Many Public relations practitioners around the world have been thrilled by the way the internet has changed the way organisations communicate and market their products or services. Access to information, the way we shop, the way we research and make decisions have all created increased demand for more content and better communication. This means we need to understand how the 4Cs have changed the rules:

**Content**

To be authentic and valuable to the consumer. Today, simple advertising is not going to work and self-promotion will not cut through. People are weary of marketing messages that just sell, sell, sell. Most of us now just block it out as we search for something more real - and that is we search for content.

**Context**

The problem for most people is how to make sense of all this information. What they really look for is how to filter, or aggregate, or just make sense of it - and that means they go to what has the right context.

Public relations professionals have long known that information really has impact when it is placed in the context of someone’s life. Often the best context is found in genuine information or in the offering of advice. This is why really good bloggers are successful - they reach you in the right context, and by delivering regular information keep you interested. Facebook and twitter work on a similar principle.

**Connection**

Human beings long for connection - which is why the more connected we become to technology the more we long for connection that involves human interaction. Current advances in technology are being matched with a corresponding human touch. This is the interaction of machine and humans. The most successful businesses balance high tech connections with high touch connections by allowing one to inform the other. They use technology to allow people to connect when and where they choose. This goes further - they allow people to connect more deeply when and where they choose.

**Community**

Public relations practitioners have known that we have always had community-our schools, our churches, institutions, and our business organizations-mostly in the past a form of community based on geography. People yearn for community, for a sense of belonging. The new internet ”communities” have no geographic boundaries - they can freely form around things like shared ideas, common interests or likes, common dislikes and the search for relationship at many levels. Distance is now irrelevant. The result is that marketers know that prospects, customers, partners, suppliers, mentors and even competitors form communities - so long as you provide content on behalf of the organization, context in terms of the community and connection as and when people so choose. We have told people to get out and network at events such as a Chamber of Commerce after hours networking event - which is still today a place to build community - but now much of this networking is online such as the conversation in a blog, on twitter, in a hosted community or other online source.

**Conclusion**

This new world belongs to communicators, networkers, thinkers, dreamers, people who are prepared to be different but have the ability to make connection and build community. Public relations professionals around the world will find the ”flat world” message very encouraging. This message is telling corporations that in a flat world, the biggest differentiator is your people. How do people effectively differentiate? We differentiate ourselves by becoming better communicators. PR campaign skills can come to the forefront as organisations seek to thrive in this new world. (This is an edited version of Mark Sheehan’s presentation at the 34th All India Public Relations Conference in Shimla held on September 29 - October 1, 2012) - Editor