

Tim Burt: Illuminating the ‘Dark Arts’ of PR

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Eryk Salvaggio, Polis reporter introduces, Tim Burt, the second speaker in Polis' Media Agenda Talks lecture series and his book 'Dark Art – the Changing Face of Public Relations.'

In the introduction of his book, *Dark Art: The Changing Face of Public Relations*, Tim Burt describes the phone call that lured him away from his desk at the Financial Times and into the multi-million dollar world of public relations. It was 2004, and traditional publishing was facing an identity crisis, business models were tumbling, and journalists were united in their anxiety about an unfortunate new beat: the decline of their industry.

When Burt took that job at Brunswick, one of the most prestigious financial PR firms in the world, it came with a warning: “You have to be sure you have finished with journalism; we occupy a different world.” But as Burt writes, journalism was not quite finished with him.

Now a joint managing partner at StockWell Group, *Dark Art* chronicles Burt’s path through the often secretive and almost invisible world of the PR industry, painting what The Guardian [calls](#) “A stark picture of life behind the boardroom panelling.”



Burt entered into PR just ahead of a series of disasters that challenged the industry’s clout – from the major players of the financial crisis, such as Goldman Sachs, to British Petroleum’s Deepwater Horizon spill in 2010. Burt depicts a desperate and increasingly agenda-driven media industry seeking accountability with an intensity that was linked to their own survival, creating quality journalism, perhaps, but a series of gaffes and headaches within the PR industry. The rise of social media created a host of new difficulties, as off-hand and cringey comments by top executives rippled through Tweets and blogs, defining the agenda before executives were even aware of a problem.

The book, and Burt’s Polis talk, promise tales of corporate intrigue and the constant search for a perfect reputation amongst titans of industry. While the world of PR is secretive by nature and discreet by necessity, we’re given a glimpse behind the thinking of corporations in times of crisis, the challenges it faces, and the ways it might evolve as it confronts them.

In his own words:

“Dark Art looks at an industry struggling to adjust. It explores what has gone wrong, and what might emerge in the next generation of strategic communications ... it examines some of the issues and the case histories of a business that rarely admits to health problems, and which does not like to self-diagnose.”

Join us for what promises to be an engaging look behind the PR curtain on Tuesday, 15 October in the New Theatre (E171), Houghton Street, LSE opposite the main LSE entrance in the Old Building. Bring your questions and your smart phones, as we’ll also be sharing highlights as they happen on Twitter at [#polisStockwell](#).

Find more details about past and future Polis talks [here](#).

[Read a report](#) of our first Media Agenda Talk, by Tom Standage, author of *Writing on the Wall*.

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