

PR NEWS' 2003 15-to-Watch: An Eclectic Mix, Blazing New Trails

This year's 15-to-Watch list features an eclectic mix of young PR pros working in every facet of communications and public relations. Rest assured, it wasn't easy to whittle down dozens of respectable nominees to just 15 PR pros, aged 35 and under. But we have a solid list of winners, recognized for innovative and outstanding achievements throughout the world of PR.

Our winners run the PR gamut, hailing from corporations, agencies and nonprofit groups. Whether they're steeped in community relations, planning glittery events for major consumer magazines or handling communications in which lives are truly at stake, they're making PR strides that we think ought to be noted. We extend our thanks to all supervisors, colleagues and clients who took the time to write in all the nominations.

Although our winners work in widely disparate areas of communications, they all share a few things in common: drive, an ability to think out of the box when necessary and a sixth sense for serving their client, members of the press and any other parties with a vested interest in the story.

Some of our winners have launched their own PR agencies while others have in short periods achieved a "seat at the table" in the legal, charitable, gaming and housing arenas. They're also winners who are blazing new trails on the agency side of the business, particularly in the high-tech sector. All told, it's a pretty impressive roster.

Michael Cianfrocca, 24

Account Executive, The Castle Group, Inc.
Boston, MA
mcianfrocca@thecastlegrp.com

Mike Cianfrocca has been breaking new ground at The Castle Group. He signed on as an intern, and in 2000 he became Castle's first PR hire directly from the intern program. Since then, he's been promoted twice.

The Castle Group, a small agency, is betting heavy on Cianfrocca, and so far those bets have paid off. In one of his most successful efforts, he engineered the entire media relations campaign for StudentUniverse.com. By positioning the client's executives as experts in the little-known field of student airfares, Cianfrocca drew some 35 million print impressions in a little more than a year for this previously unknown company.

Cianfrocca is guided by his mentor, Castle VP Mark O'Toole. "He is always a tough critic, but he is also there with reassurance and advice," says Cianfrocca. "When I started here, client contact was something that was brand new to me, and he has really helped me to understand how to work with clients, how to respond to their issues, how to think the way they think."

As an entrenched member of the Internet generation, Cianfrocca sees a new world of media opening up for forward-thinking PR practitioners. "I definitely see a trend towards more use of online sources, and I don't mean just news sites," he says. "I am thinking in terms of chat rooms, news groups. Those are becoming an increasingly important outlet for PR people, as more and more people turn to those sources for information."