

What is Public Relations?

Article provided by HMA Public Relations

How many times have you heard that your organization needs public relations? And each time, it was from a public relations professional, right? I'm here to tell you that you *do* need public relations as part of your organization and I'm a public relations professional. But this time, you're going to be convinced.

When I was in school, I learned that "public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other." Excuse me, what does that mean?

Bottom line for your company is that you need consumers to purchase your products, believe in your services and have loyalty to you because you are a good company.

How do you convince these consumers, as you battle for higher ground with your competition, that you are the right choice for whatever item they need that you offer?

You need to sway them your way, and not forcefully impose upon them. Public relations is a tool that communicates a desired message to targeted publics. Any organization that uses this tool is the better for it because it works.

Public relations applies to all business aspects from new products or services to the newly hired executive. For example it is likely that when a new executive is hired, your company will need its shareholders to trust the company's hiring decision and trust that their stock is in good hands. A public relations campaign can be designed to do just that.

Beyond the so-called publicity stunt that can gain your company a slew of attention in the media, public relations serves your company on a deeper level as well. When conducted appropriately, public relations does the following:

- Builds prestige or a favorable image
- Educates the public about or promotes products and services
- Detects and deals with issues and opportunities
- Determines the organization's position in the dealing with its publics
- Encourages the goodwill of communities in which the organization operates
- Advances the goodwill of the employees or other internal audiences
- Prevents and solves labor problems
- Fosters the goodwill of stockholders or constituents
- Forestalls attack
- Overcomes misconceptions and prejudices
- Advances the goodwill of the government, suppliers and anyone related to your business
- Enhances the ability to attract the best personnel
- Educates the public on a point of view
- Formulates and guides policies
- Fosters the viability of the society in which the organization functions
- Directs the course of change

According to the Public Relations Society of America, examples of the knowledge that may be required in the professional practice of public relations include communication arts, psychology, social psychology, sociology, political science, economics, and the principles of management and ethics. Technical knowledge and skills are required for opinion research, public issues analysis, media relations, direct mail, institutional advertising, publications, film/video productions, special events, speeches, and presentations.

If you look up public relations in various different communications manuals, you are likely to find several different explanations and definitions of public relations. When it comes down to it public relations is a planned process and a management function. According to Philip Lesly, a leading authority on public relations and a leading practitioner, public relations consists of eight phases:

1. Analyzing the general climate of attitudes and the relation of the organization to its “universe.”
2. Determining the attitude of any group toward the organization.
3. Analyzing the state of opinion.
4. Anticipating potential problems, needs or opportunities.
5. Formulating policy.
6. Planning means of improving the attitude of a group.
7. Carrying out the planned activities.
8. Feedback, evaluation and adjustment.

The scientific approach to an organization’s public image goes way beyond the standard press releases and general missteps of reaching employees or members. Public relations is a task for highly skilled specialization and talent. It demands high-caliber thinking by a number of experts, experienced in the practices of public opinion and the techniques of influencing it, and the facilities to do everything that must be done in a well-planned program.

When you determine that your company could benefit from a scientific approach to communicating your intentions, services and products to a desired public, this should be the language they speak. This will offer results for your company.

HMA Public Relations is a full-service marketing communications agency whose experience encompasses work in the traditional marketing communications disciplines including public relations, media relations, marketing communications, issues management, community relations and special events.

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