

"It does not surprise me that so many Wikipedia entries contain factual errors," said DiStaso. "What is surprising, however, is that 25 percent of survey respondents indicated they are not familiar with the Wikipedia articles for their company or clients. At some point most, if not all, companies will determine they need to change something in their Wikipedia entries. Without clear, consistent rules from Wikipedia regarding how factual corrections can be made this will be a very difficult learning process for public relations professionals."

Results of the survey indicate a gap exists between public relations professionals and Wikipedia concerning the proper protocol for editing entries.

When respondents attempted to engage editors through Wikipedia's "Talk" pages to request factual corrections to entries, 40 percent said it took "days" to receive a response, 12 percent indicated "weeks," while 24 percent never received any type of response. According to Wikipedia, the standard response time to requests for corrections is between two and five days.

Only 35 percent of respondents were able to engage with Wikipedia, either by using its "Talk" pages to converse with editors or through direct editing of a client's entry. Respondents indicated this figure is low partly because some fear media backlash over making edits to clients' entries. Respondents also expressed a certain level of uncertainty regarding how to properly edit Wikipedia entries.

Of those who were familiar with the process of editing Wikipedia entries, 23 percent said making changes was "near impossible." Twenty-nine percent said their interactions with Wikipedia editors were "never

productive."

Results of the survey also indicate that public relations professionals have only a rudimentary understanding of Wikipedia's rules for editing and the protocol for contacting editors to secure factual changes.

To meet the goal of accurate Wikipedia articles, DiStaso recommends the following in an article available through the Institute for Public Relations:

Wikipedia rules, policies and guidelines need to be clarified to consistently reflect what public relations and [corporate communications](#) professionals should and should not do concerning the editing of entries.

Public relations and corporate communications professionals should regularly review their employers' and/or clients' Wikipedia articles for accuracy and balance. Inaccurate or misleading information should be brought to the attention of Wikipedia editors via an entry's "Talk" page, and regular follow-up and dialogue should take place between public relations professionals and Wikipedia editors.

If errors are found or if public relations professionals believe content needs to be added or changed, they should refer to the Wikipedia Engagement Flowchart, available on Wikimedia Commons, for guidance on requesting edits.

"The editing of Wikipedia by [public relations](#) and corporate communications professionals is a serious issue and one that needs to be addressed by everyone," says DiStaso. "The status quo can't continue. A high amount of factual errors doesn't work for anyone, especially the public, which relies on Wikipedia for accurate, balanced information."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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