

Where is the Best PR Value?

By Robert A. Kelly

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Wherever the fundamental premise of public relations is practiced.

Look at what it suggests. 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.

What a positive message for those business, non-profit and association managers who don't really understand the role public relations can play in helping achieve their organizational objectives. Nor, that reliance on public relations' fundamental premise even identifies the tools they need to put such a plan into action.

If, sadly, you are one of those managers, here's how you can make up for lost time and actually boost your chances of reaching your organizational goals.

Make the time investment needed to identify and rank, as to their impact on your organization, those important outside audiences whose behaviors really do help or hinder your operations. Let's talk about the one at the top of the list.

It's really crucial that you know what members of that "public" think about your organization. Obviously, you must ask them! Interaction is really necessary if you are going to identify perceptions likely to lead to negative behaviors. For example, wrong-headed beliefs, misconceptions, inaccuracies and even rumors.

And while you're talking to these audience members, keep an eye or an ear on local talk show and newspaper columns for the same signs.

The results of such opinion or perception monitoring are the very data you need to establish your public relations goal. For instance,

neutralize that rumor, clear up that misconception or correct the inaccuracy.

And the very same goal will stand as your behavior modification objective so that you can measure your progress.

But here, the question always arises as to just how you will get to that goal. You need a strategy to show you the way, and you have three choices: create opinion/perception where there may be none, change existing opinion or reinforce it. Fortunately your goal will identify which strategy you should select.

Still, nothing happens until you write a truly responsive message and transmit it to members of your target audience. You must convince them that what you discovered in the way of rumors, inaccuracies, misconceptions or wrong-headed beliefs is simply not true. But do try for believability and clarity. And, above all, make your message persuasive and compelling.

Meanwhile, a whole stable of “beasts of burden” await your pleasure – communications tactics capable of carrying that hard-won message direct to your audience members’ eyes and ears. And there are scores and scores of them in that stable – articles, interviews, newsletters, personal meetings, op-eds, emails, speeches and brochures among many others.

Impatience always grows at this point as you wait for signs that your public relations program is working. But that’s the signal to once again interact with members of your target audience. The difference the second time around is that you’re looking for signs that their perceptions of your organization have been altered by your message through its aggressive delivery system. So get out there and, again, ask lots of questions.

If things aren’t moving fast enough for you, you may want to add a few more communications tactics to the mix, as well as increasing their frequency. Your message should also be vetted again for factual validity and clarity.

Gradually, the perceptions, and thus behaviors of your key, target audiences will begin moving in your direction, leaving little doubt as to where the best PR value can be found.

I can tell you from personal experience that there is no more satisfying moment in the practice of public relations.

end

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