

A Company That Doesn't Need Public Relations?

By Robert A. Kelly

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Really? You mean there are NO perceptions and behaviors peculiar to that company's outside audiences that would help or hinder it in the pursuit of its objectives?

Wow! I need to know more about a company that can ignore what its key external publics perceive about the company AND how they behave. I need to know how such a company can disregard serious negative behaviors by people who make up an influential external audience, and still reach its business objectives!

In fact, it would have to be a miracle! I don't buy it because it defies logic!

The business world doesn't believe that's possible either because it needs public relations big time, and they show it every day.

How? By staying in touch with their prime external publics and carefully monitoring their perceptions about the company, their feelings about any current topic at issue, AND the behaviors that inevitably follow.

Possibly there is an angle here for your business.

Now, with what has been learned about that audience's feelings and beliefs, the public relations goal, corrective if needed – for example, a specific behavior change -- can be established.

Which then requires that a strategy be identified. There are just three choices here, create opinion where none exists, change existing opinion, or reinforce it.

It's a logical sequence. With the strategy now set, we need persuasive messages with a good chance of moving perceptions (and thus behaviors) in the organization's direction. And we make sure the messages talk not only to the current topic at

issue, but any misconceptions encountered during our information gathering, and to any problems that might be brewing.

What will we do with our new messages? We'll carry them to the attention of our priority audience. We'll use communications tactics that are credible in the eyes of the receiver, effective in reaching him or her. We'll also want tactics that stand a good chance of moving opinion in that target audience, on the topic at issue, in the direction of the industry's position..

Fortunately, there are dozens of communications tactics to choose from: newsworthy announcements, letters-to-the-editor, news releases, radio and newspaper interviews, brochures, speeches and on and on.

At this point, we're back to the monitoring mode as we interact once again with members of the key target audience. With our communications tactics hammering away, we keep one eye peeled for signs of target audience opinion shifts in the industry's direction. The other eye, (and ears) stay alert for any references by print and broadcast media, or other local thoughtleaders, to our carefully prepared messages.

Our bottom line is, are perceptions and behaviors within the target audience being modified? If not, adjustments to both message and communications tactics – often a big increase in, and wider selection of tactics -- must be made.

Gradually, you'll begin to notice changes in opinion starting to appear along with a growing receptiveness to those messages of yours. This is real progress.

Should you still need encouragement to hang in there with your brand new public relations program, consider this. A single issue – for example, a potentially dangerous, unattended perception among a key audience -- can spread like wildfire nudging any business closer to failure than success.

Now, don't you feel better about public relations?

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