

THE CONCEPT OF INTER AND PUBLIC RELATIONS AND THEIR EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION IN PR CAMPAIGNS

Dr. Femi Onabajo

Abstract

Every organization whether product or service-based has its own publics which are of paramount importance to the survival of such organization.

Publics fall under two broad categories- they are either intra-organizational or inter-organizational. This paper attempts to identify what constitutes public relations campaigns and how the knowledge of the habits and expectations of the inter and intra publics of an organization can lead to the effective planning and execution of PR campaigns that will be mutually beneficial.

Introduction

The primary role of public relations is to manage an organization's reputation and help build consent for its enterprises. But today's business environment has become so competitive that public consent can no longer be assumed; it must be earned continuously.

Quite unfortunate, the term 'Public Relations' is widely misunderstood and misused. Part of the confusion is due to the fact that public relation covers a very broad area. Depending on the context and one's point of view, it can be a concept, a profession, a management function or a practice.

Public relations (PR) as a management function focuses on the relationships and communication that individuals and organizations have with their publics for the purpose of creating mutual goodwill. It is in critical moments in an organization's life that Public Relations is mostly needed. Because of the powerful affect of public opinion, companies and organizations must consider the impact of their actions. This is especially true in times of crisis, emergency or disaster. But it also holds true for major policy decision, changes in management or pricing, labour negotiation, introduction of new products or changes in distribution methods. Each decision affects different groups (publics) in different ways. According to Cutlip, Centre and Broom (2000:6) public relations is viewed as a practice. To them, "public relations is a planned and sustained effect to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics". But the International Public Relations Association (1978), describes "PR as an art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organizational leaders, and implementing planned programmes of action which serve both the organization's and public interest". (Salu, 1994:17).

The goals of PR are to improve public opinion, build goodwill, and establish and maintain a satisfactory reputation for the organization. PR effort may rally public support, obtain understanding or neutrality, or simply respond to inquiries. Well executed public relations is an ongoing process that molds good long-term relationships and plays an important role in relationship marketing and integrated communications.

Distinguishing Between Publics

According to Ajala (2001:75), the public is everyone interested in, or affected by an organization or whose opinion can affect the organization. In the context of public relations, a public is a group of people bound together by a common interest that is specific to them and to their situation.

To Cutlip, Centre and Broom (2000:383), a public is simply a collective noun for a group of individuals tied together by some common bond of interest and sharing a sense of commonness. The group may be small or large, but each issue, problem or interest creates its own publics. Each organization tends to have its own particular set of target publics which are normally identified by their involvement in specific situation or issues which are also of concern to the organization. According to Seitel (1987:20), there are myriads of critical publics with whom an organization must be sensitive to the needs and concerns of such publics in a timely and effective manner. The public

Dr. Ferni Onabajo

relations challenge is to effectively manage the communications function between managers and the various publics with whom they interrelate.

Every company, organization or government body has relationships with groups of people who are affected by what it does or says. They may be employees, customers, stockholders, competitors, suppliers, legislators or the community in which the organization resides. Marketing professionals refer to these groups of people as stakeholders because they have some vested interest in the company's actions, but in PR terminology, each of these groups is considered one of the organization's publics, and the goal of PR is to develop and maintain goodwill with most, if not all of its publics. Failure to do so may mean loss of esteem which weakens the organization's brand equity, as well as its ability to secure financing, make sales and expand.

Summarily, we can say that PUBLICS are the various groups of people with whom an organization relates internally or externally (Arens, 1999:310). We use "publics" in PR because the activities of PR are not directed at the "general public". They are aimed at carefully selected groups of people who are subdivisions of the general public. Moreover this means that much PR activity is aimed at these different publics in different ways. Through the mass media, as is often the case with advertising, PR is more discriminating and that often means that it is less wasteful and more successful for communicating certain kinds of messages. An organization's publics are dynamic and each organization has its own special publics with whom it has to communicate with both internally and externally (Jefkins, 1998:56).

Intra Public Relations

This is a concept that refers to an organization's internal publics which carry out its policies to meet up with its objectives. They include management, employees, shareholders, trade unions/associations and so on.

Management

This is made up of administrators and heads of departments within the organization who innovate and make the day-to-day decisions concerning the success of the organization. This is where the PR officer belongs, since he is involved in planning programmes and how they will be executed.

Employees

These can be of many kinds, some of which are management and executives, laboratory, factory and warehouse workers, office staff, sales and servicing staff, and transport staff. They may be concentrated in one building or scattered like ships' crews, airline personnel, chain-store sales assistants or field sales people. They may also represent many different salary, wage, social and ethnic groups.

Shareholders

These are the different people who have pooled resources (money/time/effort) together to run a business. They may include individuals or group like millionaires and multimillionaires and owners of smaller business enterprises.

Trade Unions/Associations

No organization can afford to ignore these groups/publics because they exert powerful influence on the life of an organization. Today, trade unions and associations employ specialists in every field, just like businesses do: lawyers, accountants, analysts, representatives lobbyists etc.

Inter Public Relations

This refers to an organization's external publics with which it relates. They include suppliers of services and materials, investors, distributors, consumers of products or services, opinion leaders, the media, governments of different levels and the community in which the organization is situated.

Suppliers ,

These can be of two kinds, those who supply raw materials, components, packaging and professional services and those who supply services such as water and energy.

The Financial Publics

This begins with the local bank and if it is a public organization - its shares are sold in the Stock Exchange; investors will consist not only of personal buyers of securities but also of investment analysis (who advice in share buying) and big share buyers. These big buyers are the pension fund managers, banks, insurance companies and unit trust managers. Willingness to buy shares, or invest in new issues, will depend on what is known about the company's background, performance and prospects. A fall in share price could invite a takeover bid.

Distributors

They are those who handle the goods in bulk between producers and consumers. They vary in kind and number according to the organization. Thus, distributors may include wholesalers, commission agents, cash and carry warehouses, brokers, retailers, direct response marketers, discount stores, credit salesmen and so on.

Consumers and Users

These include traders and industrial buyers such as "secondary suppliers", as when the product is used in the assembly or production of another, e.g. tyres for motorcars, milk for manufactured food. Public relations applied to marketing is often directed at these publics only, indicating that marketing deals only with a limited range of PR's potentialities.

Opinion Leaders

These include all those people whose expressed opinions can harm or help an organization. According to the organization, opinion leaders can be numerous and ever ranging, ranging from parents to politicians, priests to protestors. They are part of articulate democracy, but can exist in countries where traditional, military, dictatorial or religious leaders dominate. For example, in some developing countries family planning has won acceptance only after local leaders have become innovators and, in pioneering the idea they have, in the PR sense, serve as vital opinion leaders. Consumer environmentalists, newspaper columnists, television presenters, social members and others also figure among the galaxy of opinion leaders with whom an organization may have to contend. This can be a formidable public, often prejudiced and ill informed, and probably requiring face-to-face communication.

The Media

The media need completely different treatment from that given to other publics. One reason is the fact that the media are an organization's direct route to its publics. Another is simply that publishers, producers, editors and journalists have total control over what an organization's publics see and hear in their media. Another reason is that every editor, correspondent, journalist and producer is constantly seeking a good story in their professional lives, relevant to his readers, listeners or viewers.

The Government

The activities of an organization is affected by government policies, edicts and laws; so an organization has to be in the governments' (both local, state and federal) good book to operate without much interference. Sometimes companies are proscribed by government edicts or decree, if the activities of the organization are seen as threat on the lives of the public or it does not meet up with the demands of the power that be.

Potential Employees

These may exist in other organizations, or can be recruited from schools, colleges or universities or from overseas. Many are not likely to seek for employment with an organization, or answer its vacancy advert unless they understand what the organization does, and regard it as potentially good employer.

The Community

This will depend on the type of Organization. The community of a department store differs from that of a factory, research laboratory, hotel, airport, seaport, educational establishment, hospital,

prison, army barracks or police headquarters. Even when different organizations share the same location, each will have its own communication needs and problems.

What are Public Relations Campaigns

According to Osuji (1999:172), every institution faces intense competition in the market for ideas, services and products and organizational research has revealed that institutions are operating under

the microscopic eye of a public that is exhibiting a growing distrust of them. This has necessitated the placing of a lot of responsibility on the shoulders of public relations personnel in planning and executing effective campaign that will make their organizations competitive in the rendering of service to their various publics. A public relations campaign should start with a clear understanding of the goals of the management of an organization. There is also the need to organize the components of the campaign into a complete, logical and persuasive document. A PR campaign should tell a story and present procedures that will help meet set objectives and explain how their progress will be measured. An effective PR campaign must carefully segment the publics to be reached and through which media they would be reached. According to Black (1989:1 I), some form of research will be necessary before any programme can be planned completely. Research can help decide which messages will work and where they will work best. No form of communication works unless people receive the message, understand the content and are motivated to act on it.

To Bittner (1994:60), a step by step process towards effective PR campaigns include the following:

- i. The need should first be analyzed and research carried out where necessary.
- ii. The goals to be achieved by the campaign must be established because this will provide a firm foundation and direction for the campaign.
- iii. To increase the effectiveness of messages, there is the need to pretest your ideas.
- iv. Information obtained through pretesting may warrant making revisions in the campaign plan.
- v. Develop a coordinated advertising plan employing the same visual theme.
- vi. Evaluate the success of the campaign based on established criteria for measuring progress.
- vii. There is the need to review procedures at every stage of the campaign and at the end of the PR campaign.

Effective Utilization of Publics in PR Campaigns

According to Dominick (1994:25), effective PR effort in utilizing both inter and intra publics in PR campaigns is a four-step process involving the following:

- (i) Information gathering
- (ii) Planning
- (iii) Communication
- (iv) Evaluation.

(i) Information Gathering

The information gathering is an important one because what is learned from it will influence the remaining stages. Information gathering can be achieved through several means. Organizational records, trade journals, public records, and reference books serve as sources for existing personal contracts; mail to the company, advisory committees, and personnel reports represent other sources of information. If more formal research methods are required, they might be carried out by the PR department or by an outside agency that specializes in public opinion polling or survey research.

(ii) Planning

Phase two is the planning stage. There are two general types of planning: strategic and tactical. Strategic plans involve long-range general goals that the organization wishes to achieve. Top tactical plans are more specific. They detail the tasks that must be accomplished by every department in the organization to achieve the strategic goals. Plans might be drawn up that can be used only once or they might be standing plans that set general organization policy. Planning is a vital part of the PR programme, and some of the items involved in PR campaigns involve framing the objectives, considering the alternatives, assessing the risks and benefits involved in each, deciding a course of action, figuring up the budget, and securing necessary approvals from within the organization.

(iii) Communication

After gathering facts and making plans, the organization assumes the role of the source of communication. Here, several key or relevant decisions are made concerning the nature of the messages and the type of media to be used. It is important and necessary for a PR practitioner to have a thorough knowledge of the various media and their strengths and weaknesses due to the fact that mass communication media are usually important channels in a PR programme. They should also know the various production techniques of those media, more especially the print and broadcast media. Some channels through which PR messages get to their publics include; House publications, brochures, advertising and adversarial, bulletins, letters, etc. but the possible communication channels used by an organization to reach its employees include; posters, billboards, bulletins and bulletin boards, house publication etc. Yet on a more personal level, public meetings, speeches, demonstration, staging of

events, and tours are other possibilities. Meanwhile, a PR director would probably use a variety of messages and media. News conferences, adverts, news releases and public meetings would seem appropriate vehicles for explaining the company's position to its external publics, while house publications, bulletin boards, speeches, and letters could be used to reach its internal publics.

(iv) Evaluation

The importance of evaluation in public relations is becoming greater because of the development of management by objective technique. If a measurable goal must be proposed for public relations programmes, then an evaluation technique should be able to measure the success in reaching that goal. One easy method is simply to gauge the volume of coverage that the campaign generated, the number of press releases sent out, the number of letters mailed, speeches made, and so on. Also, press clippings and mentions in TV and Radio news can also be tabulated. It is important to remember, however, that volume does not equal results. To measure the impact of a campaign on the audience require more sophisticated techniques of analysis. Some common techniques would include questionnaires distributed to random samples of the audience, telephone survey, panels, reader - interest studies, and the use of experimental campaigns.

Dominick (1994:371) notes that the above four steps are distinct but progressive stages. In actuality, the PR program is a continuous process, and one phase blends into the next. The results obtained in the evaluation stage, for example, also form part of the information-gathering phase of the next cycle of the PR programme.

Recommendations

Public relations should never be misconstrued as an occasional work which a company should get involved with, whenever a problem arises or when there is crisis. For public relations to be effective, it is necessary to take the following into consideration.

- (1) Any big organization employing over one hundred staffers must have a public relations department or unit.
- (2) Public relations has to be preplanned and therefore it should have its annual budget with provisions made for emergencies.
- (3) There should be constant and effective communication with the organization's identified publics.
- (4) An organization should make itself relevant to its publics through embarking on projects that will be beneficial to these publics.
- (5) An organization should never take the media for granted, but should always cultivate their friendship at all times.

Conclusion

Public relations is very vital for the survival of any organization in the face of other competing organizations who want to gain recognition of their corporate images, product images, as well as products position in the competitive market place. In essence, for any organization to succeed, its PR programmes have to be effective in flagging off any campaign. And this could be a reality if only the publics of the organization are identified and treated as they deserve, so that they will not constitute stumbling blocks to the success of PR campaigns. Instead, they should become stepping

stones, such that the organization as well as its publics will have cause to smile at the end of every campaign.

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