

# Public Relations Creates Wealth?

By Robert A. Kelly

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Anything that helps a business become more successful creates wealth. Thus, because public relations usually makes businesses more successful, it helps create wealth.

How? By making sure those crucially important outside audiences of yours understand who and what you are, and that they harbor few, if any, negative thoughts about you and your organization.

It's not a complex formula.

It begins with the fundamental premise of public relations. "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."

That's why those key target audiences of yours are so important to the success of your enterprise.

If you haven't done so yet, start by listing those external groups of people whose behaviors can effect your operations for better or worse.

Now, which audience's behaviors have the MOST impact on your business? You've just prioritized your #1 target audience. That's the one this article will focus on, although other external audiences will need similar treatment.

How do you establish audience member perceptions of you and your organization? You speak with them, and this interaction allows you to ask pregnant questions. Are you familiar with what we do? Do you know anything about our products or services? Have you ever purchased them?

As you listen carefully to the responses, misconceptions can emerge as can mistaken beliefs, inaccuracies and even damaging rumors.

Which lead you directly to setting your public relations goal. This is your opportunity to set the record straight. Will your goal be to correct an inaccuracy, knock down a rumor, clarify a misconception – or all three?

With your public relations goal in hand, you go in search of a strategy to show you how to achieve that goal.

You're in luck here. When you deal with opinion, there are only three strategies from which to choose. Create opinion (perceptions) where none exist, change existing opinion, or reinforce it. Your choice will depend on the specifics of what you discovered during your audience member interaction.

The closest thing to real work in this sequence is preparing the message you will send to members of that key target audience, or "public" as we often say.

You know what the perception problem is so you must present the clarification as directly, clearly and persuasively as possible. Make it brief and specific, trying to leave no room for further misunderstanding.

Now, the next step may remind you of Cable TV's Animal Planet channel because we'll talk about "beasts of burden," our very own metaphor for the communications tactics you will use to carry your hard-won, persuasive message to the attention of your key audience.

The number of communications tactics from which you can select seems endless. Everything from press releases, face-to-face meetings, open houses and broadcast interviews to Internet emails and ezines, brochures, community briefings and letters-to-the-editor.

When and how will you know if your public relations effort is succeeding? Well, you established your perception and follow on behavior objectives when you set your public relations goal.

Obviously, you now have one or two months of vigorous communications activity under your belt. Now you must once again interact with members of your key target audience and probe their perceptions with questions similar to your earlier fact-finding mission.

You want to know if perceptions (leading to behaviors) have changed. Does it appear that inaccuracies have been clarified, a rumor neutralized, or a misconception corrected?

When you achieve consistently positive responses to such questions, it is likely that follow on behaviors will move in your direction. And that means that your public relations program is achieving the kind of success that, indeed, will help to create wealth – yours!

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