

The Evolution of Communications

An Interview with
Howard J. Rubenstein, President, Rubenstein Associates, Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE Howard Rubenstein founded Rubenstein Associates, Inc. in 1954. He serves on the board of The Association for a Better New York (ABNY), which he helped to found, and is a trustee of the Police Athletic League, the Foundation for the National Archives, and the Inner-City Scholarship Fund of the Archdiocese of New York. In addition, he is a co-founder and Vice Chairman of the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. Rubenstein holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Pennsylvania and a doctorate of law from St. John's University School of Law. Early in his career, he served as Assistant Counsel to the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee.



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COMPANY BRIEF New York-based Rubenstein Associates, Inc. along with Rubenstein Communications, Inc., and Rubenstein Public Relations, Inc., (rubenstein.com) represent a roster of approximately 400 clients, including global corporations, media and entertainment companies, sports teams, financial services organizations, real estate concerns, educational and cultural institutions, law firms, healthcare providers, and not-for-profit organizations, as well as business executives and other public figures. Current clients include the New York Yankees, the Metropolitan Opera, New York-Presbyterian Hospital, and Tishman Speyer.

Rubenstein Associates works with many leading companies and is known for its long-term client relationships and strategic, results-oriented work. What makes the firm so special and such an industry leader?

Our independence, our high degree of ethics, and our attention to detail are critical factors in our reputation. Everyone in a professional service business will talk about deep concern for the needs and goals of the clients, and we are no exception. But we also strive for consistency in dealing with clients – no surprises.

How has the public relations and communications industry evolved over the years and how has technology impacted the business?

When I first started, PR was not an industry, much less an honorable profession. It was seen as parasitic – not additive. That has completely changed and technology has actually accelerated the importance of communications strategy in every business and organization. That's because news and information travels faster and farther than ever. When I started, what you said and did in Brooklyn stayed in Brooklyn. Today, there are no borders for words and images. Tech has enabled mass communication of ideas, plusses, and mistakes as well.

How have client expectations changed and what is expected today from a public relations and communications partner?

Clients today are far more sophisticated, and their expectations go well beyond publicity. The measure of our success is in providing strategic advice, predicting how their actions will reflect on how they are perceived, and helping them set a long-term path for their reputation. The scope is far broader and more demanding, but the work is also more interesting.

Your clients are diverse. How have you built the varied expertise needed to efficiently deal with this?

We are constantly looking for people with diverse backgrounds who can cover the sectors we serve – from real estate and financial to entertainment and civic engagement. But we also place a high value on people who are nimble, who have varied experiences and can do a lot of different things. It's not just about expertise; it's about seeing the interconnectedness of different sectors.

How critical is corporate responsibility and community engagement to the culture of Rubenstein, and would you highlight your focus and commitment to pro bono work?

If you lose sight of your community or if the work revolves solely around professional gain, there is hollowness to success. This is true for individuals and organizations. We see corporate responsibility and community engagement as essential to everything we do. Many of our pro bono clients have been with us for decades.

You are headquartered in New York and been a leader in this business community for many years. What makes New York so special and keeps it the leading global city?

New York is special because it remains the proving ground for business, culture, art, ideas, and, perhaps most importantly, media. People from all over the world still come here to make their mark, to absorb the city's endless brainpower, and to play on the world's biggest stage. We have an economic and civic ferment here that is truly unique.

You are very active in the Partnership for New York City, which includes many of the leading executives and companies in New York in its membership. What makes the Partnership so effective in engaging the business community in its efforts to advance the economy of New York City?

Members of the Partnership are crucial to virtually every area of New York business and civic life, and even though the member companies are sometimes competitors, they are united around common goals – not only to advance their own cause, but to advance the cause of New York locally, nationally, and internationally. It's really an unprecedented unification of strengths.

You are also very involved with REBNY and work with many of the leading real estate executives and firms in New York. Is the impact that real estate has on the strength and success of New York and all of the good that the industry does in supporting the city through taxes paid, jobs created, and philanthropy well understood?

Without a doubt, the full impact of real estate as an engine of economic, cultural, and civic strength is under-appreciated. It's largely because the benefits the industry brings about are so spread out – enormous, but diffused.

You have achieved so much during your career and have built a market-leading company. Do you allow the time to reflect and appreciate what you have accomplished?

I don't spend any time thinking about that. If I became self-centered, I would be off center. No one likes an egomaniac, except the egomaniac.

You are still actively working with clients. Do you ever think about slowing down?

Not even for a moment. Why would I think about slowing down on something that brings me great joy and satisfaction? ●