

MODULE 8C Advocate Advanced Topics

MORE MARKETING

L6 Public Relations One

In order to extract the maximum desired effect from a public relations campaign, one must identify a specific goal that is the desired result of that campaign. This is most readily done by using a Public Relations plan. In this issue of the Systems Update Report, we will create a sample PR plan with an initial goal of introducing a new disability consulting service to a local community.

Identify the Goals of Your PR Campaign

Because there are a number of reasons to use public relations, a business must have a clear objective in mind before embarking on such a campaign. A specifically identified goal determines the costs and approach one might employ within a campaign. A clearly defined objective also makes it easier to measure results and fine-tune the campaign during implementation. Identifying the ultimate goal of a campaign will help assure that you enjoy the desired outcome while saving you precious time and money. The objective of our sample PR campaign is the introduction of a new consulting service to a local community. The remainder of this report will focus on the key issues you must consider when developing a campaign that will reach this defined objective.

Why Create a Plan?

In order to control both the size and costs of a Public Relations campaign, you must have a clearly defined objective to guide your actions. However, campaign objectives will do you no good unless you use them to set campaign priorities.

The best way to assure that your campaign is in keeping with your objectives is to prepare a formal or written plan of action. A Public Relations plan built around your objectives will not only give you direction, it will also keep you on track. A carefully constructed plan makes it easier for you to identify the best methods for reaching your PR objectives while helping you to make better overall marketing decisions.

Once your PR goal is defined, you can now pinpoint the methods and means to reach your objective. To determine the methods to be used, you must first evaluate and define your business. You must clearly describe the facts about your business in terms of personality, services and approach to delivery of product. These business characteristics are highly personal and tend to set you apart from all other businesses.

Begin with your own personal background. What is it about you that will make your service special? Then review the history of your company. When did it start? Why did you start it? What are the goals of the company? What's unique about your product or service? Can you define your service in one sentence? How does your company serve the community? Is the service exclusive in your community? Answering questions like these will supply you the facts you need to present your company to the public in an interesting light.

Keep Your Plan Simple and Flexible

The information you have gathered about your company is used to present your company to the public. If you try presenting your company one way and it doesn't work, feel free to change your approach. You are not obligated to stick with an approach that doesn't work for reaching your campaign objectives. You are in control of your PR campaign and you can change it whenever and however you wish. Stay flexible and seek out as much public feedback as possible. Customer feedback is the best method of gauging the success of your campaign.

Keep your PR plan simple by naming no more than three objectives per campaign. For example, we have listed three objectives for our hypothetical PR campaign:

PR objective one might be to educate your community about the Social Security disability program and the customer's rights under this program. In a PR campaign, this objective could be reached by giving out free informational booklets or flyers. The availability of the free materials will attract customers without threat. The customer gets free information (knowledge) instead of a sales pitch. Good PR is all about serving a community need! The need and desire for free information is a proven method of adding punch to any PR campaign.

In PR objective two, you want to inform your community about the availability of your disability consulting service. Public Relations is the ideal mechanism for reaching an objective like this. Rather than running an expensive ad, why not approach your local newspaper's business reporter. Seek an interview with the reporter by describing how your service serves his readership. In this case, his readership is also your potential customer. If the reporter does a story describing you, your business concept or the SSA disability program in general, you win! Any story about the SSA disability program becomes instant publicity for your business. If you are a primary source of information for the reporter's story, you or your business can expect to be named in the article. If your company's name appears anywhere in a story like this, you will attract numerous customers.

For objective three, we want to increase the number of customers seeking help with their SSA disability claims. Using Public Relations will work well for reaching this objective because of your two previous actions. You have already created a free information booklet for customers. A good business reporter will not hesitate to tell his readership where they can find free additional information concerning the story line.

A reporter may or may not be interested in doing a story about you or your specific business. However, maybe the reporter is interested in the concept of disability representation. No matter what motivates the reporter to write the story, your objective must be to be named in the story. Even if you are named only as a source of additional information, your sales will significantly increase! You want the public to see your firm as a source of knowledge about the SSA disability program, because this perception attracts customers.

You can increase your chances of being mentioned in any article about SSA disability by offering a free service to the public. In this case, the free service is a case assessment. The reporter is told that you will give any customer who calls a free

assessment that will determine their approximate percent chance of acquiring disability benefits. Because the service is free, the reporter can't resist mentioning this free service in his article.

Calls to your company could increase by 500% as a result of such an article. Customers will call primarily seeking your free assessment. However, each customer contact affords you an opportunity to sign on a new client. You have just accomplished your third and ultimate objective, which was to increase your customer base. What's nice about this PR approach is that you accomplished your objectives without significant expense.

Identify Other Media Sources

Now that you have gathered information about your business and identified your primary objectives, it's time to identify a few more potential sources of public exposure. We have already mentioned newspapers. Don't forget about other local publications! You can determine if a publication is right for your campaign by evaluating its readership. If the readership fits your customer's demographics, try and get an article in that publication. If you receive a good response from the publication via an article, you may have also inadvertently identified a good advertising source as well.

TV and Radio publicity uses the same approach as print media. If you approach a local TV news station with a story about your business, this may appear to be self-serving. The editor isn't interested in you! He wants to know how your story will serve the informational needs of his audience. If you present your story as information the community needs, this will get the editor's attention. The key to effective PR is getting the editors to respond. You can get editor's attention by preparing an effective news release. We will demonstrate how to write an effective news release in the next issue of the Systems Update Report.

Time for Money

The purpose of Public Relations is to get attention in your community without necessarily paying for it. For this reason, PR is a tradeoff! You are trading your precious time in order to save money. Preparing a Public Relations campaign will take more of your time than simply advertising, but it is well worth it. As mentioned in our previous Public Relations report, you can't beat Public Relations for its high credibility factor. Public Relations have consistently outperformed advertising by a minimum of two to one. This is as a result of PR's high-perceived credibility. Therefore, PR should be used continuously throughout the life of a business in order to promote expansion of your customer base.

Steps for Preparing a News Release

You have already identified the primary objectives of your PR campaign. You have also gathered information about your company and have identified a few potential media sources for your campaign. Now you're ready to begin general preparations. General preparations for a PR campaign require that you:

- 1) Make a list of potential media sources. Get contact information on the sources including the editor's name and phone number.
- 2) Create a PR budget. A budget can be formulated by deciding how much you're willing to spend in order to accomplish some aspect of your PR objective.
- 3) Collect all facts about your company in a single place. Include a biography of the principle owner. Placing business data in one place makes retrieval of this information easier when it comes time to develop a story line for your campaign.
- 4) Make a list of possible PR themes. Brainstorming PR ideas with friends and family will help you to identify those aspects of your company that are unique.
- 5) Prepare photographs of yourself and other key persons within your company.
- 6) Identify your potential customer base. Use this knowledge to identify the best potential media sources. Think demographically! Consider factors like age, education, work history and medical status when identifying potential customers.
- 7) Make a list of upcoming events within your company. Is there an upcoming grand opening or area expansion of your service? List any and all upcoming special events and let your local media know about these events in a news release.
- 8) Review all of the information you have collected. Use this information to prepare your news releases to the various media. Make sure that the theme you use for a particular media fits the readership.