

Title:

Maybe You SHOULD Worry About Your PR!

Word Count:

1027

Summary:

Worry can be healthy when it moves you away from a major emphasis on communications tactics to doing something positive about your key external audiences' behaviors that affect your operation the most.

Keywords:

public relations, perception, persuasion, opinion, behavior, communications, publicity

Article Body:

Especially if your public relations budget is all about tactics like brochures, special events, talking to reporters and press releases.

Please don't get me wrong. Communications tactics are valuable devices which we call upon from time-to-time to move a message from here to there.

But, as a business, non-profit or association manager, you can omit the best public relations has to offer, the crème de la crème of PR!

Try this on for size. The core public relations mission pulls together the resources and action planning needed to alter individual perception leading to changed behaviors among a business, non-profit, or association's most important outside audiences. Then it goes on to help a manager persuade those key folks to his or her way of thinking, and then, moves them to take actions that allow their department, group, division or subsidiary to succeed.

Now, there's a real theory behind that mission, and it's the underlying 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 the very people whose behaviors affect the organization the most, the public relations mission is usually accomplished.

It's comforting to note that the right public relations planning really CAN

alter individual perception and lead to changed behaviors among key outside audiences. AND equally encouraging when you remember that your PR effort must demand more than special events, news releases and talk show tactics if you are to receive the quality public relations results you believe you deserve.

And those results won't be long in coming, especially when capital givers or specifying sources begin to look your way; customers begin to make repeat purchases; membership applications start to rise; new proposals for strategic alliances and joint ventures start showing up; politicians and legislators begin looking at you as a key member of the business, non-profit or association communities; welcome bounces in show room visits occur; community leaders begin to seek you out; and prospects actually start to do business with you.

Help is at hand because the public relations people assigned to you can be of real use for your new opinion monitoring project because they are already in the perception and behavior business. But be certain that the PR folks really accept why it's SO important to know how your most important outside audiences perceive your operations, products or services. Above all, be sure they believe that perceptions almost always result in behaviors that can help or hurt your operation.

Layout the plans for your PR staff re: monitoring and gathering perceptions by questioning members of your most important outside audiences. Ask questions like these: how much do you know about our organization? Have you had prior contact with us and were you pleased with the interchange? Are you familiar with our services or products and employees? Have you experienced problems with our people or procedures?

Bringing in survey firms to do the opinion gathering work can cost a lot more than using those PR folks of yours in that monitoring capacity. But whether it's your people or a survey firm asking the questions, the objective remains the same: identify untruths, false assumptions, unfounded rumors, inaccuracies, misconceptions and any other negative perception that might translate into hurtful behaviors.

Here, you have to set a goal aiming for action on the most serious problem areas you uncovered during your key audience perception monitoring. Will it be to straighten out that dangerous misconception? Correct that gross inaccuracy? Or, stop that potentially painful rumor dead?

Naturally a goal requires a strategy to show you how to reach it. Just three strategic options are available to you when it comes to solving perception and opinion problems. Change existing perception, create perception where there may

be none, or reinforce it. The wrong strategy pick will taste like spare ribs with lemon sauce. So be certain your new strategy fits well with your new public relations goal. You certainly don't want to select "change" when the facts dictate a strategy of reinforcement.

Now your people must do some good writing. You must prepare a persuasive message that will help move your key audience to your way of thinking. It must be a carefully-written message aimed directly at your key external audience. Select your very best writer because s/he must come up with language that is not merely compelling, persuasive and believable, but clear and factual if they are to shift perception/opinion towards your point of view and lead to the behaviors you have in mind.

It's time to pick out the communications tactics most likely to carry your message to the attention of your target audience. There are many waiting for you. From speeches, facility tours, emails and brochures to consumer briefings, media interviews, newsletters, personal meetings and many others. But be certain that the tactics you pick are known to reach folks just like your audience members.

How you communicate your message is a concern because the credibility of any message is always fragile. Which is why you may wish to unveil your corrective message before smaller meetings and presentations rather than using higher-profile news releases.

If the thought of a progress report appeals to you, you must begin a second perception monitoring session among members of your external audience in order to measure headway. You can use many of the same questions used in your benchmark session. But this time, you will be on guard for signs that the bad news perception is being altered in your direction.

In the event the program slows down, you can always speed things up by adding more communications tactics as well as increasing their frequencies.

Worry can be healthy, too. Especially when it moves you away from a major emphasis on communications tactics and on to a plan for doing something positive about the behaviors of those important external audiences of yours that most affect your operation. And particularly so when you persuade those key outside folks to your way of thinking by helping to move them to take actions that allow your department, division or subsidiary to succeed.