

Are You Dissing Public Relations?

By Robert A. Kelly

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If you leave a star player sitting on the bench, you could be the loser.

Look at it this way. Because you push hard to reach your sales and marketing objectives, you need the help of your top external audiences.

If you agree, what are you doing to insure their support? At the least, you need to prioritize those key target audiences and work them hard from the top down because few of us can do them all at once.

When I say work them hard from the top, I mean start by monitoring carefully how members of that most important target audience feel about your business. You must interact with them and ask a lot of questions.

Notice any negative feelings? How about misconceptions that need fixing? Any inaccurate understandings of your products and services? In short, ANY perceptions about your business that you need to alter?

With information like that in hand, you can set your public relations goal. It could be as simple as this: clear up that misconception, explain away that inaccurate understanding, or respond clearly and positively to feelings of uncertainty.

So, with your goal all set, what's next? Right! You select a strategy. Since you have only three choices, it will be an easy decision. Create opinion (perceptions) where none exist, change existing opinion, or reinforce it. Let the goal you established guide your strategy selection.

Now you go for the meat on the bone, your message. And it will need to be a specific and compelling message that clearly and creditably lays out, for example, why the rumor is dead

wrong, or why that belief about the company is not only inaccurate, but unfair. In brief, the message must be both crystal-clear and very believable.

But even a first-class message does no good sitting on a shelf. It needs aggressive communications tactics to carry it to the eyes and ears of members of your key target audience, whose behaviors you wish to alter.

Fortunately for all concerned, there are dozens of communications tactics available to you. They range from emailings, speeches, press releases and face-to-face meetings to broadcast interviews, consumer briefings and open houses and a lot of others.

But the moment of truth arrives when you remonitor how members of your key target audience NOW perceive you and your business. Again, you must ask plenty of questions while attempting to highlight how, and if perceptions have been altered by your communication. What about that frighteningly inaccurate perception of your business – better than before? And the specific misconception that most of your products are made in South East Asian sweat shops. Any improvement there? And the small number of interviewees who had never even heard of your firm. Has that number been reduced?

If insufficient progress is noted, remedies include a heavier, and wider concentration on communications tactics. As would a review of, and adjustment to your message content.

The prize remains the same. Altered perceptions leading to desired behaviors that directly contribute to the success of your business.

end

Bob Kelly counsels, writes and speaks about the fundamental premise of public relations. He has been DPR, Pepsi-Cola Co.; AGM-PR, Texaco Inc.; VP-PR, Olin Corp.; VP-PR, Newport News Shipbuilding & Drydock Co.; director of communications, U.S. Department of the Interior, and deputy assistant press secretary, The White House. <mailto:bobkelly@TNI.net>
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