

The Insider Scoop on the Path to Success in Strategic Communications from an Industry Professional

By Zoe Lumpkin

As many aspiring young professionals progress through their education and seek to build experiences for learning industry knowledge and buffing resumes, it becomes increasingly apparent how difficult it can be to navigate through the ocean of information available out there. Becca Kepto is a strategic communications professional and graduated with her B.S. in Public Relations from [Florida State University](#) in 2015. She is also [PRSA](#) Certified in the principles of public relations. Currently, Kepto recently celebrated her four-year anniversary as a marketing manager at The Edwards Group in St. Petersburg, Florida, and has insider knowledge on how to groom oneself into an industry professional during and after pursuing one's primary education.



Becca Kepto: Marketing Manager and Strategic Communications Professional

The following text is the transcript from an interview process with Kepto.

Lumpkin: Would you provide me with a link to your LinkedIn page? I would love to attach a headshot of yours to this interview and would be very appreciative if you'd allow me to use your photo on your profile.

Kepto: [View Becca Kepto's Page on LinkedIn](#)

Lumpkin: What is the title of your position at The Edwards Group and how long have you worked with them?

Kepto: Marketing Manager - today is actually my 4 year anniversary!

Lumpkin: Are you a member of any organizations? Do you have any notable awards or achievements that you're proud of and would like mention?

Kepto: Organizations I'm part of: [Pinellas County Young Republicans](#), Downtown Neighborhood Association

Achievements: My senior year of college, I took a thorough test to be credited with a [Certificate in the Principles of Public Relations](#) from the PRSA.

Lumpkin: When entering your current position in the industry, what skills or previous experiences did you feel were the most beneficial in helping you feel qualified and confident for your current position?

Kepto: Writing press releases, being able to work WELL under pressure/time constraint, working well with a team, knowledge of social media/digital media trends. I could not recommend internships with real life experience more! My internships taught me so many different sides of PR. In class, you can learn how to write a good press release or make a good social media post but when you have a quick deadline and have to think quick, this truly pushes you to grow. I also only thought PR was press releases and media until I got internship experience and realized it can be anything from press conferences, social media, media relations, community relations to event planning, etc.

Lumpkin: What is the best advice you would give to an aspiring strategic communication professional?

Kepto: Don't limit your learning to the classroom. The industry and industry trends are ALWAYS changing. Get real life experience through internships and during those internships, be ready to soak everything up like a sponge. Also, don't be afraid to speak up as an intern. If you have a fresh idea, speak up. Yes, your ideas may get rejected but that's part of learning and growing. Working in the industry requires you to have a backbone. Don't let rejection or failure get to you. Keep pushing and learning and growing. In addition to internships, pay attention to the news and what's happening in the world. Research communication/PR campaigns on your own time and learn from other companies' successes. I was never taught digital media analytics at FSU, so I had to self-teach myself via online videos as analytics became a huge part of my job.

Finding a mentor in the industry and networking as much as you can is incredibly helpful. My former boss has turned into my mentor and she helps whenever I need project advice or her input on my resume, etc. In this industry, it really often comes down to who you know. That's the hard reality many people miss. But use that reality to push yourself to attend networking meetings, join young professionals, go to community events, introduce yourself to everyone!

Lumpkin: Describe a recent successful strategic communication campaign conducted by your organization and why do you feel it was successful?

Kepto attached the campaign summary that was given to the owner of The Edwards Group

Kepto: We ran a campaign for the Mall at Sundial St. Pete from June-August of this year called "Ray of Sunshine". The purpose of the campaign was to help people realize that life is so much more than the hard days. We wanted them to "find the sunshine" at Sundial and encouraged them to "be the sunshine" in their community. We activated the campaign through billboards, organic social media posts and paid Facebook/Google ads. We also handed out thousands of compliment cards across the city with a compliment on one side and Sundial social info on the other. The last component was influencer support. We partnered with 25 local influencers who totaled more than 1 million followers. We mailed them each a "Box of Sunshine" and had them post and tag Sundial. Overall, the campaign boosted our social media engagement rates, increased our website visits and garnered positive attention across all of Tampa Bay.



Lumpkin: In your current position, to what degree do you feel networking benefits the projects you tackle at your company? Is it something that actively and frequently helps you and your company progress through projects, or is networking more of a background task that is unrelated to your current work and would mainly be used if you were seeking alternate opportunities/positions at other companies?

Kepto: Almost every project I work on requires collaboration with another organization, another team or another venue in St. Pete. Having contacts and knowing who to get in touch with is a game changer. It takes time to grow your network, but it's worth it. Just to use an example.... I am currently planning a City wide Tree Lighting event at our shopping center. Sounds easy enough, right? Well just a few things I had to do were contact the City of St. Pete for a permit to close the street, contact the Fire Department for Santa to ride in on a truck, book a local celebrity DJ, book a photographer, send out a press release. When I first started my job here, I had no idea where to begin because I didn't know anyone. Now, these tasks were all completed in one afternoon because I have relationships with people

and can send a quick text to coordinate something rather than spending all day figuring out the right person to get in touch with. So yes, networking makes a huge impact on my everyday work.

Lumpkin: What people/organizations do you follow to stay up to date on industry trends and why?

Kepto: Local: I follow the Hype Group, Wax & Hive and RoundHouse Creative. All of these companies set new trends, create amazing content and work on some awesome brands

Other: AdWeek, AdAge, [Business Insider](#), PR News, PurplePR, Exposure London - These are good to follow to stay in the loop of advertising/PR news. The last two are amazing to follow for creativity and trend setting. I also recommend following regular news outlets, both local and national.

There are countless opportunities out there for driven students seeking to work with strategic communications. Insight from Becca Kepto shows that it's just a matter of putting one's all into experiences and building connections to begin flourishing in the industry. By doing what it takes to secure internships and make the most of them, and a little guidance along the way from a trusted mentor, the key to securing success in the industry can be acquired in no time.