

Public Relations

Public relations is an important mass-promotion technique. This concerns building good relations with the company's various publics by obtaining favourable publicity, building up a good 'corporate image' and handling or heading off unfavourable rumours, stories and events. The old name for marketing public relations was publicity, which was seen simply as activities to promote a company or its products by planting news about it in media not paid for by the sponsor. Public relations (PR) is a much broader concept that includes publicity as well as many other activities.

Definitions

- 1.Public relations is the total process of building goodwill toward an organization or individual.
- 2.Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics (Public Society of America).
- 3.The three main elements of public relations are particularly as old as society: informing people, persuading people, and integrating people with people.
- 4.The planned and sustained efforts to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics.
- 5.Public relations is also considered as an art and science of managing communication between an organization and its key constituents to build, manage, and sustain its positive image.

Functions of Public Relations

Public relations is used to promote products, people, places, ideas, activities, organizations and even nations. Trade associations have used public relations to rebuild interest in declining commodities such as eggs, apples, milk and potatoes. Even nations have used public relations to attract more tourists, foreign investment and international support. Companies can use PR to manage their way out of crisis, as in the case of Johnson & Johnson's masterly use of public relations to save Tylenol from extinction after its product-tampering scare.

Public relations can have a strong impact on public awareness at a much Lower cost than advertising. The company does not pay for the space or time in the media. Rather, it pays

for a staff to develop and circulate information and to manage events. If the company develops an interesting story, it could be picked up by several different media, having the same effect as advertising that would cost a lot more money. And it would have more credibility than advertising.

Despite its potential strengths, public relations, like sales promotions, is often described as a marketing stepchild because of its limited and scattered use. The public relations department is usually located at corporate headquarters. Its staff is so busy dealing with various publics - stockholders, employees, legislators, city officials - that public relations programmes to support product marketing objectives may be ignored. Moreover, marketing managers and public relations practitioners do not always talk the same language. Many public relations practitioners see their job as simply communicating. In contrast, marketing managers tend to be much more interested in how advertising and public relations affect sales and profits.

This situation is changing, however. Many companies now want their public relations departments to manage all their activities with a view to marketing the company and improving the bottom line. Some companies are setting up special units to support corporate and product promotion and image making directly.

Many companies hire marketing public relations firms to handle their PR programmes or to assist the company public relations team. Major corporations and multinational **firms** are also placing greater emphasis on analyzing and measuring the effectiveness of their PR activities to provide a basis for forward planning of communication strategies.

Public relations departments may perform any or all of the following functions:

- 1. Press relations or press agency.** Creating and placing newsworthy information in the news media to attract attention to a person, product or service.
- 2. Product publicity.** Publicizing specific products.
- 3. Public affairs.** Building and maintaining local, national and international relations.
- 4. Lobbying.** Building and maintaining relations with legislators and government officials to influence legislation and regulation.
- 5. Investor relations.** Maintaining relationships with .shareholders and others in the financial community.

6. Development. Public relations with donors or members of non-profit organizations to gain financial or volunteer support.

Main Public Relations Decisions

In considering when and how to use product public relations, management should set PR objectives; choose the PR messages and vehicles; implement the PR plan; and evaluate the results.

- ***Setting Public Relations Objectives***

The first task is to set *objectives* for public relations. These are usually defined in relation to the types of news story to be communicated, the communication objectives to be achieved (for instance, awareness creation, knowledge dissemination, generation of specific publicity for target groups) and the specific target audiences.

- ***Choosing Public Relations Messages and Vehicles***

The organization next selects its major public relations message themes and the PR tools it will use. Message themes should be guided by the organization's overall marketing and communication strategies. PR is an important part of the organization's Overall integrated marketing communications programme, so the public relations messages should be carefully integrated with the organization's advertising, personal selling, direct marketing and other communications.

In some cases the choice of PR messages and tools will be clear-cut. In others, the organization will have to create the news rather than find it. The company could sponsor newsworthy events. Ideas might include hosting major conventions, inviting well-known celebrities and holding press conferences. Creating events is especially important in publicizing fund-raising drives for non-profit organizations. Fund-raisers have developed a large set of special events such as art exhibits, auctions, benefit evenings, book sales, contests, dances, dinners, fairs, fashion shows, marathons and walkathons. No sooner is one type of event created - like walkathons - than competitors create new versions, such as readathons, bikeathons and swimathons. Whatever next?

- ***Implementing the Public Relations Plan***

Implementing public relations requires care. Take, for example, the placing" of stories in the media. A *great* story is easy to place, but, unfortunately, most stories are not earth shattering and would not get past busy editors. Thus one of the main assets of public relations people is their personal relationships with media editors. In fact, PR professionals are often former journalists who know many media editors and know what they want. They view media editors as a market to be satisfied so that editors will continue to use their stories.

- ***Evaluating Public Relations Results***

Public relations results are difficult to measure because PR is used with other promotion tools and its impact is often indirect. If PR is used before other tools come into play, its contribution is easier to evaluate. The easiest measure of publicity effectiveness is the number of exposures in the media. Public relations people give the client a "clippings book" showing all the media that carried news about the product and a summary such as the following:

Media coverage included 3,500 column inches of news and photographs in 350 publications with a combined circulation of 79.4 million; 2,500 minutes of air time on 290 radio stations and an estimated audience of 65 million; and 660 minutes of air time on 160 television stations with an estimated audience of 91 million.

The summary would also give an indication of the cost of the time and space had they been purchased at current advertising rates.

This exposure measure is not very satisfying, however. It does not tell how many people actually read or heard the message, or what they thought afterwards. In addition, because of the media overlap in readership and viewership, it does not give information on the *net* audience reached.

PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOLS.

News: PR professionals find or create favorable news about the company and its products or people. Sometimes news stories occur naturally; sometimes the PR person can suggest events or activities that would create news.

Speeches: can also create product and company publicity. Increasingly, company executives must field questions from the media or give talks at trade associations or sales meetings, and these events can either build or hurt the company's image.

Special events: Ranging from news conferences, press tours, grand openings, and fireworks displays to laser light shows, hot air balloon releases, multimedia presentations, or educational programs designed to reach and interest target publics.

Written materials: Public relations people also prepare written materials to reach and influence their target markets. These materials include annual reports, brochures, articles, and company newsletters and magazines.

Audiovisual materials: Such as, films, slide-and-sound programs, DVDs, and online videos are being used increasingly as communication tools.

Corporate identity materials: Can also help create a corporate identity that the public immediately recognizes. Logos, stationery, brochures, signs, business forms, business cards, buildings, uniforms, and company cars.

Contributing money & Time: Companies can improve public goodwill by contributing money and time to public service activities, for example, to fight illiteracy, support the work of a charity, or assist the aged and handicapped

Web: is also an increasingly important PR channel. Web sites, blogs, and social networks such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are providing interesting new ways to reach more people.

Sponsorship: is an important vehicle through which corporations gain public relations Exposure, In Europe, the sponsorship industry is growing, with many firms committing huge sums of money around the world to the sponsorship of sport and the arts because it makes good sense as a marketing tool (Kotler et al., 1999; Armstrong et al. 2017).

References

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