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Interior Design Identity: A Proposal to Shift Public Perception with Public Relations Strategies

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INTERIOR DESIGN IDENTITY:
A PROPOSAL TO SHIFT PUBLIC PERCEPTION
WITH PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES

By
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ABSTRACT

Studies suggest that a pervasive identity and public perception problem exists within the interior design profession which is creating a negative image of the profession. Yet, other research identifies that interior design is a legitimate and vital profession which benefits the human society directly through sustainability, aesthetics, health, safety, and welfare, and quality of life.

This situation likely makes it difficult for the interior design profession to express these benefits to the public, complete the quest for national legislation, gain professional legitimacy from society as a whole, or contribute knowledge on crucial issues on an impactful scale. This study suggests these steps are unable to occur due the confusion and misperception of the profession from the public. Specifically, five existing conditions in the interior design profession’s current situation are affecting this situation:

1. past negative media attention that spotlights the interior design profession
2. the absence of a clear step-by-step strategy for campaigns to counteract these effects
3. the profession’s reactive response to negative media attention or crisis
4. the profession’s absence of media contacts for positive exposure
5. the lack of unified information provided by associations and interior designers about the profession

The purpose of this study was to review existing research that established there are inaccuracies in the public’s understanding of the interior design profession. With this understanding in hand, the study proposed one possible approach to repair these misperceptions of the public drawing from established processes and procedures of public relations. Such measures have been successfully used by other professions to shift public perception of their identities.

Study conclusions suggested that public perception of the interior design profession could be shifted using public relations strategies and by developing a single interior design organization which would provide a unified voice to the profession. The study developed specific public relations elements including a comprehensive written
public relations strategy, a description of a public relations campaign, a crisis plan, a list of potential media outlets, and portions of a media pack. These public relations techniques were tailored to meet the current needs of interior design and sought to shift public perception in both the short and long term.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to review existing research that establishes there are inaccuracies in the public’s understanding of the interior design profession. With this understanding in hand, the study then proposes one possible approach to repair these misperceptions of the public drawing from established processes and procedures of public relations. Such measures have been successfully used by other professions to shift public perception of their identities. These public relations techniques will be tailored to meet the current needs of interior design and seek to shift public perception in both the short and long term. The intention of this study is to begin a dialogue amongst interior designers that may lead to adoption of public relations strategies that will effectively correct public perception inaccuracies.

Research Questions

Three research questions emerge from the study’s literature review.

**Question 1.** What organizational type is best suited to carry out an ongoing public relations campaign designed to alter public perception of the interior design profession?

**Question 2.** Can accepted Public Relations strategies offer a process to address the Interior Design profession’s public perception problem?

**Question 3.** What might a proactive public relations campaign for the Interior Design profession look like?

Studies will be reviewed that examine the public’s perception of the interior design profession. For the purposes of this study, the term “the public” is used broadly and includes the general population, members of the media, members of related professionals, legislators, K-12 educators and counselors, and interior designers themselves. This approach recognizes that in order to be successful, a public relations
strategy that shifts perceptions must address various stakeholder groups simultaneously.

The study will investigate public relations strategies that may be applicable to the interior design situation, exploring their application to the specific situation in interior design. Action research methodology will be used to explore the study’s questions, applying the three stages of ‘diagnosing’, ‘action planning’, and ‘action taking’ respectively (Wang & Groat, 2007).

Stemming from conclusions reached through literature review, this study will argue that a single non-profit organization is desirable and necessary to act as a unified voice of interior design on a national level. This organization will provide an example of tangible ways to seek positive exposure for the profession that uses a unified, national approach. This theoretical organization will be identified and described in detail in this study. Finally, several components of a public relations strategy to initiate public perception shift will be created.

**Definition of Terms**

As this study discusses concepts both within interior design and public relations, a selection of terms are defined here for clarity. Terms related to the study’s research methodology are also provided.

**Interior Design Definitions**

*Qualitative*- A research method relating to or involving quality or kind

*Health*- The condition of being sound in body, mind, or spirit; especially free from physical disease or pain

*Safety*- The condition of being free from harm, risk, or injury

*Welfare*- The state of doing well especially in respect to good fortune, happiness, well-being, psychological content, or prosperity (www.m--w.com, n.d.)

*Sustainability*- A method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged
**Aesthetics**- A particular taste for or approach to what is pleasing to the senses and especially sight *(www.m--w.com, n.d.)*

**NCIDQ**- The National Council for Interior Design Qualification, a non-profit organization initiated to protect the health, life safety and welfare of the public by creating standards of competence of interior design *(NCIDQ, 2004)*

**Legislation**- The exercise of the power and function of making rules that have the force of authority by virtue of their state or jurisdiction

**Professionalization**- A permanent career characterized by or conforming to the technical or ethical standards of a profession *(www.m--w.com, n.d.)*

**Body of Knowledge**- The scope and extent of knowledge required for professionals working in the field *(Guerin & Martin, 2004)*

**Architecture**- The art or practice of designing and building structures

**Interior Design**- The art or practice of planning and supervising the design and execution of architectural interiors and their furnishings

**Decoration**- To furnish something with ornament

**“The Public”**- All the people or a whole area of a nation or state *(www.m--w.com, n.d.)*

**Texas Board of Architecture and Examiners**- A Texas board that oversees the examination, registration, education, and professional regulation of architects, interior designers, and landscape architects practicing within this state *(TBAE, n.d.)*

**Global Warming**- An increase in the earth's atmospheric and oceanic temperatures widely predicted to occur due to an increase in the greenhouse effect resulting especially from pollution

**Collaboration**- To work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor *(www.m--w.com, n.d.)*
Public Relations Definitions

Public Relations (PR)- The business of inducing the public to have understanding for and good will toward a person, firm, or institution

Public Perception- How something is viewed or perceived by the public

Public Persuasion- To move the public by argument, entreaty, or expostulation to a belief, position, or course of action

Marketing- The process or technique of promoting, selling, and distributing a product or service (www.m--w.com, n.d.)

Target Audience- the primary group of people that an advertising campaign is designed to appeal to

Communications Audit- A method, usually a questionnaire or interview, that determines staff attitudes about an organization

Image Audit- A method, usually a questionnaire, to determine the public's perception of an organization, and specifically seeks out unintended messages the organization is sending

Image Matrix- A chart that is a clear visual representation of the information gained by the image audit (Ali, 2001a)

Campaign- A connected series of operations designed to bring about a particular result

Publicity- Promotional material designed to attract public attention and possibly gain support (www.m--w.com, n.d.)

Visual Identity- The persona of an organization that encompasses a logo, color palettes, typefaces, page layouts and other such methods of maintaining visual continuity and brand recognition across all physical manifestations of the brand
**Crisis Team**- A set of people in an organization who have strategically planned for potential negative public relations exposure and have created a plan of action to handle the emergencies when they arise

**Copy**- Text considered printable or newsworthy (Ali, 2001a)

**Psychology**- The science and study of the mind and behavior (www.m--w.com, n.d.)

**Methodology Definitions**

**Action Research**- Designed to solve a problem in the short and long term with the creation of an action plan (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p.258)

**Diagnosing**- Identifying or defining a problem (Wang & Groat, p. 112)

**Action planning**- Considers multiple courses of action for solving a problem (Wang & Groat, p. 112)

**Action taking**- Selection of a course of action (Wang & Groat, p. 112)

**Limitations and Assumptions**

This study acknowledges several potential limitations to its approach. While public relations strategies have been shown previously to effectively shift public perception in other fields, each field is different and may react differently to applied tactics. This study explores one of perhaps multiple options to correct the public misperceptions of the profession using public relations recommendations. This study assumes that the current public perception is not desired by the interior design profession, nor ultimately desirable for the public.

**Search Techniques**

The sources for this study were located through a combination of journals, websites, printed media, trade publications, books, search engines, and previous thesis theses and dissertations. A manual search was performed to locate journals on interior design, psychology, public relations, marketing, architecture, decoration, communications, sociology, visual arts, media, and education. Electronic search of key
terms was performed which included public persuasion, public perception, interior
design, misperception, aesthetics, sustainability, paradigm repair, television,
psychology, social conditions, marketing, public relations, architecture, collaboration,
public opinion theory, legislation, and interior design education. Outside public
relations, communications, and marketing professionals were contacted to obtain
insights into public relations strategies. Once an expert was identified through printed
sources or verbal recommendations, contact via phone or email was made to contact
them and set up an interview. Additional calls and emails were made to contact public
relations and marketing professionals from interior design organizations. This was done
to inquire about efforts that have been made in the past to shift public perception in the
field.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the inaccuracies of the public’s perception of the interior design profession, it is necessary to critically and objectively examine legislative efforts and recent research concerning the ‘professionalization’ of this quickly-evolving field. This chapter will lay the groundwork for this understanding by examining existing attitudes toward interior design and past actions taken to affect perception.

It will first discuss studies and others’ opinions about the current status of interior design, its contribution to society, and current legislative actions, as these issues serve as benchmarks of public recognition. Research is also reviewed that documents how the interior design profession is viewed by members of the profession and by others, including architects and the public. The chapter next examines past efforts undertaken by entities within the interior design field to affect perceptions. Lastly, others’ initiatives are examined that are seeking to affect the future of the interior design profession.

Public relations research will be reviewed that has shown to be effective at shifting public perception and creating a positive image for an organization. The chapter discusses these strategies (henceforth called ‘PR’) and procedures at length to introduce readers to accepted practices in this field. Lastly, several case studies are described detailing how other entities have successfully remade themselves using aspects of public relations strategies, changing common public perception toward a more positive, reality-based image.

Current Status of Interior Design

This section discusses the interior design profession’s ongoing efforts to achieve professional legitimacy and recognition from society through accurate public perception of its identity. Sources suggest that interior designers possess a collection of knowledge including functional and aesthetic skills that directly affect and benefit the public. However, with the current public misperception of the profession, it is often difficult to obtain an accurate representation of the profession, as several studies below
will demonstrate. To begin this discussion, it is helpful to first start with an historic overview of the profession.

**Brief History of the Interior Design Profession**

The history of interior design reveals a profession marked by a changing clientele and roots in multiple trades. Traditionally architects were responsible for the structure and interior of commercial and residential spaces in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, for example. They hired artists, craftspeople, and wood-workers to fabricate interior furnishings and decorative elements (Binggeli, 2007). Typically, these services were reserved for the elite and wealthy. By the end of the 1800’s Elsie de Wolfe was providing “interior decoration” services to members of high society in New York City. She is seen by many historians to be the first person to charge for decorating services instead of being paid with commission on the goods she sold. She is also thought to be the first to provide decorating services as a career other than architecture (Piotrowski, 2004).

By the start of the twentieth century, stores were carrying mass-produced products and furnishings created for the everyday consumer. Members of the public began searching for help with their homes and places of business. This was the first time that services were being provided to average people that expanded the client base to that beyond only elite socialites. Interior decoration was viewed as an acceptable career for women since they were currently maintaining the home on a regular basis. Popular magazines began to emerge providing suggestions and advice on furnishings and decorative applications and typically “focused on designing and living in good taste” (Binggeli, 2007, p. 7).

After World War I, interior decoration drew increasing interest from society and from women who needed financial stability distinct from that supplied by men. Educational programs were created to assist “early decorators in period styles and to provide the educational background needed to plan interiors” (Piotrowski, 2004, p. 6). The Parsons School of Design in New York was one of the first interior design programs in the country and was created in 1916.
The first national decorators association was called the American Institute of Interior Decorators (AIID) and was founded in 1931, and was later named the American Institute of Interior Designers (AID). Another association called the National Society of Interior Designers (NSID) was also developed to provide an organization where designers could meet, share information, and make contacts (Piotrowski, 2004). With the increase in formal training and creation of professional associations, a shift occurred between interior designers and interior decorators which created two distinct professions. Interior design became known for providing services primarily to commercial interiors and in its space planning activities. Notes Binggeli, “practitioners of the new profession of interior design relied more on their design education and less on matters of taste. As businesses realized the value of good interior design for productivity and profit, interior designers became an important force in the field of commercial design” (2007, p. 8-9). By the 1970’s interior design was recognized as a specialization for architects and as a profession of its own.

Changes were simultaneously underway within interior design professional organizations. NSID merged with AID in 1975 to create the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID). ASID “set educational and experience standards for its membership and promoted continuing education, a code of ethics, outreach to the community, and collaboration with related professions” (Binggeli, 2007, p. 7-8). By the 1980’s, degrees in interior design were available at most art colleges and many public universities. In 1990, the Institute of Business Designers, the Council of Federal Interior Designers, and the International Society of Interior Designers combined to create the International Interior Design Association (IIDA). According to Binggeli, these professional organizations may yet undergo further change, as “many interior designers look forward to the eventual unification of the profession under a single umbrella” (2007, p. 9).

Although requirements differ throughout the world, in North America professional interior designers often undergo rigorous education, training, and testing to meet minimum standards for licensing to practice interior design. ASID, IIDA and IDC (Interior Designers of Canada) all advocate a four or five year bachelor’s degree education at a university accredited by the Council for Interior Design Accreditation
The Interior Design Educator’s Council (IDEC) similarly advocates this path. Masters and doctoral degrees are also available from many colleges with emphasis on practice or research within the field of interior design. Graduates must practice under a licensed interior designer or architect for two years before being eligible to sit for the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) exam. In addition to the NCIDQ, many (though not all) United States and Canada state/provincial licensing boards and provincial associations set requirements for interior design experience for licensure and/or registration. Professional organizations such as ASID and IIDA require these steps for professional membership with their organizations along with continued education throughout the designer’s career. Although not all jurisdictions require education, training, and licensing to practice interior design professionally, this track is the ideal for demonstrating minimum competency and keeping the health, safety, and welfare of the client as the priority of the interior design profession (NCIDQ, n.d.).

According to Piotrowski, interior design’s history stems from decoration and was once more aesthetically driven. Yet, there are differences between interior design and decoration. “Although a professional interior designer might provide interior decoration services, an interior decorator does not have the education and experience to perform the many other services of a professional interior designer” (Piotrowski, 2004, p. 4). Interior design was first visible as a profession in residential design. However, CIDA accredited education programs are becoming increasingly commercial driven and professional interior designers are practicing commercial interior design more than ever (Martin, 2007). Although differentiation between interior design and interior decoration are clear, the public still views design as decoration and bases their perception of the interior design profession on residential spaces (Piotrowski, 2004). Bingelli brings further detail and clarification to this situation:

“Interior design is a relatively new profession and is still often confused with other design-oriented fields. Interior designers still struggle against the perception that they are essentially furniture, upholstery, and accessories salespeople. They also suffer from the impression that their role is to dictate style and fashion. These assumptions are encouraged by
the portrayal of interior designers on television as egocentric or comic figures imposing their design whims on hapless clients at will-- or as capable of effortlessly transforming a space overnight. By pursuing professional certification and credentialing, interior designers set themselves apart from others in terms of education, experience, and examination. Recognized status as a professional interior designer assures clients and employers of an established level of knowledge and expertise" (2007, p. 11).

**Importance of Interior Design to Human Society**

Interior design's long-term presence in human culture suggests it possesses a utility for its public, and many interior design organizations seek to make this clear. For example, the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) website seeks to justify how the actions of interior designers support and protect the public. According to NCIDQ, members of the public spend the majority of their time indoors and are constantly surrounded with environments that interior designers create. They are affected by the unique body of knowledge that designers possess including sustainability, aesthetics, and other knowledge that protects the health, safety, and welfare of the public. Professional designers are trained with the product knowledge, construction methods, and design techniques to create environmentally friendly spaces. They are also trained in the elements and principles of design which give interior designers the tools to produce aesthetically appealing spaces. Lastly, they are also trained and tested on codes, accessibility issues, fire safety, protecting the disabled, and accommodating the aging population (NCIDQ, 2004).

Interior designers are engaged in activities that seek to instill a positive image of the profession. Interior designer Brian Everton of Canada explains that, “organizationally we are getting media attention for various awards programs to celebrate good design. We are involved in numerous social causes that bring attention to the profession. We have taken up the cause of sustainability and accessibility as being specific issues that require our leadership” (personal communication, 2007).
These topics affect society directly and thus have importance and value in the public. The following sections further detail several aspects of interior designs’ utility to the public.

**Sustainability.** Interior designers are also seeking to respond to current social issues. For example, it is only in recent years that the terms *climate crisis, green,* and *sustainability* can be heard in everyday conversation, seen in documentaries at the movies, and on television. It would appear to a spectator that the main participants in the fight for the planet are celebrities, select politicians, scientists, and victims of natural disasters. However, the interior design profession is centered on creating spaces, product knowledge, and improving the quality of life for the people that occupy interior environments, according to Whitemyer (2007). The issues are large: “…because building construction now accounts for 30 percent of global raw material use- billions of tons each year- designers are waking up to the fact that since their work is part of the problem, they have to be part of the solution” (2007, p. 10). Further, with “commercial and residential buildings sucking up 36 percent of the total U.S. energy”, action is required from the design profession (2007, p. 12).

According to Adler, the changes needed in construction, product specification, and design are directly within the specialized scope of services held by interior designers. They have the opportunity to take a holistic design approach to minimize the human footprint on the world. By using technology and “cradle to cradle” standards, designers have the power to improve indoor air quality, lower energy usage, reduce materials used, increase energy efficiency, increase productivity, and help save the planet (Adler, 2006).

Whitemyer declares that designers could lead the way to sustainability with their unique body of knowledge and educate their clients and the world. In his opinion, every designer must pledge to demand sustainable products, reeducate the clients’ misconceptions about the additional cost of going green, utilize the LEED system, incorporate sustainability into everyday practice constantly, and research new products, technology, and construction methods (2007). Once every designer has taken a
concrete stance on green design, the social implications can be realized and the profession can further carve a unique professional niche.

**The Age of Aesthetics.** Writers suggest that the interior design profession is also strategically placed to assist others with aesthetic decisions, a topic that has received new attention. Despite the public’s long-held notion that the design field as a whole is an afterthought and a luxury only afforded by lofty socio-economic levels, the world is now in a unique position of having countless manufacturers with functional high quality products, and the past decade has brought about a time where “the look and feel of products will determine their success” (Postrel, 2004, p. 2). In *The Substance of Style*, Virginia Postrel has illustrated the realities and the importance of the “aesthetic age” apparent in every aspect of the world. Although utility has not been sacrificed, the consumer market is driven by creating products that express the personality and individuality that is reflected in society (2004).

“The issue is not *what* style is used but rather *that* style is used, consciously and conscientiously, even in areas where function used to stand alone. Aesthetics is more pervasive that it used to be-- not restricted to a social, economic, or artistic elite, limited to only a few settings or industries, or designed to communicate only power, influence, or wealth. Sensory appeals are everywhere, are increasingly personalized, and they are intensifying” (Postrel, 2004, p. 5). Although aesthetics have been driving the market and creating new avenues for manufacturers to explore, they by no means have replaced the importance of technology, function, price, or accessibility to the consumer.

Postrel has suggested that the traditional definition of aesthetics has expanded to include expression through all of the senses. “It is the art of creating reactions without words, through the look and feel of people, places, and things” (2004, p. 6). Aesthetics and the senses have created unintentional triggers from the brain to an experience or memory, which subconsciously lure the consumer into a product or visual expression. This response has been different in every person at any given moment. Humans have been said to be “visual tactile creatures.” They have an innate desire to express themselves in their environment, and create sensory and emotional meaning to function whenever possible (Postrel, 2004, p. 6-8). Similarly, Hartmut Esslinger coined the term,
“form follows emotion.” He expressed that society was once told what was beautiful, functional, or essential, but the age has come where the sensory experiences created by the brain have led consumers to their own decisions on what they want (Edwards, 2002, p. 237-238).

Another interview by Bruce Sterling described the implications of “mass customization” and expressed that it is has strong economic benefits and “represents a major ideological shift” (2002, p.139). This concept of manufacturing has shown that many aesthetic choices are valid, and there is no longer one acceptable visual ideal. This development banished the traditional thought that designers were hired for their taste and style, and accepted the individuality that was created with consumerism (Sterling, 2002). With the demand for aesthetics, the individuality of products, and a consumer-driven society, it is necessary for the significance of aesthetics to carry over from manufacturing into interiors. Licensed interior designers are taught visual elements and principles of design that are applied directly to aesthetics and product selection. These design elements and principles can help a designer implement the client’s taste by using rational guidelines.

Health, Safety, and Welfare. Interior designers possess a unique knowledge base and provide a beneficial and necessary service to the public (Martin, 2007). Ideally, they have been formally trained for a minimum of two years, have undertaken a mixture of education and practice for six years, and tested by the National Council for Interior Design Qualification exam (NCIDQ) to meet minimum competency standards (NCIDQ, n.d.). According to ASID, “Every decision an interior designer makes in one way or another affects the health, safety, and welfare of the public. Those decisions include specifying furniture, fabrics, and carpeting that comply with fire codes and space planning that provides proper means of egress. Additionally, interior designers deal with accessibility issues, ergonomics, lighting, acoustics, and design solutions for those with special needs” (ASID, n.d.).

According to ASID (n.d.), statistics have shown that the majority of deaths in fires can be attributed to breathing in poisons and smoke and not the flames themselves. Interior designers have preserved methods of egress and specified materials that meet
fire codes in commercial settings which were flame resistant and would not emit harmful toxins in the event of a fire. They have also specified alarm and fire systems which are easily seen and heard in a fire (ASID, n.d.).

Interior designers have been responsible for space planning, implementation of accessibility codes, and development of a safe and usable atmosphere for all occupants of a space. Some of the specific knowledge areas include the creation of space for wheelchair turning radius, usable counter heights and electrical outlet heights, and providing lever handles and hardware that can be universally used by all. Designers have also specialized in lighting, acoustics, and the creation of healthcare environments that encourage faster healing and promote health (Martin, 2007). They have addressed ergonomics in the office environment and provided practical workspaces and furniture to prevent health problems from arising (ASID, n.d.).

The baby boomer and elderly population have increased dramatically in recent years and by 2030 are expected to reach a record number of over 70 million. According to ASID, it will be essential to have licensed professionals focus their expertise on the unique needs of that growing population. Prevention of fatal injuries, the creation of a comfortable space to age in place, selection of appropriate furniture and furnishings, implementation of grab-bars, and installation of slip resistant materials will be vital to protect these people, and interior designers are the most qualified for these tasks (Martin, 2007).

**Current Legislation**

Several legal types of status are common in interior design legislation efforts. The three main types of legislation are title acts, practice acts, and permitting statute. A title act has been defined as a regulation of “the use of a title, such as ‘registered interior designer’” (ASID, n.d.). However, this act has not required people to be licensed to practice, and it did not prevent people from providing interior design services. A person could identify themselves as registered without meeting minimum education, experience, or examination standards. A practice act requires a license to practice interior design. Unlike the title act, this act has not allowed people to perform
professional services without a license. An additional type of practice act is a permitting statute. It is practiced in Colorado, where there is no state board and no title act, but there is a provision under the architectural statute which allows interior designers who met minimum requirements to submit plans for a building permit.

There have been four main titles for interior designers that are commonly linked to legislative status. The term *certified interior designer* has been used for designers in states with title acts. The title *registered interior designer* can be used in states with either a title act or a practice act. A *licensed interior designer* has been only used for designers in states with practice acts. All three of the above terms have been registered with the state board and imply the fulfillment of minimum education, experience, and examination standards. The fourth type of title is *self-certified*, and it has only been used in California where there is a title act regulating the phrase ‘certified interior designer’. However, there is no state board in California, so members are not accountable to the state (ASID, n.d.).

Throughout the past few decades, there has been considerable debate over the legislation of interior design that would serve to lend credibility to the public perception of interior design (Architectural Record, 2004). Certain fields, such as architecture, have not seen the importance of creating a legitimate niche for the interior design profession (Martin, 2007). Nonetheless, as of October 2007, there are twelve jurisdictions with title acts, four jurisdictions with practice acts, one state with self certification, three states with permitting statutes, eight jurisdictions with pending legislation, three states with title acts in place and practice acts pending, and nineteen states with no legislation (ASID, 2007). Figure 1 identifies the states that possess these laws.
Figure 1. States with interior design legislation in place or pending (ASID, 2007).

**Professionalization**

This section will summarize studies that suggest confusion exists concerning the meaning of interior design not only in related fields, but also with the layperson public. In 2004, the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) released an official definition that sought to identify the uniqueness of the profession:

“Interior design is a multi-faceted profession in which creative and technical solutions are applied within a structure to achieve a built interior environment. These solutions are functional, enhance the quality of life and culture of the occupants, and are aesthetically attractive. Designs are created in response to and coordinated with the building shell, and acknowledge the physical location and social context of the project. Designs must adhere to code and regulatory requirements, and encourage the principles of environmental sustainability. The interior design process follows a systematic and coordinated methodology,
including research, analysis and integration of knowledge into the creative process, whereby the needs and resources of the client are satisfied to produce an interior space that fulfills the project goals. Interior design includes a scope of services performed by a professional design practitioner, qualified by means of education, experience, and examination, to protect and enhance the life, health, safety and welfare of the public” (NCIDQ, 2004).

This definition was not received well by architecture and related fields due to concerns that these professions' roles in the built environment would be compromised, reduced, or even replaced by interior designers. Architects were also concerned about the professional legitimacy of interior design, and about client welfare if designers were not properly trained (Architectural Record, 2004).

In response to these concerns, Denise Guerin and Caren Martin of the University of Minnesota performed a study in 2004 using Abbott’s Theory of Professionalization, a measure that seeks to determine if a field is indeed a 'profession'. They applied the theory to architecture, interior design, and decoration. According to Abbott, there are six internal actions required in order to establish professionalization: establishment of a professional organization, change of the practice's name, establish a code of conduct, engage in legislative actions, establish educational requirements, and establish examination requirements (Abbott, 1988). It was found that architecture had completed all requirements and in fact, was a profession. Even though interior design was a much younger profession, all of the requirements have also been met, although interior designers are still trying to receive legal recognition nationally. Interior decoration only completed two actions, and had no examination, no enforced code of conduct, and had not taken any steps toward legal recognition (Ginthner, Guerin, & Martin, 2000). This study showed there are similarities between the route of professionalization of interior design and architecture. It also served to clearly show the considerable gap between the professional legitimacy of interior design and decoration.
The ‘Body of Knowledge’

Some design researchers have concluded that further definition of the interior design field is necessary in order to establish recognition of the profession. In 2004, representatives of Interior Designers of Canada (IDC) contracted with design researchers Denise Guerin and Caren Martin to identify a body of knowledge that defines the interior design profession. According to these researchers, “defining the profession’s body of knowledge is a crucial step that can assist in establishing the profession’s place among the realm of designers of the built environment, in the eyes of the public, and in the profession itself” (Guerin & Martin, 2004).

The study used the ‘career cycle approach’ in its methodology. This study reports that there are four stages of a professional interior designer’s career cycle: education, experience, examination, and legal regulation or practice. Guerin and Martin analyzed written documents from professional design organizations that discussed each of these stages. Eighty-one knowledge areas were identified from the documents and were placed in one of the following categories: codes, communication, design, furnishings, fixtures and equipment, human needs, interior building constructions, and professional practice. Each area was assessed using the health, safety, and welfare criteria (established with the NCIDQ definition of interior design) to determine the benefit to the public.

Of the 81 knowledge areas only 26 were found in all four stages of the career cycle. The experience stage had the least with 44. The examination stage had 52 areas. Knowledge of codes was found in all categories. Seventy-six of the 81 were found in education (a finding that is helpful to educators in that only six areas are missing). However, nine of those were only found in education, which showed that there were topics taught in the classroom that were not found in experience, on the examination, or in practice. The conclusions of this study suggested that interior design may need to make some changes to the curriculum being taught, what information is being tested in examination, and what type of experience practitioners are receiving.

Determining the interior design body of knowledge provides a vital step in establishing its professional legitimacy, according to Guerin and Martin (2004). The
following figure reviews the six main areas of professional focus of an interior designer as determined by these researchers (2004).

![Figure 2. Areas of focus for interior designers (Guerin & Martin, 2004).](image)

**Current Perceptions of Interior Design**

Many inferences have been made about the causes for misperception of the interior design profession (Martin, 2007). For example, it has been established that interior designer’s own perception of the profession is affecting how the public perceives the career (Birdsong & Lawlor, 2001). Interior designers such as licensed practitioner Cathy Hendrix and University of Minnesota researcher and educator Caren Martin feel that television is further confusing the public by exposing them to a false representation of interior design (C. Hendrix, personal communication, June 21, 2007; C. Martin, personal communication, June 25, 2007). The lack of support and minimum collaboration from related fields are further skewing the public's opinion and perception of the profession (Architectural Record, 2004). A combination of these inaccuracies is
providing the public with a false idea of interior design and preventing society from benefitting from designers’ knowledge (Martin, 2004). The following sections explore these ideas in further detail.

**Opinions of the Interior Design Profession by Interior Designers**

In 2001, a study was conducted by Craig Birdsong which examined the perceptions of professionalism by interior design practitioners working for the top 100 firms in the United States. The employees were asked to participate in a general demographics survey, and then asked about their perception of five components of the interior design profession: accreditation of undergraduate programs, state licensing, the NCIDQ exam, research, and graduate education.

The demographic results of participants were as follows: 69.1% were women; more than half were 26 to 35 years old; 43% had been in design less than six years; 3% had a two year interior design certificate; 73% had a bachelor’s degree; 9% had a masters degree; 8% had a design related degree; 81% were not licensed certified or registered interior designers; 84% were not NCIDQ certified; and 61% were not affiliated with a professional design organization (Birdsong & Lawlor, 2001). These demographic results alone indicated that there was a realistic concern that practicing professionals may not be qualified to the extent they should, especially with such a large percentage of practitioners not licensed, NCIDQ certified, or affiliated with a design organization. Table 1 reports these interior designer respondents’ perceptions of importance for various aspects of the interior design profession.

Table 1. Interior designer respondents’ perception of importance for various aspects of the interior design profession (Birdsong & Lawlor, 2001).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interior design professional component</th>
<th>Percent of respondents who felt the component was “important” or “very important” to practitioners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation of undergraduate programs</td>
<td>86.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State licensing</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCIDQ exam</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate education</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The fact that graduate education was last in importance indicated there is a lack of knowledge within the profession about the importance of furthering the research, intellectual legitimacy, and the future of the profession. The researchers stated it is a problem to have a lack of unification within the profession itself, and they recommended further the research to find a solution to the misunderstandings (Birdsong & Lawlor, 2001).

Opinions held by Interior Designers about Public Perception of Interior Design

Some interior designers themselves perceive a lack of accuracy in the public's perceptions of the field, as several interviews conducted for this study suggest. While these interviews do not provide a decisive sample size, they are instructive in the richness of these persons' point of view on this issue. For example, Cathy Hendrix, a licensed interior design practitioner and an active member of the Texas Board of Architectural Examiners was interviewed regarding her opinion of the public's perception of interior design. She has expressed an urgency to repair the misunderstandings of the profession and inform the public of the realities of interior design. “TV is educating the public in a negative and harmful way. Exposure like Designing Women, Will and Grace, Mrs. Doubtfire, and HGTV are providing an inaccurate portrayal of the design profession” (C. Hendrix, personal communication, June 6, 2007). She has expressed that this erroneous depiction has been detrimental to the profession and that the public is unable to see the contributions made to society by interior designers. In her opinion, the regulation of residential design should be enacted to shield the public from harm by providing standards of acceptable building and construction, products, finishes, and space planning that in turn protects the public's health, safety, and welfare. These codes would be used to create a healthy indoor environment, assist the growing elderly population age in place, and to prevent casualties from toxins released from unacceptable products in a fire. She also felt adamantly about the importance of showing the public a professional united front in order to continue to make legislative strides. In her opinion, “multiple design
organizations, such as ASID and IIDA, are preventing designers from making headway nationally” (C. Hendrix, personal communication, June 6, 2007).

Others similarly point to television “design shows” and erroneous media depictions of the interior design profession as vital issues. Interior design perception researcher and University of Minnesota professor Caren Martin, Ph. D., spoke repeatedly about the existing “void of knowledge available to the public on interior design” and how misperception and HGTV have filled that void. She continued that this lack of knowledge is preventing designers from “providing services to the middle class or low income public that could use our help” (C. Martin, personal communication, June 25, 2007).

Martin further advocated that designers can use current issues to make connections to the public. She feels it has become increasingly essential to expose the public to the profession and it should be designers’ mission educate the public about the population’s impact on the planet, provide solutions to the problems, and create alternatives to the current techniques of building and designing. In Martin's opinion, “we should focus on the human environment, because that is where interior design distinguishes itself (personal communication, June 25, 2007).”

Brian Everton, an interior design professional of Canada with over 25 years of experience in practice, design organizations, and legislative efforts was also interviewed regarding his opinion of the interior design profession and the public’s perception. He stated,

“There has always been a perception problem when it comes to the public’s understanding of what interior design is about. In the past it has been partially the fault of the profession not getting the message out to the public. However the real issue now is not that we are getting a message out, but rather that interior design has been harnessed to the omni-present ‘designer media programming’ including both main TV networks and the plethora of cable TV channels. The problem is that interior design is portrayed as an aesthetic conclusion and avoids at all costs the understanding of design as a process. Every time we see a ‘reveal’ at the conclusion of a program, or the close-up of a
surprised (happy or disgruntled) client it simply puts one more nail into our coffin; the misrepresentation of the professional practice of our chosen profession.” (B. Everton, personal communication, October 24, 2007).

Opinions about the Interior Design Profession from Related Fields

Some members of the architecture and related fields have at times been direct about their opinion of designers and the fight over title and practice acts, and several reoccurring concerns have appeared. (Dickinson & Russ, 1999; ASID, n.d.). Architects who have written about this issue have been concerned with protecting the consumer, and felt that the public should be able to feel confident they are interacting with a professional who has passed minimum standards. They felt that title measures may lead to confusion about designers’ duties, and grant professional status to undeserving designers. They were worried about losing their self-imposed title of “guardians of the public” and that some of their duties and clients will be lost (Architectural Record, 2004). Architectural Record stated that some architects do not favor the idea of grandfathering clauses because it completely ignores education or examination status. They seemed to be the most uncomfortable with designers who wished to practice duties that were generally occupied by architects and possibly outside of the interior design domain (2004).

Although opinions of interior design from architects are sometimes negative, there are times where both professions come together for legislative efforts of interior design (C. Hendrix, personal communication, June 6, 2007). There have also been several encouraging examples of practitioners, students, and legislators of both professions working together to benefit design as a whole (Dickinson & Russ, 1999). These times of collaboration show the public unified support for the interior design profession which is helpful to shift misperception (C. Hendrix, personal communication, June 6, 2007).
General Public Opinion

As public perception is the focus of this research, it becomes essential to also illustrate the general public citizen’s opinion of interior design and related fields. Solutions and conclusions can be better addressed when the problems and misperceptions have been successfully identified.

Public Opinion of Interior Design, Architecture, and Decoration

Members of the general public are the obvious beneficiaries of interior designers’ services, and have the most to gain from their engagement with interior designers. Studies suggest, however, that the public is inaccurately informed of the capabilities of interior designers.

For example, Ginther, Guerin, and Martin conducted a study in 2000 to identify the public’s opinion of architecture, decoration, and interior design and to determine how their opinions were influenced. They sought to determine if the public identifies any of them as professions. They also noted the public’s opinion about the tasks, responsibilities, qualifications, and characters of architects, interior designers, and decorators. The researchers used public opinion theory for the study that examined influence and interaction of attitude, belief, demographics, and if personally knowing a practitioner influenced public opinion (2004).

The study’s findings revealed public perceptions are potential catalysts for changes in this perception. They found that the public’s internally held beliefs and attitudes regarding architecture, interior design, and interior decoration were influenced by demographics and if one knows a practitioner. The public did consider architects and interior designers to be professionals, but not to the same extent they view a doctor or lawyer. The public was not sure of interior design practitioners’ qualifications or responsibilities. If a member of the public knew a practitioner, it positively or negatively influenced their opinion of the profession based on the personality or other qualities of that practitioner (Ginther, Guerin, & Martin, 2004).

This study showed an enormous gap in the public’s knowledge of architecture, interior design, and decoration. Architecture’s history was much longer than interior
design, and yet the public still seemed to have no real grasp of their contributions to society. The researchers recommended that the results be further analyzed to find a way to change the perceptions. However, no other studies have been conducted to date. This study suggests a need to shift public perception on the interior design profession.

**Institute of Justice**

Interior designers have recently been required to defend the profession and its status to another public organization. The Institute of Justice is a “libertarian public interest law firm” which litigates, strategizes, and pushes for legislation to “defend freedom” (IJ, n.d.). The Institute of Justice has been lobbying against regulation of the interior design profession, has been trying to overturn title acts, practice acts, and other legislation that interior designers have been seeking to put in place.

The Institute’s first lawsuit against interior design has been against Texas and the Texas Board of Architectural Examiners. Texas was granted a title act in 1991 and interior designers have been working toward the establishment of practice act legislation ever since. In 2007, interior design representatives of Texas lobbied for further educational standards of six years’ total experience and successful passage of the NCIDQ examination. The nearing success of a practice act prompted the Institute of Justice to get involved to prevent further legislation and to attempt to have the 1991 title act overturned. IJ claimed that the NCIDQ exam “has very little to do with the day-to-day practice of most interior designers; the bills would have put thousands of talented, hard-working Texans out of business overnight” (IJ, June 2007).

The Institute declared they were defending interior designers currently practicing the profession in Texas. However, according to Cathy Hendrix, an interior design member of the Texas Board of Architectural Examiners, this encounter undermined the progress the profession has made in the past fifty years. This lawsuit implied to the public that it was acceptable to practice without having met minimum standards of education and competency (C. Hendrix, personal communication, June 6, 2007). The lawsuit is still underway and the precise impact this exchange had on legislators is
unknown (IJ, June 2007). In October of 2007, Cheryl Durst, the executive vice president and chief executive officer of the International Interior Design Association (IIDA) similarly voiced a concern about the actions of IJ. Durst informed educator attendees at the 2007 Midwest Regional Interior Design Educator’s Council Conference that this issue may become known to interior design students as IJ reaches out to seek their alliance against licensing (C. Durst, 2007).

**George Will and The Washington Post**

The Institute of Justice event described above incited another public media exchange concerning the legitimacy of the interior design profession. The Institute of Justice informed independent conservative columnist George Will of their efforts against the interior design profession, which prompted him to publish a March 22, 2007 article in the Washington Post entitled *Wallpapering with Red Tape*. In this article, interior designers were portrayed as a profession that insulted decorators in order to secure financial stability and professionalization. Will attacked the need to legislate interior design on grounds that it is unnecessary and costly regulation that does not serve taxpayers. Will’s article describes that merely moving an armoire is ‘space planning’ which under current regulation needlessly requires an interior designer. He describes that this legislation is merely creating a scarcity of services to benefit a few financially (Will, 2007).

Many readers replied in outrage to the article on the Washington Post website; however, the overwhelming majority of them were interior designers, design students, or professional design organizations such as ASID. One response entitled *A Profession of Substance* reviewed the important social contributions interior designers have made through health, safety, and welfare and explains the intense education, experience, and examination that interior designers undergo (*The Washington Post*, 2007). The incident likely exposed the public to a highly partisan depiction of the interior design profession. IJ and Will's articles have influenced the public to points of view that are likely not universally held about the profession.
Television Design Myths

Television’s current embrace of interior design practice as the subject of its shows may also be affecting the public’s perception of the profession, as several studies suggest. One such study was completed by Caren Martin in 2004 that outlined six main TV design myths characterized by HGTV, TLC, BBC of America, and the Discovery Channel. Over the course of the study, Martin watched over fifty hours of Designer’s Challenge, Trading Spaces, Design on a Dime and other design shows to observe the ways interior design was portrayed on television and provided some clarification of the profession.

Martin summarized her findings into a series of myths the observation revealed. The first myth was that “the goal of the design process is to ‘surprise’ the client” (Martin, 2004, p.161). Martin explains that a professional interior designer would have known the significance of involving the client and educating them throughout the entire process. The second myth was “quality and speed are synonymous” (2004, p.161). On a real project a great deal of time is spent determining what the client needs from a space, planning a concept, preparing contract documents, specifying furnishings and finishes, and hiring subcontractors, which is completely overlooked on the shows. Also, the function or construction methods should never be sacrificed for the sake of aesthetics. In other words, the physical appearance cannot be the sole basis for materials selection and the longevity and integrity of the materials must also be considered. The third mistake made on “design shows” is the premise that “anyone can be an interior designer.” Years of education, two years of apprenticeship, and the NCIDQ licensing exam have been implemented to require a minimum level of knowledge and to ensure the public is protected (2004, p.161). The assertion that anyone can design is in contrast with current existing standards established by interior design professional organizations and numerous state mandates. As such, it provides a dichotomous perception to the public.

The fourth myth stated that “good design is trendy and cool.” Martin described that “Good design can be trendy and cool; however, design is considered good if it satisfies the clients’ lifestyle needs, and is based on the elements and principles of
design” (2004, p. 162). Every space and every client encompass different requirements and a ‘good designer’ could adapt their approach accordingly. The fifth legend was “designing your space will be super expensive or super cheap,” and neither of those scenarios present an accurate portrayal of design. A clear budget must be determined and a creative solution should be found that works within the budget and desired timeline for construction. Shows which portrayed designers as ‘extravagant’ with spending or misleading a client to imply they can deliver a certain look for a certain price have served to create a false perception to the public about designers. A licensed interior designer has been held to ethical standards of practice and would not promise more than they could provide on the given budget or insist on a look they wanted if it did not meet the client’s needs. The final myth was that “interior designers are zany, flamboyant airheads.” Martin described that one of the unique qualities of interior design is that it has been caught between the artistic and the logical, so designers are aware of their creative and social implications and responsibilities. They have received rigorous education and training and are typically extremely intelligent and gifted in visualizing space (2004, p. 162).

The design myths discovered by Martin’s research help identify reasons the public is confused about the design profession and why their public perception has been skewed. She continued that not all design shows are inaccurate or detrimental to the profession. The British show Design Rules appeared to be have educated the public, provided holistic examples, used proper terminology, and even provided researchers on one occasion to discuss their work. However, these accurate reflections of the profession are few and far between and Martin has recommended other alternatives to gaining ideas from “design shows.” ASID, IIDA, and NCIDQ have provided accurate education and information to the public and offered search methods on their websites to locate a qualified and licensed interior designer (Martin, 2004).

Another study by Waxman & Clemons in 2007 confirmed that television design shows are skewing the public’s perception of the interior design profession. The researchers are also educators and illustrated the immense increase of enrollment into interior design programs. They described their students as being confused about the
realities of interior design versus what they had seen on TV (Waxman & Clemons, 2004). “Research indicates that television audiences have great difficulty distinguishing between nonfiction and fiction in media presentations and that audiences learn and construct knowledge from both types of presentations. Inherent in the phrase ‘reality show’ is the understanding that what audiences see depicted in a particular television show is ‘real’ or a slice of reality” (2004, p. VII). Undergraduate students have been influenced enough by shows like Trading Spaces to change their major to interior design after they were well into another course of study (Waxman & Clemons, 2004). As part of their study, students from Florida State University and Colorado State University were surveyed on their attitudes of design-related television. In the fall of 2005, more than 90% reported to watching at least one design-related show at least once a week, and 53% stated that the shows had some influence on their decision to choose interior design as their major (2004, p. VIII). Students held both positive and pessimistic views about the shows.

Some optimistic themes emerged from the students:

1. The designers on the shows possessed excellent creativity and demonstrated inventive solutions to design problems
2. Students enjoyed the entertainment provided by the television personalities
3. Viewers appreciated seeing the beginning and end of a project
4. The programs were educational and taught them about construction methods and materials
5. The show raised awareness to the benefits of design, removed the ‘mystique’ of designing, and encouraged the public to design
6. The show communicated that “the quality of the built environment has value”
7. The shows introduced the idea that designers can contribute to society (2004, p. VIII)

Several negative themes also emerged from the students:

1. “Television shows portrayed an inaccurate perception of the profession by oversimplifying the process of creating an interior environment” (2004, p. VIII)
2. The shows infrequently represented the accurate process and planning that is involved in design
3. “These shows are just ‘show design’ on a surface level” (2004, p. IX)
4. Budgets were unrealistic, either too low or too high
5. Designers were inaccurately represented and “the image of the designer was actually tarnished” (2004, p. IX)
6. “I think they cheapen the image of interior design” (2004, p. IX)
7. “I believe they portray our industry as a joke” (2004, p. IX)
8. Students were astonished that many of the ‘designers’ had no degree or training in interior design, and discovered that on one design show only two of the fifteen had degrees in interior design and one in architecture (2004, p. IX).

While design-related shows increase awareness of the profession, they also have provided the public with negative misperceptions. These inaccurate images of the profession have presented society with mixed messages which are also translating into the incoming freshman classes of interior design students. According to Waxman and Clemons, “more must be done to offset the potentially inaccurate perceptions created by the recent popularity of design-related television” (2004, p. X).

This portion of Chapter 2 has illustrated the activities of interior designers, legislation, and the perceptions of the profession from multiple points of view. The second portion of this chapter investigates public relations strategies in an effort to explore the possible application of these approaches to repair the misperceptions of the interior design profession.

**Public Relations**

Public relation techniques have provided tangible strategies to strengthen the reputation and image of an organization while improving relationships with target audiences (Ali, 2001a). ‘PR’ strategies have been designed to create a positive image of a company or entity which allows a proactive approach to business, as opposed to a reacting to negative attention and media exposure. “The aim of PR is to win
understanding and support from, and to influence the opinions and behavior of, an organization’s key audiences" (Ali, 2001a).

**Public Relations Strategies**

According to Ali, no matter how unique or appealing a company’s services may be to the public, if the company’s reputation is not viewed as positive, there will be a negative impact on sales. It was because of this that PR was said to be the fifth “P” of marketing in addition to product, price, place, and promotion (2001b). All five have been shown to be essential to a successful marketing and public relations mix. Although proportions of each will change, the ingredients have remained the same (2001b).

Many public relations sources describe that long-term planning and the use of a strategic approach in public relations have been an extremely effective method to shift public perception (Birk, Burgoon, & Pfau, 1990; Center, Cutlip, & Broom, 1985). The PR strategy should work well alongside the general goals of the organization and the corporation’s marketing strategy so that all three support each other on all levels. A strategic approach allows a company to proactively plan and be offensive rather than constantly reacting to negative PR (Gregory, 2000). Ali has identified six general steps to create a strategic public relations solution. These are discussed below.

**General Procedure for a PR Initiative.**

1. **Conducting research to determine the public’s view of the organization.**
   Questionnaires, focus groups, and samples of existing media attention can help determine current public consensus of an issue or perception. Once it is determined how the company is viewed, image repair and proactive PR strategies can begin to be implemented.

2. **Creating a list of objectives that express the desires of the organization.**
   The goals should be easy to understand, include a time frame to achieve the goal, and have a measurable success. Objectives should also present a challenge, yet be attainable. These should be updated often to ensure their relevance to the organization.
By taking the time to develop these goals, progress, results, and effectiveness will be evident.

3. Identifying the target audiences.
There may be several groups of people that need to be informed and persuaded about the organization. Each public group needs to receive a distinct message tailored directly towards their needs and views. Some key audiences might include employees, the media, the public, customers, investors/donors, government, or members of the community.

4. Exploring avenues to achieve the objectives.
The best way to explore the options is by scheduling meetings to brainstorm as individuals and as a collective whole. Creating multiple solutions to meet each objective and determining the cost of each option are critical activities. Once the decision has been made on the best ideas, an activity timetable is developed, which includes who will be responsible for each solution and the timeframe for each.

5. Documenting the written PR strategy.
When the research and brainstorming are complete, it is important to document the strategy. This should include a list of the key audiences, essential messages that need to be conveyed to each, objectives and the methods to achieve them, how success will be measured, a date to evaluate progress, and the activity timetable. After the PR strategy is documented, it should then be implemented.

6. Assessing the PR strategy’s effectiveness.
Conducting similar research to what was used in the beginning can help determine if the messages were received by the desired audiences. Knowing which techniques were successful and which were not will help the organization revamp the PR strategy and be more effective in the future (Ali, 2001a). The chart in figure 3 reviews indicators for measuring the effectiveness of the campaign.
Figure 3. Example of measuring effectiveness of a PR campaign (Ali, 2001a, p. 15).

**Public Relations Procedure**

The above section details the overall steps for a successful PR initiative. Within these steps are additional activities that must occur that require careful attention to procedure and foreseeing possible issues before they occur. For example, in order to set public relations strategies in motion, inquiries, research, and planning must be conducted (Wood, 2000). Although Public Relations strategies have universal standards, the following steps were derived largely from Ali and have been selected for discussion due to their relevancy to the interior design perception challenge.

**Sub-steps within General Procedure Step 1.** Conducting research to determine the public’s view of the organization.

**Communication with Staff.** In order to have effective communication and PR skills with the public, it must start within the organization. It is important to establish two-way communication, share good and bad news with employees up front, and encourage the entire team to share ideas and recommendations. A communications
audit should be conducted to see what staff thinks of the organization. The company should determine what the employees believe is the corporate message and what forms of communication the staff prefer (Ali, 2001a).

**Corporate Reputation.** After the organization is aware of the perception from within the company, to the company should research the public’s opinion. By conducting an image audit, the perceptions of the key audiences will be apparent. The questionnaires and focus groups should be used to search for unintended messages in every aspect of the organization. The building headquarters needs to be examined along with the brochures sent to clients or press, etc. to determine the messages they convey. The detailed information from the surveys should be used to create an easy to read image matrix. The chart should separate out each item studied and state the image it conveys, what the desired image was, if any action is required, the budget to repair the image, who is in charge of image repairs, and a guideline of beginning and ending dates (Gregory, 2004). The chart in figure 4 provides an example of an image audit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM 1</th>
<th>ITEM 2</th>
<th>ITEM 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item examined</td>
<td>Lobby area</td>
<td>Promotional brochure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image conveyed</td>
<td>Dowdy and old-fashioned</td>
<td>Cheap and unprofessional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desired image</td>
<td>Welcoming and stylish</td>
<td>Attractive, professional, and upmarket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action required</td>
<td>Redecorate and replace chairs</td>
<td>Produce new brochure with good design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
<td>$18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegated to</td>
<td>Melanie</td>
<td>Stephen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start/completion</td>
<td>Feb/March</td>
<td>March/June</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4. Example of an image audit (Ali, 2001, p. 18).*

Once the problems with the organization’s image have been identified, a plan needs to be created to improve perceptions. Each action should be assigned to a qualified person. Each person should be provided a sufficient budget, allotted an
appropriate amount of time to complete the task, and asked for progress periodically. When the repairs have been made, proactive attempts should be made to keep staff content and provide excellent customer care to prevent any future image problems (Ali, 2001a).

**Considerations within General Procedure Step 2.** Creating a List of Objectives.

Planning a Campaign. A public relations campaign has several parts. There is the campaign as a whole which is the overall goal; for example, to shift public misperception. There are also smaller campaigns which might be created by categorizing target audiences. Further, each small campaign has its own goal to shift perception, but they all collaborate either simultaneously or chronologically to contribute to the overall campaign.

PR campaigns can be expensive, so considerations need to be made to determine the goals of each campaign, who the campaign should reach, and how the goals will be achieved. The strengths and weaknesses of the organization should be studied closely and the organization needs to be aware of all opposing arguments that may surface during the campaign (Gregory, 2004). The objectives of each campaign should be narrowed down by naming the campaigns. Each campaign is encouraged to create a visual identity, logo, and even a slogan that can be used on all campaign material to reinforce the goals and messages. The campaign materials may include a pamphlet, poster, bag, pen, button, or even a video to encourage support. A factsheet about the organization should be included along with objectives to ensure supporters are well informed to speak out on issues of the campaign. Publicizing the campaign, organizing a launch, and inviting the media are important ways to create a buzz. The activity timetable needs to be used to ensure a constant flow of campaign efforts so that interest does not die down after an encouraging start. Creative new ways should be sought to spread the campaign message and keep the organization in the limelight by publishing new research, partaking in photo opportunities, going to exhibitions, creating displays, or even petitioning (Ali, 2001a).
Considerations within General Procedure Step 3. **Identifying the target audiences.**

**Internet Site Development.** A website has been shown to affect public perception, persuade, inform, and increase communication with the target audience. It is important to maintain the visual identity of the organization consistent throughout all media and include internet address in all publicity materials (Gregory, 2004). The target audience should be surveyed during the design process of the website to determine what information is needed and the desired format. The site should have a professional appearance, quick loading graphics, and a changing ‘special features’ section to encourage people to revisit regularly. In the past, a PR driven website has been the most effective by providing a section for pictures, press releases, and background information in a clear and accessible format. The website has the potential to act as another method of persuasion, and due to the “interactive nature of the internet,” it creates a pathway of communication as well (Ali, 2001a).

Considerations within General Procedure Step 4. **Exploring Avenues to Achieve the Objectives.**

**Dealing with Crisis.** Oftentimes a PR crisis can damage public perception of an organization. If it is handled appropriately, however, it can improve the company’s image. A proactive approach is essential to investigate vulnerabilities and to plan for potential problems in advance. A crisis plan needs to be developed which would include a list of the possible setbacks and a planned strategy for each one. A crisis plan typically incorporates the names of and order in which staff would be notified, the employee in charge, and what should be done to handle each crisis (Ali, 2001a). A crisis team should be created who are familiar with the corporate message, work well under pressure, and feel comfortable in a crisis situation. Upon completion of the crisis plan, everyone should receive a copy of the plan, be properly trained for their task, and be aware of who is in charge. Scenarios should be performed of potential problems and the action plan should be revised after crisis (Center, Cutlip, & Broom, 1985).

When a crisis occurs, the media will likely be standing by to report on the events. Dealing with the media successfully can improve the crisis, get the intended information
across, and further develop the positive image of the organization. The organization may choose to present a statement or reply to exploration by the media. The representative chosen to speak on behalf of the organization needs to be well informed, should have reviewed the potential questions and answers from the crisis plan, and should be capable of answering difficult questions under pressure (Ali, 2001a).

**Working with the Media.** According to Gregory (2000), developing a positive relationship with the media is essential to running a successful PR campaign. It is necessary to proactively build a contact list with media representatives and attract positive exposure for the organization through the submission of news releases. An organization should participate in interviews, publish photos, monitor media exposure, create printed publicity, implement the AIDCA strategy (discussed below), produce written copy, design publicity, commission photography, and have publicity printed to develop a thorough PR campaign. By proactively seeking positive attention, the media and public will become more familiar with the organization and the goals of the campaigns.

**Making Contacts.** Building a strong relationship with the media is a vital part of a proactive PR strategy. It is important to become acquainted with central media correspondents before a crisis occurs to acquire consistent positive exposure of the organization. A list of reporters should be created and contacted to introduce them to the organization. The friendly meeting provides an opportunity to “build and enhance your profile, promote products, present your case, or simply inform the public, politicians, and trade and professional audiences. Reactive media relations leave you responding to other peoples’ stories” (Gregory, 2000).

It is also important to research different media types and publications to become familiar with the unique qualities and benefits associated with each. Considerations should be made for various language styles that apply to each type of media and the information should be tailored accordingly. A list of radio programs, newspapers, magazines, and television programs should be created that might be excellent suitable outlet for the goals and concerns of the organization. The organization should become familiar with contacts who concentrate on stories in the company’s field of study and
make an effort to develop the mutually beneficial relationship. It might be helpful to invite media to an event or office, so they can observe the important work of the organization in person (Ali, 2001a).

**Attracting Positive Attention with News Releases.** In addition to proactively preventing negative media attention, it is imperative to strive to draw in as much positive attention as well. The organization should be aware of stories that might be of interest to the media and tailor news releases accordingly. Unless the story immediately attracts the editors’ attention, it will likely be abandoned like approximately ninety-seven percent of all news releases. The story must be appealing, extraordinary, controversial, unanticipated, or noteworthy to set itself apart from the countless stories received each day. Some of those stories might be appealing due to a significant proclamation, receiving an award, offering new services, or making a social contribution (Center, Cutlip, & Broom, 1985). The following is an example of an effective news release.

![Example of a news release](Ali, 2001a, p. 43).

*Figure 5. Example of a news release (Ali, 2001a, p. 43).*
The release should be clear and concise while including all of the necessary information included by the “Five W’s of who, what, where, when, and why. When announcing an event it is imperative to include who will be performing the action and what they will be doing. It is also vital to state when and where the activity will be occurring. The most crucial element is “why” because editors and members of the target audience need to feel attached to the story and personally effected by the occasion (Ali, 2001a). The release should be evaluated several times before it is sent to the intended media. The “specialized media directory” can provide detailed information about various media sources so that the release can be delivered to the desired media category and intended person. The release should be stapled so nothing is lost and addressed to a specific person’s attention including their employment title. Typically, delivery by mail, by personal courier, or digital format is preferred over a fax version to avoid loss.

Each media type has unique benefits and drawbacks which affect the phrasing of release. Television “is a fast-moving, visual medium” that requires attention to be attracted instantly. Captivating scenery, color, animals, or spokespeople can immediately draw the viewer in. Radio depends on language, words, and sounds to engross listeners. Nationwide and local broadcasts tend to look for different qualities, and some stories have more listener appeal than others. Newspapers are typically looking for news with national importance or an extensive local appeal. Depending on how significant and noteworthy the story is, the national or local angle should be exploited. Magazine articles usually pertain to a particular group of people, and require focused attentiveness to plea to that unique group (Ali, 2001a).

A Media Pack. At times a news release needs to be accompanied by a “media pack” which can include any additional information on the organization that may be helpful to the journalist. The “press pack” can include a history on the company or campaign, a factsheet, list of frequently raised questions and answers, product samples, examples of work, and photographs to give a further depiction of the importance of the story. These items can be sent directly to correspondents or given out directly at an event (Gregory, 2000). On occasion it might be appropriate to generate a
news conference if the story is expected to spawn extensive buzz by the press. When this is the case, essential participants from the organization and media should be invited so that the declaration and inquiries can be made in the same instance (Ali, 2001a).

Interviews. Although it can be difficult to remain in control under pressure, it is critical for the spokesperson to be extremely prepared and ready for an interview. A list of delicate questions and acceptable answers must be rehearsed thoroughly in advance to guarantee a positive outcome from the discussion. The points of view the organization would like to get across should also be planned in advance and reiterated throughout the interview. Distracting gestures should be eliminated and the speaker should appear authentic, informed, relaxed, and self-assured. “No comment” should never be an adequate answer to any question; instead, the target message should be reiterated even if the inquiry must be interpreted (Ali, 2001a).

Publishing Photos. Being able to generate a successful photo narrative can prove to be a valuable asset to public relations. When a ‘photo op’ (or opportunity) is being developed, the event should be designed to draw in photographers and videographers from local or national media sources. An announcement should be sent to journalists approximately a week prior to the affair (Center, Cutlip, & Broom, 1985). From time to time, some publications use excellent photos that are submitted to them independently. A professional freelance photographer should be hired and thoroughly briefed on the organization and the goals of the photos. If suitable for a media source, the photos are typically submitted with a news release, and are available to download from the organization’s website. A caption should be provided to identify who is in the photo, what is occurring, and where it occurred (Ali, 2001a). Appropriate photos may be particularly important to interior design given the field’s close association with visual and aesthetic activities.

Supervise Media Exposure. Proactively seeking positive media attention is not enough to improve PR-- the coverage must be carefully and thoroughly monitored. There are several steps to ensure consistent and positive exposure. First, the media reactions and inquiries should be monitored in detail. With every exploration, a note should be made of who called, what their questions were, and the responses given.
Inquiries should be made to determine when the story will run and a follow-up must be made to make certain the journalist conveyed the story accurately (Gregory, 2004). Figure 6 is an example of a media log used to monitor exposure.

![Media Log Example](image)

*Figure 6. Example of a media log (Ali, 2001a, p. 50).*

Secondly, the amount of exposure the organization is receiving versus the amount of press releases being distributed should be examined. A copy of news and photo press releases affixed to the contact list should be retained to calculate the “hit rate.” When the majority of releases are being published the success rate of coverage is promising; if only a small number of releases are chosen an exploration needs to be made to determine what is going wrong. Some typical errors are missing the closing date, production of an ineffective story, or if the wrong types of media were chosen. It may also help to phone some of the distribution contacts to find out why they chose not to use the stories.

Third, it might be overwhelming to monitor all of the media exposure, so sometimes is becomes necessary to contract out observations to an expert bureau. For a fee, the companies will gather press clippings, audio tapes of radio coverage, video tapes of television exposure, and transcripts of broadcast coverage (Ali, 2001a).
Finally, it is vital to appraise “qualitative measures” in addition to the number of releases being used to determine if the exposure is helpful or hurtful to the organization. It is important to evaluate the fusion of how often the release is used, how many people view the story, and if the people reached were in the target market. Each piece of media coverage should be assessed to ascertain whether the messages conveyed are positive, negative, or neutral (Gregory, 2000).

**Creating Printed Publicity.** Printing successful publicity pieces are vital to creating a successful corporate image and can dramatically shift perception and persuade the audience. The body of the publicity must be effective, have a captivating design, strong photography, an efficient layout, and include viable quotes from professionals. Figure 7 provides an example of a publicity piece.

A production schedule must be created to provide a timeline and a closing date to review photos, quotes, and design work. As with any other design process, a strong concept must be decided on and clarified to writers, photographers, and designers on the project (Center, Cutlip, & Broom, 1985). Again, appropriate graphics may be particularly important to the credibility of the interior design profession, given the field’s close association with visual and aesthetic activities.

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 7. Example of a good and poor publicity designs (Ali, 2001a, p. 58).*
The AIDCA Strategy

Another approach to designing and creating an effective PR initiative is the AIDCA strategy. It has been used for decades to provide tangible guidelines for creating printed copy or publicity material. The acronym AIDCA stands for the key words Attention, Interest, Desire, Conviction, and Action (Heller, 1999). The five phases have been used for sales and gaining audience support. The tactics can be used to arrange and clearly develop the publicity material so it is readable and well received (Ali, 2000b).

Developing a genuine concern for the campaign or organization is crucial to creating successful publicity. Implementation of these tactics can increase support among members of the target audience, and the expectation of AIDCA is to shift the audiences’ perception to support the organization’s objectives. The five stages of AIDCA should enable the key audience member to develop positive concern and perception of the organization. These are briefly discussed below.

1. **Attention.** The first phase requires gaining the focus of the targeted persons which can be done with a direct proposal, endorsement by a celebrity or professional, or even music, art, and movement. Although the organization may not be competing for a sale, the target audiences should be approached as if the piece is contending with other publicity to persuade them to shift their perception and want to know more. “You have to win the customers’ eyes and ears before you can win their minds, hearts, and wallets” (Heller, 1999).

2. **Interest.** The second step is meant to take the attention that was captivated and create an interest in the organization or cause. This step is designed to make the audience feel like they are in need of the services, are affected by the cause, or have been missing out by not participating in the campaign. Creating interest sets the stage for the audience to receive the message in the future steps.

3. **Desire.** The third part includes creating a strong desire. This tactic must make a case that enlightens the audience on what truly sets this organization apart and why they have to be a part of the movement. Providing little snippets of information that take
the extra mile to intrigue the customer can “tip the scale” and create enough desire to want to help (Heller, 1999).

4. **Conviction.** The audience has to feel compelling conviction for the organization and feel like they want to support them alone. In order to do this, the “Unique Selling Proposition” (USP) must be established. The USP is “the attribute that persuades the buyer that your product or service is different and better” (Heller, 1999). Once the target audience sees the USP they are likely to persuade themselves to wanting to participate in the company’s goals.

5. **Action.** The final phase is provoking action and to entice a sense of “immediacy and urgency.” The customer needs to feel as if they have to do something now before it is too late. This is the most important step because without tangible action, all the progress made with the other parts is lost. If implemented correctly, this step, and process as a whole are extremely rational and successful in encouraging the key audience to join the cause (Heller, 1999).

The ideal outcome of AIDCA is to shift audiences’ perception to increase support for the organization. Expectantly it will “persuade the buyer to prefer your offering to all alternatives and, you hope, to shift from their current product or service to yours” (Heller, 1999). It is vital to describe in detail the personal and social benefits of the organizations cause, and may be helpful to use personal statements from other supporters, professionals, or celebrities (Heller, 1999).

Once the publicity materials are created, it is crucial that supplies are distributed to the target audiences. A “distribution plan” should be created with a timeline, a list of what materials are needed for each event, what is to be mailed, and what is to be handed out personally. Staff should be properly trained on procedures, and should always keep enough publicity materials on hand to take to all events (Ali, 2001a).

Creating a positive relationship with the media is vital to operating a successful PR campaign. By proactively building a contact list with media representatives and attracting positive exposure though the submission of news releases, the organization can improve media relations. By participating in interviews, publishing photos, monitoring media exposure, creating printed publicity, implementing the AIDCA
strategy, producing written copy, designing publicity, commissioning photography, and having publicity printed, an organization can begin to develop a thorough PR campaign. All of these steps are essential to ensure an effective public relations campaign. By proactively seeking corporate exposure and creating opportunity for positive media attention the organization’s image can be improved. If followed in sequential order the tactics have repeatedly been shown to successfully shift perception of the public (Center, Cutlip, & Broom, 1985; Gregory, 2000).

Public Relations Activities in Interior Design: Past and Future

It is important and relevant to explore the past efforts of interior design before additional conclusions can be reached. Attempts have been made by interior design organizations such as ASID and IIDA to shift public perception of interior design.

Past Public Relations Efforts

ASID. Since its creation in 1975, the American Society for Interior Designers has become the most recognized interior design organization, and has nearly 40,000 members (Martin, 2007). ASID’s website recounts that the organization has a history of advocating for the interior design profession through its legislative efforts. They currently have three federal lobbyists on their payroll and track state and local code adoption. They are aggressively participating in meetings and organizations for codes, legislation, the American with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines Committee on Architectural Features, and public safety. ASID has represented the profession to many federal agencies to make the case for professional legitimacy and need for further legislation. They have also spearheaded the fight for legal recognition by being a frontrunner in states recently awarded title or practice acts and in jurisdictions still seeking legislation (ASID, n.d.).

ASID maintains an active strategy to educate members on legislation and encourage participants in legislative efforts. They inform chapters and coalitions on legislative strategies, provide legislative training sessions to members, send quarterly e-newsletters and updates, and have donated over five million dollars to legislative efforts.
They have produced the newsletter “Grassroots” every three months to inform designers on legislation and code matters, and have also developed the newsletter “Capital Connections” which allows designers to contact legislators to make a stance on interior design issues. ASID has held symposiums to get designers together to network, strategize about legislation, discuss the future of the profession, and review benefits of interior design for the public (ASID, n.d.).

ASID has created a website that provides up to date information to the public. It includes ways to search for licensed designers, legislation publicity, thorough information about the profession, copies of letters to editors or legislators in response to negative publicity, a section on sustainability and aging, and product information (ASID, n.d.).

For the purposes of this study, ASID Manager of Public Relations Korenna Cline was contacted to obtain information about their public relations efforts. Cline stated that “ASID is in the process of revamping their marketing strategies to make it really hip and cool” (personal communication, October 17, 2007). They are developing a campaign called “Real World Design Week” which is a week long mentorship program for interior design students that will be launched throughout all ASID chapters in October 2008 (ASID, n.d.). The celebrity spokesperson for this campaign is Matt Lorenz who was the winner of Top Design on the Bravo channel. “It is a positive campaign getting a very young figure that students can relate to in order to promote the profession” (K. Cline, personal communication, October 17, 2007).

When asked what PR and media campaigns ASID has developed to directly reach the public, Cline stated “ASID has two main platforms: sustainable design and universal design. Most press releases are about a specific story and can sometimes incorporate our platforms but have to have that media hook. We try to get a voice out there but rely on ASID leadership and members to reach the general public.” (personal communication, October 17, 2007).

A review of ASID publicity offerings and interview of ASID personnel suggest that ASID’s public relations efforts have been primarily oriented toward its interior design members, legislators, and related professions. This conclusion is supported by Cline’s
statement above. Contact with the public is largely dependent upon the public’s active seeking of information that is resident on the ASID website. This is in contrast to other organizations such as the American Psychology Association, whose PR strategies have been shown to be effective at shifting public perception which have proactive campaigns in place to influence public opinion (APA, n.d.; K. Cline, personal communication, October 17, 2007).

IIDA. The International Interior Design Association (IIDA) was established in 1994 from a fusion of the Institute of Business Designers (IBD), the International Society of Interior Designers (ISID), and the Council of Federal Interior Designers (CFID). Their membership is over 12,000 and includes 30 chapters around the world (IIDA, n.d.). In their 13 years they have sought to educate members and create a sense of community among the interior designers of the world. They have created their website to provide information to members and encourage networking, collaboration, and interaction among interior designers. They have developed Perspective magazine which is designed to share stories, issues, and new information with members (IIDA, n.d.). IIDA was contacted for this study to identify their past strategies to shift public perception. An email response was received from Jocelyn Pysarchuck, the Senior Director of Communications and Marketing:

“As you are probably aware, consumer awareness campaigns can be a significant investment of money and resources. We’ve seen several associations over recent years invest in such campaigns with very mixed results. As such, IIDA has channeled its efforts in this regard toward strategic partnerships with outputs targeted toward the client community. Examples include editorial partnership with Fast Company Magazine, IIDA’s Leader’s Breakfast series whose attendee base includes many in the local business communities who are invited to interact and learn more about our profession, and the creation of an annual Power of Design issue of IIDA’s Perspective Magazine (see Summer 2006
IIDA seeks partnerships with companies and clients, encourages members to share information about the profession to clients, and hosts events to educate a selected sample of the public about interior design. However, these efforts are not targeting the majority of the public who are not clients of an IIDA member (J. Psyarchuck, personal communication, May 21 2007; Birk, Burgoon, & Pfau, 1990).

**IDC.** The Interior Designers of Canada organization has existed for 27 years, serving “the Canadian interior design industry, advancing the profession through high standards of education, professional development, professional responsibility and communication” (IDC, n.d.). The IDEC website describes that “Interior Designers of Canada, with the support of its seven provincial association members, provides a forum for the unified voice of Canadian interior designers, so that the profession continues to grow and receive recognition and respect, locally, nationally and internationally, from government, industry and the public sector” (IDC, n.d.).

IDC requires CIDA accredited education, successful completion of the NCIDQ exam, and continued education for membership. IDC actively seeks to represent its interior designer members to the Federal Government. “Through active participation IDC ensures that Canadian Interior Designers are represented internationally and kept informed on current issues” (IDC, n.d.). IDC also provides information to its members on continuing education, current legislation, the “Environmental Impact of Design…and seek[s] to promote environmental consciousness” (ICD, n.d.). A review of IDC website materials does not suggest a primary goal of outreach to the general public.

In summary, the ASID, IIDA and IDC interior design organizations demonstrate an ongoing engagement with issues of legislation, networking with other designers, and education. A review of website content and interview with organization staff suggests that IIDA focuses most on their members and creating a sense of partnership, whereas ASID focuses on membership education and legislation as their primary goals (ASID,
However, ASID and IIDA do not cite direct public outreach amongst their primary goals.

**Other Ongoing Initiatives in Interior Design Public Relations**

There have been many discussions and studies performed that seek to take steps that elevate public perception of interior design, and to focus the future of the interior design profession. Unification of design organizations, continued education, collaboration, and promotion of the profession to future generations are each in their own way seeking to remedy incorrect public perceptions (Anderson, Dudek, & Honey, 2007).

**Unification of Design Organizations**

The unification of all design organizations including ASID and IIDA was attempted in 1988 but was not achieved. Efforts toward unification have been unsuccessful since this time and have been marked by contradicting opinions on the best approach of maintaining design associations. Some professionals feel that by showing a united front and having one voice more can be accomplished. This was the route architects have taken, and it has demonstrated to be successful in raising awareness and creating a basis of understanding for the profession and the American Institute of Architects (Martin, 2007). Others feel that there are unique qualities to all of the organizations, and that by unifying, they would be losing those individual issues that are important to each group (Kangas & Stumpf, 2002).

**Continued Education**

As interior design has gained more professional legitimacy, there has been continued support for post graduate education (Bender & McCoy, 2007; Martin, 2007). Even though studies have shown there is not enormous support for post-graduate education from practitioners, studies have shown there are benefits beyond the classroom education. It has been indicated that continuing education could enhance
leadership and business skills in addition to furthering interior design knowledge (Bender & McCoy, 2007).

Collaboration

The future of the built environment depends highly on the collaboration of designers, architects, and other disciplines, according to Edwards (2002). Yet, there appears to be a lack of understanding between fields on qualifications of each profession and on roles in the built environment (Martin, 2007). The misunderstanding could be one reason for the lack of support by some members of the architecture profession. There has been a missing component in education to expose students to collaboration in the classroom so that it becomes second nature in the field, according to Dickinson and Russ (1999). Multiple studies have taken place in order to show the importance of collaboration (Dickinson & Russ, 1999; Edwards, 2002). One study showed the different phases of collaboration with interior design, landscape architecture, and architecture and the immense benefits it had on the students at the university. Although within the phases there was turmoil, some arguments and confusion, the collaboration was found to be an extremely positive experience. The study was improved by creating a lecture component before the project began to give a brief overview of each field and its importance to the built environment. The instructors report that the students felt it was extremely eye-opening and overall a wonderful experience (Dickinson & Russ, 1999).

Another successful study took architecture and interior design students out of the classroom to work on an actual project in the field. This study also received extremely positive feedback on the experience of working as a team (Edwards, 2002). Both of these studies showed that information, education, and exposure can make a notable difference and made recommendations to continue collaboration efforts in the future.

Outreach to Future Generations and Other Initiatives

Another avenue that has been researched is outreach to the next generation of interior designers and the public. There have not been significant efforts to reach out to
K-12 students and inform them of the potential career of interior design, according to Nussbaumer (2000). Prior to 2000, the information available to students in printed sources and by school counselors has been insufficient; however, IIDA has recently produced a CD-ROM oriented toward these groups which provides information on the interior design profession. The previous inaccuracies occurred in the misrepresentation of interior design as decoration (Nussbaumer, 2000).

Other researchers recommend approaches calibrated to resonate with the public's sensibilities in various ways. For example, Anderson, Dudek, & Honey recommend that that interior design profession should inform the public of interior design's obligation to society to provide public good, thus fulfilling its 'social compact' (2007). Another recommendation is to reiterate that knowledge of sustainability is directly under the body of knowledge and scope of services of interior designers, thus making a connection to a current issue (Martin, 2007).

**Case Studies: Successful Shifts in Public Perception**

The interior design profession is not alone in its challenges of inaccurate public perception. Several other professions and organizations have been perceived incorrectly by the public in the past. For example, the psychology profession, the issue of sustainability, and The New York Times has been negatively characterized and in reaction to this crisis shifted public perception and gained positive exposure. All three have implemented a range of public relations strategies that have shown to correct the misperception and create a positive image for the profession or organization.

**The Psychology Profession**

Similar to interior design, psychology is nestled between a logical science of proven fact and an intuitive, more artistic realm of thought. The profession has endured years of scrutiny due to the public’s perception of a 'shrink' listening to a patient who is lying on a couch talking about their feelings for hours on end. The profession has successfully shifted public perception of the profession by using many of the PR tools previously reviewed. Some of the contributing factors of success are the age of the
profession, the existence of one unified organization which represents the profession, and the use of proactive public relations campaigns.

The American Psychological Association was founded in 1892 and is the largest association of psychologists worldwide with over 148,000 members. Their website provides detailed information on the organization, a mission statement, definitions, contact information, psychology topics, references for publications, career information, a section on new releases and press, annual reports and much more. APA takes a holistic approach and is not only dedicated to its members but to providing information to the public, increasing awareness, and promoting psychology, health, education, and public welfare (APA, n.d.).

APA was contacted for information on their experience with shifting public perception. The manager of the APA Public Affairs Office, Pamela Willenz, was eager to assist in providing information on the association and stated:

“As the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the U.S., APA enlists its different departments to educate the public about psychology. From ongoing public education “campaigns” based on numerous topical themes including school violence, resilience and mind-body health to having experts quoted in the media that represent the different areas of psychology, APA influences the public’s perception of psychology on a daily basis. APA’s professional practice directorate conducts campaigns that address how your mind and your body can work together to support each other; how people become resilient when faced with difficult events that change their lives; and how those coming back from war and their families can handle the stress and uncertainty of what to expect. For more information about these campaigns see: http://www.apahelpcenter.org/featuredtopics

APA’s education directorate is involved in programs that promote outreach to high school teachers. The program, APA Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools (TOPSS), brings
introductory and advanced psychology course materials into the high schools to meet the curriculum needs of secondary school teachers and to also provide opportunities for high school students to be recognized and rewarded for their academic excellence in psychology courses. There are currently 2,000 members of TOPSS and an estimated 500,000 high school students taking psychology courses. The Public Affairs Office within the Office of Public and Member Communications links the Association and psychology with the news media and the public. Ongoing public communications projects are designed to build better public understanding and support for psychology. Furthermore, the Public Affairs Office is a primary point of contact to the Association for the general public. The office responds to telephone, mail, and e-mail requests for information. Common requests include information on how to select a psychologist, treatments for depression and anxiety disorders, and careers in psychology.

The Office houses the Media Referral Service (MRS), a database of approximately 1,400 members who are interested in working with the news media. We use this database to respond to inquiries from national and local print and broadcast journalists seeking on-the-record interviews or background from leading scientists, practitioners and educators. The database allows us to search for members with specific areas of expertise, or ones who live in a particular media market, or with particular media experience depending on what the reporter has requested.

The Public Affairs staff also research, write and distribute an average of 80 – 100 press releases a year; the majority of the releases summarize research being published in APA journals. In addition, the office creates monthly radio news features also based on research appearing in APA journals. These new radio features
reach millions of radio listeners. For samples of APA press releases go to www.apa.org/releases.

Psychology Matters is a web-based compendium of psychological research that has had a lasting impact on everyday life. This is a valuable information resource for students and the public. For more information go to www.psychologymatters.org.

The Association’s violence-prevention campaign *ACT – Adults and Children Together against Violence* is on-going and jointly managed by Public Communications and Public Interest staff. The campaign includes public service advertising, a website and community-based training programs. To date, the ACT television and radio spots and print and outdoor (billboard) advertisements have earned over $50 million dollars in donated ad space. This donated media translates to a viewing audience of millions of Americans.

In response to the advertisements, thousands of consumers have called the campaign’s toll-free number and visited the campaign website. All campaign ads carry the campaign tagline – *What a Child Learns about Violence They Learn for Life.* For more information about the campaign visit it’s website at www.actagainstviolence.org” (P. Willenz, personal communication, May 31, 2007).

In the last year, APA’s website had 4,262,804 visitors. The internet site combines easily accessible data, topics information, press releases, access to journals, information about the organization, and a listing of APA divisions. The website follows proven PR strategies to create a user friendly site is geared toward the general public as much as APA members. By implementing these strategies, the APA site has the potential to influence the public’s perception of the American Psychological Association (P. Willenz, personal communication, May 31, 2007).
Going Green

Environmental sustainability presents another example of an issue that only recently has achieved widespread public attention, and it is increasingly common to hear about sustainability, the climate crisis, or something ‘going green’. This is due in substantial part to the shift in public relations strategies and the new approach of businesses, environmentalists, the Alliance for Climate Protection, “the green group,” celebrities, musicians, and even former vice president Al Gore.

Over the last twenty years Al Gore has been sharing a slide show on global warming and the prominent threat to the planet because of increasing carbon dioxide levels in the air. This slide show became the premise for “An Inconvenient Truth” which was Gore’s Academy Award-winning documentary. The book version of the movie sold nearly a million copies and the idea to “popularize” this issue emerged from its success. The idea of ‘mass persuasion’ was used to create the movie, and will be continued into a children’s TV show, a reality show, concerts, press releases and other ventures. “The monolith of apathy and opposition has begun to break up; and because, as Gore says, social change like climate change is ‘nonlinear,’ the shift in public opinion may come about very suddenly” (Traub, 2007, p.46).

The next stride for popularizing global warming was in the massive idea of ‘Live Earth’ which was thought, if it went well, to “be the biggest concert in history, a twenty-four-hour event spread across nine cities (Serpick, 2007, p. 20). Artists like Dave Matthews Band, Madonna, Kanye West, John Mayer, and many others were asked to take a stand on the issue of global warming and donate their time and proceeds to benefit the Alliance for Climate Protection. The Live Earth Global Warming Survival Handbook was sold at the concert, which provides environmental tips for consumers. A ‘manifesto’ was created to develop “specific action points organizers will ask politicians, corporations, and consumers to sign off on as part of Live Earth” (Serpeck, 2007, p. 20). A “Green Handbook” provided touring tips to performers to inform them on how to offset the impact of their travel to play at the shows. The entire concert functioned in the most sustainable ways possible (Serpeck, 2007).
Gore said, "I concluded a long time ago that the only pathway is through a mass political movement that engenders a sea change in public opinion across the planet" (Bates & Goodell, 2007, p. 52). The shifts in public perception have been fueled by the drastic change in PR strategies of Al Gore and other supporters for sustainability. "When people make changes in their own lives, they are much more likely to become part of a critical mass of public opinion and to support the bigger policy changes that are going to be needed to really solve the problem" (Bates & Goodell, 2007, p. 52). Gore’s 2007 securing of the Nobel Peace Prize for his work on this issue will likely spread the message of sustainability further.

**The New York Times**

In May of 2003 Jayson Blair, a reporter for The New York Times admitted to plagiarizing a story about a family of a United States soldier in Iraq, and subsequently resigned. The newspaper tried to repair the negative image by implementing public relations strategies in hopes of correcting their tarnished reputation as a leading source for news (Nwazota, 2004). This paradigm repair demonstrated the necessity of using PR strategies when a crisis emerges.

According to communications researcher Elizabeth Blanks Hindman “a paradigm is a set of broadly shared assumptions about how to gather and interpret information relevant to a particular sphere of activity…When a group acquires near-universal faith in the validity of a system of representing and applying information, that system attains paradigmatic standing” (2005, p. 226). When The Times was forced to repair their paradigm and their image, they defended their methods of producing media, distanced themselves from Jayson Blair, but also took responsibility for the situation by apologizing, accepting responsibility, and creating new opportunities to increase public perception (Blanks Hindman, 2005).

Initially an investigation was performed to see how management permitted this situation to occur, and a committee was created to investigate newsroom policy. During the next few months, the personnel were interviewed and discovered “a series of management and operational breakdowns” and "a stunning lack of communication
within the newsroom” (Nwazota, 2004, www.pbs.org). The investigation brought about the realization of an inadequate or nonexistent crisis plan and action plan, as recommended in PR strategies (Ali, 2001a). Additionally there were staffing changes, and the implementation of many new policies and procedures to monitor sources and factual content of stories (Nwazota, 2004). If this crisis were to ever happen again, the newly executed public relations strategies would better prepare *The New York Times* to handle the situation by using their action plan (Ali, 2001a).

Each of the three case studies presents a unique approach to the implementation of PR strategies. The American Psychological Association proactively uses PR strategies and campaigns to maximize outreach to the public. APA has one unified organization, a PR driven website, a proactive public education program, multiple campaigns that address quality of life, outreach to K-12, proactive news and media to educate public, hundreds of press releases per year, and toll free hotline for public questions and education. The sustainability movement popularizes the issues of global warming to reach the public. The organizations use mass persuasion to develop movies, concerts, and press releases. They elicit support from celebrities and musicians, hand out publicity materials at concerts and events, and have several campaigns to involve the public and get society to care about their issues. The New York Times used proactive publicity and paradigm repair to correct their image after a scandal. They were able to successfully create a crisis strategy for future needs of the company.

All of the case studies implemented numerous PR strategies outlined within this chapter. Each of these organizations had positive outcomes over time and were able to successfully shift public perception. It should be noted that the organizations also had the financial support to commit to an enduring PR campaign, a necessary resource to a successful movement.

**Summary**

The studies of this chapter have identified the efforts made by interior design to establish itself as a profession. Interior design has followed steps recommended by
Abbott (1988) to become a profession, is in the process of defining a ‘body of knowledge’ (Guerin & Martin, 2004), and made efforts through legislation (ASID, 2007) to gain professional legitimacy. The interior design profession has also established the training in products and construction techniques that make designers a knowledgeable resource on sustainability (Whitemyer, 2007; Adler, 2006). The consumer-driven instincts of western society ascribe increasing importance and value to aesthetics, providing validity to the visual aspects of design and the responsibilities of interior designers (Postrel, 2004; Edwards, 2002; Sterling, 2002). Interior design has also demonstrated its direct impact on the health, safety, and welfare of the public (Martin, 2007; ASID, n.d.).

The research presented throughout this chapter has discussed the dilemma of the public’s inaccurate perception problem for interior design. By having only 26 states with licensing provisions, there is a distinct mixed-message about the importance and legitimacy of the profession (ASID, 2007; Martin, 2007; C. Hendrix, personal communication, June 6, 2007; Anderson, Dudek, & Honey, 2007). Opposition and partial support from related fields such as architecture have also provided the public with uncertainty about how necessary interior design is to the built environment (Architectural Record, 2004; ASID, n.d.; Dickinson & Russ, 1999; Edwards, 2002). The contradictory public image that interior design has acquired through lawsuits with the Institute of Justice, negative media attention, and design-related television shows are further damaging the reputation of the profession (IJ, 2007; Will, 2007; Martin, 2004; Waxman & Clemons, 2007).

Interior design organizations such as ASID and IIDA have made efforts to gain support for the profession, increase legislation across the country, educate the public, and increase collaboration and support from related fields. However, it has been shown by the psychology profession, the sustainability movement, and The New York Times that a proactive public relations campaign is an effective way to shift public perception (Ali, 2001a; Wood, 2000). In the three presented case studies a thorough and documented PR campaign provided the missing link to shift the misperceptions held by the public (Whitemyer, 2007; Traub, 2007; P. Willenz, personal communication;
Nwazota, 2004; Blanks Hindman, 2005; APA, n.d.) The success of these case studies is also likely positively influenced by funding that assisted with their ongoing efforts.

Interior design professionals such as Caren Martin and Hendrix have expressed a need for a new approach to attempt to shift the misperceptions of interior design (Martin, personal communication, June 25, 2007; C. Hendrix, personal communication, June 6, 2007). They felt that the public is unable to receive the benefits of interior design due to the false perception that interior design is only for the elite and wealthy. Hendrix saw an emerging need for interior design in the aging population and baby boomers, people with special needs, implementation of residential codes, and sustainability. Martin expressed that more focus is needed on interior designers’ positive impact on the human environment, sustainability, and health, safety, and welfare, all issues where the profession is distinguishing itself. They also stressed that television is educating the public incorrectly about the profession and what it truly entails.

Numerous sources discussed within this chapter suggest that public misperception exists, and this perception must be corrected in order for the interior design profession to be recognized and accepted by the public. Overall, there is a lack of clear knowledge of the profession being provided proactively to the public. The inaccurate portrayal of interior design on television and in the media is creating a negative public perception and confusion about what design involves. The consensus was that proactive efforts need to be made to correct these misperceptions and prevent further interior design identity problems in the future. The implementation of a comprehensive and ongoing public relations strategy for the interior design profession may offer one avenue to begin this process.
CHAPTER 3

IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

As outlined in chapter 2, there is a likely problem with the public’s inaccurate perception of interior design. Several components have prevented the public from correctly perceiving the profession:

1. The public is not shown ways that the interior design profession’s unique knowledge can benefit society.

2. Opposition from related professions and the media provide negative attention to interior design.

3. Lack of knowledge, mixed messages from the profession, and television leave the public confused about what interior design entails.

Interior designers have spent decades applying a distinct skill set and have demonstrated the profession can make a difference in public quality of life and safety. For example, sustainability is an extremely important topic that affects the public and the world on a very large scale. Interior designers have the knowledge to implement environmentally friendly products and building practices, but have not been viewed as a resource by building professionals or the public to apply this vast knowledge (Whitemyer, 2007). Aesthetics are increasingly important to consumers around the world, according to Postrel (2004) and others. Production and commerce have drastically benefitted from the increase in products and options that are offered by aesthetics, yet visual qualities and aesthetics are still not valued or viewed as important contributions (Sterling, 2002). Interior designers also affect the health, safety, and welfare of the public in nearly every aspect of the profession. Designers apply their knowledge to egress, fire safety with products specification, ADA codes/accessibility, ergonomics, lighting, acoustics, persons with special needs, baby boomers/aging population/elderly, and healthcare design (ASID, n.d.), all pervasive, important topics and population segments.
Chapter 2 reviews research that suggests resistance from related professions and the media provide an unattractive image to the public about the profession (Martin, 2007). For example, only 26 jurisdictions have legislation which appears that the government does not give validity to the interior design profession (ASID, 2007). Lack of support, opposition, and atypical collaboration from architecture demonstrate to the public that interior design is not valued within related fields (Architectural Record, 2004). Negative media exposure from the Institute of Justice and newspapers like the Washington Post leave the interior design profession responding to negative publicity instead of proactively seeking positive media coverage.

The public does not understand the difference between architecture, interior design, and decoration, or that each has reached a different level of professionalization (Ginthner, Guerin, & Martin, 2000). A review of research studies and other information identified in chapter 2 reveals that the interior design profession sends mixed messages to the public in several ways:

1) Interior Design has few and little evidence of timeframe for implementation of those goals (ASID, n.d.; IIDA, n.d.; NCIDQ, n.d.).
2) Multiple design organizations exist within interior design that possess different platforms of beliefs and strategies (ASID, n.d.; IIDA, n.d.).
3) Interior designers themselves vary in their explanations concerning their roles in the built environment (Birdsong & Lawlor, 2001; Kangas & Stumpf, 2002).
4) No unified list of answers exists to frequently asked and difficult questions interior designers may be asked (ASID, n.d.; IIDA, n.d.; NCIDQ, n.d.).
5) No unified opposition to design myths exist (Martin, 2007; Waxman & Clemons, 2007).
6.) Interior designers do not proactively seek positive media attention or exposure on an impactful scale (ASID, n.d.; IIDA, n.d.).
7.) The two main design associations ASID and IIDA have different approaches which mainly focus on reaching out to legislators or interior designers respectively, but not primarily or directly to the general public (ASID, n.d.; IIDA, n.d.).
The lack of knowledge provided to the public is being filled with information supplied by television (Martin, 2007). HGTV and other stations show viewers that design and decoration are interchangeable synonyms and portray interior design as a purely aesthetic profession. This information is falsely educating the public on the profession of design and further damaging the credibility and reputation of the profession (Martin, 2004). Other groups are stepping in to point out negative aspects of a recognized interior design profession (Architectural Record, 2004; Will, 2007; IJ, 2007).

It is from the above insights and conclusions that this study’s questions arise.

**The Study’s Questions and Methodology**

This study will address three research questions and will use the *action research* model of inquiry to address them. The study will yield a designed product (an action plan) arising from content gathering and analysis. It is envisioned as a preliminary study that applies process knowledge exterior to interior design (public relations) to a unique interior design based problem.

Action research was chosen as the research method because it is conducted to solve a problem. Practical action research addresses a specific problem within an entity, such as an organization or profession. “Its primary purpose is to improve practice in the short term as well as to inform larger issues…. To be maximally successful, practical action research should result in an action plan that, ideally, will be implemented and further evaluated.” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 568). The action plan in this case will be the creation of a tangible set of public relations tactics tailored to the interior design profession. Action research is decidedly pragmatic. Explains Wang & Groat, “the emphasis is upon knowledge emerging from localized settings, as opposed to abstract knowledge applicable for many settings” (2007, p. 111). Figure 8 describes the entire action plan strategy, and the portions this study will undertake.
Donald Shon explains that “reflection in action” is “a product that is the sum of the reflective actions taken in response to the factors unique to the concrete content.” (2007, p. 111). Therefore, the resulting strategies should be designed specifically for the interior design profession and should not be applied to other situations. It is acknowledged that the action plan that arises will require further evaluation beyond the scope of this thesis.

Below is a detailed explanation of the methodology for each of the study’s research questions.

**Question 1.** What organizational type is best suited to carry out an ongoing public relations campaign designed to alter public perception of the interior design profession?
Analyzing the data discussed in Chapter 2, a case will be built that a single organization is most suitable to address the required public relations activities of the interior design profession. The public relations activities of this organization will be identified and detailed, using previously detailed references and case studies. This question equates to Susman’s “Action Planning” phase within action plan research.

**Question 2.** Can accepted Public Relations strategies offer a process to address the Interior Design profession’s public perception problem?

The study will identify public relations strategies and procedures point by point, comparing and applying them to existing circumstances in interior design. This analysis will seek to build a logical argument that a sufficient contrast between current interior design efforts and proven public relations strategies exist that public relations can likely be of assistance to this challenge. This question equates to Susman’s “Diagnosing” phase within action plan research.

**Question 3.** What might a proactive public relations campaign for the Interior Design profession look like?

This part of this study starts from the assumption that this single organization can embark on a public relations campaign, and describes the nature of this theoretical undertaking, drawing its structure from proven strategies in public relations. This question equates to Susman’s “Action Planning” and “Action Taking” phases within action plan research. This will be realized in the creation of several key public relations components within the public relations strategies. These components will include the following:

1. A *written public relations strategy* will be developed including a list of key audiences, essential messages that need to be conveyed, objectives and the methods to achieve them, how success will be measured, and a suggestion of dates to evaluate progress.
2. *Description of a public relations campaign* will be created that provides an overview to a potential movement to shift public perception. Campaigns will be broken down by order of importance which will narrow down objectives of each campaign.

3. A *crisis plan* will be produced that includes a list of possible setbacks, a planned strategy for each setback, and a prepared statement for media for each of the several possible crisis scenarios.

4. A *list of potential media outlets* will be formed to seek out proactive media exposure that could directly enhance the positive publicity of the interior design profession.

5. A *media pack* will be developed that provides the interior design profession’s history, factsheet about the campaign, and list of frequently asked questions and answers.

**Internal and External Threats to the Study’s Conclusions**  
It is acknowledged that data collector bias may influence conclusions as the researcher is an interior design student with a vested interest in the outcome. This research has limited generalization to other professions. The study recommends a plan based on proven strategies demonstrated in other case studies. Its proposals react specifically to challenges in the interior design profession at this particular point in time.
Reiteration of the Public Perception Problem

Many public relations sources describe that long-term planning and the use of a strategic approach in public relations have been an extremely effective method to shift public perception (Birk, Burgoon, & Pfau, 1990; Center, Cutlip, & Broom, 1985). As established in Chapters 2 and 3, there is a problem with the public’s perception of interior design. This problem is being further complicated by the lack of action being taken by the interior design profession, the absence of campaigns to correct the existing identity problem, and the deficiency of a proactive PR campaign to prevent future public misperceptions. The interior design profession is sending mixed messages to the public in several ways:

1) Interior Design has few goals unified across the spectrum of the profession and little evidence of timeframe for implementation of those goals (ASID, n.d.; IIDA, n.d.; NCIDQ, n.d.).
2) Multiple design organizations exist within interior design that possess different platforms of beliefs and strategies (ASID, n.d.; IIDA, n.d.).
3) Interior designers themselves vary in their explanations concerning their roles in the built environment (Birdsong & Lawlor, 2001; Kangas & Stumpf, 2002).
4) No unified list of answers exists to frequently asked and difficult questions interior designers may be asked (ASID, n.d.; IIDA, n.d.; NCIDQ, n.d.).
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6) Interior designers do not proactively seek positive media attention or exposure on an impactful scale (ASID, n.d.; IIDA, n.d.).
7) The two main design associations ASID and IIDA have different approaches which mainly focus on reaching out to legislators or interior designers.
respectively, but not primarily or directly to the general public (ASID, n.d.; IIDA, n.d.).

This chapter now seeks to address the study’s three questions that stem from this situation.

**The Study’s Questions**

**Question 1.** What organizational type is best suited to carry out an ongoing public relations campaign designed to alter public perception of the interior design profession?

The current structure of the interior design ‘voice’ is spread out over the international organizations of ASID, IIDA, IDC and others; further information is provided by the Council of Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA) and the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ). While these organizations undoubtedly provide necessary information and services to their members, their distinct natures may make a unified public face for interior design difficult to achieve and maintain. Although the associations’ efforts are valid and are making some progress towards continued professional legitimacy, neither ASID nor IIDA (the primary United States organizations) target public opinion as a priority. Further, neither have actively sought to repair the public’s misperception of the profession or proactively create a positive public relations campaign to prevent further image problems in the future (ASID, n.d.; K. Cline, personal communication, October 17, 2007; IIDA, n.d.; J. Pysarchuk, personal communication, May 21, 2007). However, the Issues Forum annual meeting does bring the organizations of ASID, IIDA, IDC, IDEC, CIDA and NCIDQ together to discuss collective issues. Further, some emerging crises have moved the organizations to work together, such as the Institute of Justice issue (Durst, 2007).

Additionally, there is no single national organization enforcing education, experience, and an examination standard throughout the country so that all professionals are qualified to practice interior design (Birdsong & Lawlor, 2001). Both CIDA and NCIDQ are longstanding organizations devoted to these issues; however,
there is not universal adoption of their accreditation and examination standards throughout all jurisdictions nor by all interior design professionals.

Based on evidence reported in chapter 2, this study identifies five reasons why a unified organization may be better suited to establish and administer an ongoing PR initiative designed to correct incorrect public perception concerning the interior design profession. These are detailed below.

1. Duplication of message is confusing and inefficient

   Currently, the interior design profession has multiple design organizations which represent their members in legislative efforts, continuing education, provide information on code changes, public safety issues, lobby for professional legitimacy, offer mentoring programs, promote collaboration with other professions in related fields, and encourage networking with others. The primary interior design associations have different approaches, principal focuses, and platforms/issues of their campaigns, which provide a confusing image to interior designers and the public. In one interior designer’s opinion, “multiple design organizations, such as ASID and IIDA, are preventing designers from making headway nationally” (C. Hendrix, personal communication, June 6, 2007).

2. Effective PR initiatives are expensive and long-lasting

   Public relations campaigns are likely an expensive endeavor, and one of the organizations has identified this as a hindrance to a large-scope, enduring public relations. Although monetary details were not in the scope of this study, the financial involvement of a public relations endeavor was considered. This fact may further underscore the need for a single organization that taps centralized, potentially larger funds necessary to wage an extended PR effort.

3. Interior design must respond to a variety of complex issues

   At this time there is no unified voice to speak out for interior designers on issues such as sustainability, legislation, or combating organizations such as the Institute of
Justice and responding to erroneous claims from media like G. Will at the Washington Post. Challenges in media portrayals present yet another hurdle for interior designers. “TV is educating the public in a negative and harmful way. Exposure like Designing Women, Will and Grace, Mrs. Doubtfire, and HGTV are providing an inaccurate portrayal of the design profession” (C. Hendrix, personal communication, June 6, 2007). There is no unified stance against the inaccuracies of ‘design television’ nor is there an ongoing campaign to combat these TV design myths.

4. The nature of PR crises necessitates a quick, organized response.

    Recent negative exposures were reviewed in Chapter 2. One setback was the George Will article from the Washington Post which depicted the interior design profession as ‘glorified decorators.’ Another example is the Institute of Justice litigation which is trying to remove existing licensing from the interior design profession. Hindrances such as these require a swift, concise, and unified response. The lack of a unified voice of interior design causes confusion concerning who is the spokesperson for the profession which further skews public and the media’s perception of interior design.

5. Other case studies suggest the success a single organization approach

    The three case studies reviewed in Chapter 2 reveal struggles with negative public perception, public misperception, and lack of knowledge concerning the organizations. Each was successful in shifting public perception largely due to the unified appearance of each campaign, and the use of PR strategies. Only one organization or company was running the PR campaigns, commenting to the media, speaking to organization members and other professionals, organizing events, and producing publicity. This approach was successful to the American Psychological Association (APA), the sustainability movement, and the New York Times. Even given
the varied nature of these organizations, it is logical to conclude that a unified response could potentially yield positive results for the interior design profession.

In light of current research and the gathered opinions of others in Chapter 2, the opinion of this author is that many inaccuracies and misunderstandings about the interior design profession could be minimized if not eradicated with the unification of the existing design organizations with regard to their PR efforts and the implementation of a collective PR strategy to repair the current image of the profession.

Many interior designers are in favor of merging the professional design associations and feel that interior design could benefit from a unified voice to legislators, other professionals, and the media (C. Hendrix, personal communication, June 6, 2007; C. Martin, personal communication, June 25, 2007). According to Martin, “Interior designers in the United States had anticipated that a total unification would mark the end of the former splintering or practitioners into multiple groups, thereby presenting the profession to the public, the government, allied professionals (such as architects and engineers) and the trade industry as a single, powerful entity. This would follow the American Institute of Architects (AIA) or American Medical Association (AMA) model of representation, creating a perception of professional unity, affording the profession legal, political, and social power” (2007, p. 31).

There are many issues requiring resolution if interior design organizations seek to unify. This study does not take a stand or further detail the specific structure of a single organization, or argue for or against the inclusion of educators (IDEC), accreditation (CIDA), or examination bodies (NCIDQ) within this single entity. For the purposes of this study, however, a single unified organization (be it an exterior alliance or a complete restructuring) is an essential step to implement the recommended PR strategies highlighted in the study’s previous chapters. Public relations recommendations rely on a unified conclusion of what the profession and organization are, what the objectives and goals are, and the essential messages that need to be expressed throughout the campaign. Such a campaign cannot be run with multiple responses to each of those questions. A logical conclusion is that a single professional
organization must be behind the initiative to assure interior designers and the public that interior design is a single, clearly defined, and legitimate profession.

**Question 2.** Can accepted Public Relations strategies offer a process to address the Interior Design profession’s public perception problem?

Public relation techniques (or “PR”) have provided tangible strategies to strengthen the reputation and image of an organization while improving relationships with target audiences (Ali, 2001a). The mixed messages of interior design are largely PR related and, given the right circumstances and adequate funding, can be transformed with the creation of a holistic proactive public relations campaign. As discussed in Chapter 2, the implementation of several of the described PR strategies have been shown in other professions and organizations such as psychology, the sustainability movement, and the New York Times to effectively shift public misperception.

In this study, the public relations initiative is structured around and is disseminated by a single organization (heretofore called ‘the organization’). Table 2 explores the general application of existing public relations strategies to interior design by this organization. The left column provides a step by step chronological list of the recommendations for a holistic and effective public relations initiative as identified by Ali (2001a). The column on the right provides one example of a tangible way to apply the PR recommendations to the interior design profession.

**Recommended PR Strategies and Proposed Interior Design Strategies**

Table 2: Recommended PR strategies and the potential use within the interior design profession. Adapted from Ali (2001a). **The bold type sections represent exhibits that will be discussed in Question 3.** The purple highlighted sections represent the general PR examples provided in Chapter 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommended Public Relations Strategy</th>
<th>Application of the Public Relations Strategy to Interior Design</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research should be conducted to determine the public's view of</td>
<td>Studies reviewed in Chapter 2 (and others) suggest there is an inaccurate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended Public Relations Strategy</td>
<td>Application of the Public Relations Strategy to Interior Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>organization/profession.</td>
<td>public perception of the interior design profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A list of objectives/goals should be created.</td>
<td><strong>A list of objectives/goals</strong> of the PR campaigns will be developed to shift inaccurate perception of ID; this list will be part of the written PR strategy of this study. The initiatives for each objective/goal will vary depending on importance and the target audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target audiences should be identified who need to be persuaded.</td>
<td>Target audiences for this study are members of the public including the general population, legislators, professionals in related fields, members of the media, K-12 educators and counselors, and interior designers. This broad interpretation is taken recognizing that simultaneous campaigns should be initiated that effects change in these groups at the same time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple ways to achieve objectives/goals should be explored and costs for each should be included.</td>
<td>The public relations campaign developed in Chapter 4 will explore various methods to achieve objectives/goals of the campaigns. Costs of the initiatives are not within the achievable scope of this study and should be explored in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Activity Timetable should be developed which reviews methods which will be implemented to achieve the objectives/goals, who will do each one, and a timeframe for each.</td>
<td>An Activity Timetable should explore several methods that will be implemented to achieve objectives/goals, who will be responsible for each one, and a timeframe should be provided for each. The methods of implementing the campaign will be reviewed in the written PR strategy and description of the PR campaign later in this Chapter, along with an overall timeline to measure progress. The responsible parties can not be named without detailing the organizations’ structure (outside the scope of this study); however, the organizations’ president or CEO would be the logical spokesperson during all campaigns and initiatives to provide a...</td>
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<th><strong>Recommended Public Relations Strategy</strong></th>
<th><strong>Application of the Public Relations Strategy to Interior Design</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Written PR Strategy should be developed which includes the list of key audiences, essential messages that need to be conveyed, objectives and the methods to achieve them, how success will be measured, a date to evaluate progress, and the activity timetable.</td>
<td><strong>A Written PR strategy</strong> will be developed later in Chapter 4 which includes a list of key audiences, essential messages that need to be conveyed, objectives and the methods to achieve them, how success will be measured, and a suggestion of dates to evaluate progress. Target audiences for this study are members of the public including the general population, legislators, professionals in related fields, members of the media, K-12 educators and counselors, and interior designers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After implementing written PR strategy the public’s perception of the organizations should be studied to measure effectiveness, and the strategy should be revised as needed.</td>
<td>Original studies reviewed in Chapter 2 should be repeated and additional studies should be added that established a misperception of interior design in the public, and the PR strategy should be revised accordingly. (A chart was provided in Figure 3 of Chapter 2 to show how to measure effectiveness of a PR campaign.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A communications audit should be conducted to see what staff thinks of the organization. The company should determine what the employees believe is the corporate message and what forms of communication the staff prefers.</td>
<td>Once the design organization is in place, a communications audit should be conducted to see what staff and members of the interior design profession think of the organization. Employees and members should be provided with the goals of the organization and of the interior design profession. They should also receive a <strong>factsheet on the campaign</strong> and frequently asked questions, which will be created later in Chapter 4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An image audit should be conducted to look for unintentional messages in every aspect of the organization.</td>
<td>Unintentional mixed messages were identified in research presented in Chapter 2, clarified further in Chapter 3, and presented at the beginning of Chapter 4. For example, there are currently no unified answers in the profession to frequently asked questions and not unified dispute to design myths.</td>
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<th>Recommended Public Relations Strategy</th>
<th>Application of the Public Relations Strategy to Interior Design</th>
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<tr>
<td>By creating a single organization and a proactive PR campaign, many of the unintended messages should be repaired. Many of the solutions to the unintended messages will be provided later in this Chapter. (An example of an image audit was provided in Figure 4 of Chapter 2.)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>An image matrix should be developed to separate out each item studied and state the image it conveys, what the desired image was, if any action is required, the budget to repair the image, who is in charge of image repairs, and a guideline of beginning and ending dates</td>
<td>Creating an image matrix could use the list of mixed messages from the beginning of Chapter 4. The unintentional messages that the interior profession is conveying should be provided along with a contrast to explain what the desired image was, the required action, the budget to repair the image, who is in charge of image repairs, and a guideline of beginning and ending dates. Several unintentional messages were developed in the beginning of the chapter and the desired image will be reviewed later in this chapter along with guidelines of dates; however the budget, person in charge, and exact beginning and ending dates cannot occur until the organization is in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths and weaknesses of the organization should be studied and the organization needs to be aware of opposing arguments that could surface during the campaign.</td>
<td>Strength and weaknesses of the organization and profession have been established from previous studies reviewed in Chapter 2, and the profession is aware of opposing arguments that could surface. For example, the recent negative media exposure by George Will at the Washington Post which alludes to interior design being the equivalent of decoration. Three examples will be provided in the Crisis Plan in this chapter which provides a planned strategy for future setbacks and a statement to the media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple PR Campaigns should be created that narrow down objectives of each campaign and name each campaign. An</td>
<td>A Description of a public relations campaign will be created later in this chapter that provides an overview to a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Recommended Public Relations Strategy</strong></th>
<th><strong>Application of the Public Relations Strategy to Interior Design</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>identity should be developed for each campaign, along with a logo and slogan that can be used in campaign materials. Campaign materials include pamphlet, posters, bags, pens, buttons, a video, a factsheet about the organization, and a list of objectives.</td>
<td>potential movement to shift public perception. The essence of the campaigns will be provided in the written PR strategy. Campaigns will then be broken down by order of importance which will narrow down objectives of each campaign. One example of an interior design campaign is the repair of the misperception caused by ‘design television.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A website should be developed to provide easily accessible information to key audiences. The visual identity of the organization should be consistent throughout, and the website should provide pictures, press releases, background information, and a pathway of 2 way communications.</td>
<td>A website should be developed to provide easily accessible information to key audiences. The internet site should provide press releases, information on the interior design profession, frequently asked questions, updated status on legislation and other campaign initiatives. A specific example includes an opposition to television design myths, which should be released to the public, and clearly stated and available on the organization’s website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Crisis Plan should be created which provides a list of possible setbacks, a planned strategy for each setback, names and order of staff to be notified, who is in charge, and what to do to handle each crisis. A statement for media should be developed for each scenario.</td>
<td>A crisis plan will be produced that includes a list of possible setbacks, a planned strategy for each setback, and a prepared statement for media for each of the three possible crisis scenarios. For example, a crisis addressed later in this chapter is the inaccurate portrayal of interior design on television, in movies, or books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempts should be made to proactively make contacts with members of the media</td>
<td>A list of potential media outlets will be formed to seek out proactive media exposure that could directly enhance the positive publicity of the interior design profession. The list in Table 7 and 8 will be separated by target audience. For example, a potentially fruitful outlet to change interior design message are magazines and newspapers that are not design related because they will reach the most vital target audience which is the general public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommended Public Relations Strategy</strong></td>
<td><strong>Application of the Public Relations Strategy to Interior Design</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Different media types should be researched and the unique qualities and benefits associated with each should be determined.</td>
<td>Several different media types will be included in the list of potential media which will provide the interior design organization with multiple varieties of contacts. Several examples include the top 20 newspapers in the United States, business magazines, fashion magazines, and educational magazines which clearly target the key audiences. Television will be addressed throughout the campaign strategies to combat the perception problem enhanced by 'design TV.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News releases should be created as often as possible which incorporate five W’s of who, what, when, where, and why.</td>
<td>News releases should be created as often as possible which incorporate five W’s. (A general example of a news release was provided in Figure 5 within Chapter 2.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Media Pack should be created containing the organization’s history on the campaign, a factsheet, a list of frequently asked questions and answers, product samples, examples of work, and photographs.</td>
<td>A media pack will be developed that provides the interior design profession’s history, factsheet about the important campaigns of the organization, and list of frequently asked questions and answers. An example of a campaign is proactively educating legislators on the practice of interior design, the ways it benefits the quality of life of the public, and the reasons why licensing should be national to benefit the safety of the public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews should be done as often as possible. Delicate questions and answers should be reviewed in advance and important points of view the organization should be expressed whenever possible.</td>
<td>Interviews should be done as often as possible with representatives from the media, and informally with members of the target audiences. The frequently asked questions, history of the profession, and objectives of the organization should be used for an interview. Campaigns and objectives/goals should be learned and reviewed during an interview, particularly when the interview is a member of one of the target audiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional photography should be commissioned, photos should be published and photo ops should be scheduled</td>
<td>Photos should be taken professionally at all events, or even in daily activities, and published as often as possible. For</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended Public Relations Strategy</td>
<td>Application of the Public Relations Strategy to Interior Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>whenever possible.</td>
<td>example, photos of actual interior designers working with clients, interacting with other professionals, working on a social justice project, or even in situations that combat the ‘design TV myths’ should be taken regularly, submitted to media for publicity, and posted on the organization’s website.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Media exposure should be supervised. Media reactions and inquiries should be tracked with a media log. The (quantitative) amount of exposure the organization is receiving versus the amount of press releases distributed should be monitored. An appraisal should be performed to assess the “qualitative measures” to determine if the message and exposure were helpful, hurtful, or neutral.

Supervising media exposure can not occur until these strategies have been implemented. Once the strategies are in place, media reactions and inquiries should be tracked with a media log. The (quantitative) amount of exposure the organization is receiving versus the amount of press releases distributed should be monitored. An appraisal should be performed to assess the “qualitative measures” to determine if the message and exposure were helpful, hurtful, or neutral. (An example of a media log was provided in Figure 6 of Chapter 2).

Printed publicity should be created using AIDCA recommendations.

Printed publicity should be created using AIDCA recommendations. For example the publicity the grab the attention of the target audience immediately, create interest in the organization of campaign, create a desire for the reader to be part of the campaign, establish conviction in the cause, and finally to get the target audience member to take action or shift their perception.

A distribution plan should be created including a timeline. It should be determined how many materials are needed for each event, what publicity is to be mailed, and what is handed out personally at the event.

A distribution plan for interior design could potentially be complex given the number of factsheets and frequently asked questions handouts that would be necessary for the various target audiences; however, some messages may be applicable to multiple audiences.

Written copy should be produced that is printable and newsworthy.

Written copy should be produced that attracts the attention of the media it is being submitted to. For example, a story...
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Recommended Public Relations Strategy</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>about meeting with producers of ‘design shows’ to discuss the inaccuracies of ‘design TV’ may be of more interest than of positive collaboration between related fields due to the element of conflict.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity/press release should be designed to promote the organization, attract public attention, and gain support from key audiences.</td>
<td>Publicity/press releases for interior design must be well designed given the profession’s identity hinges on its work with visual literacy. (A general example of publicity/press release was provided in Figure 7 of Chapter 2.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity material should be professionally printed.</td>
<td>Publicity material should be professionally printed. Again, this is especially true for interior design as its credibility hinges on sophisticated design, including text and image-based reading materials.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PR strategies were designed to create a positive image of a company which allows a proactive approach to business, as opposed to a reacting to negative attention and media exposure. “The aim of PR is to win understanding and support from, and to influence the opinions and behavior of, an organization’s key audiences” (Ali, 2001a). By implementing these public relations strategies under the scope of a single design organization, interior design may be able to successfully create a positive image of the profession. Interior design may also be better prepared to handle negative media attention if it arises, create a proactive media campaign, and be able have the professions objectives and goals better received by the public.

**Question 3.** What might a proactive public relations campaign for the Interior Design profession look like?

This study discusses a comprehensive public relations initiative intended to shift public perceptions about the interior design profession. Question 2 above addressed general strategies that can be applied to interior design. Question 3 addresses further specifics of these ideas within the context of a public relations campaign— a specific,
connected series of operations designed to bring about a particular result. For example, it is in the context of a public relations campaign that audiences can be identified succinctly and particular crises planned for.

Five components are created in this section that are specifically important to the profession and bring further definition to this study’s overall introductory proposal for PR in interior design. The elements include:

1. a detailed, written PR strategy;
2. the description of specific public relations campaigns;
3. a crisis plan;
4. a list of potential media outlets; and,
5. components of a media pack.

The five components were chosen based on five existing conditions (discussed in chapter 3) in the interior design profession’s current situation:

1. past negative media attention;
2. the absence of a clear step-by-step strategy for campaigns;
3. the reactive response to negative media attention or crisis;
4. the absence of media contacts for positive exposure; and,
5. the lack of unified information provided by associations and interior designers about the profession.

1. Written Public Relations Strategy

The first element of the PR campaign is a written public relations strategy which acts as an overall roadmap that clarifies participants, identifies goals, and how they will be addressed. What follows here is a detailed description of the strategy, its goals, actions and ideal results. It should be noted that PR strategies by their nature are costly.
As noted earlier, one benefit of a single organization is the potential pooling of monetary resources that could assist in the realization of this strategy.

Specifically, the written public relations strategy includes:
1. A list of key audiences
2. Essential messages that need to be conveyed
3. Objectives and the methods to achieve them
4. How success will be measured
5. A suggestion of dates to evaluate progress.

Research discussed in Chapter 2 has shown that a crucial step in a PR campaign is the identification of the target audiences. In the past, interior design organizations have not actively sought out key audiences nor proactively tailored campaigns and messages to the audiences’ specific needs. This component is crucial to determine which audiences directly impact the perception of the interior design profession. First, Table 3 provides a list of possible target audiences which are addressed by the public relations campaign for interior design. For the purposes of this study the term 'public' is broadly used by including the following six target audiences under its umbrella.

Table 3. Potential key audiences of a public relations campaign for the interior design profession.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List Of Key Audience Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. General public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Legislators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Professionals in related fields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Members of the media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. K-12 educators and counselors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Interior design professionals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tables 4 through 9 bring further detail and justification to the written public relations strategy and describe the campaign’s dilemmas, resulting goals, and ways to counteract these challenges within the various audiences described in Table 3. For the purposes of this study, the key audience ‘interior design professionals’ include interior design practitioners and post-secondary educators.

Table 4. Public relations strategy for the general public audience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem With Current Messages Being Provided to the General Public</th>
<th>Potential Essential Messages to be Conveyed to the General Public</th>
<th>Objectives and the Methods To Achieve Them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The public is being inaccurately educated about the interior design profession through ‘design television shows.’ A mistake made on “design shows” is the premise that “anyone can be an interior designer” (Martin, 2004, p. 161).</td>
<td>The profession of interior design ideally requires formal education, experience, and examination, and is not based on taste or experience alone (Martin, 2007).</td>
<td>1. The organization releases publicity to the public directly stating the inaccuracies of design television.</td>
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<td>2. The organization also presents a case to the producers of ‘design television’ shows offering research (a selection of which is detailed in Chapter 2) and states concerns about the inaccurate image their shows are providing to the public about interior designers.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ideally, the organization and television producers reach a compromise which could include the replacement of more detrimental programs with more realistic shows, a disclaimer to the public that ‘design shows’ are entertainment based, and that they are not an accurate representation of the interior design profession. The outcome of these discussions in turn affects the tone of writings and actions taken in #3 below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. A press release is created and disseminated to illustrate the problem with ‘design shows,’ reveals the desires of the organization and the profession, and explains to the public the progress made during negotiations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem With Current Messages Being Provided to the General Public</td>
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<td>Objectives and the Methods To Achieve Them</td>
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</table>
| “Television shows portray an inaccurate perception of the profession by oversimplifying the process of creating an interior environment” (Waxman & Clemons, 2004, p. VIII). | Current ‘design television’ shows portray interior designers inaccurately, are entertainment based, and should not be used as a clear depiction of the interior design profession. Decorating and interior design are not synonymous (Martin, 2007). | 1. The design organization conducts research to determine if ‘design shows’ are in fact desired by the public long term. If so, the organization works to persuade television producers that realistic portrayals of designers can also be compelling subject matter if handled properly.  
2. Opposition to design myths are released to the public in clear language and are made available on the organization’s website. |
| On ‘design television’ shows many of the ‘designers’ had no degree or training in interior design, and discovered that on one design show only two of the fifteen had degrees in interior design and one in architecture (Waxman & | Ideally, a professional interior designer’s education involves a four or five year bachelor’s degree at a university accredited by CIDA, has undertaken a mixture of education and practice for six years, and tested by the NCIDQ to meet minimum competency | 1. The unified organization works to convince producers of ‘design shows’ that education, experience, and examination requirements on programs support the true ‘reality’ of interior design. The organization requests that decorators or layperson hosts are not portrayed as interior designers, called interior designers verbally, or titled as such during the show.  
2. A press release and publicity is created to enlighten the public about the efforts made by the organization |
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clemons, 2004, p. IX).</td>
<td>standards (NCIDQ, n.d.).</td>
<td>to legitimize the profession’s portrayal on television. Disagreement with design myths is released to the public, and clearly stated and available on the organization’s website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The majority of ‘design shows’ demonstrate residential ‘design’ (HGTV, n.d.).</td>
<td>Many interior designers’ education and experience is in commercial design (NCIDQ, n.d.). Most decorators engage in residential and rely on their experience rather than education (Martin, 2007). (However, interior designers are also engaged in residential design).</td>
<td>1. The organization once again expresses concern to producers of ‘design shows’ and works toward persuading them that a more accurate balance of commercial and residential design is desirable. A disclaimer is created and presented to producers for their viewers that decorators are typically involved in residential design and design and decoration are not equal in education, experience, or examination. However, interior design services can include interior decoration activities, yet also interacts with the interior environment’s non-structural entities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The public is not being proactively exposed to a positive and accurate representation of interior design on a regular basis</td>
<td>Sustainability, accessibility, ergonomics, universal design, social justice, and quality of life can all be positively affected by the</td>
<td>1. Press releases and publicity are proactively produced and distributed that regularly share stories of interior designers making a contribution to society. Frequent documentation seeks to ensure consistently positive publicity. The publicity is also documented on the organization’s</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>Problem With Current Messages Being Provided to the General Public</th>
<th>Potential Essential Messages to be Conveyed to the General Public</th>
<th>Objectives and the Methods To Achieve Them</th>
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<tr>
<td>(Martin, 2007).</td>
<td>implementation of a professional interior designer.</td>
<td>website and updated regularly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The public is not well informed of the knowledge that professional interior designers possess such as sustainability, aesthetics, social justice, accessibility, and health, safety, and welfare (Whitemyer, 2004; NCIDQ, 2004; Postrel, 2004; ASID, n.d.).</td>
<td>“Every decision an interior designer makes in one way or another affects the health, safety, and welfare of the public. Those decisions include specifying furniture, fabrics, and carpeting that comply with fire codes and space planning that provides proper means of egress. Additionally, interior designers deal with accessibility issues, ergonomics, lighting, acoustics, and design solutions for those with special needs” (ASID, n.d.).</td>
<td>1. The organization creates an ongoing campaign that demonstrates the power design has for quality of life. The campaign facilitates designers’ donation of time, knowledge and services to social causes and organizations and publicizes these designers’ efforts. Progress on these efforts is readily available on the organization’s website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific groups of the public with individual needs are</td>
<td>Persons with lower incomes, disabilities, the aging population</td>
<td>1. The organization creates campaigns that collaborate with other non-profit organizations such as American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem With Current Messages Being Provided to the General Public</td>
<td>Potential Essential Messages to be Conveyed to the General Public</td>
<td>Objectives and the Methods To Achieve Them</td>
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<tr>
<td>not aware of the benefits of a professional interior designer (C. Martin, personal communication, June 25, 2007).</td>
<td>and the elderly can directly benefit from the knowledge, education, and experience of a professional interior designer that contribute to quality of life through universal design (C. Hendrix, personal communication, June 21, 2007).</td>
<td>Association of Retired Persons (AARP), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Medicare, Medicaid, and Habitat for Humanity that donate designers’ time pro bono and demonstrate social justice and the impact of design.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. These collaborations include the dissemination of definitions and capabilities of interior designers through these collaborating organizations’ websites, newsletters and other information vehicles.

Table 5. Public relations strategy for legislators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem With Current Messages Being Provided to Legislators</th>
<th>Potential Essential Messages to be Conveyed to Legislators</th>
<th>Objectives and the Methods To Achieve Them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Currently, only 26 jurisdictions have licensing provisions in North America (ASID, 2007). Multiple design organizations are lobbying using various tactics causing confusion of interior design's professional platforms to legislators.</td>
<td>Interior design is a legitimate field that has taken all six steps recommended by Abbott’s Theory of Professional-ization, a measure that seeks to determine if a field is indeed a ‘profession’ (Guerin &amp; Martin, 2004). Trained interior designers provide a unique ‘body of knowledge’ that affect quality of life and health, safety, and welfare of the</td>
<td>1. The organization initiates an ongoing campaign that strategically lobbies multiple legislators, creates and disseminates press releases on the benefits of design, conducts and publicizes interviews, and coordinates publicity events to define and continually reiterate the unique importance of interior design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The organization secures alliances with allied fields such as landscape architecture and engineering where possible to advocate for legal recognition in all states and provinces.</td>
<td>2. The organization secures alliances with allied fields such as landscape architecture and engineering where possible to advocate for legal recognition in all states and provinces.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Problem With Current Messages Being Provided to Legislators</th>
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</table>
| Sustainability is not being utilized as an important niche for the interior design profession. | “Building construction now accounts for 30 percent of global raw material use- billions of tons each year” (Whitemyer, 2007, p. 10). Further, with “commercial and residential buildings sucking up 36 percent of the total U.S. energy”, action is required from the design profession (Whitemyer, 2007, p. 12). | 1. The organization sets as a goal that interior design establish a forefront position within the sustainability movement as the changes needed in construction, product specification, and design is directly within the specialized scope of services held by interior designers (Adler, 2006). The organization engages in lobbying, creates press releases, and facilitates and publicizes interviews to establish professional credibility by association with demonstrated knowledge of sustainable materials, construction techniques, and green design. The campaign’s progress and goals are documented on the organization’s website.  
2. The organization establishes an ongoing goal to detect relevant and important societal movements and trends, quickly establishing positions on these happenings in order to maintain a recognized leadership position. |
Table 6. Public relations strategy for professionals in related fields.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem With Current Messages Being Provided to Professionals in Related Fields</th>
<th>Potential Essential Messages to be Conveyed to Professionals in Related Fields</th>
<th>Objectives and the Methods To Achieve Them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There appears to be a lack of understanding between fields on qualifications of each profession holds and on roles in the built environment (Martin, 2007).</td>
<td>Interior designers are “engaged in planning designing, and administering projects in interior spaces to meet the physical and aesthetic needs of people using them, taking into consideration building codes, health and safety regulations, traffic patterns and floor planning, mechanical and electrical needs, and interior fittings and furniture” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).</td>
<td>1. The organization releases a statement that defines the roles of interior designers in the context of the design team consisting of interior designers, architects, mechanical engineers, electrical engineers, landscape architects and other members.</td>
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<td>2. The organization undertakes an initiative to develop and distribute materials that clarify interior design to K-12 students that normalizes the presence of interior designers in a design team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. The organization urges interior designers to place the official NCIDQ definition of interior design on the back of their business cards to provide related professions with an accurate understanding of the profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of collaboration from related fields is further skewing the public’s opinion and perception of the profession (Architectural Record, 2004).</td>
<td>Collaboration has been shown to improve relationships between interior designers and related professionals, and made a notable difference in the design of the built environment (Edwards, 2002; Dickinson &amp; Russ, 1999).</td>
<td>1. The organization initiates a campaign to facilitate and promote collaboration amongst students in various programs of studies at universities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Working with other allied professions, the organization facilitates continuing education courses that bring various building professionals together in group learning situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. A list and description of collaboration suggestions, case studies, and testimonials are made available on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Problem With Current Messages Being Provided to Professionals in Related Fields | Potential Essential Messages to be Conveyed to Professionals in Related Fields | Objectives and the Methods To Achieve Them
--- | --- | ---

The absence of legislative support from many architects and other related fields is impairing interior design’s attempts for comprehensive licensing in all jurisdictions in North America (Architectural Record, 2004; C. Hendrix, personal communication, June 21, 2007). | Legislative support from related fields such as architecture will play an imperative role in securing interior design’s professional legitimacy through legislation on a national level (Architectural Record, 2004; C. Martin, personal communication June 25, 2007). | 1. The organization establishes a regular, normalized dialogue with the associations of related fields to make contacts, shift misperceptions, provide accurate information on interior design, and encourage collaboration.

2. The organization regularly shares real case studies which demonstrate the effective collaboration of interior design with these organizations.

3. The organization publicizes positive examples of encouraging collaborative legislative support from these other organizations through its website.

Table 7. Public relations strategy for members of the media.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem With Current Messages Being Provided to Members of the Media</th>
<th>Potential Essential Messages to be Conveyed to Members of the Media</th>
<th>Objectives and the Methods To Achieve Them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Members of the media at times portray interior design negatively out of ignorance or stereotype. Other writers, such as George Will from the Washington Post, use interior</td>
<td>Interior designers are “engaged in planning design, and administering projects in interior spaces to meet the physical and aesthetic needs of people using them, taking into</td>
<td>1. The organization submits multiple articles to major newspapers, publications, radio programs, and television shows on a regular basis to proactively maintain a positive media spotlight. In particular, articles that portray interior design accurately and express professionals’ dedication to social justice and quality of life can improve public perception, in turn</td>
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Table continued on next page.
design as an exemplar for issues such as eradication of governmental regulation. These writings showcase the profession as 'glorified decorators,' which is reinforcing the public’s misperception of the interior design profession.

consideration building codes, health and safety regulations, traffic patterns and floor planning, mechanical and electrical needs, and interior fittings and furniture” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

making interior design a less attractive target. A section for press releases is maintained on the organization’s internet site.

2. It should be realistically noted that not all negative attacks can be repelled by promoting positive good will. A crisis plan (noted below) will be an additional necessary component of a comprehensive PR initiative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem With Current Messages Being Provided to K-12 Educators and Counselors</th>
<th>Potential Essential Messages to be Conveyed to K-12 Educators and Counselors</th>
<th>Objectives and the Methods To Achieve Them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students are not being exposed to the interior design profession in daily curriculum in schools (C. Hendrix, personal communication, June 21, 2007).</td>
<td>The elements and principles and the logical design process of the interior design profession are significant and should be incorporated into K-12 curriculum (Nussbaumer, 2000).</td>
<td>1. The organization facilitates and promotes an interior design curriculum created by researchers and educators specifically tailored to K-12 which presents the profession in an accurate manner. 2. The organization seeks to normalize an accurate understanding of interior design by promoting its use in K-12 learning strategies such as word problems and essays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselors are not receiving adequate information on the interior design profession to inform and guide students to a viable career option (Nussbaumer,</td>
<td>Interior design is a stimulating and legitimate career option. Adequate information should be provided to K-12 educators and counselors that promotes the</td>
<td>1. The organization consistently provides a definition and scope of services of the interior design profession to educators and counselors. An ongoing awareness and promotion campaign on the profession is provided to K-12 institutions (particularly high schools) and their counselors. Regular studies</td>
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</table>
profession to new generations of learners. determine the most effective delivery method for this quickly changing target group.

Table 9. Public relations strategy for interior design professionals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem With Current Messages Being Provided to Interior Design Professionals</th>
<th>Potential Essential Messages to be Conveyed to Interior Design Professionals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interior designer practitioners and educators appear to have confusion about the identity of the profession and are concerned that not all interior designers are as qualified or as educated as they should be. The confusion of interior design’s identity is translating into the way some designers perceive and present themselves and the profession to the public (Birdsong &amp; Lawlor, 2001).</td>
<td>Interior designers need to be aware of the accurate definition, current research, scope of services, history, current legislation, and the present issues the profession and the ways interior design benefits society and the quality of life. Interior designers should translate their education and information learned into a confident and (given the new emphasis on a minimum of 4 years of higher education) scholarly presentation of the profession.</td>
<td>1. The organization provides an accurate definition of interior design, current research and its effects, and the legislative progress in all geographic areas proactively to interior designers through digital or other means.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Literature is prevalent and easily accessible that describes activities interior designers can take locally and nationally to further legislative efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. The organization provides prominent and visible suggestions to interior designers of how to contribute to public betterment, such as sustainability and social causes. The organization also provides competitive grants to help designers make their social betterment activities known to their local constituents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. The organization provides a correct history of the profession, current issues, negative and positive publicity, and up to date press releases on the association’s web page, email newsletter, and magazines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. The organization informs interior designers on campaigns, and keeps</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continued on next page.
members current on progress and how they can contribute. Design professionals are urged to share the information with the general public, related fields, friends, family, and anyone else they can speak to about the important issues of the profession using readily available organization materials.

Evaluating the success of the public relations strategy

Successful shifts in the public’s perception are evaluated differently for each of the six target audiences, and this ‘post-occupancy evaluation’ is a critical component of the overall initiative.

1. For the general public, success is measured by repeating surveys and research reviewed in Chapter 2. For example the study by Ginther, Guerin, and Martin can be repeated which identified the public's opinion of architecture, decoration, and interior design and determined how their opinions were influenced (2000).

2. A shift in the perception of legislators is measured in part by the results of the general public survey (as they are a member of the public), and also through monitoring changes in national legislation increases for the interior design profession.

3. Changes in the perception of related fields are partially measured by the surveys of the general public and also by increased support for legislation, improved collaboration, and by scholarly analysis of the overall attitude of articles written in magazines and in publicity created by related fields.

4. For members of the media, a shift is determined by the quantitative and qualitative measurement of negative and positive media exposure for the profession of interior design.

5. A shift in the perception of K-12 educators and counselors is determined by detection of future curriculum that references or otherwise includes interior design and by the number of designers beginning college who were encouraged to consider interior design by their counselor.
6. For professional interior designers, success is measured by the increase of pro bono/social justice design work (after ascertaining a pre-test baseline figure), by studies that examine the frequency of official definitions of interior design appearing on practitioners’ business cards, and repetitions of studies that determine how designers are perceiving themselves and presenting the profession to the public. For post-secondary interior design educators, success is measured by the impact their knowledge has on their students, the ability to portray and convey an accurate representation of the interior design profession, and to encourage students to actively participate in pro bono/social justice design, legislative efforts, collaboration with related fields, and proactive positive attention for the profession.

Qualitative and quantitative data are constantly measured, documented, and reviewed by the staff of the unified organization. If any negative results or exposure occur, a supervisor is notified immediately. If harmful results are seen, the campaign may need to be revamped or discarded at once. Although results are monitored constantly, target audiences, key messages, and objectives and goals are reviewed and amended quarterly (every 3 months) to monitor progress on a holistic scale.

2. Description of Public Relations Campaigns

It is critical to plan out public relations campaigns step by step and determine what goals and objectives belong with each campaign as part of the holistic PR strategy. The second component of question 3 in this study is a description of public relations campaigns created to provide an overview to a potential movement to shift public perception. Table 10 illustrates a list of possible campaigns in optimal chronological order for each target audience. It is assumed that campaigns can occur simultaneously with these various audiences with all campaigns commencing with campaign 1. Some audiences require succeeding campaigns indicated in the table by campaign numbers 2 and 3.
Table 10. List of possible campaigns to address public misperceptions about interior design.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Audience</th>
<th>Campaign Number</th>
<th>Campaign Topic/Goal</th>
<th>Reason For Campaign Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interior design professionals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interior designers should make themselves aware of the accurate definition, current research, scope of services, history, current legislation, and the present issues the profession and the ways interior design benefits society and the quality of life. Interior designers should be proud of their profession and translate their education and information learned into a confident and scholarly presentation of the profession to others.</td>
<td>Interior designers need to be aware of the definition of the professions and the current issues of the unified organization. Once there is unification and confidence within the profession the PR campaign can extend to the public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of the general public</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Television ‘design shows’ are for entertainment and should not be used as an accurate depiction of the interior design profession. ‘Design shows’ on TV oversimplify the interior design process portraying the profession inaccurately. Television ‘design shows’ portray decorators (without formal training) as interior designers.</td>
<td>‘Design shows’ are depicting the interior design profession inaccurately which is causing a key misperception. The realities of ‘design TV’ shows much be revealed so the paradigm repair can begin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of the general public</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A professional interior designer ideally has a 4-5 year Bachelor’s degree, 2 years of additional experience, has successfully passed the NCIDQ exam, and has met state licensing requirements. Most ‘design shows’ illustrate residential design although the majority of professional interior designers are trained in and practice commercial</td>
<td>Once the public are aware of the inconsistencies between ‘design shows’ and the realities of the interior design profession, they are then ready to be educated on the details of the profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Audience</td>
<td>Campaign Number</td>
<td>Campaign Topic/Goal</td>
<td>Reason For Campaign Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of the general public</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The profession of interior design includes the understanding of sustainability, universal design, social justice, designing for the aging population, ergonomics, quality of life, and health, safety, and welfare of the public. The aging population and people with special needs can benefit from the knowledge and training of the profession of interior design.</td>
<td>After there is further understanding of the interior design profession, the public can be exposed to the detailed benefits of interior design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of the media</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interior designers are “engaged in planning designing, and administering projects in interior spaces to meet the physical and aesthetic needs of people using them, taking into consideration building codes, health and safety regulations, traffic patterns and floor planning, mechanical and electrical needs, and interior fittings and furniture” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Interior design and decoration are not synonymous.</td>
<td>If the media have an understanding of the scope of services of the interior design profession they may be less likely to publish publicity which depicts interior designers in a negative way reinforced by common misperceptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals in related fields</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interior designers are “engaged in planning designing, and administering projects in interior spaces to meet the physical and aesthetic needs of people using them, taking into consideration building codes, health and safety regulations, traffic patterns and floor planning, mechanical and electrical needs, and interior fittings and furniture” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Interior design and decoration are not synonymous.</td>
<td>Some professionals in related fields are unsure of the scope of services provided by an interior designer. Alternately, this campaign could occur at the same time as the campaigns that target the general public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Audience</td>
<td>Campaign Number</td>
<td>Campaign Topic/Goal</td>
<td>Reason For Campaign Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals in related fields</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Collaboration has been shown to improve relationships between interior designers and related professionals, and made a notable difference in the design of the built environment (Edwards, 2002; Dickinson &amp; Russ, 1999).</td>
<td>Professionals in related fields need to have knowledge and understanding of the interior design profession for them to participate in positive collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals in related fields</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interior design entails a distinctive ‘body of knowledge’ that affects health, safety, and welfare, and the quality of life of the public. Related fields should develop an understanding of the profession and support its legislative efforts to protect the safety of the public.</td>
<td>Professionals in related fields should have accurate knowledge and positive experiences with the interior design profession for them to contribute to legislative efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislators</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Building construction now accounts for 30 percent of global raw material use—billions of tons each year” (Whitemyer, 2007, p. 10). The changes needed in construction, product specification, and design is directly within the specialized scope of services held by interior designers (Adler, 2006).</td>
<td>Legislators need to be aware of one of the ways interior design can contribute to quality of life and the health of the public. Tying the initial campaign to legislators to current issues such as sustainability can be a compelling entry into an overall perception change strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislators</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interior design is a legitimate profession which is recognized by the U.S. Census Bureau and 26 North American jurisdictions. The profession contains a unique scope of services in order to make</td>
<td>Legislators must have an understanding of interior design’s scope of services in order to make</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Crisis Plan

In the past interior design has been scrutinized by the media and related professions, and does not appear to the public to be prepared for potential problems. For example, in the opinion of this author the response to the recent George Will attack appeared scattered, weak and lacking in strong counterargument. Therefore, the third element discussed in this PR strategy proposal is a crisis plan which includes a list of possible setbacks, a planned strategy for each setback, and a prepared statement for the media for each of the several possible crisis scenarios. This planning provides the interior design profession with the intellectual ammunition to combat the negative media exposure with clear concise answers. With an effective crisis plan, unanticipated negative publicity can potentially end faster, and interior design can not only gain positive exposure but also come out of the situation with an improved public image. Table 11 provides an example of a portion of a crisis plan which illustrates possible setbacks, a planned strategy for each setback, and prepared talking points for the media for several dilemmas.
Table 11. Example of a portion of a crisis plan which illustrates possible setbacks, a planned strategy for each setback, and a prepared statement for the media for each.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Setback</th>
<th>Potential Strategy to Confront the Setback</th>
<th>Example Key Content within a Prepared Media Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Negative media exposure such as the George Will article in the Washington Post which illustrates the interior design profession as 'glorified decorators.' | • An immediate response is made to the media disputing the negative exposure.  
• Multiple articles are submitted including a response to the publication which printed the negative article.  
• An overview and statement are also submitted to major newspapers, publications, radio programs, and television shows to attempt to repair the public perception immediately.  
• A press release and possibly a press conference is held depending on the seriousness of the issue.  
• Articles that portray interior design accurately and express the dedication to social justice and quality of life are submitted regularly after the negative exposure to attempt to improve the media’s perception of the profession. (With a repaired or improved perception, the media may be less likely to write negative articles and editorials in the future.)  
• An update is made available to the organization’s members that illustrate the situation and what has been done to repair it. An email update is sent to members to inform them of the negative exposure and the attempts | A professional interior designer is educated, experienced, has past the qualifying exam to meet standards of competency, and has met additional requirements within their jurisdiction. Interior designers’ skills are tailored to improve the quality of life, increase productivity, and protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public, and can be applied to commercial or residential design. Decorating is a legitimate, yet different profession practiced primarily in residences which require no formal education, examination, or licensing. However, interior design services can include interior decoration activities, yet expands beyond this to further alterations within the interior environment. “Interior design is a multi-faceted profession in which creative and technical solutions are applied within a structure to achieve a built interior environment. These solutions are functional, enhance the quality of life and culture of the occupants, and are aesthetically attractive. Designs are created in response to and coordinated with the building shell, and acknowledge the physical location and social context of the project. Designs must adhere to code and regulatory requirements, and encourage the principles of environmental sustainability. The interior design process follows a systematic and coordinated...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Setback</th>
<th>Potential Strategy to Confront the Setback</th>
<th>Example Key Content within a Prepared Media Statement</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>made to repair the damage.</td>
<td>methodology, including research, analysis and integration of knowledge into the creative process, whereby the needs and resources of the client are satisfied to produce an interior space that fulfills the project goals. Interior design includes a scope of services performed by a professional design practitioner, qualified by means of education, experience, and examination, to protect and enhance the life, health, safety and welfare of the public&quot; (NCIDQ, 2004).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A halt of further success with legislative efforts or the removal of licensing in North American jurisdictions.</td>
<td>A proactive campaign is stepped up in its visibility to legislators, lobbyists, senators, constituents of congress, members of related professions, and interior designers to illustrate the importance of interior design, its relevancy to the public good, and to advocate the further legislative efforts of the profession. If a standstill is anticipated or actually occurs or licenses are removed from jurisdictions, an immediate task force is created to push for further legislation and craft a response to the specifics of the impending crisis. Legislative efforts include press releases, lobbying, tailored events, fundraisers, increased communication with state/provincial legislative boards, collaboration with related fields to gain support, and involvement of students to support the profession. All participants are clearly informed of the goals of the profession and answers to difficult questions that may be asked.</td>
<td>Interior design is a legitimate field that has taken all six steps recommended by Abbott’s Theory of Professionalization, which is a measure that seeks to determine if a field is indeed a ‘profession’ (Guerin &amp; Martin, 2004). Interior designers are “engaged in planning, designing, and administering projects in interior spaces to meet the physical and aesthetic needs of people using them, taking into consideration building codes, health and safety regulations, traffic patterns and floor planning, mechanical and electrical needs, and interior fittings and furniture” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Interior design is a legitimate and vital profession which is acknowledged by the U.S. Census Bureau and 26 jurisdictions in North America. Decisions made by interior designers affect quality of life, sustainability issues, and health, safety, and welfare of the public, and should be legally recognized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Setback</td>
<td>Potential Strategy to Confront the Setback</td>
<td>Example Key Content within a Prepared Media Statement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inaccurate portrayal of interior design on television, in movies, or books</td>
<td>An active movement is initiated to ideally remove harmful ‘design shows’ from television or, as a more likely fallback position, begin a dialogue to alter the shows to reflect the differences between interior design and decoration. Success in this goal may lie in convincing producers of the financial viability of increased accuracy in their depictions. The organization also presents research to the producers of ‘design television’ shows and jurisdictions concerns about the inaccurate image the shows are providing to the public about interior designers. A disclaimer is given by the organization to the producers that make clear that ‘design shows’ are entertainment based, and that they are not an accurate representation of the interior design profession. If necessary, the organization creates and distributes a press release that illustrates the problems with ‘design shows,’ reveals the desires of the organizations’ members to remove or alter the content and presentation of the shows, and explains to the public the progress made during negations with producers. An update is available on the organization’s website to illustrate interior design’s stance on ‘design TV’, and the status and progress of the issue.</td>
<td>The public is being inaccurately educated about the interior design profession through ‘design television shows.’ A mistake made on “design shows” is the premise that “anyone can be an interior designer” (Martin, 2004, p. 161). “Television shows portray an inaccurate perception of the profession by oversimplifying the process of creating an interior environment” (Waxman &amp; Clemons, 2004, p. VIII). On ‘design television’ shows many of the ‘designers’ had no degree or training in interior design, and discovered that one design show only two of the fifteen had degrees in interior design and one in architecture (Waxman &amp; Clemons, 2004, p. IX). The profession of interior design ideally requires formal education, experience, and examination, and is not based on taste or experience alone. Decorating and interior design are not synonymous (Martin, 2007). Ideally, a professional interior designer’s education involves a four or five year bachelor’s degree at a university accredited by CIDA, has undertaken a mixture of education and practice for six years, and tested by the NCIDQ to meet minimum competency standards (NCIDQ, n.d.). Most interior designers’ education and experience is in commercial design (NCIDQ, n.d.). Interior designers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Setback</td>
<td>Potential Strategy to Confront the Setback</td>
<td>Example Key Content within a Prepared Media Statement</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>can perform the tasks of surface finish selection, furnishings and accessories that interior decorators engage in, yet also move beyond these activities in the consideration and alteration of non-structural interior environmental elements and systems. Most decorators engage in residential and rely primarily on their ‘taste’ and experience rather than formal education (Martin, 2007).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. List of Potential Media Outlets

It is necessary for the interior design organization to proactively seek out positive exposure in between crises to increase awareness of the profession, improve public perception, and make contacts that could be of use during a crisis. Interior design organizations have typically sought out design journals, design related publications and media, interior design professionals, and clients of designers to share the important messages of the interior design profession. This study’s fourth element within the proposed PR strategy is a list of potential media outlets. Table 12 provides a list of several options for proactive media exposure separated by type of publicity. All are oriented toward the general public in an effort to broaden outreach. The entities within the assembled list are chosen to offer proactive media exposure that could directly enhance the positive publicity of the interior design profession. By seeking non-design trade publications, general media exposure, television, and publicity that reach the general public, the interior design profession can begin to repair the public’s misperception, raise accurate awareness of the profession, and prevent future paradigms.

It is recognized, of course, that media buys are an exceedingly expensive component within a PR strategy. Again, the pooling of funds amongst the existing interior design organizations into a single entity may enhance a budget that would make
strategic outreach through these outlets more feasible than before. Given interior
design’s limited funds, it is also worthwhile for the organization to seek positive, free
press coverage. By submitting news releases, publicity, and press releases to the
media, the desired positive exposure can be attained without monetary compensation.
Many free media sources will likely be print or radio exposure and could include many
newspapers and websites from Table 12 which are oriented toward the general public.

Table 12 presents a list of numerous choices for proactive media exposure which
are separated out by type of publicity and target audience. While sports magazines
may initially seem out of context for an interior design PR strategy, their inclusion
recognizes that interior designers obviously design numerous sports venues such as
sports bars, stadiums, and other related projects.

Table 12. A list of several options for proactive media exposure to the general public.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. USA Today</td>
<td>Elle</td>
<td>Newsweek</td>
<td>ESPN</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. New York Times</td>
<td>Marie Claire</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Inside Sport</td>
<td>Newslink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Washington Post</td>
<td>Essence</td>
<td>Boston Review</td>
<td>Sporting News</td>
<td>Village Voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Chicago Tribune</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Atlantic Monthly</td>
<td>Sports Jones</td>
<td>Google</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. New York Post</td>
<td>Redbook</td>
<td>Economist</td>
<td>I play Outside</td>
<td>AOL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continued on next page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Newspaper/Source</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Website/Link</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Long Island Newsday</td>
<td>Vogue</td>
<td>American Conservative</td>
<td>ABC News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Houston Chronicle</td>
<td>Allure</td>
<td>Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>USA Today: NFL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>San Francisco Chronicle</td>
<td>Maxim</td>
<td>Insight</td>
<td>Baseball America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>New York Newsday</td>
<td>Men's Health</td>
<td>In These Times</td>
<td>Baseball Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Chicago Sun-Times</td>
<td>Ralph</td>
<td>Globalist</td>
<td>Slam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Boston Globe</td>
<td>GQ</td>
<td>National Review</td>
<td>Hoops Vibe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Atlanta Journal-Constitution</td>
<td>Stuff</td>
<td>New American</td>
<td>Golf &amp; Travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>New Jersey Star-Ledger</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>Tee Time Magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Minneapolis Star Tribune</td>
<td>Us Weekly</td>
<td>Spectator</td>
<td>Golf Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Detroit Free Press</td>
<td>In Touch</td>
<td>World Magazine</td>
<td>Inside Hockey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Philadelphia Inquirer</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Weekly Standard</td>
<td>Hockey News</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 13. A list of options for proactive media exposure to the general public, legislators, related professions, interior designers, and K-12 educators and counselors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Geographic</td>
<td>Biz Journals</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: The Environmental Magazine</td>
<td>Business Week</td>
<td>Architectural Record</td>
<td>American Educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Green Guide</td>
<td>Dollars &amp; Sense</td>
<td>Architecture Week</td>
<td>American School Board Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth Island Journal</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Contract Magazine</td>
<td>Current Issues in Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utne Reader</td>
<td>Forbes</td>
<td>Design-Build</td>
<td>Education Next</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>Fortune</td>
<td>Dwell</td>
<td>Education Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geo Times</td>
<td>Harvard Business Review</td>
<td>Icon</td>
<td>Education Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Futures</td>
<td>Money Week Magazine</td>
<td>Interiors and Sources</td>
<td>Learners Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green @ Work</td>
<td>Strategy &amp; Business</td>
<td>Elle Décor</td>
<td>Media &amp; Methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Environmentalist</td>
<td>My Business Magazine</td>
<td>Architectural Digest</td>
<td>Newsweek Education Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Life</td>
<td>Financial Times</td>
<td>Residential Architect</td>
<td>School Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People and the Planet</td>
<td>Fast Company</td>
<td>Volume 5</td>
<td>Student Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Watch</td>
<td>Business 2.0</td>
<td>Frame Magazine</td>
<td>Teaching K-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resurgence magazine</td>
<td>Inc Magazine</td>
<td>Environmental Design &amp; Construction</td>
<td>Technology &amp; Learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sources in the above tables offer only a selection of possibilities for proactive positive media exposure. Additional media could be explored such as internet sources, radio shows, television programs, movies, commercials, interviews, public service announcements, and books.
5. A Portion of a Media Pack

Interior design is still an emerging profession with a past that is sometimes unclear. Members of the public, related professionals, and interior designers themselves are often confused about the history of the profession. A portion of a media pack is detailed here that usefully summarizes and clarifies the interior design profession’s history, provides a factsheet about the campaign, and lists answers to frequently asked questions and answers. A complete media pack (with other components not detailed here) is used to provide information to interior design practitioners, educators, the media, and members of the public and related fields to create a clear understanding of the profession’s past, current issues, and goals for the future. Media packs can be delivered in various ways including print, internet, or other means, depending on the particular situation. It should be noted that media packs are written in a persuasive voice and style. As the primary purpose of this study is to identify the content of an interior design PR strategy, the components below detail content only, with the understanding that a professional writer would be employed to add necessary literary persuasive style.

a. The interior design profession’s history.

- Interior design has a long and intricate history, although this is not typically recognized. Traditionally, architects were responsible for the structure and interior of commercial and residential spaces. They hired artists, craftspeople, and wood-workers to fabricate interior furnishings and decorative elements (Binggeli, 2007). Typically, these services were reserved for the elite and wealthy.

- By the end of the 1800’s Elsie de Wolfe was providing “interior decoration” services to members of high society in New York City. She is seen by many historians to be the first person to charge for decorating services instead of being paid with commission on the goods she sold. She is also thought to be the first to provide decorating services as a career other than architecture (Piotrowski, 2004).
• By the start of the twentieth century, stores were carrying mass-produced products and furnishings created for the everyday consumer. Members of the public began searching for help with their homes and places of business. This was the first time that services were being provided to average people and no longer just elite socialites.

• Interior decoration was viewed as an acceptable career for women since they were maintaining the home on a regular basis. Popular magazines began to emerge providing suggestions and advice on furnishings and decorative applications, and typically “focused on designing and living in good taste” (Binggeli, 2007, p. 7).

• After World War I, interior decoration had increasing interest from society and from women who needed financial stability from men. Educational programs were created to assist “early decorators in period styles and to provide the educational background needed to plan interiors” (Piotrowski, 2004, P. 6). The Parsons School of Design in New York was one of the first interior design programs in the country and was created in 1916 (Binggeli, 2007).

• The interior design profession’s organization at the national level occurred long ago in the 1930’s and reflects the longstanding utility of the profession to the public. The first national decorators association was called the American Institute of Interior Decorators (AIID) and was founded in 1931, and was later named the American Institute of Interior Designers (AID).

• Another association was developed called the National Society of Interior Designers (NSID), to provide an organization where designers could meet, share information, and make contacts (Piotrowski, 2004).

• With the increase in formal training and creation of professional associations, a shift occurred between interior designers and interior decorators, which created two distinct professions.

• Interior design became known for providing services primarily to commercial interiors and on space planning. “Practitioners of the new profession of interior design relied more on their design education and less on matters of taste. As
businesses realized the value of good interior design for productivity and profit, interior designers became an important force in the field of commercial design” (Binggeli, 2007, p. 8-9).

- Currently, it is recognized that interior design now often encompasses the activities of interior decorators, and interior designers often engage in decorative selection of furnishings and finishes while also addressing the interior environment’s non-structural elements and systems. “Although a professional interior designer might provide interior decoration services, an interior decorator does not have the education and experience to perform the many other services of a professional interior designer” (Piotrowski, 2004, p. 4)
- “By the 1970's interior design had been recognized as a specialization for architects and as a profession of its own” (Binggeli, 2007, p. 9).
- NSID merged with AID in 1975 to create the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) (Piotrowski, 2004). ASID “set educational and experience standards for its membership and promoted continuing education, a code of ethics, outreach to the community, and collaboration with related professions” (Binggeli, 2007, p. 7-8).
- By the 1980’s, degrees in interior design were available at most art colleges and many public universities.
- In 1990, the Institute of Business Designers, the Council of Federal Interior Designers, and the International Society of Interior Designers combined to create the International Interior Design Association (IIDA). “Many interior designers look forward to the eventual unification of the profession under a single umbrella” (Binggeli, 2007, p. 9).
- Although requirements differ throughout the world, in North America professional interior designers undergo rigorous education, training, and testing to meet minimum standards for licensing to practice interior design.
- Typically, education involves a four or five year bachelor’s degree at a university accredited by the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA). Masters and
doctoral degrees are also available from many colleges with emphasis on practice or research within the field of interior design.

- Graduates must practice under a licensed interior designer or architect for two years before being eligible to sit for the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) exam.
- In addition to the NCIDQ, “state licensing boards and provincial associations set requirements for interior design experience for licensure and/or registration” (Binggeli, 2007, p. 11).
- Professional organizations such as ASID and IIDA require these steps for professional membership of the organization along with continued education throughout the designer’s career.
- Although not all jurisdictions require education, training, and licensing to practice interior design professionally, this track is the ideal for demonstrating minimum competency and keeping the health, safety, and welfare of the client as the priority of the interior design profession.
- Interior design was first visible as a profession in residential design; However, CIDA accredited education programs are becoming increasingly commercial driven and professional interior designers are practicing commercial interior design more than ever (Martin, 2007).
- “Interior design is a relatively new profession and is still often confused with other design-oriented fields. Interior designers still struggle against the perception that they are essentially furniture, upholstery, and accessories salespeople. They also suffer from the impression that their role is to dictate style and fashion. These assumptions are encouraged by the portrayal of interior designers on television as egocentric or comic figures imposing their design whims on hapless clients at will- or as capable of effortlessly transforming a space overnight. By pursuing professional certification and credentialing, interior designers set themselves apart from others in terms of education, experience, and examination. Recognized status as a professional interior designer assures
clients and employers of an established level of knowledge and expertise” (Binggeli, 2007, p. 11).

b. A factsheet on the campaign. The purpose of a factsheet is to provide a condensed version of the overall campaign goals of the organization. This provides an easy to read way to review the campaigns to understand the campaigns’ contribution to the overall PR strategy. Table 14 illustrates a potential factsheet on the ongoing campaigns. The table includes a list of the target audiences and the corresponding campaign ideas for each. This is an essential step to demonstrate the overall goals of the organization. This portion of the media pack is handed out at events, given to members, legislators, members of the media, professionals in related fields, educators, researchers, family and friends of association members to involve the general public on the issues, goals, and current setbacks the campaign is struggling with.

Table 14. An example of a factsheet of the campaigns separated by target audience and campaign.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Audience</th>
<th>Campaign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Members of the general public</td>
<td>Television ‘design shows’ are for entertainment and should not be used as an accurate depiction of the interior design profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Design shows’ on TV oversimplify the interior design process portraying the profession inaccurately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Television ‘design shows’ portray decorators (without formal training) as interior designers. A professional interior designer ideally has a 4-5 year Bachelor’s degree, 2 years of additional experience, has successfully passed the NCIDQ exam, and has met state/provincial licensing requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most ‘design shows’ illustrate residential design although the majority of professional interior designers are trained in and practice commercial interiors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The profession of interior design includes the understanding of sustainability, universal design, social justice, designing for the aging population, ergonomics, quality of life, and health, safety, and welfare of the public. The aging population and people with special needs can benefit from the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Audience</td>
<td>Campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislators</td>
<td>Interior design is a legitimate profession which is recognized by the U.S. Census Bureau and 26 North American jurisdictions. The profession contains a unique ‘body of knowledge’ that affects quality of life and health, safety, and welfare of the public, and should be governed by licensing provisions in all jurisdictions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interior designers affect public issues regularly and on a large scale. For example, “Building construction now accounts for 30 percent of global raw material use—billions of tons each year” (Whitemyer, 2007, p. 10). The changes needed in construction, product specification, and design is directly within the specialized scope of services held by interior designers (Adler, 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals in related fields</td>
<td>Interior designers are “engaged in planning, designing, and administering projects in interior spaces to meet the physical and aesthetic needs of people using them, taking into consideration building codes, health and safety regulations, traffic patterns and floor planning, mechanical and electrical needs, and interior fittings and furniture” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration has been shown to improve relationships between interior designers and related professionals, and can make a notable difference in the design of the built environment (Edwards, 2002; Dickinson &amp; Russ, 1999).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interior design entails a distinctive ‘body of knowledge’ that affects health, safety, and welfare, and the quality of life of the public that is distinct from and supportive of other fields’ work. Related fields should develop an understanding of the profession and support its legislative efforts to protect the safety of the public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of the media</td>
<td>Interior designers undertake activities that matter. Interior designers are “engaged in planning, designing, and administering projects in interior spaces to meet the physical and aesthetic needs of people using them, taking into consideration building codes, health and safety regulations, traffic patterns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and floor planning, mechanical and electrical needs, and interior fittings and furniture” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Interior design and decoration are not synonymous.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Audience</th>
<th>Campaign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-12 educators and counselors</td>
<td>The elements and principles of design and the logical design process of the interior design profession are significant and should be incorporated into the K-12 curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior design professionals</td>
<td>Interior design is a stimulating and viable career option for students. Interior designers should make themselves aware of the accurate definition, current research, scope of services, history, current legislation, and the present issues the profession and the ways interior design benefits society and the quality of life. Interior designers should translate their education and learned information into a confident and scholarly presentation of the profession.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### c. A list of frequently asked questions.

A list of frequently asked questions with the organization’s correct answers represents publicity that is given to attendees of events and fundraisers, to members of the unified organization, legislators, members of the media, professionals in related fields, educators, researchers, family and friends of association members. Table 15 details such a list for the interior design profession. Again, as the primary purpose of this study is to identify the content of an interior design PR strategy, the component below details content only, with the understanding that a professional writer would be employed to add necessary literary persuasive style.

#### Table 15. List of frequently asked questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is interior design?</td>
<td>“Interior design is a multi-faceted profession in which creative and technical solutions are applied within a structure to achieve a built interior environment. These solutions are functional, enhance the quality of life and culture of the occupants, and are aesthetically attractive. Designs are created in response to and coordinated with the building shell, and acknowledge the physical location and social context of the project. Designs must adhere to code and regulatory requirements, and encourage the principles of environmental sustainability. The interior design process follows a systematic and coordinated methodology, including research,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
analysis and integration of knowledge into the creative process, whereby the needs and resources of the client are satisfied to produce an interior space that fulfills the project goals. Interior design includes a scope of services performed by a professional design practitioner, qualified by means of education, experience, and examination, to protect and enhance the life, health, safety and welfare of the public” (NCIDQ, 2004).

| Is interior design the same as decoration? | The profession of interior design ideally requires formal education, experience, and examination, and is not based on taste or experience alone. Decorating and interior design are not synonymous (Martin, 2007). Ideally, a professional interior designer’s education involves a four or five year bachelor’s degree at a university accredited by CIDA, has undertaken a mixture of education and practice for six years, and tested by the NCIDQ to meet minimum competency standards (NCIDQ, n.d.). Most interior designers’ education and experience is in commercial design (NCIDQ, n.d.). Interior designers can perform the tasks of surface finish selection, furnishings and accessories that interior decorators engage in, yet also move beyond these activities in the consideration and alteration of non-structural interior environmental elements and systems. Most decorators engage in residential and rely primarily on their experience rather than formal education (Martin, 2007). |
| What are the qualifications of a professional interior designer? | Ideally, a professional interior designer’s education involves a four or five year bachelor’s degree at a university accredited by CIDA (the Council for Interior Design Accreditation), has undertaken a mixture of education and practice for six years, and tested by the NCIDQ (National Council for Interior Design Qualification) to meet minimum competency standards (NCIDQ, n.d.). A professional must also adhere to the licensing requirements of their jurisdiction, and meet continuing education obligations of the profession and organization. |
| Why should interior designers be licensed? | Interior designers are “engaged in planning designing, and administering projects in interior spaces to meet the physical and aesthetic needs of people using them, taking into consideration building codes, health and safety regulations, traffic patterns and floor planning, mechanical and electrical needs, and interior fittings and furniture” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). The scope of services provided by a professional interior designer affect the safety and quality of life of the public; thus, the general population should be protected and able to be confident that interior designers have met minimum competency standards and are qualified to perform these services. |
| Is there a difference | The public is being inaccurately educated about the interior design profession through ‘design television shows.’ A mistake made on |
between interior design on television and in real life?

“design shows” is the premise that “anyone can be an interior designer” (Martin, 2004, p. 161). “Television shows portray an inaccurate perception of the profession by oversimplifying the process of creating an interior environment” (Waxman & Clemons, 2004, p. VIII). On ‘design television’ shows many of the ‘designers’ had no degree or training in interior design, and discovered that on one design show only two of the fifteen had degrees in interior design and one in architecture (Waxman & Clemons, 2004, p. IX).

What types of specializations are available within interior design?

A professional interior designer could specialize in retail, hospitality, office, health care, government, institutional, entertainment, facilities management, or residential. Most interior design firms concentrate in one or more specialties.

Summary

It was established in previous chapters that there is a pervasive identity and public perception problem with the interior design profession. This chapter has sought to answer the three questions of this study, using the research and knowledge gained from Chapter 2 in conjunction with the Action Research Model described in Chapter 3. It was argued in this chapter that a single interior design organization is desirable and ideal to provide a unified voice to the profession. It was determined that public relations techniques have provided tangible strategies in the past to strengthen the reputation and image of a profession or organization, which could be helpful to the interior design profession. A proactive public relations strategy was created for the interior design profession which implemented many of the techniques provided by the research of Chapter 2. The five components created were specifically important to the problems of the interior design profession. The elements included:

1. a written PR strategy;
2. the description of a specific public relations campaign;
3. a crisis plan;
4. a list of potential media outlets; and,
5. components of a media pack.
This public relations proposal is one of many possible approaches to rectifying the public's misperceptions of the interior design profession's utility and identity. These elements and tactics seek to put a tangible face on strategies public relations sources suggest may lead to success.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

This study identifies previous research that demonstrates several misperceptions about interior design within the profession, from related professions, and from the general public. This research was considered in combination with a review of public relations strategies to propose methods to shift the public’s misperceptions about the profession.

The research discussed and referenced in Chapters 2 and 3 establish that public misperceptions of the interior design profession exist, and are likely injurious to the advancement of the interior design profession. This problem is being further complicated by the lack of proactive action being taken by entities within the interior design profession, the absence of a unified voice that speaks for interior design, the deficiency of campaigns that might correct the existing identity problem, and the nonexistence of a proactive PR campaign to prevent future public misperceptions.

Currently, the interior design profession is sending mixed messages to the public in several ways:

1) Interior Design has few goals unified across the spectrum of the profession and little evidence of timeframe for implementation of those goals (ASID, n.d.; IIDA, n.d.; NCIDQ, n.d.).

2) Multiple design organizations exist within interior design that possess different platforms of beliefs and strategies (ASID, n.d.; IIDA, n.d.).

3) Interior designers themselves vary in their explanations concerning their roles in the built environment (Birdsong & Lawlor, 2001; Kangas & Stumpf, 2002).

4) No unified list of answers exists to frequently asked and difficult questions interior designers may be asked (ASID, n.d.; IIDA, n.d.; NCIDQ, n.d.).

5) No unified opposition to design myths exist (Martin, 2007; Waxman & Clemons, 2007).
6.) Interior designers do not proactively seek positive media attention or exposure on an impactful scale (ASID, n.d.; IIDA, n.d.).

7.) The two main design associations ASID and IIDA have different approaches which mainly focus on reaching out to legislators or interior designers respectively, but not primarily or directly to the general public (ASID, n.d.; IIDA, n.d.).

Action research was chosen as the research method as it is conducted to solve a problem. Logical action research addresses a precise problem within an entity, such as an organization or profession. “Its primary purpose is to improve practice in the short term as well as to inform larger issues…. To be maximally successful, practical action research should result in an action plan that, ideally, will be implemented and further evaluated.” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 568). The action plan in this case was the creation of a tangible set of public relations tactics tailored to the interior design profession. The action plan product detailed in chapter 4 resulted in the following conclusions and ideas:

**Question 1.** What organizational type is best suited to carry out an ongoing public relations campaign designed to alter public perception of the interior design profession?

A review of public relations studies and procedures and case studies of organizations experiencing similar public perception problems to those of interior design suggest that a single cohesive organization is a vital step to implement the recommended PR strategies. Such a unified organization may enjoy several advantages to the multiple organizations now seeking to represent the profession.

Firstly, a unified organization is likely able to react more quickly to public relations crises that can arise abruptly; and secondly, be able to respond to a variety of complex issues which require a unified appearance to the media and public. A single organization may also have access to enhanced funds (potentially culled from the multiple existing professional organizations) that are critical for an enduring, effective
public relations initiative. Other existing case studies were presented in Chapter 2 which shows the effectiveness of presenting a unified voice of the organization and creating a proactive PR campaign when attempting to shift perception.

A public relations strategy relies on a unified conclusion of what the profession and organization are, what the objectives and goals are, and the essential messages that need to be expressed throughout the campaign. Such a campaign cannot be run with multiple responses to each of those questions. A logical conclusion is that a single professional organization must be behind the initiative to assure interior designers and the public that interior design is a single, clearly defined, and legitimate profession.

**Question 2.** Can accepted Public Relations strategies offer a process to address the Interior Design profession’s public perception problem?

Public relation techniques can provide concrete strategies to strengthen the reputation and image of an organization while improving relationships with target audiences (Ali, 2001a). Several case studies detailed in chapter 2 chronicle the transformation realized by several other professions and companies afflicted with public perception problems. The analysis detailed in chapter 3 suggests that the mixed messages of interior design and resulting misperceptions of the public, related professions, the media, legislators, and K-12 educators and counselors, and interior designers themselves are often PR related. Specifically, Chapter 3 describes that proven PR strategies may assist interior design to correct inaccurate perceptions created by ‘design television shows,’ advocate for collaboration and support from related professions, achieve national legislation in all jurisdictions, educate future generations of designers, and inform the general public on the contributions of the interior design profession to sustainability, health, safety, and quality of life. Identifying target audiences, establishing a clear crisis strategy, developing campaigns, and proactively seeking media attention may help establish and maintain accurate perceptions about the profession within six separate constituent groups this study collectively identifies as the public (interior designers, members of the media, legislators, professionals of related fields, and K-12 educators and counselors), given
sufficient funding and the presence of a single organization from which this strategy might spring.

**Question 3.** What might a proactive public relations campaign for the Interior Design profession look like?

This study describes that a workable public relations campaign is best structured around a single organization as discussed in question 1. To help describe the nature of a customized initiative for the interior design profession, five components of the public relations strategy described in question 2 were created that are specifically important to the interior design profession. The elements included a written PR strategy, the description of a public relations campaign, a crisis plan, a list of potential media outlets, and components of a media pack. The five components were chosen based on the interior design profession’s past negative media attention. Specifically, these are 1) the absence of a clear step by step strategy for campaigns; 2) the reactive response to negative media attention or crisis; 3) the absence of media contacts for positive exposure; and, 4) and the lack of unified information provided by associations and interior designers about the profession.

In the past public relations strategies have provided other organizations with tangible ways to repair negative damage enhance the organization’s image. The expectations of implementing PR strategies reviewed in Chapter 4 are to initially correct the misperceptions of the interior design profession and secondly, prevent future negative perceptions. Essentially, the results of this study suggest that implementing public relations tactics can potentially assist in repairing the public’s misperception about the interior design profession and create a proactive long term public relations campaign to prevent further negative exposure.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This study’s main focus was the identification and analysis of PR techniques that seek to shift perception held by the general public regarding the interior design profession. While existing research provided an overview of current perceptions, it is
likely that this issue is a quickly changing one. Further and continuing research should be performed to verify and update interior designers’ perception of the profession, the perceptions of related fields, perceptions held by the media, perceptions held by all levels of educators, and perceptions of legislators toward interior design. There may be other public subgroups that should also be specifically considered. Further, there are additional problems that were not addressed that have been linked to the perception problems such as gender.

It is hoped that a comprehensive and effective PR strategy will indeed be initiated by an appropriate and funded entity within or on behalf of the interior design profession. As detailed in Chapter 4, this process implies that significant formative monitoring and summative research is a critical activity to determine the efficacy of these efforts. This represents a significant research opportunity for future academic studies.

This study represents only one possible solution to the perception and identity problem of the interior design profession. Further studies should be conducted to explore other viable options, elaborate on these or other findings in more detail, and produce further detailed examples of the PR strategies. Much work remains to be done to design the elements of the interior design centralized organization such as the logo, corporate identity, website, and publicity materials.

**Implications**

Several findings within this study are potentially important to the profession. First, this is the first known academic thesis study that combines the current interior design issues of identity and public perception with a tangible proposal to repair the problem. Given that studies identified in Chapter 2 suggest that identity and perception problems are having a detrimental effect on the profession, it follows that these issues should be repaired as soon as possible.

This author is hopeful that this proposal offers a first step that helps increase awareness of the misperceptions of the profession, supports others’ work in seeking to correct the identity problem of interior design, and joins other voices that encourage the creation of a single unified organization to represent interior design. It is also hoped that
this work demonstrates that perception change is indeed possible as evidenced through successful change in other, similar cases.

A centralized, comprehensive PR strategy holds promise to address the misperceptions of key audience members which include interior designers themselves, members of the media, legislators, professionals of related fields, and K-12 educators and counselors. Such a PR initiative can potentially provide a proactive strategy to prevent future perception problems and thus permit interior design to better serve its more accepting public.
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sarah Chaney was born on October 14, 1983 in Brandon, Florida. She is the daughter of Patricia and Glenn Chaney and the sister of Erin and Lindsay. She received her Bachelor’s of Arts degree in Theatre from Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida. She earned her Masters of Fine Arts in Interior Design from Florida State University, and is interested in understanding the public’s misperception of the interior design profession. She has proposed a tangible strategy to shift public perception with the use of public relations tactics and the formation of a unified interior design organization. She hopes to practice the profession of interior design, become an instructor at a university, and continue her research and efforts to shift the public’s perception of the interior design profession.