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Role of Public Relations in Image Management of an Organization

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Abstract: *The paper seeks to establish the importance of maintaining good and meaningful relations with all the publics who interact with a corporate organization. It is the people who form an opinion over a period of time (about a firm) that gives the organization its reputation. So maintaining good relations with all the concerned publics is important for an organization. Public Relations, as the name suggests, is all about maintaining relations with the public. The corporate organizations feel the need to maintain, enhance and foster good relations with their prospective customers (public) in order to succeed. The Role of Public Relations in this aspect becomes very important.*

Keywords: *Image management, Reputation, Public, Public Relations, communication.*

INTRODUCTION

Public Relations, as the name suggests, is all about maintaining relations with the public. Here, it is the corporate organizations that feel the need to maintain, enhance and foster good relations with their prospective customers (public) in order to succeed. According to Herbig and Milewicz (1993), corporate reputation is formed as a process that gathers the judgments over time of the various groups who interact with the firm. Public relations are progressively more about communicating convincingly with key persons who affect business results, such as media analysts, policymakers and policy persuaders, customers and shareholders. It is a significant component in supporting the supremacy and value of an organization's brands to all stakeholders. Enhancing the knowledge perceptive and dedication to a brand through public relations is usually a crucial part of any overall strategy aimed at maintaining and raising bars of performance and credibility.

What are Public Relations?

Public Relations, as the name suggests, is all about maintaining relations with the public. Here, it is the corporate organizations that feel the need to maintain, enhance and foster good relations with their prospective customers (public) in order to succeed.

Public Relations is an intriguing field where people describe it more in the means of what it does rather than what it is. So, whenever you ask someone what is public relations; you will get a list of activities that are involved in it. This is the magnificence of Public Relations.

Below are a Few Definitions that will make us understand Public Relations better:

Public relations helps an organization and its publics to adapt mutually to each other. Public Relations broadly applies to organizations as a collective group, not just a business; and publics encompass the variety of different stakeholders.

PRSA (Public Relations Society of America)

Public relations is about communicating your organization's messages at the right time and in the right place to the right audience. With the proliferation of tools and technologies, we can measure the value of those efforts and how they align with a business' overall mission. **Marla Aaron** – MRM Worldwide

Public relations is a management function that establishes and maintains two-way, mutual relationships and communications between an organization and its publics and stakeholders (i.e. those who have a stake, such as employees, shareholders, etc.) that often determine their success or failure. Areas of PR specialization include Investor Relations, Lobbying, Public Affairs (Government & Community), Publicity & Media/Blogger Relations, Employee Relations, International Relations and Crisis Management. **Beth Harte** – The Harte of Marketing

Who is the Publics in Public Relations?

All those people who are in some way or the other come in-touch with the organization and are of some relevance to the company are its 'Publics'

1. Consumers
2. Competitors
3. General
4. Shareholders
5. Government
6. Scientific Community
7. Financial institutions
8. Legal/court
9. Public Employees
10. Suppliers
11. Interest Groups
12. Media



Simple Stakeholder Model (Polonsky 1995; p. 34)

Elements of Public Relations

Define the Situation:

It is important to make a detailed study and develop an in-depth understanding of the business we have to use Public Relations for. How is the business placed financially, in the market and where they want to go is supreme? Without this, the campaign will be direction-less and make any impact will not be possible. Knowing what strategy has been used previously will be of use to know what not to do, as well as impact your strategy. It is also essential to understand what competitors are doing, what they are missing and how your client could fit into the market.

Define your Objectives:

You have to point down as to what you aim to achieve with your strategy. You decide your path only when you know your destination. A clueless journey is rarely successful. Your strategy has to achieve its pre-decided goals. You know what to put into the campaign, but what you expect to get out of it. Not the means, but the end. It is evaluated by asking if it is measurable. Can it be achieved? Is it realistic?

Define your Audience (Public):

You should know who you are trying to reach; your target publics. Find out who they are and then sell your message to them. Identify them by type and the distinctiveness that makes them different. If a target public can be known, then you can understand how to make the product and/or services attractive to them as well as know how to get in touch with them.

Define the Strategy of your Plan:

Making a strategy is one of essential components of your plan. You have to decide step-by-step every move of yours. What will be your key messages and how you will deliver them has to be strategized minutely. This provides guidelines for the action and program components that are planned.

Define the Tactics of your Plan:

This describes the specific activities that put each strategy into operation and helps to achieve the stated objective. This is the most visible part of the PR campaign and can be the make or break point. All elements of the plan must be considered at this point and must be re-evaluated regularly throughout the campaign.

Define the Calendar Timeline:

A timeline to every step of your plan has to be given. Timely execution of every step can only lead to a successful campaign. Determine a timetable for the campaign focusing on key points is essential. There are numerous steps in a campaign and timely execution of each step only can make the previous and next step successful. The timing of each aspect must be intended for the audience. It is also important to most of the effort in the early stages of the campaign.

Define the Budget:

Knowing how much can be spent is primary for any plan. How much can you spend? How much should you spend? This also allows for contemplation for more or less money to be used at any juncture of the campaign. PR budgets can be broken into 2 aspects; staff time and out of pocket.

Define Evaluation of the Program:

By being able to measure the objectives to show clients your accomplishments and intention, this also determines the success of the campaign. Criteria should be realistic, credible and specific. It should also reaffirm the objectives and then show the evaluation methods to be used. Keep it simple. The client will be focusing on the return on their investment in your Public relations.

Public relations functions

Public relations functions are classified by the publics with which relationships are created, and to whom requests are made to understand and/or accept certain policies, procedures, individuals, causes, products or services. Practitioners who perform these specific functions may play be from the management, operate as a communications technician, or function in a dual role.

Community Relations

A public relations function including of an organization's planned, active and continuing participation with and within a community to sustain and improve its atmosphere to the benefit of both the organization and the community. This can include partnerships, volunteer activities, philanthropic contributions and public involvement.

Employee Relations

Employee Relations is managing and corresponding with the employees of an organization. This can include team building and employee empowerment. It is often said that a happy employee leads to a great company.

Government Relations

This includes managing and communicating with law enforcers and government agencies on behalf of an organization.

Financial Relations

All the concerned companies and personnel with whom the firm has financial relations, it is important to have positive relations with them. Financial Relations includes dealing and communicating with firms and interest groups within the organization's industry.

Media Relations

A tricky and challenging task is developing, managing and maintaining favorable relations with the media. It is important to communicate tactfully with the news media when seeking publicity or responding to reporters' questions. It also involves setting up and sustaining a professional and mutually beneficial working relationship with news gatherers and gatekeepers.

Public Affairs

Dealing and communicating with government and groups with regard to community (public) policies, action, and legislation. Unlike government relations, where the practitioner works strictly on behalf of an organization, public affairs also are concerned with the effect of public policies, actions and legislation on its publics.

Objective:

The objective of the study is to understand that:

It is compulsory to create a superior image of the company. In today's times of cut-throat competition, it has become crucial to have a fine image management mechanism to survive and be successful. To build a good image we need to make constant efforts. The Proper strategy needs to be formulated and effectively executed to succeed in this direction.

Research Methodology and Data Collection

The researcher has done a study on establishing the importance of Public Relations in image management for corporate organizations in today's times even for a well-established brand. A detailed study on the need of Public Relations for image management has been focused upon. Also, the kind of tools that are being used in Public Relations in corporate organizations has been emphasized upon. This is all done through a literature review of research papers, interviews, articles and blogs of leading professionals dealing in the Public Relations field and who have worked with many corporate organizations to enhance their profitability through the same.

Data Interpretation

The various tools and functions of Public Relations have been interpreted as proof that an organization makes to register itself in the minds of the people, who can also be its prospective customers.

It is this edge that will help customers decide and purchase in favor of the particular company when given a choice amidst other brands. Constant efforts need to be made to maintain and enhance a company's image because as the famous saying goes "out of sight, out of mind". So, constant reminders of one's goodness need to be given to be in the minds of publics.

Key Findings

- Communication of all types – internal and external – is the key to manage and maintain a good image of an organization.
- Maintaining good relations with all the concerned publics is crucial to have a favorable image for an organization.
- A good image helps a company have that extra edge required in today's competitive times.
- Constant efforts need to be made to maintain and enhance a company's image.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate image is described as the overall impression made on the minds of the public about a firm (Barich and Kotler, 1991; Dichter, 1985; Finn, 1961; Kotler, 1982). The Corporate image comprises all the visual, verbal and behavioral elements that make up the organization. As such, the corporate image has two principal components: the functional and the emotional (Kennedy, 1977).

The earliest given definition for Public Relations, which still holds true, is that it is the attempt by information, persuasion, and adjustment to engineer public support for an activity, cause, movement or institution (Bernays, 1955).

Public Relations is the process of "building good relations with the firm's various publics by obtaining favorable publicity, building up a good corporate image, and handling or heading off unfavorable rumors, stories, and events" (ZainBooks.com, 2011).

Carthy (1992) has found that:

"The public is divided into many smaller publics or audiences. These include employees, the community, customers, consumers, suppliers, distributors, politicians, public servants, financial institutions, stockbrokers, shareholders, financial analysts and opinion leaders" (1992 P5).

Although corporate websites, chat-rooms, email customer response facilities and electronic news release distribution are now viewed as standard aspects of public relations practice (Galloway, 2005) many public relations practitioners are struggling with the impact of new media, and especially the Internet.

Although various propositions are found in the literature as to how the image is formed in people's minds, MacInnis and Price (1987) report that researchers in the field agree that corporate image is the result of a process. The image is the reflection of one's personality, values, attitudes, interests, abilities, uniqueness, roles and often goals.

Organizational researchers examine reputation as being a social identity and portray it as an important and intangible resource which may significantly contribute to an organization's performance, and even to its survival (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Hall, 1993; Rao, 1994).

Corporate reputation may be seen as a mirror of the firm's history which serves to communicate to its target group's information regarding the quality of its products or services in comparison with those of its competitors (Yoon et al., 1993).

Everything an organization does and does not do has an impact on the perception of that organization and its performance, products, and services. According to Herbig and Milewicz(1993), corporate reputation is formed as a process that gathers the judgments over time of the various groups who interact with the firm.

The reputation of a firm is built through its trustworthy actions. It is also delicate because the impact of a bad action on the customer is much stronger than that of a good action (Herbig and Milewicz, 1994). The nature of a firm's reputation depends on the results of its perceived actions in this period. If the firm repeatedly succeeds to fulfill its promises, it should have a positive reputation; and inversely, the firm's failure to express its true intent may create a negative reputation (Herbig and Milewicz, 1993).

Herbig and Milewicz (1993, p. 18) define reputation as "an estimation of the consistency over time of an attribute of an entity". A firm can have, therefore, multiple reputations - one for each aspect such as price, product quality, innovativeness, management quality - or a global reputation.

"The most critical, strategic and perhaps enduring asset that a corporation possesses is its reputation" (Cravens, Goad Oliver and Ramamoorti, 2003, p.201)

Corporate reputations influence and are influenced by all the ways in which the company projects its image, its behavior, communication and symbolism (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001)

Corporate reputation brings together marketing and organizational studies, strategic management and communications (Davies et.al.,2003).

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