



# iPRS News and Views

An Institute of Public Relations of Singapore Publication

The Networking Hub for Communicators

## IPRS Leads Delegation to Beijing

A group of about 10 local PR professionals under the umbrella of the Institute of Public Relations of Singapore (IPRS) were in Beijing for the China International Public Relations Congress 2006. This is IPRS' second business visit to China following a 2004 visit to Shanghai.

The delegation comprised practitioners from organisations like W.R. Grace, Singapore Exchange, Singapore Management University and Ministry of Information, Communications and The Arts.

The China International PR Congress was organised by the China International Public Relations Association (CIPRA) and the theme for this year's conference was 'Breakthrough and Innovation'. Discussion topics focused on developments and trends in the global PR industry with briefings on the opportunities and challenges of the PR landscape in China.

Conference speakers included Mr. Wang Guoqing, Deputy Director of News Office of the State Council; Mr. Grapp Robert, President of the International Public Relations Association (IPRA); Mr. Li Dongsheng, President of TCL Group and Mr. Ray Kotcher, CEO of Ketchum Newscan.

Ms K Bhavani, President of IPRS, spoke on the PR industry in Singapore and accreditation of PR industry professionals.

With Beijing and Shanghai set to host the Summer Olympics in 2008 and World Expo in 2010 respectively, there is no better time for PR practitioners to familiarise themselves with China's business environment.

Commenting on PR growth in China, Ms K Bhavani said,

“ *There is a lot happening there and we felt that this is the opportune time and the best possible way to expose interested practitioners from Singapore to the business environment in China.* ”

*The demand for PR services has increased exponentially in China. Major events to be held in 2008 (Olympics) and 2010 (Shanghai World Expo), add further to this demand.*

*Singapore's PR industry, which has matured over the last 35 years, could contribute to the development of PR practice in China, through working there or through collaborations. There is a demand for experienced PR professionals in China – and we believe we have a good talent pool in Singapore. ”*



Ms K. Bhavani, President of IPRS (right)

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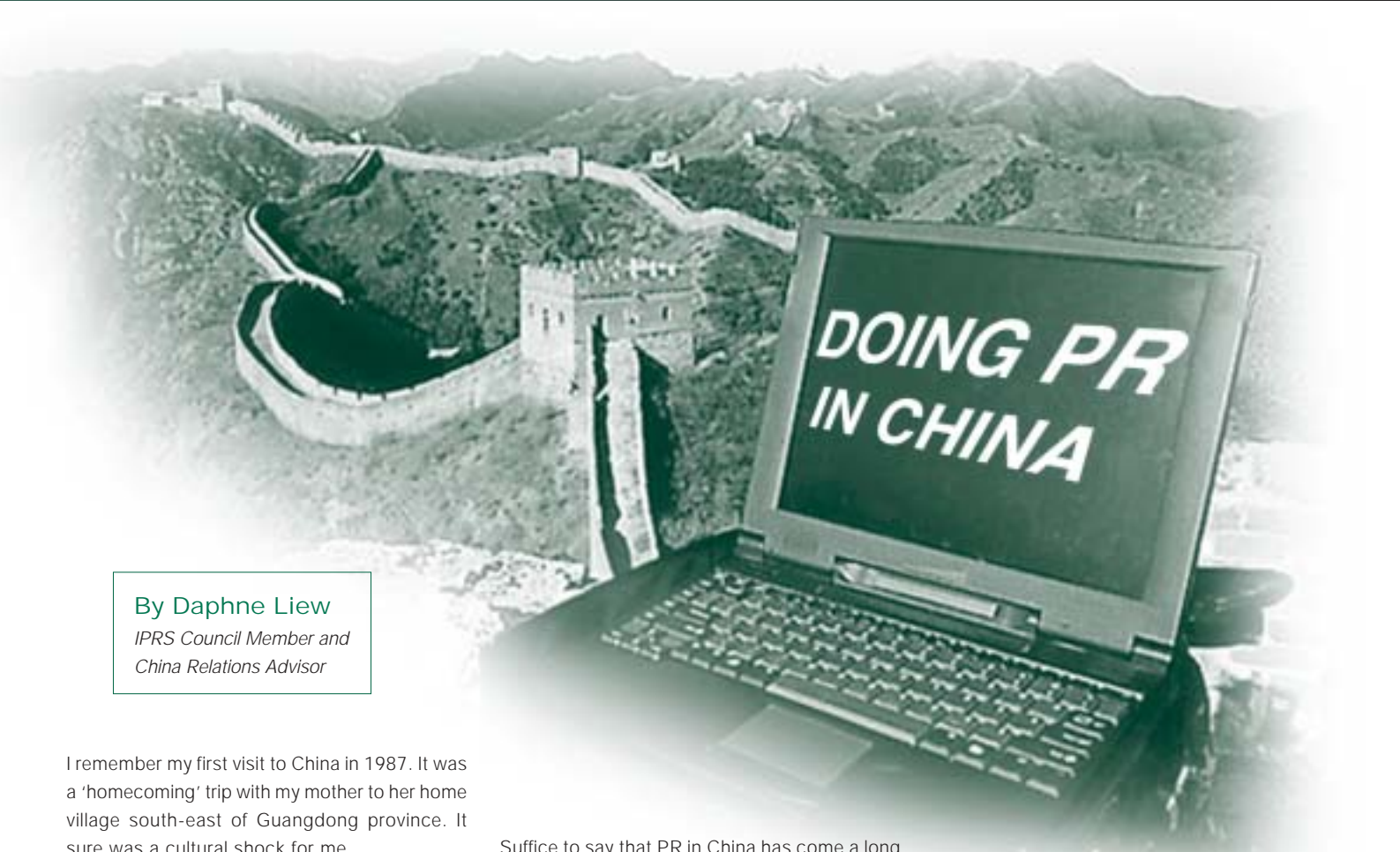
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# Beijing Mission Trip





By Daphne Liew

*IPRS Council Member and  
China Relations Advisor*

I remember my first visit to China in 1987. It was a 'homecoming' trip with my mother to her home village south-east of Guangdong province. It sure was a cultural shock for me.

Since then, I have been in and out of China as a consultant working on various projects. It always seem like an understatement to say that China now is different. Let me start by giving you a snapshot of the public relations (PR) industry as it stands in China. Even before that let's put some perspective into what we consider the China market<sup>1</sup>.

### The PR Landscape

From a business standpoint, one can safely say that the whole of China is your oyster. Certainly for retail, consumer marketing to manufacturing, this is so. As for public relations, at this point in time, activities are largely concentrated in Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou. Having said that, PR activities are rapidly stepping up in the tier-two cities like Chongqing, Chengdu and Dalian. An annual survey conducted by the China International Public Relations Association (CIPRA) early this year reveals that current market size for PR in China exceeds USD800 million at some 33% increase from last year<sup>2</sup>.

As a keen observer of China development, I too cannot hide my amazement at the speed and scale of growth in China's PR industry. A handful of international PR firms began entering the China market in the 1980s through joint ventures and to the best of my knowledge, there were no local PR agencies at that time. Interestingly, the Shanghai Public Relations Association will be celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary later this year.

Suffice to say that PR in China has come a long way since. The CIPRA survey reported that the average revenue for a PR agency in China, international and local, for 2005 was USD4.2 million. This shows an 11.3% increase from the year before whilst the growth rate in terms of staff strength grew by almost 16%, an average across the industry. It is projected that the industry will continue to grow in the next 10 years with the market estimated to reach USD1.8 billion by 2010.

### Media Development

Over the last decade, China has seen a proliferation of media – print, broadcast and online. In Shanghai alone, there are more than 20 newspapers daily; at least 13 television channels and 12 radio stations. Not forgetting the countless print publications and an onslaught of online news since the dot com era of 2000. At the same time, every major city and province in China has developed its own local and regional media outlets. Because of the large number of media outlets in metropolitan cities like Shanghai and Beijing, local Chinese are quite discerning about what they read.

In recent years, online news have become an important media channel. A rapidly growing number of people especially the younger population get their news online. PR practitioners in China need to be mindful of the impact online news can have over other forms of media, including the mainstream dailies. Online news have the flexibility of being

refreshed as and when needed and the news stay online much longer. Often, news breaks on the internet and is quickly downloaded onto print publications.

As one might expect, journalism have taken a long treacherous journey to be where it is today in China. Journalists here are highly educated and many receive specialist training from journalism schools at universities. However, PR professionals working in China have to remind themselves every so often that beneath the outwardly capitalist consumer market and burgeoning business environment is a controlled social framework. The robust media is not all together free. However, as long as the news and information do not carry political and social agendas, business news is covered in much the same way as they would elsewhere.

At the other end of the spectrum, new media have certainly taken China by storm. Reportedly, more than 111 million Chinese are online. China is fast becoming a blogger nation. "In China, freedom of speech has found an outlet on blogs." said one blogger.<sup>3</sup> "Blogs are filling in the gap between the freedom the government allows and the freedom it should allow." According to a Beijing-based internet service provider, 50,000 new bloggers register on its site each day.

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Well and fine. However, we still need to deal with journalists face to face. So, how different are media relations in China? I'm tempted to say very simply that dealing with journalists are generally similar anywhere. Differences stemmed largely from culture and socio-economic background and not unlike dealing with journalists in Philippines, India or China. In general, reporters in China prefer face-to-face meetings. They look to us as a source of information for corporations and depend on us to gain access to senior executives. Allow me to share just a few simple pointers on dealing with the media in China.

1. Do not forget the impact of online media.
2. Build one-on-one relationships. First of all, it is important to speak Chinese (Mandarin). Be sincere about getting to know reporters individually and work at building trust through the relationship.
3. Stay away from socio-political issues. Do not try to *westernise* the media.
4. Always have a Chinese news angle. No matter what your story is, why does it matter in China?
5. All materials must be translated locally. As far as possible, do not translate materials elsewhere even in Hong Kong or Taiwan. This will allow local context and sensitivity to be incorporated into the translated materials.
6. It is an industry norm to pay a nominal 'transport allowance'<sup>4</sup> to the local media. Do not be mistaken, you cannot pay to get your story covered<sup>5</sup>. I believe even this industry practice ('transport allowance') would erode eventually.

### Market Outlook

Without doubt, as the PR market grows so does the competition. Increasingly, the differentiating gap between local and international firms is closing. Local agencies have grown in sophistication and, partly to plug the talent shortage, are hiring experienced professionals from abroad. Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore have become a natural talent pool for these firms. Currently, local agencies are larger than their international counterparts and many are building capabilities in higher level services like strategic counseling, corporate communications, investor relations, issues management and crisis communications. Business to business communications will be a key driving force for the industry going forward as the market matures.

Much has also been said and written about the growth of PR fueled by the two major events in China - Beijing Olympics in 2008 and the

Shanghai World Expo 2010. With the economic development in China seen in the last 15 years, it is small wonder that PR with or without these events will catapult in the same way. Communications is after all a key component to help drive businesses keenly competing in a fast developing economy. For foreign multinationals and growing domestic enterprises, corporate and investor communications have now risen to an international stage. PR professionals in China, and a broader Asia, need to brace themselves to execute communication strategies across geographic borders and diverse cultures.

### Issues Management and Crisis Communication – An Experience

In the spring of 2005, I was managing a crisis communications project in Shanghai for a foreign corporation in China. The situation required communications with external and internal groups. When I first arrived in Shanghai for this project, I immediately appointed a local media 'old hand', a Shanghainese whom I was fortunate enough to have found through my contacts in Shanghai. The crisis situation unfolded rapidly and (together with client's senior management) we were not short of surprises that confronted us and climaxed within a week. The main point I want to drive here is how important it is to have profound understanding of the local media landscapes, the way to work the media ground and it was certainly useful to know a few key people in the media.

My local media counsel and I really struck the right chord in terms of 'chemistry'. During and in the weeks that followed the media breakout of the crisis, we played a good double act. I was the company spokesperson<sup>6</sup> when I needed to be quoted officially and have my messages dispensed. She was my eyes and ears on the ground with the media, unofficially the media mediator between me and the journalists and, someone I confided in for a deeper understanding on people and socio-economic culture at play given the specific situation. One important take-away here is that not all Chinese people think and act the same. Cultural differences among the Chinese are denominated by local geography (by provinces, cities and villages); age groups (socio-political background of upbringing); and individual economic ambitions.

The main thrust of the communications strategy in the crisis is scenario planning using key messages and standby statements to continuously pre-empt the 'what's next'. Throughout the whole period, the company

positioned itself as being open and transparent and, constantly reiterating its company policies in dealing with such a situation. Like in most crisis situations, a critical success factor is the close working relationship and trust between the agency and the client at the most senior level. This enabled key information to be communicated and shared effectively and time sensitively.

Over the last 10 years, many multinationals have had their fair share of crises in China, such as KFC, McDonald's, SK II, Johnson & Johnson, Dupont, Kanebo Cosmetics and Citicorp. One common lesson learnt from their experiences - do not underestimate how fast and wide a crisis could build up.

### A Note on Guanxi

'Guanxi' has long been hyped as the most important 'X' factor for doing business in China. To me, 'guanxi' in China is no more essential than the 'guanxi' anyone needs to do business anywhere else. It is about relationships. And, relationship building requires an introduction to start with. The right 'chemistry', time and personal effort to build that relationship into a 'guanxi'. No matter where you are, a good relationship is built over time. Merely knowing someone who knows someone is, in my opinion, a 'broker' relationship. Doing PR in China is about professionalising the industry; helping to train local practitioners and contributing to local best practices.

China is ready to compete on the world stage. Fueled by the development and growth we have seen so far, economists around the world agree that the 21st century belongs to Asia. As PR professionals in a global city like Singapore, we are well positioned to contribute to the development of professionalism and growth of PR in China.

#### (Footnotes)

- 1 China refers to mainland PRC excluding Hong Kong and Macau.
- 2 Source: Survey report printed in PR Magazine, China
- 3 An article "Blogger Nation" in the Newsweek, February 27, 2006
- 4 An industry practice; a nominal sum to cover local transport costs for which reporters are not reimbursed by the media organisation they work for. Some local agencies may work differently.
- 5 Generally, mainstream media organisations are credible and professional.
- 6 In China, I played the role of the company's in-house PR.

# Personality Profile :

**Julie Yeo,** *Director, Corporate Communications for Singapore and Southeast Asia*  
UBS AG

## 1. You have been in the financial sector for more than 15 years. Any differences in PR practice in this sector?

I believe the most notable and positive change is the increased access and transparency provided to the media. When I first started in financial PR over 15 years ago, very few companies held media briefings in conjunction with the release of their financial results and there was very much less interaction between the senior management of a company and the media.

## 2. What are some of the key problems faced in your area of PR practice?

I would not call it problems, but some key challenges would be the need to always be technically up to speed with the various financial issues or services we are helping to communicate. Another is the need to be very careful about regulatory restrictions of what can or cannot be said for listed companies, what is deemed fair disclosure especially when a transaction is taking place. In such instances, close cooperation with the legal and compliance team is very important.

## 3. What are some of the common misconceptions of PR that you have heard?

- That we spend all our time wining and dining the media, and organising launch parties for new products and services.
- That good media relations means being able to guarantee a story or control what a journalist writes.
- That we can wave a magic wand and the problem will not be reported by the media

## 4. How do local practitioners compare to foreign practitioners?

I find that the basic PR principles and practices are the same. What differs is the level of experience an individual has from dealing with a variety of issues globally, and the level of PR expertise and tools they have garnered over the years.

Foreign PR practitioners would have different experiences which they would have gained from international markets or a certain

specialty field or expertise and could bring a different dimension to an issue. Local PR practitioners can bring a deeper level of understanding of how things are done locally and of the media scene here, the regulatory framework. They have the added advantage of stronger relationships with the media here. Both have a role to play and can complement and learn from one another.

## 5. Are local practitioners given fair playing field to demonstrate their abilities and to grow?

I would say the opportunities are available but it will be a question of talent development and the positioning of local PR practitioners.

## 6. How did you get into PR? Did you have a mentor?

It was by accident. I started off doing a marketing communications role at a time when integrated communications or marketing was the buzz word. It was good as that gave me a depth of experience in the different aspects of marketing communications and promotions. Later, I was given a choice to focus on Advertising & Marketing or Public Relations. I chose Public Relations as I felt I could learn a lot more in this field.

I have been very fortunate to have many bosses who have been great mentors along the way and whom I learnt from. I also learnt from bouncing ideas with PR colleagues both in-house and from PR agencies in Singapore and Asia.

## 7. What was the advice given to you which made the biggest impact on your professional life? What advice would you give to young PR practitioners?

The most important asset you have as a PR practitioner is your credibility, both with your client or firm but more importantly with the media.

Credibility and trust is built by being upfront, honest and professional at all times. Never compromise on this for any short term gain. We are at our jobs because we are the bridge between the company or client and the media. Our work is to find the best win-win outcome for both.



## 8. Women are better communicators than men. Agree?

Depends on the individual and not the gender.

## 9. When choosing a candidate for a PR position, do you choose experience over qualifications?

Absolutely. PR is one function where there is no immediate right or wrong way of doing it or a set precedent on how it should be done. Every issue is different and will have its own nuance. A lot of how we respond to an issue will be based on experience and for want of a better word – "gut feel" that this is the best course of action for a particular issue.

## 10. Is there one thing that you are most proud of in your PR career?

It would be the friendships I have established and maintained with the various people I interact with, especially journalists and other PR practitioners - many of whom I count as my very good friends.

## 11. What most inspires you – professionally and personally?

God, Family, Friendships and Friends.

## 12. Describe a typical non-working day in the life of Julie Yeo.

On weekends or holidays, I spent most of my time with my family, especially my two kids. I also enjoy reading and cooking (esp. baking) to unwind. I have just started a little herb garden which unfortunately is not thriving very well! I also enjoy watching movies and plays, and these are usually date nights with my husband and friends. Church also takes up my time over the weekend where I teach Catechism to active 9 year olds.

# EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

## In April...

- Once again, the workshop that continues to sustain interest is the one on writing and editing skills. Trainer Valerie Valberg, former editor of prize-winning in-house newspaper, *Outlook*, shared the golden rules of journalistic writing and editing.

The group of 17 PR professionals attending the two day workshop was also shown how to write and produce effective newsletters, including a hands-on session in text editing and layout. Many brought previous issues of their newsletters for discussion, in return gaining valuable tips on how to make their newsletters more attractive to readers.

- For the more than 30 practitioners who turned up to hear what Dow Jones Newswires senior editor Marcus Wright had to say about pitching stories to the wire service, it was worth the effort. After the session, it is no more a secret as to how Dow Jones is able to share precise and detailed information within minutes of a breaking story.

## In May...

- Many people are daunted when faced with the prospect of facing a journalist, whether for a print or live broadcast interview. Such fears were hopefully put to rest when media skills trainer and IPRS Vice President, Kathy O'Brien, gave workshop participants tips on how to handle media questions with confidence and put them through a 'live' exercise, complete with camera recording and lights.
- IPRS Lifetime Achievement Award winner Yeo Toon Joo held a one-day workshop on news release writing for more than 20 PR professionals - from the basic principles of writing to common mistakes made, and persuasive writing. He also touched on creative ways to turn a dull event into a major media event.



by Camilla Adindamaulani

## Yellow Roses Capped IPRS Inter-Class Networking Session

If you ever wonder about the connection between yellow roses and a networking session, wonder no more. Creativity is a growing hallmark of successful businesses.

At a recent June 1 gathering attended by current Diploma students from batch 03/2005 and 01/2006 and Professional Certificate students of batch 02/2006, Goh Huili and Goh Huilin talked about their floral business, Blume Link. Armed with a Degree in Business from NUS, the twin sisters had previously worked in the finance, trademark and industrial design sectors but wanted to do something different. They started Blume Link with zero capital in 2004. Two years later the young entrepreneurs received overseas orders from Malaysia and Hongkong.

Sharing their story with other students at such a networking session, their passion for their floral arrangement business was infectious as they shared humorous accounts as well as the challenges faced in running a labour intensive venture like Blume Link. Ultimately, their interest in public relations encouraged both to enroll in IPRS' diploma programme. Newsletter writing and media pitching are two areas of relevance that they were constantly required to apply to their business. Since graduating from the IPRS course, they have successfully won projects from the National Museum.

Perhaps not a coincidence, participants left the networking session with a yellow rose of friendship, with compliments from Blume Link. Savvy move, indeed!

As the voice of Singapore's PR industry, IPRS has pioneered PR training and education programmes for over two decades. Today, we continue to be a leading institution in meeting the industry's current skills and knowledge needs. And the PR industry has spawned many an out-of-the-box idea, not always for business but sometimes an exercise in goodwill and mindshare, familiar terms to many of us in public relations.

Our part-time Professional Certificate and Diploma in Public Relations and Mass Communication course have produced more than 1000 graduates, comprising students from finance, engineering, law and the civil service. Airline crew and professional dancers too have counted among IPRS students. Twice a week from 7.00 to 9.30pm, our PR-practitioner lecturers share their industry knowledge with course students.

### In June...

A lunch-time discussion on *Communications on High-Risk, High-Profile Projects* with guest speaker Peter Stephens, the World Bank's Regional Communications Manager and Singapore Representative, saw PR professionals from across industry sectors in attendance.

Mr Stephens shared his experience on the Nam Theun 2 hydroelectric dam project in Laos, which attracted worldwide attention for its environmental and resettlement issues. The project also had an impact on the World Bank and changed the way the organization handled communications on such controversial projects.

Key points of the discussion also touched on the importance of corporate transparency, the need for internal communications to be an integral part of external strategy, and ways to handle criticisms and attacks.



# Industry Buzz

Marketing Magazine has promoted writer **Debbie Cai** to Editor. A writer for Marketing Magazine since March 2004, Debbie's goals for Marketing is to be even more in touch with its readers, and always remain the objective voice in the industry.



**Judith Knight** has joined Icon International Communications as a lead consultant in Singapore. Formerly from Burson Marsteller's technology practice, she is tasked primarily with new business development and senior-level client servicing.

**Louise Harris**, Singapore-based President and MD of Ruder Finn Asia, will relocate to the agency's New York headquarters in October, retaining her regional role while focusing on new business development.

**Monica Alsagoff** and **PN Balji** have set-up a new PR outfit, Communications DNA, following their departure from Bang Public Relations. The agency's clients include Public Utilities Board, Far East Organisation and Nike Women.

**Kai Tamin-Goh** has joined Hill & Knowlton Singapore as a Group Director after leaving Singapore International Foundation. Ex-MDK client services director, **Yvonne Koh** and ex-MDK account manager, **Joan Liew** are among the agency's recent hires, which include technology media veterans **David Chin** (founding editor of Optimize Asia) and **Raoul Le Blond** (ex-editor of Optimize Asia Supply Change Management portal).



**Prasanna Nair**, former VP of Fleishman-Hillard Singapore, has joined Ruder Finn Asia as Vice President and Managing Director. Based in Singapore, Prasanna was with Fleishman-Hillard for seven and a half years.

**Donna Liew** has joined Swissotel The Stamford and Swissotel Merchant Court as senior manager for marketing communications. The ex-Singapore Tourism Board staffer heads the hotels' marcoms department and is said to oversee the entire spectrum of the two hotels' marketing management issues.

**Porter Novelli** has reportedly bought the remaining 20 per cent of Bentley Porter Novelli in Singapore, now known as Porter Novelli. Edward Dixon has been appointed Singapore MD.

The IPRS Secretariat bade farewell to **Betty Fong**, its manager of two years who has joined the Singapore Exchange as a Senior Associate. **Anusha Sadhnani** rejoins IPRS in June as manager. Many will remember Ms Sadhnani, who was IPRS' Communications Executive a year ago.

## Calendar of Events

DATE	PROGRAMME
<b>AUGUST 2006</b>	
Friday, 11 Aug	<b>Networking Night: IPRS-Press Club National Day Social Night</b>
Monday, 21 Aug	<b>Course: Diploma in Public Relations &amp; Mass Communications</b> Fee: \$2,700 (members), \$2,900 (non-members)
Weds, 30 & Thurs, 31 Aug 9.00am to 5.00pm	<b>Workshop: Influencing, Persuading &amp; Negotiating Skills</b> Trainer: Anisha Kaul Fee: \$650 (members), \$720 (non-members)
<b>SEPTEMBER 2006</b>	
Friday, 22 Sep 9.00am to 5.00pm	<b>Workshop: Writing for the Web</b> Trainer: Robin Yee Fee: \$500 (members), \$650 (non-members)
Thurs, 28 & Fri, 29 Sep 9.00am to 5.00pm	<b>Workshop: Who Says Writing A Speech is Tough?</b> Trainer: Thomas Wee Fee: \$680 (members), \$800 (non-members)

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