

## UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC RELATIONS

### **Purpose: Communicating Corporate Identity**

Public relations (PR) is a form of communications that seeks to enhance the image of a company, product, service or individual.

In the business sphere, “public” exposure can help companies project a corporate identity that reflects management’s goals and philosophies, generates sales leads, attracts interest from the investment community, and establishes credibility.

### **Legwork: Building Credibility and Relationships**

Typically, a PR/communications program involves intense press contact, an area which many business people are unfamiliar. Working with reporters and editors requires an understanding of their needs – the type of publication or broadcast outlet for which they work, their deadlines, the kind of story they are developing, and the background needed to complete their research.

Key to initiating and maintaining effective press relations is a firm’s ability to establish credibility. That is where PR comes in – alerting the media to the legitimate news value of a company’s activities, services or products.

Unlike advertising, where one pays for exposure in a publication or in the electronic media, news stories and features cannot be “bought” – at least not in the credible media outlets in which legitimate companies seek to have their stories appear.

Successful PR professionals are always responsive to the press, even in adverse situations, thereby facilitating a positive relationship between a company and the media.

Bringing together, in a timely manner, the right individual at a company with an editor or reporter is crucial. The more helpful a company and its PR representatives are in supplying the press with needed information, the more likely editors and reporters will call upon that business again – giving the enterprise yet another chance at publicity.

### **Strategy: Proper Positioning, Messaging and Consistency**

The implementation of an effective PR program is a comprehensive, well-planned project. It is not “quick hits” in a publication or a simple press release announcing a new product or service.

Rather, a successful PR/communications program pulls together the story a company wants to project. It requires detailed research to position correctly a company and its products or services. It involves briefing thoroughly all persons likely to participate in press relations, enabling them to tell their “story” succinctly, factually, and on terms that can be understood easily. It entails knowing how to exploit editorial opportunities.

An equally important component of PR programs is the use in all printed materials of the same clear, concise, factual writing style employed by the press. Familiarity with news writing methods allows PR professionals to assist news organizations in relaying the correct message to the public. Reporters and editors are frequently working against the clock and on many stories simultaneously. They cannot spend time trying to decipher an unintelligible, confusing press release. Moreover, poorly written press materials reflect negatively on a company.

**Benefits: Cost-Effective Visibility, Branding and Marketing**

An understanding of PR is essential to any business aiming to disseminate news-worthy information to the public and to build and maintain a positive reputation. The benefits of a successful PR program are numerous:

- PR is cost-effective, particularly in comparison to advertising.
- PR establishes credibility. The public tends to see news accounts as verifiable and impartial. A news story has much more impact on the public's perception of a company or individual than an advertisement for which the public knows the advertiser has paid.
- PR builds image, both internally and externally. A company that gets "good press" not only generates sales and credibility, but also boosts employee morale.
- PR is good business management. It encourages company officials to focus on long-term strategy and convey that message consistently.
- PR complements sales and marketing activities, giving a company yet another avenue by which to preempt competition.
- PR enables companies to educate the public, particularly about complicated, misunderstood products or services. Few will buy a product or seek a service they cannot comprehend.
- PR makes it possible for a business to project goodwill.
- PR is influential, creating opportunities for company officials to be viewed as key resources in their fields.