

Are You PR-Challenged?

By Robert A. Kelly

Are You PR-Challenged?

Robert A. Kelly
bobbkelly@TNI.net

PRCommentary.com LLC <http://www.prcommentary.com>

Yes?

You won't be if you accept a very simple premise. Here, in just two sentences, is your pathway to effective public relations. A pathway that lets you target the kind of stakeholder behavior change that leads directly to achieving your objectives.

People act on their own perception of the facts before them, which leads to predictable behaviors about which something can be done. When we create, change or reinforce that opinion by reaching, persuading and moving-to-desired-action those people whose behaviors affect the organization, the public relations mission is accomplished.

And what behavior changes they can be. Legislators who see you as a dynamic member of their business public; prospects deciding to patronize your enterprise; customers buying from you again and again; local thoughtleaders strengthening their relations with you; employees who value their employer, and on an on.

What it boils down to, is that people in your marketing area behave like everyone else – they take actions based on their perceptions of the facts they hear about you and your organization.

So, you need to deal promptly and effectively with those perceptions by doing what you need to do to reach them with the right message. Your job is to persuade your stakeholders to your way of thinking and move them to take actions that lead to the success of your organization.

Here's one way to do exactly that.

Who are those important outside audiences whose behaviors have the most positive OR negative impacts on your enterprise? List them in the order of how negatively or positively those impacts affect you.

Working on the target audience in first place on your list, let's look at whether any of those perceptions out there are likely to morph into behaviors that can hurt your organization.

Assuming you don't want to make a large investment in a professional opinion survey, you and your colleagues must interact with members of that target audience and ask many questions: "What have you heard about us and our products or services? Have you done business with us? Do you have a bone to pick with us? Keep an eye peeled for hesitant or evasive responses, and watch for any negative undertones. Notice a misconception, inaccuracy or rumor? Jump on it right away!

The data you gather from such interaction lets you form a specific public relations goal. In other words, you get to decide exactly what perception out there you would like to alter so that it improves your chances of getting the behavior change you really want.

Now, unless you select the right strategy that tells you how to pursue that goal, nothing's going to happen. You're lucky there are just three strategies to choose from when you're dealing with matters of opinion: create perception/opinion where there isn't any, change existing opinion, or reinforce it. And be certain that your choice matches the needs of your goal. For example, if you aim to correct an inaccuracy, you need a strategy that changes existing opinion, not one that reinforces it.

As you might expect, you must now prepare the message that, hopefully, will alter the offending perception and lead to the desired behavior. Since it must clearly address the untruth, inaccuracy, rumor or misconception in a believable and compelling way, you've got your work cut out for you. Oh, the message must also be persuasive as it makes the case for your point of view.

Keep in mind that, to be successful, your message usually must alter what a lot of people may have come to believe. It's a big job, but as said in literary circles, "it's worth the candle."

How do you get this stunning message of yours to the right eyes and ears among members of your target audience?

Right! Communications tactics will do the job, and there are a ton of them at your disposal. From newsletters, press

releases and letters-to-the-editor to brochures, consumer briefings, personal meetings, print and broadcast interviews and many others.

Soon, the question will arise, are we making any progress? At this point, you are wise to go back to those members of your target audience and ask the same questions you asked during your original perception monitoring session.

This time, however, you're looking for evidence that perceptions are being altered in your direction.

If you are the impatient type, you can always increase the beat by adding new communications tactics and increasing their frequencies. It's also worth re-examining your hard-won message not only for clarity and persuasiveness, but for factual effectiveness as well.

When it becomes obvious that the program has, in fact, persuaded many target audience stakeholders towards your way of thinking, you have a public relations success on your hands.

end

Bob Kelly counsels, writes and speaks to general management personnel 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>
Visit:<http://www.prcommentary.com>

[Get-Articles.com : 1000's of reprintable business and internet marketing-related articles.](#)

[Submit your article for reprint.](#)