

# THE BUZZ

YOUR SOURCE FOR EVERYTHING INDIE.



Hello <<First Name>>,

Hope you enjoy the latest edition of *The Buzz*!

## A message from PIC chair Sharon Aschaiek

Major shifts in how we communicate are significantly affecting our profession. It's up to us to stay current on these trends and be adaptable and nimble while still strengthening and expanding our core skills. Some of these shifts relate to social change, others to emerging technologies or workplace diversity practices, but they all play a role in reshaping how we think about and practise professional communications.



That was perhaps the main lesson I took away from [Global PR Summit Canada 2](#), an event IABC/Toronto co-sponsored that took place last week in Toronto. The two-day event featured a range of topical presentations by PR, communications social media leaders from organizations such as PepsiCo Foods Canada, Thomson Reuters, Shell, Heineken USA, John Hopkins Medicine and even the White House and the British monarchy. Also speaking was Maliha Aqeel, the president of IABC/Toronto, and communicators who run their own agencies.

A few random insights from the event that stuck with me:

- Communicators need a mix of strategic, creative, technical and social skills to excel.
- Video is going to rule the content game, so it's worth developing this skill.
- Developing an appropriate corporate apology is far more complex than I realized.
- We are data rich but insight poor—how do we find the useful nuggets of information?
- When social media strategy is baked into an organization's strategic planning, it leads to better results.

Want to discover what else I learned at this conference? [Check out this Storify](#) with my tweets about it.

Meanwhile, I hope to see you at our PIC Merry Mingle holiday party on Dec. 13!

Continued success,



**Sharon Aschaiek**  
Chair, Professional Independent Communicators (PIC)  
Vice President, Special Interest Groups, IABC/Toronto  
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### Quick Links

- [PIC on the web](#)
- [PIC on LinkedIn](#)
- [@PICToronto](#) on Twitter
- Get a copy of [The Independent Life](#)
- [IABC/Toronto](#)
- PIC email: [toronto-pic@iabc.to](mailto:toronto-pic@iabc.to)

### Newsletter archives

- Find back issues of *The Buzz* from Jan. 2010 to Aug. 2016 [here](#).
- [Join Our Mailing List!](#)

### We want your talents!

Interested in writing, editing or contributing ideas for PIC's *The Buzz* or IABC/Toronto's *Communicator*? We'd love your help. [Let us know!](#)

### PIC Executive

Contact any of us with questions, comments and ideas for speakers or topics:  
Chair: [Sharon Aschaiek](#)  
Past Chair: [Donna Papacosta](#)  
Communications: [Sue Homer](#)  
Membership: [Melika Ramkissoon](#)  
Programming: [John Bromley](#), [ABC](#)  
Social Media: [Bill Smith](#)

## Nov. 9 recap: Tips for growing your business By Sue Horner

Margaret McCaffery felt a sense of freedom when she left a "horrible job" to launch a communications agency. She realized, "My career doesn't rely on that job."

At PIC's Nov. 9 seminar, the writer, editor and president of Canterbury Communications walked us through that career, with tips for growing our own businesses.

Margaret underlined the value of having a niche, which allows you to know and anticipate what your clients need.

Her own niche serves lawyers, engineers, accountants and other professionals. As she pointed out, not all writers can handle legal or medical terms.

When starting out, she took chances, accepting whatever came her way with an attitude of "Say yes first, panic later."

"Outsource if you have to," she said. "Don't say no. Say, 'Let me see if I can get someone for you.' And have dependable associates with the skills you need."

Margaret found that the busier she was, the more opportunities there were for business. "Think beyond the project," she said. "Take your cue from the handyman who always points out what else could be fixed."

She also recommended:

- The most effective actions are often the most simple, like picking up the phone.
- Be open to learning. A job may not be what you expect, but what can it teach you?
- Remember you have a reputation to build in addition to getting your job done.
- Understand what keeps your clients up at night and what they need (visibility, say) vs. what they want (a large one-time ad).
- The more you can do for a client, the more useful you become. Let your clients know about other services. Get their projects off their plate. Be on time. Be on budget.
- Let clients know skills you've added or that they don't know about in a casual "How are you doing?" call.

#### Price your way to success

Margaret told the group that pricing work properly makes the difference between success and failure.

"Know what you need or want to earn," she said. "Then understand the job. Is the subject complex? Will it require lots of research or meetings? Is there a tight timeline? Does the client make a lot of changes? Thoroughly estimate the time you think a project will take, then double it."

She also shared these tips:

- **Quote a range** and bill somewhere within it.
- **Hourly** works best if you don't know what the job entails. Clients don't like it but it protects you when they take up more time.
- Use a **flat fee** when you know the client well and can accurately scope out the project.
- **Consider a sliding scale of prices** (hourly, daily and package rates), as she does to encourage clients to do more with her.
- **Build in a contingency.** Be prepared for the client who will make you redo your work multiple times.
- A **retainer** for a minimum amount of work gives you a guaranteed steady income. Specify what happens if you go over or under the number of hours. Be prepared to do "whatever they fling at you."
- **Allow for scope creep.** Outline up front how you will bill for additional work.
- **Regard half of the price as your fee** and assign the rest to pay bills or save for your pension.

Margaret also shared how clients evaluate bids for work:

- Assurance that you have done this kind of work before.
- How your pricing compares. If low, they wonder what you left out. If high, why?
- Your ability to fit in with their existing service providers or difficult people on staff.
- References. This is seldom about cost, but more about if you're easy to work with, reliable, on time, a professional or a prima donna.

Margaret closed by sharing these five ways you can add value:

1. Keep your core skills and knowledge sharp, including communication channels, technology, news. If you have specialized knowledge, you're worth more.
2. Add skills, like project management.
3. Learn how to think strategically.
4. Be familiar with the client's products, services and other offerings.
5. Understand the client's target market.

[Learn more about Margaret](#) on LinkedIn.

## Dec. 13: PIC's Merry Mingle

Wednesday, Dec. 13, 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Duke of York Pub, 39 Prince Arthur Ave., Toronto

Break out your mittens and scarves and join PIC members and friends to celebrate the upcoming holidays.

Ho-ho-hold the date and enjoy a pint within the warm confines of our unofficial North Pole headquarters—the [Duke of York](#). The pub is located east of Bedford Road, north of Bloor Street, just steps from the St. George subway station.

As always, this PIC social is free to attend, but drinks and food are pay-your-own-way.



## Other upcoming events

(1)

**PWAC: Ho-Ho-Holiday party**

**Monday, Dec. 4, 6:30 p.m. onward**

**Pogue Mahone Pub and Kitchen, 777 Bay St., Toronto**

PWAC Toronto chapter members and friends are invited for nibbles and conversation at Pogue Mahone Pub and Kitchen (entrance is on College Street just west of Yonge Street). There is no fee to attend; pay for your own drinks and additional menu items. RSVP to [Carolyn Camilleri](#), VP.

(2)

**IABC/Toronto holiday party**  
**Tuesday, Dec. 5, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.**  
**BATCH Toronto, 75 Victoria St., Toronto**

Toast the year with friends and colleagues at a warm gathering place known for great food, cold beer and friendly people. IABC members pay \$45 plus HST. Registration fee includes admission, hors d'oeuvres throughout the evening and an alcoholic beverage.

[Learn more and register](#)

(3)

**PWAC: Advanced Interviewing Skills for Writers**  
**Monday, Jan. 29, 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.**  
**Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre, 750 Spadina Ave., Toronto**

Whether you're a journalist, a corporate writer or a ghostwriter, you need to know how to ask tough questions and get good answers—preferably without alienating your interview subject. At this panel presentation, you'll get practical tips from professionals who are experts at getting people to share information. PIC members are considered PWAC Partners and pay \$10 plus tax.

[Learn more and register](#)

*Note: If you hear of a communication-related course, workshop or other event we should share with PIC members, please let Sue Horner [embed sue@getitwrite.ca] know. Thanks!*

## PIC PERSONALITY: Meet Rod Cumming By Sue Horner



Rod (Roderick) Cumming is a communications strategist who helps private and public sector organizations create communications strategies, programs and special events. Find him on [LinkedIn](#) or [send an email](#).

### What's your background?

After university, I spent a few years in politics at Queen's Park before joining CIBC. I spent most of my career in corporate communications roles at CIBC, including a few years in the Caribbean, and in 2013, was seconded to the Pan Am/Parapan Am Games organizing committee. In addition to strategic communications planning, my role included coordinating with three levels of government on issues, operations, protocol and integration.

### When did you launch your independent business and how did it come about?

After the games and a brief return to CIBC, I joined a short-lived provincial government initiative: the Ontario retirement pension plan, designed to be a supplement to the Canada Pension Plan. A policy change resulted in shutting down the program, so once it wrapped up, I decided to explore independent consulting.

I started my business in September 2016, when I landed my first client—a contract with the Global Risk Institute, a Toronto-based think-tank on financial risk management.

### What type of work are you doing now?

I just finished an intense and gratifying contract with the Invictus Games. I had been volunteering in a protocol role with Invictus since June 2016, and this June took a contract to help with the final communications push. It was a great opportunity to combine communications, media relations, protocol and stakeholder engagement activities.

I'm now looking for other freelance project-based work involving strategic planning, stakeholder/government engagement, community outreach, media relations, issues management or change management. Having said that, I'm not completely against moving back to a full-time corporate or not-for-profit role.

### What do you enjoy most about being an independent?

I like the variety of work, the different lengths and scope of projects, and the networking.

### What *don't* you like about being an indie?

Like I've heard from many others, it's got to be the ups and downs of the business cycle and always looking for the next opportunity. When you're crazy busy, there's no time to think about the next opportunity.

### What advice would you give someone new to independent life?

You don't need to formalize everything at first. I jumped in too quickly to try and come up with a company name and register a business. If I were to do it again, I would set up as an individual freelancer—just go with my name, print a business card and not try to create a whole business entity.

### How long have you been a PIC member and what value do you get from your membership?

I was an IABC member when I was with CIBC, and rejoined in January 2017. I discovered PIC soon after, and so far have been to a few events. The sessions have been extremely helpful and the handbook and other PIC resources are priceless.

*We count more than 100 members in PIC, offering a range of talent from coaching and media relations to video production and writing. Do you know everyone? Our PIC Personalities feature introduces new members and randomly profiles existing members. Let [Sue Horner](#) know if you'd like to be profiled and she'll be in touch to set it up.*

## Is your profile on the PIC member list?

As a member of PIC, you can promote yourself at no charge on the PIC member list on the IABC/Toronto website. We keep a running list of changes (such as new contact information or links to your LinkedIn profile or website) and update it with IABC/Toronto every quarter.

Not on the list yet? Send [Melika Ramkissoon](#) your name, company name, location, email address, telephone number, website URL and a brief description of your business (up to 40 words). The next deadline to submit a profile or make changes to your existing profile is **Dec. 29**.

## What's new on PIC's LinkedIn group?

You'll find useful information about building and managing a small communications business when you visit PIC's LinkedIn group: [IABC/Toronto Professional Independent Communicators](#) (login required).

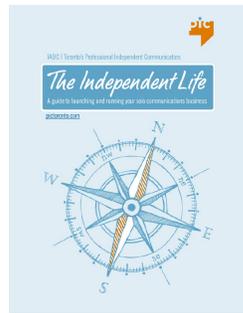
Recent posts have shared how to respond to requests to lower your fee, steps to be seen as an expert and more. You are welcome to post articles or ask questions that will help you and other members grow and manage your businesses.

## Join the PIC conversation on Facebook (chapter members only)

Build and strengthen your connections with other PIC members and advance your communications business by joining PIC's Facebook group. This is a great opportunity to network, discuss business issues and ideas and access exclusive professional development resources.

To access this IABC/Toronto chapter members-only perk, search for our private Facebook group by our name, [Professional Independent Communicators \(PIC\), part of IABC/Toronto](#).

## Get your copy of *The Independent Life*



PIC has a wonderful resource in our e-book, *The Independent Life*. It shares the wisdom of PIC members with online resources to guide you through the steps in starting your own business, setting up your office, managing your finances, setting fees, marketing and more.

Our thanks to graphic designer **Cathy Ledden, RGD**, for turning the content provided by many PIC members into a handy guide. [Grab your copy](#) as a PDF download or as an e-publication for Kobo or iReader.



PIC is a special interest group of [IABC/Toronto](#). PIC's mission is to support independent IABC/Toronto communicators through professional development, networking and marketing. *The Buzz* is PIC's e-newsletter, intended to inform independent communicators about our activities, share professional development tips from past meetings and keep us aware of what's going on. Connect with us on the web at [pictoronto.com](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

As the largest chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators, IABC/Toronto provides access to products, services, activities and networking opportunities in Toronto and around the world. IABC helps people and organizations achieve excellence in corporate communication, public relations, employee communication, marketing communication, public affairs and other forms of communication. For more information, visit the [IABC website](#).

[Sue Horner](#)

Editor and Director, Communications — PIC



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