

# Emily G. Abbas, APR

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## **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

### **Strategic America (SA)**

*Executive Director of Public Relations / PR Department Head – August 2013 to present*

- Advance the SA mission by leading PR efforts and working collaboratively to provide communications counsel and service to SA clients and the agency. Currently leading a team specializing in media relations and training, strategic planning, research, corporate social responsibility, crisis and issues management, employee engagement, community relations and philanthropy. Grew PR team to seven members, with 100 percent team member retention.
- Serve as account and PR lead for the Governor's STEM Advisory Council's public awareness campaign, garnering \$750,000+ in media value and 95 percent message penetration in three months, while also increasing overall STEM awareness from 26 to 41 percent. Client described effort as "outperforming the Council's urgent expectations by delivering ahead of our own breakneck pace – and the product is top-quality."
- Other clients include Broadlawns Medical Center and the Broadlawns Foundation Advocate Circle, Iowa Network Services (INS), Pella Windows, Iowa Select Farms, Kum & Go, Brownells, Wendy's, Stoney Creek Hospitality, Des Moines Home + Garden Show, Iowa Sleep and more. Have grown PR business and maintained 100 percent voluntary client retention.

### **Drake University and Simpson College**

*Adjunct Professor of Public Relations Writing at Simpson College – October 2013 to present*

*Adjunct Professor of Master's Level Workshop on Internal Communications at Drake – September 2013*

*Professional Advisor/Co-Instructor for Drake's PR Senior Capstone Course – 2012 to 2013 school year*

- For Simpson class, received the highest possible student ratings in the following categories: Instructor had a genuine interest in students; course helped me grasp the connection between the subject and other areas of study; course clearly met its stated purposes and objectives; overall, course was a worthwhile learning experience, instructor was effective in helping me learn, and more. Have been asked to teach the same class in fall 2014.
- At Drake, graduate student feedback included, "Emily understands her students and makes great use of classroom time. In the short time together, she provided lots of ideas and techniques to be used in the workplace. She did a great job with the subject matter, delivery of the material and encouraging discussions. The only thing that could have possibly made the class better would be having more time together. Emily has so much to share that a day and a half was not enough time."

### **Aviva USA (with company 4 years)**

*Director of Customer Value Management – June 2012 to August 2013 (promotion)*

*Director of Mktg. / CMO Business Mgr. – Sept. 2011 to May 2012 (leadership development position)*

*Director of Internal Communications – July 2009 to August 2011*

- Led U.S. effort to carry out the company's vision to become the Most Recommended Insurance Company. Defined the initiative, organized the approach and gained business buy-in to align the organization behind this effort. The project was consistently singled out as leading the way for Aviva globally, with employee awareness increasing five-fold and Aviva product employee sales doubling.
- Embedded the company's business strategy to help employees understand the connection between their daily jobs and the successful achievement of Aviva USA's goals. Survey results showed a 21-point increase in two years (seven points above the North American norm score) related to employees seeing a clear link between their work and company objectives.
- Helped jump-start Aviva USA's Diversity & Inclusion program, earning a global Diversity Award.

- Developed a comprehensive communications plan to support Aviva USA's move of 1,400 employees to the new U.S. Operations Headquarters without interruption to customers. This presented an opportunity for the re-birth of the company's culture – centered around customers – with a heightened focus on collaboration, engagement and teamwork. During the process, 98 percent said they were prepared to move.
- Used event planning and communication skills to play an integral part in the Grand Opening Ceremony for Aviva USA's new LEED-gold certified headquarters – attended by the Governor, Mayor, Aviva's global CEO and CFO from London, community leaders, agents and employees. Held an employee open house for family members that was rated 9.4 out of 10.
- Helped build company brand equity in Central Iowa by finding ways to get Aviva employees more involved in the Des Moines community. Coordinated an on-site Jazz in July concert, employee Earth Day and Trash Bash activities, annual United Way campaigns and Coats & Boots program.
- Served as a member of the Marketing Leadership Team to help align, develop and execute regional marketing and communication efforts across North America that supported the global business strategies. Created marketing plans and developed effective reporting systems.
- Provided executive communication consulting to the Aviva USA CEO and other senior leaders on various issues, including office and department consolidations, management personnel changes, analyst rating downgrades and more.
- Served on a cross-functional team that took employees on a "Customer Immersion Excursion" to increase customer empathy through understanding. This effort contributed to a 19-point increase in Aviva USA's consumer Net Promoter Score (NPS) – the largest across all Aviva countries in 2011.
- Planned and coordinated all aspects of Aviva's 2012 Key Distribution Partner kickoff meeting in Scottsdale. Provided ways for 200 attendees to share 2012 key business priorities with their agents after the meeting via a Website, videos and other event materials.
- Worked to retain high-value customers, while migrating others to profitability by executing intelligent preventative, proactive and reactive retention campaigns using front-line call center efforts, direct mail and focused field support. This required collaborating cross-functionally with leaders from across the organization. Effort saved the company more than \$62 million in 12 months.

**GuideOne Insurance** (with company 10 years)

*Corporate Communications Manager II – 2005 to 2009 (promotion)*

*Corporate Communications Manager – 2002 to 2005 (promotion)*

*Senior Communications Specialist – 2000 to 2002 (promotion)*

*Communications Specialist – 1999 to 2000*

- Provided integrated, comprehensive communication support and strategic leadership to the communication and marketing team, as well as ongoing public relations guidance to GuideOne's commercial and personal lines business units, company executives and the organization's sales force for issues such as product launches, portal enhancements, emerging trends, customer data security, the sale of GuideOne's life company and other crisis situations.
- Implemented targeted media relations and national brand advertising programs for local, national and trade publications to leverage subject matter expertise and position the company as a thought leader. Launched media relations campaigns to generate coverage of the company's FaithGuard auto and home insurance products for churchgoers – generating placements on Fox News Live, Paul Harvey, Glenn Beck, *Kansas City Times*, *National Underwriter*, *Best's Review* and more. Served as the company's primary media contact and created/maintained its online newsroom. Jumpstarted GuideOne's social media efforts.
- Helped differentiate GuideOne by leveraging the company's world-class risk management resources. This included launching the comprehensive SafeChurch Web site and online training programs, creating Church Safety and Security Month and America's Safest Churches awards, publishing *The Missing Ministry* book, and educating audiences about risk management issues.

- Oversaw GuideOne Foundation grants and coordinated company involvement in community events and sponsorships attracting approximately two million visitors each year, including GuideOne ImagineEve, the Des Moines Arts Festival, Iowa Prayer Breakfast, Iowa State Fair, national Mother's Against Drunk Driving (MADD) programs, KidsFest, United Way campaigns, drinking and driving PSAs, the company's business-school partnership and quarterly employee volunteer activities.
- Implemented an award-winning employee and field agent communications program that encompassed writing and editing, Web site content, utilizing new technologies, producing publications and videos, planning all-employee meetings and managing feedback mechanisms such as surveys and focus groups. Nearly 98 percent of employees reported being satisfied with the company's internal communications.
- Helped launch a new corporate mission, vision and tagline to employees at an offsite kickoff event. Following the rollout, 96 percent of employees reported they understood GuideOne's strategic plan.
- Supported the Human Resources Team with communication planning and messaging in order to enhance GuideOne's corporate culture. This helped lower the company's voluntary employee turnover rate from 14.8 percent in 2003 to 4.8 percent in 2009.

**Iowa State Fair Blue Ribbon Foundation** (with company 2 years)

*Assistant Director – 1998 to 1999 (promotion)*

*Communications Manager – 1997 to 1998*

- Oversaw the creation, implementation and evaluation of Foundation giving programs that generated \$17 million for Fairground renovation projects in two years.
- Designed and produced newsletters, media kits, brochures, direct mail pieces, grant proposals and Web sites in order to increase brand visibility and tell the Foundation's story to stakeholders. Served as the primary media contact.
- Engaged a group of 500+ volunteers, hired/mentored Foundation staff members and interns.
- Planned and coordinated the first three Corn Dog Kickoff Benefit Auctions, Iowan of the Day recognition program, fairground ribbon-cutting ceremonies and Foundation annual golf outing.

**EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

- **Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa**
  - B.A. in Journalism and Mass Communication; 3.8 overall GPA, 4.0 in major sequence (1997)  
Public Relations major, Business Management and Marketing concentrations
  - Master's Degree in Communication Leadership; 4.0 GPA (2009)  
(Half MBA classes and half classes focused on improving leadership/communication skills)
- **Accreditation in Public Relations (APR)** by the Public Relations Society of America (2002)
- **Greater Des Moines Leadership Institute** Community Leadership Class (2003 to 2004)
- **Aviva North America Leadership Foundations** – 2% of employees selected to participate (2011)

**HONORS AND AWARDS**

- Named one of *The Des Moines Register's* "14 People to Watch in 2014" (2014)
- Recipient of Drake University's national "Young Alumni Loyalty Award" (2013)
- National PRSA Silver Anvil Winner for the planning/execution of employee communications supporting Aviva's U.S. headquarters move (2011) – the highest honor in PR
- Member of first and only U.S. employee team selected to the "Top 10/Grand Finals" of Aviva's global "Customer Cup" Competition in Gstaad, Switzerland (2011)
- National PRSA Bronze Anvil Winner – "Best Internal Magazine" (2003) and Runner-up (2006)
- Voted "PR Professional of the Year" (2011), "Outstanding Chapter Member" (2005) and "Outstanding New Member" (2001) by peers/members of the Central Iowa PRSA Chapter
- Recipient of nearly 50 local Public Relations Mark of Excellence (PRIME) Awards – Including "Best of Show" twice and "Best Newsletter" for 10 consecutive years (1999 to 2008)
- "Forty-Under-40" leadership recognition from the *Des Moines Business Record* (2005)
- Recipient of Marjorie Conrad Cotton Award honoring outstanding service to Delta Gamma (2004)

## **PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

- **Drake University National Alumni Board, 2010 to present**  
Board President (2014 to present; 2-year term as President followed by 2-year term as Chair and on the Board of Trustees); Vice President of Student/Alumni Relations and advisor for the Student Alumni Association (2012 to 2014); founder of downtown networking event (2011); coordinated regional focus groups with young alumni (2012)
- **Des Moines Community Playhouse Board of Directors, 2011 to present**  
Board President (2013 to present); Executive Committee (2012 to present); Marketing Committee Chair (2013); Hollywood Halloween event Chair (2011 & 2012); Capital Campaign Major Gifts Committee Co-Chair (2012 to present); Sip, Savor, Switch (2013 to present, Co-Chair in 2013)
- **Des Moines Symphony “Pops” 4<sup>th</sup> of July Viewing Party, 2011 to present**  
Event Co-Chair (2012 & 2013); Planning Committee member (2011 to present)
- **Central Iowa Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), 1997 to present**  
Counselors Academy Member (2013 to present); Various chapter leadership roles including President, Drake PRSSA Liaison, Institute Chair, Scholarship Chair, Membership Chair, Accreditation Coach, student mentor, luncheon and institute speaker
- **Greater Des Moines Partnership, 2003 to present**  
Communications Advisory Council member (2005 to 2012, 2014 to present, Chairwoman in 2008); Board of Directors member (2008 to 2009); Greater Des Moines Leadership Institute Class Member (2003 to 2004); Advised students at Drake University in their efforts to create a civility initiative as part of the Capital Crossroads Vision Plan for Central Iowa (2012 to 2013 school year)
- **United Way of Central Iowa, 2000 to present**  
Women’s Leadership Connection donor and member (2011 to present); Live United Awards judge (2014); Marketing Cabinet Messaging Committee (2013 to present); Media/Communications companies pre-campaign calls (2013 to present); ELI member (2009 to 2010); Helped create first social media plan as a part of Master’s program (2008)
- **Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, 2012**  
25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Planning Committee member
- **ChildServe, 2012 & 2013**  
Bubble Ball fundraising event Decor Committee member
- **Delta Gamma House Corporation, Alumni Association, Advisory Team, 1997 to present**  
Recruitment Advisor (2006 to present); House Corporation President and VP (2000 & 1999)
- **Hanawalt Elementary School, 2006 to present**  
Fundraising auction committee member (2011 to 2013); school volunteer (2006 to present)
- **Iowa Prayer Breakfast (formerly the Governor’s Prayer Breakfast), 2000 to 2008**  
Invitation Chair and planning committee member
- **Waterbury Neighborhood Association, 2003 to present**  
Board Member (2005 to 2006); Newsletter Editor (2005 to 2006); member (2003 to present)
- **100 Chicks for Charity member, 2011 to 2013**