

Reflections from Atlanta: Attendee Impressions of the 2015 PRSA International Conference



Interviewed and compiled by [Shonali Burke, ABC](#), a Social PR strategist based in Washington, D.C. Check out Shonali's newest offering, [The Social PR Virtuoso](#), that helps smart [public relations](#) pros up their game by getting their Social PR swagger on.

The PRSA International Conference is always one of the most vibrant conferences in the public relations world, and the 2015 conference in Atlanta was no exception. From dynamic keynotes to packed breakout sessions, PR pros of all stripes reconnected with friends, made new ones, and left inspired with new ideas and strategies for their clients and organizations.

I asked a few pros their impressions of the conference:

Seattle-based Angee Linsey ([@linseycareers](#)) owns an executive search firm that specializes in marketing and communications searches:

“The thing I love about coming to conferences like this is that I get to interact with people from all over the country and all around the world. I always take away great morsels of information that I can use not only in my own business but that I can share with my colleagues. [One of the keynote

speakers] who was a futurist said, 'When you do a SWOT analysis it's a little naïve because the marketplace determines your strengths, not you.' I thought that was really profound. We all think we know what our strengths are, but our strengths are only our strengths if *other* people think they are strengths. I use that with my own business and clients."



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 Kathy Barbour, APR @kathybarbour · Nov 10
Happy birthday US Marine Corps! We honored you and all those who've served in the US armed forces at #PRSAICON

ector of public relations for the Daughters of the American Revolution in Washington, D.C.:

"This is my ninth PRSA conference, and hopefully there will be many more, because I love it. Whenever you go to these things, there's always one session that's a dud or you don't get as much out of. But literally every single one I've been to [this year] has been great ... and the downtime, getting to

see friends and meet new people is always a great experience. Arby's did a really great presentation talking about their experience with jumping on after Pharrell at the Grammy's wearing his hat. They sent out a tweet saying, 'Hey we need our hat back,' which got them such great publicity. The idea being: when something comes out of the blue, you don't know what's going to happen but you should be prepared with what you're going to say and when to 'drop the mic.' [It also made me think] of crisis communications – if you take a bold step, you better have a plan in case people don't like it."

Heidi Sullivan ([@hksully](#)) is the SVP & Product Lead, Content & E-commerce, Interim Managing Director, Canada, at Cision:

"The exciting thing at this conference was the focus on converged media and really seeing how people are utilizing digital and social tools to power their PR. In my session with Heather Whaling ([@prtini](#)), I asked the audience how many of them actually use native advertising for their content. About 3/4 of the room raised their hands, which is radically different from what we would've seen a year before. It's exciting to see the PR industry really morph into something new during this digital and social revolution."

Kirk Hazlett, APR, Fellow PRSA ([@kirkhazlett](#)) is an Assoc. Professor, Communication/Public Relations, Curry College, and a member of the PRSA Board of Ethics & Professional Standards:

"This has been one of the most amazing conferences I've been to. My problem has been finding or deciding which one of the

programs I want to go to because I'm interested in everything as a professor, what's happening in social media, where we are going in public relations, what are the hot buttons. Our profession changes daily. What was current yesterday, what was THE thing you needed to do, tomorrow morning it's going to be different. I go back to my earlier roots. One of the people I met when I moved to Boston back in the dark ages was Edward Bernays. Eddie, at 95 years of age, was still coming to PRSA Boston events to learn things, not to be a *presenter* – but to learn things! That's where I am today. I can't teach what was done yesterday. I can't teach what's in the text books. I have to teach what's coming tomorrow and the way I learn it is right here at PRSA."

Michael Ratty ([@heyratty](#)) is director of communications at MCPHS University in Boston:

"This year has been fantastic. First off I've actually never been to Atlanta before, so I've really enjoyed experiencing it – the CNN tour, World of Coca Cola, Centennial Park – we've been making the rounds. The actual conference has been fantastic. Every year there's something new because technology and apps and the media are changing so much; every year there's something new to learn about. Probably the best session I've been to so far has been the one about how Arby's uses social media to shape its brand. From a personal perspective, I'm an office of one. So unlike people at larger organizations or companies, I don't really have someone I can walk down the hall and say, 'Hey, So-and-So, how should we do this?' or, 'How would you handle that?' So these conferences are really my chance to talk to people and share best practices and talk about everything. I'm also in the Counselors to Higher Education Section, so I also go to their senior summit in Washington, D.C. every April. These are the two big conferences I go to every year."

“My friend Bren [Landon], we’re PRSA friends, we actually met at the 2006 conference in Salt Lake City. We’re the same age, we have very similar jobs, we’ve both been at our jobs for over a decade... we both signed up for the 2005 conference in South Beach that got canceled because of the hurricanes, so I like to think if it hadn’t got canceled we would’ve met then. But we met in Salt Lake City and we’re still friends. We have a little group of 5 or 6 people who see each other once a year at this conference, but [outside of that] we’re friends; we text each other and visit each other if we’re in the same city. *I love International.*”