Michel Dumas

Plural horizons

A visionary PR Leader in Quebec, Canada and Abroad

Translated from French by Deanna Drendel and Michel Dumas
This profile is the result of an in depth interview with Michel Dumas conducted in Montreal, on May 6, 2015. Many documents were also consulted.

A short version of this text is available in Jack Yocom Public Relations Profile Collection, an e-book published in June 2016 by the Canadian Public Relations Society. This collection provides a portrait of the history of public relations in Canada through the personalities who have developed and influenced the practice.

Thanks to Mary Barker, Yocom Committee Chair, for her kind permission to make available a more complete version of this profile.
Original French version
Solange Tremblay

Translation
Deanna Drendel and Michel Dumas

French verbatim
Julie Camirand

French interview
Directed and animated by Solange Tremblay
May 6, 2015

Advisers
Deanna Drendel
Thérèse Drapeau
Philippe Lefèvre

Published by SUSTAINABILITY | COMMUNICATION Group
September 2016

Reproduction is authorised, except for commercial purposes, provided the source is acknowledged.
INTERVIEWS

COLLECTION

The Collection is a tribute to the inspiring career of women and men whose contribution helped build and promote a solid corpus of knowledge and skills in PR; and fostered the development of democratic and human values – universal foundation of PR practices. The Collection also expresses the vitality of the increasing interest in the essential role of communicators in the promotion of sustainable development.
# Table of contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A man and his profession – Summary</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional life and values</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discovering a profession</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional debuts</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A new consulting firm is born</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A unifying force behind a new professional association</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• An international presence</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developing study programs for present and future professionals</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A promoter of ethics, professional recognition and new social values</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Words of wisdom for the next generation of PR practitioners</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The future of PR – challenges and dangers on the horizon</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix I – Achievements and awards</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix II – Publications</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix III – Main speaking engagements</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A man and his profession

Summary

Michel Dumas is a visionary leader in the development of public relations, in this country and abroad. He is also one of the first, if not the first in Canada to complete graduate studies – in the late 60s – in this field. Which may explain why he is offered important PR responsibilities in large organizations at the very start of his career. By 1980, he is ready, with a colleague, to set up his own consulting firm, and BDDS rapidly acquires an excellent reputation throughout Canada.

Dumas also exerts considerable influence within the public relations community where he acts as a unifying force. In 1973, he is elected President of the newly founded Association des relationnistes du Québec, which, within a few short years, is bringing together PR professionals from all corners of the province. He later becomes President of Worldcom Public Relations Group, the largest network of independently-owned PR consulting firms, after serving as President of Worldcom Canada and Worldcom Americas.

Recognized for his strategic vision, Dumas is invited to speak or conduct workshops at major conferences and meetings in Canada and the United States, as well as in metropolitan areas such as Moscow, Shanghai and Paris, and in other international centres such as Trieste (Italy), Saragossa (Spain) and Salonia (Greece). Later he is asked to take on a major consulting assignment for the Bureau International des Exposition (BIE) based in Paris, the results of which would require the approval of some 150 member countries. Michel Dumas is particularly proud of this major achievement. In addition, he will undertake a daunting research project – never before undertaken. Using the important BIE reference centre and the testimonies of former exhibition organizers as his major sources of information, he digs the role of public relations in the organization of large international events and addresses various audiences in several countries regarding the communication challenges facing world exhibitions. This work culminates in the publication of his book launched during the 2010 World Exhibition in Shanghai. In 1998 and subsequent years, he chairs the jury of the Prince Awards in Budapest – the first international festival of PR film, video and multimedia which is supported by the principal European and international professional associations as well as Global Alliance.
Dumas is a fervent promoter of PR professional recognition, ethics and education. In the mid-70s, at a time when hardly any training options were available, he contributes to the development of the first PR undergraduate certificate program in Quebec, and in the 80s, to other certificates including one aimed specifically at practicing PR professionals. He also teaches in several Quebec universities.

Today, Dumas is an associate professor with the Department of Social and Public Communication at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). Generous with his time, he never misses an opportunity to point out the challenges and dangers facing the profession, and to promote the watch-dog role of the PR professional in today’s organizations, with respect to their social responsibilities.

Professional life and values

Discovering a profession

Following undergraduate studies in the social sciences at Laval University (BA, 1958), philosophy at Université de Montréal (Licence, 1962) and during his first professional assignment as Executive Director of a professional association (Syndicat professionnel des enseignants), Dumas realizes that he enjoys meeting people – for instance, the different association stakeholders– and editing the association newsletter. At the same time, he discovers the existence of the public relations profession and decides to specialize in that field. He resigns from his job to pursue a Master’s degree in Public Relations at Boston University’s College of Communications, recognized at the time for offering the best program in the field in the United States. He has the good fortune to study with Edward Bernays, one of public relations’ pioneers and the first great consultant in the field. Having discovered a profession well suited to his tastes and talents, Dumas will profit throughout his long career from the reference framework and structured approach learned during his graduate studies.

Professional debuts

Being one of the first, if not the first professional in Canada with a graduate degree in public relations, Dumas is hired in 1969 as the first communication manager at the new Université du Québec. This university is new in many ways, first as a multi-campus institution with new units in Montreal where a second francophone university has long been required, and in other regions that still lacked institutions of higher learning, such as Trois-Rivières, Chicoutimi and Rimouski. The university also innovates with a new educational system which enhances the role of both teachers and students. Apart from managing his own office, Dumas presides over the Public Relations Commission where communication managers of the various units gather to harmonize communication strategies and activities throughout the network.

In 1977, he then becomes, head of communications at Fiducie du Québec, or Desjardins Trust, associated with the Desjardins cooperative group, where he oversees not only public relations activities, but all promotion, advertising and marketing activities. He manages a major advertising budget.
Following these work experiences with a public institution and a financial institution, Dumas moves to a government environment. In 1978, he joins Quebec’s Department of Industry, Commerce and Tourism as communication manager, with a team of 50 employees and a budget of more than $10 million. There he is responsible for all government communications with an economic content directed at Quebec’s delegations located abroad and of some 50 publications a year including an international magazine produced in seven languages. He faces the difficult challenge of promoting foreign investments in Quebec following the election of a sovereigntist government. Well versed in the political and economic issues of the day, Dumas skillfully navigates this reality by working closely with Quebec agents in each of the delegations abroad.

During his tenure at the Department, he also contributes to the work of the commission regrouping all the communication managers from the various departments and state-owned organizations and companies. Defining the role of a communications department, the Commission insists on basic principles such as the necessity for the manager to report directly to the first-in-command within the organization and the importance of considering communications as a true management function where a PR professional must navigate both political and administrative aspects.

**A new consulting firm is born**

Even though Dumas has a challenging job, considerable resources and interesting personal benefits, he begins to contemplate the possibility of working on his own to provide counsel to a variety of clients. Just as he did 10 years earlier when he left a lucrative job to grow his knowledge through graduate studies, he leaves his government position to begin a new career in a consulting firm of his own.

On November 1, 1980, with a close colleague, a secretary and a small office located on the premises of a Montreal ad agency, the fledgling firm has only its reputation to count on to attract new clients. Fortunately, within a two-year period, the firm greatly expands and then, following a merger with another new dynamic agency, it grows faster still, operating under the name of Bazin, Dumas, Dupré, Sormany, better known as BDDS. Five years later, in 1986-1987, BDDS boasts more than 50 employees and is second in size in Quebec.
A unifying force behind a new professional association

In 1973, the Quebec chapter of CPRS primarily regroups members from large corporations in the Montreal area. A group of professionals from Montreal and other regions of Quebec, working in a variety of different environments, decides with Dumas to found a new PR association to address larger needs; and he becomes its first president. The Association des relationnistes du Québec (ARQ) develops rapidly, and members adopt a code of ethics and put in place an accreditation program.

Some years later, following certain changes within CPRS-Quebec, such as the use of French as the primary language, a larger presence outside Montreal and greater representation of practitioners from sectors other than finance and industry, both organisations begin merger talks. Dumas, on behalf of the ARQ, holds discussions with official representatives of CPRS-Quebec which culminate in a single PR professional association in the province operating under the name Société des relationnistes du Québec (SRQ), known today as Société québécoise des professionnels en relations publiques (SQPRP).

An international presence

Although Dumas believes that public relations must have strong local roots, he progressively plays a major role in what can be called international public relations. In the late 80s, he becomes President of Worldcom Canada, the Canadian arm of the Worldcom Public Relations Group, the largest network of independently-owned public relations firms in the world, and then President of Worldcom Americas which represents firms from both North and South America. In 1995, Dumas is elected President of the Group for a two-year term.

In this age of globalization, it was becoming important for small and medium-sized consulting firms to have access to the outside world. Membership in an organization such as Worldcom gave them the opportunity to serve their clients better and to do more business. Moreover, the network also acts as a training ground where members can exchange valuable information, especially about best practices.
Of particular interest to Dumas was whether there exists significant differences in the way a similar PR case is handled in different parts of the world. He therefore conducts a research project involving member firms on all continents. The results – presented at an IABC conference in Washington – show that all firms have more or less the same PR approach. However, they all stress the importance of local factors and values that must be taken into account during the execution of the plan, thereby emphasizing the complexity of international public relations.

Developing study programs for present and future professionals

In the 70s, the need for public relations, and PR professionals, is growing by leaps and bounds. At the time, no Quebec university has yet developed specific PR programs, especially because there is a lack of competent instructors. Since Dumas is one of the rare professionals to hold a graduate degree in the field, Université Laval invites him to work with a team on a certificate to be offered by the Journalism Department, where he later becomes a lecturer. The Université de Montréal’s Continuing Education Department also calls on him to help reevaluate its PR certificate. Since practicing PR professionals also have professional development needs, Dumas contributes, in the mid-80s, to the creation of a new program at HEC Montréal, specifically aimed at this group. He acts as coordinator and lecturer for the new program.

Dumas takes advantage of his teaching engagements to convey his beliefs regarding a structured PR approach. And over the years, he shares his passion for the profession with hundreds of students in various Quebec universities.

A promoter of ethics, professional recognition and new social values

Throughout his career, Dumas continues to promote public relations as a profession with a proven body of knowledge and well-defined practices. He is worried about the number of persons who call themselves PR professionals without their possessing the appropriate training, and he fights the actions of “spin doctors” by stressing the importance of ethics and professional recognition. From 2007-2014, he is responsible for the A+ accreditation program created by the Association des cabinets de relations publiques du Québec.
(ACRPQ), founded some years earlier to foster the professional quality of the work conducted by Quebec’s PR consulting firms.

Similarly, after the enactment of Québec’s Sustainable Development Act in 2006 followed by the Canadian legislation in 2007, Dumas gets involved in the organization of a conference inviting Quebec and Canadian communicators to increase their responsibilities and social commitments.

Words of wisdom for the next generation of PR practitioners

What advice would Dumas share with future PR professionals? Not surprisingly, a solid training before entering the profession, i.e. liberal arts and public relations studies combined with training in other fields such as the social sciences, management or law. Public relations studies should put the emphasis on PR theory as well as the variety of programs and techniques used in practice.

More than ever, professionals should know how to write and how to speak in public. Notwithstanding the importance of virtual communications today, writing remains a fundamental skill for PR practitioners, who are called upon to write blogs, news releases, communication plans, bulletins, proposals, and more. Similarly, they must be able to express themselves with ease in public since they often must act as spokespersons or meeting moderators.
Future practitioners must also have a genuine interest in public affairs, since public relations practice deals regularly with matters of public opinion. They should be interested in public issues and the values that influence public opinion and the media – such as sustainable development and social responsibility which organizations can no longer afford to ignore. And their interest should lead them to act.

Dumas believes that future practitioners should foster dialog as the key to any effective communication. Dialog not only generates understanding and mutual respect between the parties, but it contributes to mutual influence between an organisation and its stakeholders. In that respect, Dumas strongly supports the concept of bidirectional communications put forward by James Grunig, which should inspire the actions of all future communicators.

PR professionals, he adds, are the professionals who best master the issues and challenges their organization must face, as well as the needs and expectations of its different stakeholders. They are therefore in a better position to bring about and channel change, what means that they must demonstrate diplomacy and pay heed to everyone’s attitudes and opinions – which some will be able to do better than others, depending on individual personalities.

Last but not least, having a taste for entrepreneurship constitutes an asset for future professionals, especially if they wish to work in a PR firm. Consultants must find the best ways to serve their clients and offer them the variety of services available in the firm. They must develop their own clientele – as true entrepreneurs do.

**The future of PR – challenges and dangers on the horizon**

Dumas is somewhat ambivalent regarding the future of public relations. Although he is convinced that there is a bright future for public communication, he fears that the traditional PR function may be assumed, more and more, by professionals other than trained public relations specialists.

The practice of public relations has encountered many changes since Dumas began his career some 45 years ago. PR practitioners must be able to keep up with new developments if they want to succeed. At the same time, they must work to enhance the PR profession and promote the need for more ethical, high-quality communications on the part of corporations and in society in general.

No doubt that their biggest challenge in recent years has been to cope with the explosion of social media. Today, these media influence public opinion more than any other source, which means that PR professionals
must find ways to monitor and interpret what is said and written about an organization so that their employer or client can react rapidly and effectively. At the same time, practitioners must be proactive and find the appropriate means of aggressively telling their story through those social media.

Maintaining a central role in public communication also constitutes a major challenge for PR professionals. More and more, other professionals such as advertising, marketing, or management consultants, as well as lawyers, try to act as communication consultants because there is a growing need for this type of service and because it represents a potential source of additional revenue for them. This is a threat with which PR professionals must deal.

PR practitioners must also cope with the growing presence of “spin doctors”, especially in the political milieu but also in other spheres of social activity. These persons often identify themselves as public relations professionals and, without any moral or ethical scruples or obligations, they, more often than not, communicate without transparency and sometimes distort the truth. Therefore, PR professionals must constantly distance themselves from these “spin doctors” and denounce their actions. The problem, however, is that PR professional associations can be too small or too weak, particularly at the regional level, to effectively tackle this issue. Lacking the financial and human resources, they simply cannot take on all the efforts that would be required.

This being said, Dumas wants to reassure young professionals:

“For me, the future is neither rosy nor bleak. I see major challenges facing the profession, but, at the same time, I am convinced that PR professionals possess the means to tackle and overcome them. They can count on their expertise, their deep understanding of issues and new values such as sustainable development, as well as their professional ethics, to remain the leaders in public communication. Inaction is not an option. They must continue to play their essential role as interpreters to their organization of their stakeholders’ needs, and vice-versa. Public relations remains a wonderful profession, and PR professionals have everything in their hands to be able to promote it properly”. 
Appendix I

Achievements and awards

Alliance des cabinets en relations publiques du Québec
- Director, Accreditation program (2007-2014)
- First recipient of the « Distinction en consultation ACRPQ » Award (2003)

Association of Canadian University Information Bureaux
- President (1971)

Association des relationnistes du Québec
- First president (1973-1976)
- President of the Accreditation Council (1977)
- First recipient of the Award « for pre-eminent contribution to the development of public relations teaching, research and practice in Québec » (1979)

Authors Awards
- Jury member for awards program of the Foundation for the Advancement of Canadian Letters (1993)

Better Business Bureau
- Member of the Board (1983-1984)

Canadian Public Relations Association
- President of the Professional development committee (1986-87)

Centraide Montréal
- Vice président, Public Relations, campaign cabinet (1987-1992)

Chaire de relations publiques de l’UQAM
- Member of the Board (2003-2005)
- Director, Innovation Centre (2003-2007)
- Editor-in-Chief, Recherches RP (2003-2005)

Conférence des recteurs et principaux des universités du Québec
- Member of the oversight committee on the code of ethics on information matters in universities related to students and colleges (1977)

Educational All-Press America
- Recipient of the « All-Press America » Award (1968)

Fondation du Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf (Montréal)
- Member of the Board (1990-1992)
Fondation Expo 67
• President (2010-2014)

Québec Government
• Representative of the Public Relations industry on the Consultative Committee on communication techniques (1979-1981)
• Member of the committee on exceptional financing cases for private schools (1964)

International Association of Business Communicators
• Responsible for a study on cultural differences in Public Relations (1990-1991)

La Magnétothèque
• Member of the Board (1980-1981)

Prince Awards International Public Relations Film and Video Festival (Budapest)
• President of the international jury (1996-2000)

Société des relationnistes du Québec
• Recipient, Grand Prix Équinoxe for « exceptional contribution to the practice of public relations in Québec » (2003)

United Way/Centraide
• Member of the Board (1993-1994)

Worldcom Group
• Vice president, Worldcom Canada (1989-1990)
• President, Worldcom Canada (1991-1992)
• Vice president, Worldcom Americas (1993-1994)
• President, Worlcom Americas (1994-1995)
• President, Worldcom Group (1995-1997)

World Energy Conference
• Special recognition « for the quality of personal involvement and the contribution to the exceptional success of the Fourteenth Congress (1989)
Appendix II

Publications

Books
- Les expositions internationales, un univers de communication, PUQ, 2010.

Articles
- « Rentable à long terme, la tenue d’une exposition universelle est âprement souhaitée par les villes les plus dynamiques du monde » La Presse, October 17, 2009.

Editing
- Director, Québec économique, monthly publication by the Quebec Department of Industry, Commerce and Tourism, 1977-1980.
- Director, Québec international, quarterly publication published in six languages by the Quebec Department of Industry, Commerce and Tourism for promotion abroad, 1977-1980.
- Administrator, Québec Science, Université du Québec, 1969-1976.
- Founder, director, editorial writer, Éducation québécoise, magazine published by the Syndicat professionnel des enseignants, 1967.
Main speaking engagements

Guest speaker

- Association francophone pour le savoir (ACFAS), *La profession des relations publiques*, Université de Sherbrooke, May 12, 2011.
- Association francophone pour le savoir (ACFAS), *L’organisation de la profession des relations publiques dans le monde*, Université de Montréal, May 12, 2010.
- Chaire en relations publiques de l’UQAM, *Le contexte actuel de la reconnaissance professionnelle en relations publiques*, Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), Montreal, May 27, 2009.
- Institut français de Presse, Université Panthéon-Assas Paris II, Department of information and communication, Université Laval, and UNESCO-Bell Chair, joint seminar on training and research in communication, journalism and media, *Perspectives sur la formation en relations publiques*, Université Laval, Quebec City, October 4, 1996.
- International Association of Broadcast Monitors, annual meeting, *Broadcast Monitoring on an International Scale*, Quebec City October 3, 1996.
- John Labatt Marketing Chair (UQAM), *L’entreprise et ses communications en période de turbulence*, Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), Montreal, October 18, 1990.
- Institut international de la communication, Le Centre d’études des sciences et techniques de l’information (CESTI, Dakar, Senegal), L’école supérieure des sciences et techniques de l’information (ESSTI, Yaoundé, Cameroun), *La formation des communicateurs institutionnels*. Montreal, April 18, 1985.
Moderator

- Centre Enzyme d’innovation et Centre d’étude sur les responsabilités sociales, le développement durable et l’éthique, Chaire en relations publiques de l’UQAM, Symposium, Développement durable et communications, Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), Montreal, October 4, 2006.
- The 2005 Aichi Summit of cities and regions hosting an international exhibition, World Expositions enhancing cooperation for sustainable development, Nagoya, Japan, September 23, 2005.
- Institut international de recherche, Quels sont les bénéfices à retirer d’une impartition partielle de la fonction communication ? Montréal, 1998.
- Institut international de la communication, seminar on communication and communication networks, African Consultants Association, Abidjan, Ivory Coast, April 28-30, 1987.

Discussant

- United Way/Centraide Canada, Media relations, Charlottetown, PEI, June 14, 1995.
- Association des relationnistes du Québec, Vers les États généraux de la communication de masse au Québec, Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), Montreal, April 1980.