

# Public Relations "Insurance?"

By Robert A. Kelly

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Buying insurance is a time-honored and proven strategy for covering exposure to possible business losses including fire, flood, theft and even malfeasance.

But what about a very real loss of key audience understanding and acceptance that puts the survival of your business in question threatening real financial loss?

I believe this kind of failure, or gross under performance, by ANY organization – non-profit, business, association or public entity – qualifies as such a loss.

So how about some insurance against such financial damage in the form of public relations and its fundamental premise?

Put another way, could now be the time to cover that possible loss of key audience understanding and acceptance with a form of "insurance" likely to reach, persuade and move-to-actions-you-desire, those very people whose behaviors directly affect your organization's success?

The answer is yes, and the "insurance" in question is public relations.

But why? Actually, for two very simple reasons. One, putting public relations into the battle for the financial success of your business means you're buying protection, in this case against failure, and that sounds like insurance to me.

Two, the fact that people act on their own perception of the facts before them, about which something can be done along with the resulting behaviors.

You'll be happy to know that when public relations creates, changes or reinforces that opinion by reaching, persuading and moving-to-desired-action those people whose behaviors

affect the organization, the public relations effort is a success.

And, by the way, the “insurance premium” is fully earned.

But there’s still work to be done.

How aware are YOU of the perceptions of your business held by those folks you KNOW help or hinder your business the most?

If your answer is “somewhat aware,” there’s probably trouble brewing.

Which group – external audience, if you will – helps or hinders your business the most by their actions? Could it be prospects, current customers, community residents, area clubs, activist “trouble makers”, influential folks or even local radio and newspapers?

Unfortunately, you can’t do much about them if you don’t see the problem in the first place. You must be alert to who’s saying what about who. To do that, you must interact regularly with members of each “public,” each key audience.

When you notice trouble brewing in the form of misconceptions about your business that can lead to negative behaviors, take action to correct what’s wrong. And if it’s appropriate, let members of that key audience know about it.

Yes, this does take time, but we are talking about averting serious damage to your business. It’s worth it!

Those hurtful, inaccurate perceptions about you might include a belief that you are guilty of age discrimination, that your prices are not competitive or that your manufacturing process injures your employees, among others. Any one can hurt.

So now, while busy monitoring your most important audiences, you identify a misconception that might produce behaviors that could hurt.

And by the way, you should be using this “insurance” on a regular basis. Local business and fraternal clubs are always looking for speakers with something interesting to say. So are your local radio stations and newspapers. This is how you build good will against the inevitable problems certain to occur.

Now, you put into action a two-point strategy. First, a persuasive message designed to correct the inaccurate perception about your business. Second, hard-hitting communications that quickly reach that key audience.

And these can include face-to-face meetings, media interviews

producing publicity that reaches the right people, open houses, speeches, seminars and many other aggressive communications tactics.

How do you know that you're making a difference? By once again monitoring the views of individuals drawn from your key audiences. And by keeping an eye on those radio and newspaper reports and listening carefully to the public statements of local influentials.

What we're saying here is, if you let misconceptions about you and your business fester, you're playing with fire!

Why allow that to happen? Do something about them right now that makes the success of your business the more likely outcome.

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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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